

# Student Success Stories

## BREAKING BARRIERS: LEADING WITH VALUE

WRITTEN BY: ELBUN LAMBRECHTS, A B-ED 4<sup>TH</sup> YEAR STUDENT



When I became Prim, I don't think I fully realised what I was walking into. I knew it would be tough, but I didn't expect just how heavy the title would feel at times. There were days where I felt completely overwhelmed, trying to juggle leadership, academics, personal relationships, and still somehow show up as a functioning human being. I had to sit in rooms where I was the only person who looked or thought like me. I had to constantly remind myself that I deserved to be there, even when it felt like I didn't. And on top of that, I needed to be strong for others, even when I was breaking inside.

My name is Elbun Lambrechts, and I am a B.Ed student. I come from a small town called Moorreesburg. I didn't grow up thinking one day I'd be a Prim at Stellenbosch University, but here I am, and it's been a ride.

To be real, being a student leader at Stellenbosch, especially as a coloured student, comes with a different kind of weight.

From the moment I was elected for student leadership, I felt like I had to constantly justify why I deserved to be there. It was like I had to prove myself every single day, not only as a leader, but especially as Primarius. People would subtly question my abilities (and sometimes not so subtly). They'd doubt my decisions or treat me like I was only chosen to "tick a box." Even my degree, of which I'm very proud, was something I was made to feel needed to be defended, like it wasn't "good enough" in the eyes of some people in leadership circles.

There were times where I felt like I was fighting just to breathe in spaces that weren't designed for people like me to thrive. I faced racial microaggressions, and sometimes even outright dismissiveness. It felt like no matter how hard I worked; I had to push twice as hard just to be taken seriously. It was heavy. Way heavier than I thought it would be.

One of the hardest parts of this experience was feeling like no one saw the effort behind the scenes. The late nights, the difficult conversations, the moments of self-doubt, the days where I just wanted to disappear but couldn't because people were relying on me. I had to navigate conflicts, disappointments, and often even criticism from the same people I was trying to serve.

Despite this, I stayed. I served. I showed up. And I kept showing up. Even on the days when I was tired, when I felt small, when I wanted to disappear. I leaned on the reason I ran in the first place: my love for people, for my House, and for making student spaces better. I didn't do it for the title. I reminded myself that I wasn't just doing this for me. I was doing it so that the next coloured student who wants to lead doesn't feel like they're alone. I did it because I believe that student spaces can be better, more inclusive, more real, more human. I learnt to back myself, even when others didn't, and I found strength in the late nights, the tough conversations, and in proving that I could stand my ground.

# Student Success Stories

## BREAKING BARRIERS: LEADING WITH VALUE

WRITTEN BY: ELBUN LAMBRECHTS, A B-ED 4<sup>TH</sup> YEAR STUDENT

If I could do it over, I think I would be a bit kinder to myself. I carried the weight of trying to be strong all the time, and I didn't always give myself space to just be human. I also would ask for help earlier, instead of trying to juggle everything on my own. Leadership doesn't mean carrying the whole world on your shoulders. It means knowing when to share the load too.

I hope somebody out there, another coloured student, another kid from a small town like mine, reads this and realises they don't have to shrink themselves to fit into Stellenbosch. That they belong, even if the room tries to tell them otherwise. That their voice, their story, and their way of leading have value.

I hope people start to see that leadership isn't just about the person with the loudest voice, or the smoothest CV. Sometimes it's the student who comes from a place no one has ever heard of, who carries the weight of expectation and doubt, who still chooses to show up and serve.

I hope it opens people's eyes to how heavy leadership can feel when you're carrying more than just a title. When you're carrying history, identity, your community's hopes, and all the doubts people throw at you. For me, it wasn't just about being "Prim." It was about standing in spaces that weren't built for me and saying, 'I'm still here. I'm still standing. I'm still leading.'

And I honestly just hope that it makes this space a little more human. Less about perfection, more about real stories. Because leadership isn't shiny photos and speeches. It's late nights where you're exhausted but still pushing through. It's moments of self-doubt where you question if you're enough, but you show up anyway. It's small wins that no one else notices, but you know how much they mattered.

I'm proud that I served. Proud that I didn't give up when it got heavy. Proud that I could represent not just myself, but the possibility for others who'll come after me. ***My story isn't neat, but it's real. And if it makes even one person feel seen, makes one leader feel less alone, or inspires the next student from a small town to step up and own their place, then it was worth it.***