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## Meet the Southern African Rhodes Scholars-Elect, 2026

*Ten outstanding young graduates from Southern Africa  
have been announced as the Rhodes Scholars-Elect for 2026*

### SAZI BONGWE (Gauteng Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large Scholar-Elect 2026)



Sazi (22) was born and brought up in Johannesburg. He attended St John's College, where he was the Head Prefect in his Matric year, and went on to study English Literature at Harvard, with a secondary field in European History, Politics and Societies.

Before beginning his studies, he worked for half a year as a journalist, reporting on the lives, struggles and cultures of South African people for *New Frame* and *The Mail and Guardian*. He continues to write, on such subjects as literature and art, history and politics, for such publications as *The New York Review of Books* (forthcoming), *The Nation*, and *Africa is a Country*. In the course of his studies he received an Artist Development Fellowship, in recognition of significant artistic promise, to spend three months writing in Paris. He has acted in and written plays, and had his photography exhibited. He hosts a bi-weekly music hour on the student radio.

At Oxford, Sazi hopes to spend a year continuing his studies in literature and language, before spending another studying history of art and visual culture. He believes that the work of art makes us pay attention to the world, imagine it differently, and work to change it, and it is to this end that he directs his studies and his work.

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### RAPHAEL DE SOUSA (Western Cape Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large Scholar-Elect 2026)

Raphael (22) grew up in Cape Town, where he attended Milnerton High School and Parklands College. He graduated from the University of Cape Town (UCT) in March 2025 with a triple major in Mathematics, Physics, and Applied Mathematics, and is currently completing a BSc (Honours) in Physics at UCT.

Raphael's academic interests lie in theoretical and mathematical physics. He is particularly fascinated by quantum field theory — the mathematical framework underpinning the Standard Model of particle physics, one of the most successful theories in modern science. During his third year, he collaborated on research in soliton theory and co-published the paper "The energy–frequency diagram of the (1+1)-dimensional  $\Phi^4$  oscillon" in the *Journal of High Energy Physics*.

Beyond academia, Raphael is the co-founder and developer of Delta Education, an initiative providing free, offline mobile apps for high school students in mathematics and physical sciences. The platform has reached nearly 60 000 downloads and runs a calculator donation campaign that has distributed over 300 scientific calculators to under-resourced schools across Cape Town, with plans to significantly increase this number in the coming years. Delta Education aims to expand to all subjects, grades, and South African languages to make quality education accessible to every learner.

Raphael is also an incoming Allan Gray Fellow, driven by a passion for entrepreneurship.



In his free time, Raphael enjoys hiking and running.

At Oxford, Raphael hopes to pursue an **MSc in Mathematical and Theoretical Physics**, where he will delve into the mysteries of quantum field theory and the search for physics beyond the Standard Model, with the long-term goal of lecturing in Africa and inspiring the next generation of physicists.

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## NTANDO DUBE (KZN Regional Finalist, KwaZulu-Natal Scholar-Elect 2026)



Proudly hailing from Imbali Township in Pietermaritzburg, **Ntando** (23) attended St John's Diocesan School for Girls, where she was the Head Girl in her Matric year. Ntando holds a BSc Actuarial and Financial Mathematics (cum laude) and BSc (Hons) Actuarial Science from the University of Pretoria (UP). As a Technical Member of the Actuarial Society of South Africa (TASSA), she is currently working as an Actuarial Associate in the Non-Life Actuarial Team at Ernst & Young South Africa.

While at UP, she was a recipient of the Vice Chancellor's Distinguished Merit Award, the Postgraduate Merit Plus Award and the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation Scholarship. In addition to serving as a class representative in numerous classes, she was also a teaching assistant in the Actuarial Science Department, focusing on second-year Financial Mathematics.

Despite her rigorous degree, and being a full-time student, Ntando simultaneously balanced both academic and professional responsibilities during her time at the university. Initially, as an Intern at Africa's first digital women's health platform, Zoie Health; then Bank of America, Merrill Lynch as an Investment Banking Intern and, most recently, as a Research Intern at the Harvard Business School Africa Research Centre. It was at the Centre that her admiration for the African continent was born. It was Africa's attributes of resilience, indomitability and, more so, its great potential rather than its perceived need, that drew her deep affection and lasting reverence. As a result, while at Oxford, she hopes to pursue an **MSc in African Studies**.

Guided by Dr Martin Luther King Jr.'s quote, *"Life's most urgent and persistent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"*, she is deeply committed to public service, especially as it relates to education. In 2020, she appeared on National Television shining a light on COVID-19 and its contribution to the digital divide within the educational space; she founded Libraries4Learning to create safe library spaces and address low literacy rates within her community.; and presently serves as an Advisory Board Member for Amathuba Foundation, an education-focused non-profit in South Africa. These efforts underscore her commitment to addressing the educational inequality that exists within her broader community.

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## RUTH KASANGA (Gauteng Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large 2026)

Growing up in Durban, **Ruth** (23), attended New Forest High School where she was the Head Prefect in her Matric year. She is currently completing an MA in International Relations at the University of Pretoria (UP), where her research examines the capability of Africa's Regional Economic Communities' youth development policies to achieve human security outcomes in complex regional environments. She graduated cum laude in her BA Honours International Relations degree and summa cum laude in her BPolSci International Studies degree, both from UP.

Ruth recently completed a Politics internship at Oxford Economics Africa and currently serves as a Youth Advisor to the Embassy of Sweden in South Africa. She is part of the teaching support staff in the Department of Political Sciences and is a Research Assistant at the African Centre for the Study of the USA at the University of Pretoria.

Ruth has received numerous awards, including the Politika and CF Nieuwoudt Awards for top undergraduate student in Political Science and International Relations, the Mandela Rhodes Scholarship for her honour's degree, and the Mastercard Foundation Scholarship for her master's degree.

She is the founder of LeadHership by Ruth, a mentorship programme supporting early professional development of young women aspiring to enter politics and international relations across Southern Africa. Ruth is also a Youth Fellow with the Sweden-based International Youth Think Tank, where she co-develops participatory democracy policies presented at international forums such as the Athens Democracy Forum and implemented in countries including South Africa, Sweden, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Uganda. Ruth enjoys collecting contemporary African literature, travelling, and hiking in her spare time. At Oxford, Ruth hopes to pursue a **Master of Public Policy**.





## Meet our Rhodes Scholars-Elect, 2026

### DR NGWAO NGWAKO (BLMNS Regional Finalist, Botswana Scholar-Elect 2026)



**Ngwao** (26) graduated from the University of Botswana with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) degree. She is currently working as a Medical Officer under Greater Gaborone DHMT rotating in 16 clinics. Ngwao's research work spans adolescent HIV and mental health and cancer care in Botswana. She has co-authored peer-reviewed publications and recently completed an advanced course in biostatistics to strengthen her data-driven approach to health equity.

Ngwao is also the founder of Ignite Youth Network, a school based, youth empowerment program delivering mental, sexual and reproductive health education and career mentorship in junior schools. Ngwao, has received honourable mention for Excellence Beyond Lecture Halls by the University of Botswana, and multiple international research scholarships, to attend and present at international conferences including Paediatric Academic Societies conference in the US. Ngwao has held leadership positions including being student class representative throughout medical school and being part of the Youth Advisory Panel under the UNFPA.

She enjoys swimming, crocheting and being part of a local book club. Ngwao is also a passionate writer and poet who uses storytelling including her personal experience as a cancer survivor to amplify survivor stories and inspire conversations on resilience and health.

At Oxford University, Ngwao hopes to pursue the **MSc Global Health Science and Epidemiology**.

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### KABELO MBUYISA (Gauteng Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large Scholar-Elect 2026)

**Kabelo** (23) was born in Rietvallei Ext. 2 a township in Krugersdorp, West of Johannesburg. He matriculated from Thatulwazi WR High School and graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand with a BEd (Senior Phase & FET) (Cum Laude) with triple majors in Physics, Life Sciences and Geography. He holds an Honours Degree in Education; and is currently completing his MEd by Research Dissertation, where he is exploring Decoloniality in Science Curriculum Policies and seeks to validate indigenous knowledge systems as genuine scientific knowledge equilateral to western science for the humanisation of Africans and their knowledge systems.

Kabelo recently commenced reading for an MSc in African Studies at Oxford University where he is doing a comparative study on Africa's resource-rich countries, evaluating the impact of geopolitical competition for resources on education and economic development outcomes which directly influence the fiscal allocations to address underdevelopment on the African continent. He works as a Research & Organisational development consultant for the Club of Rome; and is the founder and Executive Chairman of the Pedagogical Science Institute and Education for Economic Development Centralised Regulator NPC.

Over the course of his studies, Kabelo has been awarded multiple honours and scholarships including the Faculty Jake Hutton Memorial Award, 22 certificates of first class, Golden Key membership, Wits University Council Merit Scholarships and Postgraduate Merit Awards. He is a 2025 Mandela Rhodes Scholar, recipient of the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Higher Education Award, NRF-DAAD Germany scholar, a FirstRand International Postgraduate Scholar and an Allan Gray Postgrad Candidate Fellow







## Meet our Rhodes Scholars-Elect, 2026

Kabelo is the youngest member in Africa of the UNESCO Chair in Teacher Education for diversity and development and has served in multiple significant leadership roles where he advocates for relational social justice.

Outside of his academic pursuits he spends his time with podcasting, hiking, cooking, writing and quality moments with his family.

At Oxford University he will pursue a **DPHil in International Development** where he will explore how African resource-rich countries can leverage the global just transition to green industrialisation to diversify their economies and deal with their education and technology development challenges for the improvement of the lives of ordinary people.

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### DR NANDIPA MPONDA (Western Cape Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large Scholar-Elect 2026)



**Nandipa** (26) grew up in Cape Town and attended Herschel Girls' School. Nandi graduated from Stellenbosch University in 2023 with an MBChB and is currently completing her internship and working as a junior doctor in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape. Her experiences in the South African public health sector have shaped her passion for health economics, health policy, and addressing the challenges of population health in resource-limited settings.

Nandi served on student organisations focused on health advocacy, global health, and medical education, including serving as Professional Exchange Director for the International Federation of Medical Students' Association, and Secretary of the Global Health Students Network. She also co-authored a paper accepted for publication in the South African Medical Journal on the usability of an electronic health record in a public healthcare facility, exploring digital innovations to strengthen healthcare service delivery.

During her studies, Nandi received multiple academic awards, including the Excel Award, Senior Merit Award, and the Public Health Enhancement Fund Scholarship.

Outside of her academic and professional pursuits, Nandi enjoys baking layered cakes, maintaining a seasonal vegetable garden, and sewing handmade clothing.

At Oxford, she intends to pursue an **MSc in International Health and Tropical Medicine**, followed by an MBA, furthering her commitment to advancing equitable and financially sustainable healthcare reform in South Africa.

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### CORAL PILLAY (Gauteng Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large Scholar-Elect 2026)

**Coral** (23) hails from Chatsworth and attended Southlands Secondary School. She is currently completing an MSc in Astrophysics at the University of the Witwatersrand, where she previously earned her BSc Honours in Physics with distinction. Her research focuses on how galaxies and the supermassive black holes at their centres grow, merge, and shape the cosmos over billions of years. Coral is interested in bridging the gap between advanced supercomputer simulations of the universe and observations from modern radio telescopes, including South Africa's MeerKAT+ and the upcoming Square Kilometre Array (SKA). Coral has also contributed to international research with the European Space Agency's Laser Interferometer Space Antenna (LISA) Consortium, expanding her expertise into the extraordinary realm of gravitational-wave astronomy. During her postgraduate studies, she has received awards to conduct research abroad at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and at the Joint Institute for VLBI ERIC (JIVE) in the Netherlands, where she worked as a summer student in 2024.





## Meet our Rhodes Scholars-Elect, 2026

At home in Johannesburg, Coral is an active science communicator and community organiser, passionate about making science more inclusive, socially engaged, and politically responsive. She believes that science can be a tool for social resistance, expanding opportunity and democratising knowledge for all who seek to better understand our universe. Outside her research, Coral enjoys spending time in nature, reading, and taking in her city's art and music scene. She delights in new experiences, especially those shared with her loved ones. Coral hopes to pursue a **DPhil in Astrophysics** at the University of Oxford.

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### KERRY PORRILL (Western Cape Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large Scholar-Elect 2026)



**Kerry** (22) is from Cape Town and attended Cannons Creek High School. She is currently a BSc Honours student at Stellenbosch University, where she studies Mathematics. She recently received a Rector's Award for Academic Excellence for achieving one of the highest averages of BSc graduates in 2024 at Stellenbosch University.

Kerry is passionate about mathematics and has participated in many mathematics competitions. Notably, she represented South Africa at the International Mathematics Olympiad while in high school and since matriculating she has been involved in training and leading the national teams. Kerry has run several Maths training camps for girls interested in Mathematics Olympiads, and she led a team to the European Girls Mathematics Olympiad this year, which was South Africa's first time participating.

Kerry has also co-authored a paper that was recently published in the Journal of Algebra and its Application. This paper was the result of an internship she participated in at the end of her second year.

When she isn't busy studying, she enjoys reading and playing video games.

Kerry hopes to pursue a **DPhil in Mathematics** at Oxford.

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### NKOSINATHI THOBANI SANGWENI (KwaZulu-Natal Regional Finalist, SA-at-Large Scholar-Elect 2026)

**Thobani** (23) grew up in a small village in Ulundi, Kwa-Zulu Natal, called Ntendeka. He attended Nsikayendlu High School, where he tutored and often taught his fellow classmates.

Thobani graduated from the University of Cape Town (UCT) with a BSc in Physics and Astrophysics in 2022 and achieved a First Class BSc Honours in Physics in 2023. He is currently completing an MSc in Physics at UCT.

For his Honours research, Thobani explored how new physics at higher energy scales might subtly shape the behaviour of top-quark interactions at the LHC, using the Standard Model Effective Field Theory to probe deviations in key observables and deepen our understanding of the Universe's fundamental structure.

His MSc research is within the ATLAS experiment at CERN and explores a search for tWZ production which contributes





towards understanding rare Standard Model processes which is yet to be observed in ATLAS.

He was one of only two South African students chosen in 2024 to participate in the prestigious CERN Summer Student Programme, where he attended lectures by leading experts and contributed to a research project within the CMS experiment. During his time at CERN, he developed a machine-learning model capable of distinguishing prompt from non-prompt muons while simultaneously using domain-adversarial techniques to reduce correlations between lepton isolation and muon classification, the two variables used in data-driven background estimation, an advancement that could improve the precision of future CMS analyses.

Beyond research, Thobani serves as a physics tutor and lab demonstrator for first and second-year undergraduate students. He volunteered with the Golden Future Project that tutored high school students from Khayelitsha. He was also a scribe for the Disability Services in the Office for Inclusivity and Change at UCT.

Thobani is an avid football player and is learning to play the electric guitar in his spare time. He is a big Formula 1 fan and an Anime and Manga enthusiast.

Thobani hopes to pursue a **DPhil in Particle Physics** at Oxford

The Southern Africa National Secretariat has fulfilled its mandate again this year. Following rigorous regional and national interviews, held over the last three months, ten Rhodes Scholarships (2026) have been awarded to an outstanding cohort of young graduates from Botswana and South Africa.

Reflecting on the 2025/26 selections for the Rhodes Scholarships for Southern Africa, the National Secretary, Ndumiso Luthuli, commented:

*"The Rhodes selection process aims to identify young people with proven academic excellence who also show exceptional character and grit, the courage to lead and make a difference in the broader community, the energy to use their talents to the full, and a commitment to solving humanity's challenges. We believe that the ten Scholars-Elect for 2026 personify these core values and criteria. All intellectually gifted, driven, and well-rounded young leaders, they will be impactful changemakers in the years ahead."*

We wish the Southern African Scholars-Elect for 2026 (pictured below) every happiness and success at Oxford University; and look forward to their impactful leadership in the years to come.

