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UCT's seven graduates among 11 Southern African Rhodes Scholarship recipients for 2025



Phemelo Matie.

Photo: Supplied

The University of Cape Town (UCT) continues to shine as a beacon of academic excellence and leadership, with seven of its graduates named among the 11 recipients of the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship for 2025 in the Southern African cohort. This remarkable achievement underscores UCT's reputation as a premier institution that nurtures not only academic talent, but also future leaders committed to making a global impact.

The seven scholars-elect – Niamh Ahern, Dr Christian Cotchobos, Dr Inae Kim, Jacob Lund, Dr Tshegofatso Masenya, Phemelo Matie and Jeremy Simpson – form part of the Southern African cohort. They were selected after a rigorous and competitive process and will join more than a hundred scholars from around the world at the University of Oxford in October 2025. As Rhodes scholars, they will undertake fully funded postgraduate studies and become part of an esteemed international network devoted to creating a positive difference in the world.

The Rhodes Scholarship, established in 1903 and widely regarded as the most prestigious graduate fellowship, has awarded nearly 1 000 scholarships to Southern African students over its 121-year history. This year, UCT's dominance within the region's selection process reaffirms its role in producing scholars who excel in academics, leadership, service and innovation.

UCT acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Internationalisation, Professor Jeff Murugan, expressed immense pride in the achievements of UCT scholars. "We are incredibly proud of our graduates who have earned this significant recognition. Their dedication, leadership and commitment to addressing societal challenges embody the spirit of [UCT's Vision 2030](#) – to unleash human potential to create a fair and just society. This milestone underscores the excellence that UCT strives for, and we are confident that these scholars will carry forward the values of resilience, innovation and service."

Matie said being awarded the Rhodes Scholarship represents not only her personal milestone but also a chance to contribute meaningfully to the communities that have shaped her. "I feel deeply grateful and excited to be part of this remarkable community of scholars, and I am thankful to God for His faithfulness and my family, friends, mentors and lecturers who encouraged me to pursue this journey and walked it with me. This scholarship presents the opportunity to gain the tools, knowledge, and networks that I hope to bring back into my work within South African communities. My goal is to use business as a means to address the pressing social, environmental and developmental challenges our communities face. I am committed to driving sustainable and impactful development that can uplift and empower these communities for the long term," she said.

The Southern African selection process involved extensive application reviews, followed by a series of interviews at both regional and national levels. These selection committees, comprising renowned leaders and senior Rhodes scholars, assessed candidates on qualities such as character, leadership and the determination to use their talents for the greater good.

National Secretary for Southern Africa Ndumiso Luthuli emphasised the rigor of the process. "Interviews were thorough, probing and rigorous; and selectors deliberated for many hours before awarding the Rhodes Scholarships for 2025. They had very tough choices to make, but we believe that the Rhodes Scholars-Elect announced will make us proud at Oxford University and go on to become changemakers who will impact positively on our continent and the world."

Chief Executive Officer of Rhodes Trust Dr Elizabeth Kiss highlighted the global and transformative nature of the programme. "For more than a century, the Rhodes Trust has brought exceptional individuals to Oxford and fostered a vibrant global community. We eagerly anticipate the invaluable contributions these Scholars will make, not just during their studies, but throughout their lives as they join the community of Rhodes Scholar alumni who are creating a more equitable and sustainable future for the world."

UCT remains a leader in fostering intellectual growth and equipping its students with the skills and drive necessary for transformative leadership. The achievements of these seven UCT graduates further solidify the university's standing as a hub for nurturing talents who are ready to contribute to Africa and the world's lasting change.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

MEET THE UCT RHODES SCHOLARS-ELECT FOR 2025

Short bios on each of the six UCT Rhodes scholars-elect.

Niamh Ahern (22)

Niamh graduated from UCT in March 2024 with a BA in music, psychology and Afrikaans (with distinction), and is currently completing a BA Honours in Afrikaans at UCT.

She is exploring hauntology, place and enfreachment in a comparative study of Afrikaans and Appalachian gothic novels for her honours thesis, and has additional research interests in the medical humanities, digital humanities and libraries and archives. She works as an editorial assistant at New Contrast and has previously volunteered at a local public library.

Niamh was awarded a merit bursary from the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns and the Prof JJ Smith Scholarship from UCT's Afrikaans and Netherlandic Studies Section in support of her honours degree, and received a Student Leadership Award (Team category) for her work as deputy editor-in-chief of Varsity Newspaper in 2024.

She is an active student leader currently serving as managing editor of Varsity Newspaper, social sciences director of the African Research Society, chairperson of the UCT Student Psychiatry Society, technical officer of the UCT Cortex Club, and Student Parliament representative for the Students with Disabilities' Forum. She was a member of the UCT Symphony Orchestra during her undergraduate studies.

Outside of these pursuits, she is a writer, musician, therapy dog handler and occasional ceramicist.

At Oxford, Niamh hopes to pursue an MPhil in global and area studies, in which she aims to cultivate expertise in African studies and develop research skills that will enable her to influence public library policy, special collections practice and African archival integrity.

Dr Christian Cotchobos (27)

Christian grew up in Cape Town and studied an MBChB at UCT and graduated with first-class honours in 2022. During this time, he also completed a BSc Honours degree, specialising in infectious diseases and immunology. He is currently a junior doctor in his second year of internship at Livingstone Hospital in Gqeberha, in the Eastern Cape. As an aspiring clinician-scientist, his goal is to improve surgical care through innovation research.

His current focus of clinical research is on improving intimate partner violence care provided by orthopaedic practitioners. He is completing a Master's thesis on this topic with UCT's Global Surgery Division.

Christian is a keen runner. At university, he was a national level 800m athlete and chairperson of UCT athletics. He relaxes by spending time in nature, hiking or trail running with friends, and playing guitar. At Oxford, Christian hopes to pursue an MSc in musculoskeletal sciences.

Inae Kim (26)

Inae is a South Korean-South African junior doctor currently working at Groote Schuur Hospital with a passion that lies at the intersection of clinical science research, specifically in viral hepatitis and hepatobiliary diseases, and global health. She is currently involved in research projects within the hepatobiliary surgery unit at Groote Schuur Hospital.

She obtained both MBChB and BMedSci (Hons) specialising in infectious diseases and immunology as part of the intercalated programme at UCT with first class honours. During her studies, she has obtained various awards and scholarships including multiple class medals and the Faculty of Health Science Surgery Prize in her final year of studies.

Inae has held various leadership positions during her studies such as in International Association of Student Surgical Societies, executive committee of South African Surgical Student Societies and vice president of the UCT Surgical Society. She was awarded the Klaus-Jurgen Bathe Leadership Scholarship for demonstrating high intellectual power and leadership potential.

At Oxford, Inae hopes to harness both her passions in global health and clinical science research by pursuing research in liver diseases, whilst also pursuing studies to understand how to take research and use it to advocate for changes within the healthcare sphere. She hopes to champion and celebrate diversity through her own identity.

Jacob Lund (22)

Jacob graduated from UCT in March 2024 with a BSc in mathematics and applied mathematics and is currently in the process of completing a BSc Honours in mathematics at UCT.

He has taken on mathematical projects in a broad collection of fields, ranging from categorical topological, to quantum complexity, to classical chaos. He shares his enthusiasm

for mathematics by teaching, and has run mathematical thinking workshops for first years, with the aim of breaking down "maths-anxiety".

He has received the class medal for all core mathematics courses during his undergraduate, and all applied mathematics courses since second year, and was awarded the Harry Crossley Research Fellowship for his honours year, based on his research potential. His third-year project, "The early universe as an open quantum system: decoherence and complexity", was published in the Journal of High Energy Physics.

Jacob is also a co-creator and moderator of isiXhosa.click, a free online open-source dictionary which has received a grant as a part of the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources' Digital Humanities Open Educational Resources Champions initiative.

In his free time, Jacob can usually be found on a mountain or in the climbing gym. At Oxford, Jacob hopes to pursue an MSc in mathematical sciences, followed by a DPhil in mathematics with the intent of exploring the nexus of pure and applied maths, particularly on how insights from traditionally pure fields can be used to solve pressing problems.

Dr Tshegofatso Masenya (26)

Tshegofatso is a medical professional with a deep commitment to healthcare, social equity and educational access. Currently an intern at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital, Tshegofatso is known for her work both in clinical settings and in community-driven projects that aim to address systemic inequalities. She is currently pursuing a postgraduate diploma in health economics from UCT, where she also earned her MBChB degree.

She is the founder of *GoShare*, a donation-based crowdfunding platform dedicated to assisting "missing middle" students in securing the funds needed to settle their outstanding university fees. She also leads a health education series under the Golden Key International Honour Society, promoting health literacy among young adults. Her previous leadership roles include heading health promotion with SHAWCO Health, coordinating outreach for the Rural Support Network, serving on the Health Sciences Students' Council, and serving as head of entrepreneurship with the UCT chapter of the Association of Black Securities and Investment Professionals.

Recognised as one of South Africa's Top 10 GradStar students, Tshegofatso is a member of the Global Shapers Community, part of the World Economic Forum's network. She will represent South Africa at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January 2025.

Outside of her professional life, Tshegofatso is a voice-over artist, a Formula 1 enthusiast and an avid reader with a particular interest in African literature.

Tshegofatso will be heading to Oxford University, where she aims to deepen her expertise in health systems and policy, empowering her to drive impactful change with a focus on advancing universal health coverage in South Africa's public health sector.

Phemelo Matie (22)

Phemelo is a final-year LLB student at UCT, where she graduated with distinction in 2023 with a BA in law and isiXhosa communication.

As an Allan Gray Orbis Foundation candidate fellow, she co-founded Legal Standpoint, an award winning legal tech start-up aimed at increasing access to legal education in South Africa. Though she has since stepped back from the start-up, her commitment to making the law more accessible remains strong. Phemelo is actively involved in her church's campus ministry, serves as a children's church teacher, and tutors legal writing in the law faculty. She has also held various roles in student governance within her residence, faculty and UCT societies.

Phemelo believes businesses can and should be a force for positive social impact and development, and aims to pursue an MSc in sustainability, enterprise and the environment at Oxford. Through this degree, she hopes to harness business as a tool for positive transformation, driving sustainable change, investment and development in communities.

In her spare time, Phemelo enjoys attending music concerts and cherishes spending quality time with her family and friends.

Jeremy Simpson (24)

Jeremy graduated from UCT in March 2024 with a BCom (Hons) in economics and a BSc in economics and Mathematics. Currently, he is working as a management consultant with Boston Consulting Group. In this role, Jeremy has worked in Global Health as well other strategy and business transformation engagements. While at UCT, he won two class medals in his honour's year and placed third in his cohort. In his final year, his thesis explored the informal sector's role in South Africa's macroeconomy using a dynamic stochastic general equilibrium model.

Jeremy was also an active member of Varsity Newspaper while at UCT, serving as a news reporter, deputy editor-in-chief and eventually its publisher. Jeremy is an avid music lover and a singer, having sung in the Cape Town Youth Choir at university. In addition to choral music, he loves musical theatre and every opportunity he gets to perform it in the car with his sister.

While at Oxford, he hopes to pursue studies in economics and energy systems with a focus on using multidisciplinary methods to address the challenges that developing countries will likely face from the Just Energy Transition.

ENDS

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