



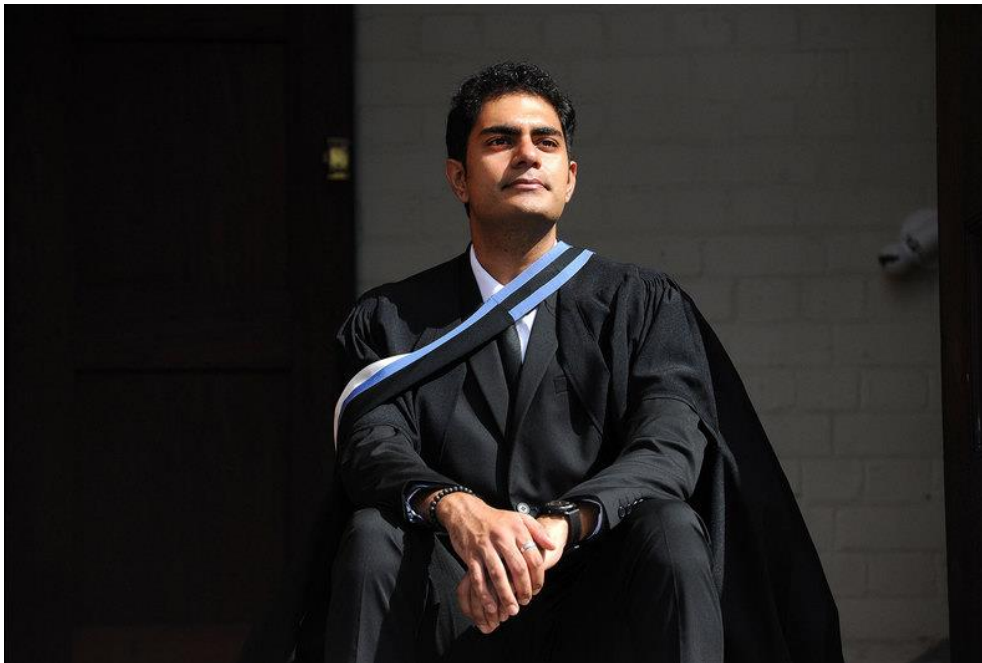
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Taking the road less travelled – to graduate with a triple major degree



Yuri Behari-Leak
Lerato Maduna

Photo:

When starting his studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT), inspirational graduate Yuri Behari-Leak, intended to obtain an MBChB, but his destiny wasn't in the medical field. "I started studying a Bachelor of Social Sciences at UCT in 2018 and was actually supposed to pursue a medical degree, but fate steered me towards law and the humanities and I haven't looked back since," he said.

"Once I decided I would be studying humanities, I immediately knew I wanted to major in psychology. I also noticed that the Faculty of Humanities allowed you to pursue majors from other faculties, so I added law to my degree. I completed these undergraduate degrees in 2020, but

by then I'd decided to extend the completion of my undergraduate to 2021 as I'd added my third major in film and television studies."

The study of storytelling

For Yuri, his interest in combining psychology, law and film was in the fact that these subjects allowed him to explore himself and the world around him to better understand how to bring about change.

"Psychology inspires me for its emphasis on the importance of exploring and understanding oneself, mind, body, emotions, behaviours and motivations in order to live a healthier, more holistic, integrated and balanced life. Law has the potential to make real, substantive and tangible change in people's lives, which is both exciting and humbling to be a part of.

"Film, on the other hand, engages our thoughts, emotions and imaginations to create new ways of expressing and exploring the meaning of life, and envisaging new social imaginations. It allows us to reflect on ourselves and thus learn and grow," he explained.

Aside from speaking to his varied interests, these areas of study are also excellent for transdisciplinary research and knowledge-building.

The advantages of the transdisciplinary approach have been seen in a variety of cases where solutions to issues in one discipline have been found in an ostensibly unrelated field. Some of the most well-known examples involve healthcare practitioners applying Formula One pit stop knowledge to provide enhanced patient care.

According to Yuri, the advantages of this approach can also be seen across humanities such as psychology, law and media. "Each field is about storytelling: the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and others through psychology; the stories we tell ourselves to invoke our rights and enjoy our dignity, freedom and equality in society through law; and the stories we tell to connect emotionally with others through film. It sometimes feels like I am studying storytelling as opposed to three separate fields," he said.

"This storytelling connection has enabled me to identify many transferable skills. Psychology has consistently reminded me of my personhood and the strengths and limitations thereof throughout everything I've written and created. Law has helped to hone my critical thinking and analytical skills, which help me to gain a deeper understanding of the theories I come across. Finally, film has opened up new ways of thinking more creatively and courageously."

A social justice trifecta

In addition to the academic interrelation of his fields of study, Yuri has a keen interest in the potential these areas have for advancing social justice.

"In psychology, the exploration of self and society can be in service of social justice and the greater good of humanity and society. The law lets

us know that there's always the possibility of a brighter and more equitable future which we can all work towards, while film is the ultimate act of creative empathy in the way in which it tells stories about life, people and society," he noted.

"Each field also has potential for advancing social justice in different ways. Psychology provides opportunities to work with real-life social issues. Law allows one to advance social justice in more permanent, institutional and systematic ways with long lasting effects for generations to come. Film gives us the opportunity to challenge the status quo and mainstream ideologies while imploring us to think and act in a more socially conscious way."

While the theory of social justice is a point of interest, implementing its practice is a passion for Yuri – one that he has followed throughout his time at UCT.

"Being a Psychology tutor has given me an opportunity to encourage undergraduate students to think about social justice in their assignments, essays and projects. Mooting (ie simulated court proceedings) has inspired me to think about social issues with social justice and a means to attain it," he said.

"I have also participated in activities such as volunteer tutoring for children from under-resourced schools, which makes a smaller yet more practical difference in people's lives. This year, I am involved in an incredible psychology project around critically exploring knowledge produced about [gender-based] and sexual violence, which will present many opportunities to advance social justice."

The value of taking the road less travelled

Despite his impressive academic achievements, Yuri's modesty and desire to help others shine through. "My story being described as inspirational initially surprised me. From my perspective, I was just studying three fields that I enjoyed and didn't see the need to choose between them.

"This honour makes me believe in the value of taking the road less travelled and appreciate the journey itself more than the destination. It has also made me reflect on how thankful I am to my family for supporting me in all my endeavours over the past four years, and for always believing in me.

"It feels humbling for my story to be considered inspirational. I hope that it shows others that sometimes it's not just the triple major – or any major – that matters, but what these majors can teach you about yourself, and what they can inspire you to do, accomplish and become," he added.

ENDS

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