THE RHODES SCHOLARSHIPS FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

NEWS

18 NOVEMBER 2026

# Meet the Southern African Rhodes Scholars-Elect, 2027

*Ten outstanding young graduates from Southern Africa have been announced as the Rhodes Scholars-Elect for 2027*

## ILOKE ALUSALA (Gauteng Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large, South Africa Rhodes Scholar-Elect 2027)



**Iloke** (22) grew up in Pretoria and is a final-year student at the University of Cape Town (UCT), where he is completing a BSc in Mechatronics Engineering. He is the founder of the Chevo Collective, a project-based engineering community at UCT, and has completed internships focused on predictive maintenance, and building machine-learning systems that spot faults in industrial motors before they break down. His final-year research in UCT's African Robotics Unit looks at how a robot can determine its location using 3D Gaussian Splatting, a new way of building photorealistic 3D maps from ordinary images.

A six-time winner of international Autodesk engineering contests and a member of UCT's Dean's Merit List, Iloke was part of the four-person team that built a small supercomputer to win the 2025 CSIR Student Cluster Competition and represent South Africa at the International Supercomputing Conference in Hamburg, Germany. He also represented his province in tennis, plays volleyball, and is a saxophonist with a Grade 8 distinction who has played in big bands and orchestras but enjoys jazz improvisation most.

Iloke shares engineering content with more than 100,000 followers online and takes part in discussions on AI safety and governance, particularly how AI can be developed responsibly in the Global South. He hopes to pursue studies in robotics at Oxford, with the aim of building robotic systems that work where infrastructure is weakest across Africa.

## LARA BETZ (St Andrew's Rhodes Scholarship, South Africa Scholar-Elect 2027)



**Lara** (born Rowles) is 24 years old and hails from Durban (KwaZulu-Natal). She is a final -year Bachelor of Fine Art (BFA) student at Rhodes University, where she studies Fine Art, Art History and Visual Culture. Lara's research focuses on renegotiating the clinical gaze through practice-based research, with a focus on Endometriosis and female reproductive health. Lara has received awards for academic excellence, including the 2024 Top 120 Award: Academic Excellence -Faculty of Humanities, presented by The Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics.

She served as the 2026 Chairperson of the Rhodes Ultimate Frisbee Team and will represent the team at the South African Mixed Nationals Tournament in December 2026. An avid runner, Lara is constantly striving towards longer distances and bigger goals.

Lara hopes to pursue her studies in Fine Art at the postgraduate level at the University of Oxford in 2027.

# Introducing our Rhodes Scholars-Elect, 2027

## TERIQUE CARIM (Gauteng Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large, South Africa Rhodes Scholar-Elect 2027)



**Terique** (24) grew up in Johannesburg, attended Greenside High School, and graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 2024 with a Bachelor of Laws (with distinction). He currently serves as a law clerk for Justice Kate Savage at the Constitutional Court of South Africa.

During his undergraduate studies, Terique was a tutor at Wits' School of Law and an active member of its moot court team, which he represented at various international competitions. He received the Johannesburg Society of Advocates prize for the Most Distinguished Bachelor of Laws Graduate and won the 2022 African Democracy Essay Award. After graduating, he worked for a year as a candidate attorney at Webber Wentzel. Since 2025, he has served as an editorial assistant for the *South African Constitutional Law* loose-leaf publication.

Terique hopes to pursue the Bachelor of Civil Law at Oxford. He has a keen interest in structural constitutional law, substantive equality, and horizontality, especially the way South Africa's Bill of Rights influences the common law governing private relationships. He aims to further his understanding of these concepts through his studies at the University of Oxford.

Terique's passion for legal theory grew partly from a constitution he drafted for a video game community. Outside of law, he enjoys watching films, following football and cricket, and playing tennis.

---

## BLESSING GUMBU (Gauteng Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large, South Africa Rhodes Scholar-Elect 2027)

**Blessing** (23) is a neuroscience researcher and science communicator from Signal Hill in Mahikeng, North West Province. A first-generation student, he is completing an MSc in Neuroscience and Physiology at the University of Cape Town (UCT). He previously earned a BSc in Human Anatomy, Physiology and Biochemistry (Dean's Merit List) and a BMedSci (Hons) in Neuroscience with distinction (finishing in the top two in his stream).

Based in UCT's CryptoLab, Africa's first cryptococcal brain infection laboratory, Blessing studies how the brain environment shapes antifungal resistance in Cryptococcus neoformans.

In 2025, he was the inaugural recipient of UCT's Student Leadership Vice-Chancellor's Award. He also received the Kerry Capstick-Dale Student Leadership Award and was named a Siyaphumelela Scholar, one of five from 20 partner institutions nationally.

Blessing founded BSc Chronicles, a YouTube channel and podcast dedicated to breaking the stigma around research careers.

He is a poet whose spoken-word piece, *Becoming the Voice of the People,* was featured in I Am the Unfolding Dream, an anthology by the Centre for Creative Arts at UKZN and the Poetry Africa Festival.

At the University of Oxford, Blessing intends to pursue a DPhil in Neuroscience. He hopes to return to Africa to advance brain infection research, improving patient outcomes and drug development.



# Introducing our Rhodes Scholars-Elect, 2027

## MABOLETSO LETSOALO (SACS Rhodes Scholarship, South Africa Scholar-Elect 2027)



**Maboletso** (23) is a computational health researcher and student leader at the University of Cape Town (UCT). She is currently an MSc candidate specialising in Computational Health Informatics, building on a BMedSc (Hons) in Bioinformatics and a BSc in Human Physiology, Genetics and Psychology.

Maboletso's research currently focuses on advancing Tuberculosis (TB) diagnostics and risk stratification. She is especially interested in how advances in health data and computational biology can be translated into meaningful improvements in healthcare delivery and health outcomes across Africa.

Beyond research, she has previously served on the University Council, and currently serves as the Vice President of the Students' Representative Council (SRC) and Co-Chair of the Institutional Forum at UCT. Through these roles, she has advocated for student success and well-being, institutional transformation and has driven several student-centred initiatives.

At the University of Oxford, Maboletso intends to pursue a research degree in Healthcare Data Science. Her broader vision is to contribute to the development of efficient African health systems through the use of data and technology.

## BUHLALI MHLANZI (KwaZulu-Natal Rhodes Scholarship, KZN Scholar-Elect 2027)

**Buhlali** (22) grew up in Hillcrest, KwaZulu-Natal, attended Westville Boys' High School, and graduated with distinction in BSc Mathematical Statistics from the University of Pretoria (UP) in 2025, earning honorary academic colours. He is currently completing his BSc (Honours) at UP, where his research applies dynamic, layered survival analysis models to improve breast cancer prognosis.

An entrepreneur and writer, Buhlali founded Uniquely Drafted, published Android games, and authored a quantitative sports piece in ABSIP Pinnacle Magazine alongside a LinkedIn series on data storytelling.

Recognised among South Africa's top 10 graduates by Gautrain Gradstar, Buhlali is a Dell Sikelela Scholar, UP statistics tutor, and represented SA U18B hockey in 2022 before joining UP's league-winning TuksEkhaya residence team. He is also an avid runner and home baker.

At the University of Oxford, Buhlali intends to pursue a research degree in Mathematical Statistics and Computational Biostatistics, aiming to build robust quantitative infrastructure for South African public health systems.



# Introducing our Rhodes Scholars-Elect, 2027

## FRANCESCA MNENULA (BLMNS Rhodes Scholarship, Malawi Scholar-Elect 2027)



**Francesca (**23) hails from Lilongwe, Malawi, and graduated from St Lawrence University, New York, in May 2026 with a Bachelor of Science in Data Science Honours and Economics. She is currently a Data Science Assistant with the World Bank Group's Corporate Finance Unit in Washington, DC, where she supports financial modelling and data analytics.

An alumna of United World College (UWC) East Africa in Tanzania, Francesca is interested in applying data science to development challenges in Malawi, particularly in agriculture. Her Honours thesis explored how machine learning and image-based methods could be used to estimate wind patterns from grass orientation, contributing to research on how traditional ecological knowledge can be adapted in the context of environmental change in Savoonga, Alaska.

Francesca has received awards including the Charbern Outstanding Junior Economics Scholarship and the Davis United World College Scholarship, and was elected to the Phi Beta Kappa Honour Society.

Francesca is active with the United World College Malawi National Committee, supporting access to UWC educational opportunities for Malawian students. Outside of her academic and professional work, she enjoys photography and videography and documenting the people and places around her.

Francesca hopes to pursue graduate study in Statistical Science and Social Data Science at the University of Oxford.

## DR KAI MOORS (Paul Roos Rhodes Scholarship, South Africa Scholar-Elect 2027)



**Kai** (26) matriculated at Paul Roos Gymnasium in Stellenbosch and currently lives in Cape Town. He graduated as the top performer in his final year from Stellenbosch University in 2024 with an MB, ChB (cum laude) and is currently completing his internship as a junior doctor at South Africa's oldest academic hospital – New Somerset Hospital.

Kai is a published first author in a peer-reviewed journal and has presented his research at the International Conference of Undergraduate Research. His passion is for neurology, particularly epilepsy, and the ways in which doctors and traditional healers can collaborate to destigmatise the condition and improve the diagnosis and management of sufferers.

He is the recipient of the Rector's Award for Excellence in Leadership, having chaired and vice-chaired both Stellenbosch University's Stoic Society and Surgical Society, respectively. He also served as faculty sports representative and worked as an international ambassador for three separate online medical education platforms. He is the recipient of multiple academic awards, including the Academic Merit Award, Senior Academic Merit Bursary and Top Performer Award.

Kai is passionate about teaching and served as a registered tutor-mentor during his undergraduate degree. At the same time he also became qualified and volunteered as an official ultrasound tutor to undergraduates – a

# Introducing our Rhodes Scholars-Elect, 2027

skill which he continues to empower students with during his internship.

Kai's interests and hobbies span a broad range from philosophy, chess, meditation, and playing the guitar to rugby, racquet sports, running, cycling, and cold-water swimming in the oceans around Cape Town.

Kai hopes to pursue studies in Neuroscience at the University of Oxford and aims to specialise as a neurologist and lecture in academia, thereafter, using the knowledge he gains at Oxford to train tomorrow's doctors. Furthermore, he wishes to use his research to elevate the neurological care of South Africa, and Low- and Middle-Income Countries in general.

## NTLAHLA SIKWANA (Free State & Eastern Cape Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large, South Africa Rhodes Scholar-Elect 2027)



**Ntlahla** (22) is a South African emerging anthropologist, researcher and youth advocate from Kwazakhele, Gqeberha, in the Eastern Cape.

She is currently pursuing an Honours degree in Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand, where her research explores amagwijo as archives of collective memory, cultural knowledge and embodied resistance. She is passionate about understanding Black histories, African knowledge systems, and the social and political experiences that shape everyday life.

She is the founder of *Hand in Hand for Hope*, a youth-led initiative working to expand educational opportunities for young people in under-resourced communities. Her commitment to education, youth development and social justice has also shaped her involvement in leadership and fellowship programmes, including Theirworld's Global Youth Ambassador programme and the Get Engaged Fellowship. Through her academic, leadership and community work, Ntlahla is interested in contributing to more equitable societies and creating opportunities for young people to participate in shaping their own futures and those of their communities.

At the University of Oxford, she hopes to further her studies in Anthropology.

## JOSEPH ZELEZNIAK (Western & Northern Cape Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large, South Africa Rhodes Scholar-Elect 2027)



**Joseph** (23) hails from Cape Town, and graduated from the University of Cape Town (UCT) with a BSc in Pure Mathematics and Physics and a BSc Honours in Mathematics, and subsequently spent 2026 doing an MSc in Mathematics there. He is currently a Commonwealth Master's Scholar at Imperial College London, where he is pursuing an MSc in Pure Mathematics. His research interests lie in harmonic analysis, extremal problems on spheres, sphere packing and analytic approaches to geometry. His UCT Masters research studied the Turán extremal problem for spherical caps.

# Introducing our Rhodes Scholars-Elect, 2027

Joseph has co-authored two peer-reviewed papers in algebra: *On hollowness in multiplicative lattices*, published in *Algebra Universalis*, and *Strongly hollow ideals: Complete join-primality, dual irreducibility, and local obstructions*, published in the *Journal of Algebra and Its Applications*. Joseph graduated from his Honours degree with a 97% result and received the prize for Best Postgraduate Presentation at the 2025 South African Mathematical Society Congress.

He represented South Africa internationally in debating for four years and later chaired the UCT Debating Union. He also writes poetry, has written and directed one-act plays, and plays football recreationally.

At Oxford, he hopes to pursue a DPhil in Mathematics focused on harmonic analysis and geometric extremal problems.

Announcing the results of the 2026/27 selections for the Rhodes Scholarships for Southern Africa, the National Secretary, Ndumiso Luthuli, commented:

> *"Following rigorous and challenging regional and national selections, held over three months, the national selection committee reached consensus on 08 November 2026 and confirmed the new cohort of Rhodes Scholars-Elect for the constituency. We are excited to introduce the 2027 Scholars-Elect for Southern Africa to the Rhodes Community. They are a diverse and remarkable group of young leaders who embody the core values of the Rhodes Scholarship. We look forward to seeing the many ways they will use their talents and skills to shape the future and make a positive difference to Southern Africa and the world in the years ahead."*

We wish our Rhodes Scholars-Elect for 2027 (pictured below) every happiness and success at the University of Oxford and look forward to the lasting impact of their leadership in the years to come.




***Issued by: The National Secretariat, Rhodes Scholarships for Southern Africa***
***P O Box 41468, Craighall 2024 Johannesburg, South Africa***
***E-mail:*** *southernafrica.secretary@rhodestrust.com*