

DSA Global Citizenship Developmental Programme (2026)

University of Eswatini, Eduardo Mondlane University & University of Kigali

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1. Introduction

Global citizenship is not an innate competency; rather, it must be intentionally cultivated to enable individuals to navigate the complexities of the globalized 21st century. For global citizenship scholars, universities bear a responsibility to foster students' global citizenship skills as part of the broader educational mandate (Grad & Van der Zande, 2022:13). In fact, the DHET's policy framework for internationalization of higher education makes global citizenship initiatives not an option for South African public universities (DHET, 2019). While universities in the Global North have traditionally led efforts to promote global citizenship, especially through "study abroad programmes", institutions in the Global South have historically lagged behind in terms of such initiatives (Massaro, 2022).

At the University of the Free State (UFS), the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) recognizes the necessity and urgency of strengthening global citizenship development within the African higher education context. Henceforth, the DSA launched a Global Citizenship Programme with a deliberate African-centered and experiential learning focus, prioritizing the development of global citizenship competencies among student leaders.

The initiative commenced in 2024 through a partnership with the University of Zambia (UNZA). In 2025, the programme expanded to include collaboration with the University of Botswana and the University of Namibia. This ongoing expansion reflects the DSA's commitment to advancing an African-centered global citizenship development agenda, aligned with the University of the Free State's Vision 130 and 2023–2028 Internationalization Strategy (UFS, 2020; UFS, 2023).







The programme seeks to:

- Promote a global citizenship mindset among UFS students, particularly student leaders.
- Enrich and prepare young leaders to lead effectively in contexts characterized by collaboration, diversity and constant change.
- Develop future leaders equipped with the skills and knowledge, such as intercultural competence, essential to navigating international environments and driving meaningful global impact.
- Provide a platform for the exchange and benchmarking of best practices in student support systems and student welfare initiatives.

In 2026, the programme will further expand through partnerships with the University of Eswatini (UNESWA), Eduardo Mondlane University (EMU) and the University of Kigali (UoK). Following a rigorous selection process, a cohort of successful students will spend six days at the 2026 partnered institutions, engaging with culturally distinct student environments and exploring leadership, diversity, and student support practices within culturally dissimilar African university contexts.

2. Shared Institutional Values

While UFS has its unique values, UNESWA, EMU & UoK share certain values with UFS. It is important to note that these may be differently named by the individual institutions, but there are sufficient similarities for them to be regarded as complementary in meaning.

	VALUE	UFS	UNESWA	EMU	UOK
1.	 <i>Excellence/ Professionalism/ Quality</i>	X	X	X	X
2.	 <i>Impact/ Innovation/ Creativity/Relevance/ Development</i>	X	X	X	X
3.	 <i>Accountability/ Integrity/ Transparency/ Ethicality/Honesty</i>	X	X	X	X
4.	 <i>Care/Emapathy/Patience/Tolerance</i>	X			X
5.	 <i>Social Justice</i>	X			
6.	 <i>Sustainability</i>	X			X

Encouraged by the above values, all three institutions have a mission to respond to current and future societal challenges through research, teaching and learning, innovation, and community engagement programmes. The DSA at UFS holds that the Global Citizenship Programme contributes to all four institutions' individual journey towards the fulfilment of their connected missions. The contribution will be salient in the next section.

3. Institutional Strategies

3.1 University of Eswatini

The 2024–2029 institutional strategy of the University of Eswatini (UNESWA) and the 2023–2028 strategic plan of the University of the Free State (UFS) both position the institutions as key contributors to society's future (UNESWA, 2024; UFS, 2023).

UNESWA's six strategic pillars—Teaching and Learning; Research, Innovation and Enterprise; Human Resource Development and Management; Institutional Effectiveness and Efficiency; Stakeholder Engagement and Management; and Financial Sustainability—find strong resonance with UFS's five broad goals of academic excellence and impact, agility and accountability, transformational institutional culture, strategic stewardship of resources, and collaborative innovation and global integration. Within this shared strategic orientation, the UFS DSA Global Citizenship Programme functions as a co-curricular mechanism that operationalizes both universities' institutional strategies in tangible ways by translating abstract strategic aspirations into lived people experiences. It serves as a human and social

capital development platform that advances sustainable societal impact through the cultivation of interculturally competent graduates equipped with 21st-century leadership capabilities, ethical responsibility and global awareness. Simultaneously, it acts as a strategic soft-skills driver that enhances institutional reputation, strengthens stakeholder engagement, and increases regional partnership visibility, thereby contributing meaningfully to both UNESWA's pillar-based sustainability agenda and UFS's research-led, student-centered and globally integrated strategy.

3.2 Eduardo Mondlane University

The 2023–2028 strategic plan of the University of the Free State (UFS) also aligns closely with the 2018–2028 institutional strategy of Eduardo Mondlane University (EMU), particularly in their shared emphasis on research as the foundation for teaching and learning, governance reform and societal impact. UFS's goal to improve academic excellence, reputation and impact resonates with EMU's Teaching and Learning and Research focus areas, especially objectives that strengthen the research–training nexus, enhance research output, promote innovation in pedagogy and increase dissemination for visibility and impact. UFS's aim to establish collaborative innovation and global integration mirrors EMU's Cooperation priorities centered on partnerships and mobility, and the stewardship of resources aligns with UEM's Management, Finance, Human Resources and Infrastructure objectives (UFS, 2023; EMU, 2018). Within these parallel institutional strategies, the UFS DSA Global Citizenship Programme contributes meaningfully to both institutions' transformation, global engagement and student-centered excellence plan through the cultivation of intercultural competence, ethical citizenship and socially responsible leadership. In doing so, it enables opportunities to harness African intercultural teaching and learning ideas, strengthens the intercultural and intergroup research–teaching nexus, advances cross-cutting institutional values, enhances regional and international visibility, and translates research-led institutional ambitions into the lived formation of globally aware future graduates set to contribute to responsible societal futures.

3.3 University of Kigali

The 2023–2028 strategic plan of the University of the Free State (UFS) matches the 2025–2029 strategic plan of the University of Kigali (UoK), particularly in their shared commitment to sustainability, innovation, global engagement, and societal impact. UFS's goal of enhancing academic excellence and impact resonates with UoK's pillar of World-Class Innovative Education, which emphasizes technology-driven curricula, interdisciplinary learning, and the preparation of graduates for a rapidly evolving global economy. Similarly, UFS's focus on agility, accountability, and institutional responsiveness finds expression in UoK's emphasis on Financial Sustainability, Staff Excellence and Capacity Building, which foregrounds human capital development, leadership, and organizational efficiency. UFS's commitment to a transformational institutional culture aligns closely with UoK's Inclusive Community Engagement, of which embeds sustainability, ethics, social justice, and community-driven knowledge production into the core of institutional practice. Furthermore, UFS's objective of advancing collaborative innovation and global integration mirrors UoK's Strategic Internationalization and Partnerships and Research and Innovation Excellence pillars, which prioritize global collaborations and the co-creation of solutions to regional and global challenges (UFS, 2023; UoK, 2025). Within this shared strategic direction, the UFS DSA Global Citizenship Programme serves as a vital co-curricular activity that

operationalizes the institutional goals/pillars by fostering intercultural competence, ethical responsibility, and global awareness in the selected cohort of student leaders. It contributes to UoK’s vision of producing graduate readiness for projected sustainable futures, while advancing community engagement, enhancing global partnerships, and translating institutional strategies into lived educational experiences that promote inclusive development and responsible global citizenship.

4. Aligned Graduate Attributes

The UFS is intentional about producing graduates who possess globally required employability attributes. As such, the DSA Global Citizenship Programme will foster the following graduate attributes.

Graduate Attribute	Alignment to Outcomes
Critical Thinking	This program will develop critical thinking amongst participants as they analyse complex international issues and formulate solutions and strategies.
Oral Communication & Written Communication	The nature of the programme enables an environment for students to develop intercultural communication competence, which is interlocutors’ ability to communicate with culturally dissimilar individuals effectively and appropriately (Sarwari et al., 2024: 2). These skills will include, but are not limited to, mindful listening, cultural empathy, mindful reframing, cultural humility and adaptive code-switching (Rivera Sanchez and Du Plessis, 2020: 2018–210). These are essential 21st-century communication skills that student leaders need. Furthermore, the programme is set to enhance confidence in engaging unfamiliar cultural audiences. Participants will be able to articulate their thoughts clearly in both oral and written communication.
Problem solving	Participants will develop the ability to create innovative solution to problems, and demonstrate resilience and adaptability.
Community Engagement	The program will develop intercultural competencies. Participants will learn to respect cultural differences, understand their diversities and improve communication.

As students will be equipped with skills to contemplate, discuss and engage with issues of diversity, leadership and citizenship in the programme, they are expected to acquire and enhance their growth in knowledge and skills, compare what they learn internationally with the situation at the UFS, and ultimately initiate their role as agents of change upon their return. In essence, they should display development in the cognitive, behavioral and affective capacity to deal with the diversity, leadership and citizenship demands of the 21st century.

5. The Selection Process

Students will be selected on the basis of strict criteria focused on their commitment to learning, academic record, leadership abilities, and student life participation.

The programme is three-fold:

- the selection and preparatory phase,
- the abroad phase and,
- the return-learning phase.

6. The Criteria

To be considered, applicants must meet **all** of the following requirements:

1. Student Registration

- Must be a **currently registered UFS student** (Bloemfontein, QwaQwa, and South Campus) for the 2026 academic year.
- Must have completed **at least three consecutive semesters** of study at UFS at the time of application.

2. Academic Performance

- Must have a **good academic record** (minimum average of 60% is recommended).
- Must provide an **official academic transcript** as proof of performance.

3. Student Conduct

- May have no history of repeat-disciplinary action
- Must not have unresolved matters with the Student Discipline and Mediation Unit (SDMU).

4. Citizenship & Travel Requirements

- Must possess a **valid passport** (with at least 6 months' validity from the date of departure).
- Must be eligible and available to **travel for the duration of the programme**.

5. Leadership and Campus Involvement

- Must demonstrate **strong leadership qualities**, community engagement, or active involvement in student life activities.
- Must be willing to **participate in all phases** of the program:
 - Pre-departure preparation and training
 - Study visit abroad
 - Return-learning and student engagement phase

6. Personal Motivation

- Must submit a **motivational letter (500–700 words)** that clearly outlines:
 - Their motivation for applying
 - What they hope to learn
 - How they intend to contribute to UFS upon return

7. References

- Must provide **two reference letters**:
 - One from an academic staff member
 - One from a student affairs or student organisation advisor (e.g., SRC, residence head, society chair)

8. Preferred Attributes

While not mandatory, preference may be given to students who:

- Have participated in **volunteering, mentoring, or community outreach** initiatives.
- Have **held leadership positions** within student organisations or societies.
- Demonstrate a **keen interest in African development**, internationalisation, or intercultural learning.

9. Programme Eligibility and Participation Limitations

- Only undergraduate students registered at the University of the Free State will be considered for this programme.
- Students who have previously participated in this programme, or any other overseas / international opportunity offered by the University of the Free State, are not eligible to apply

10. Submission Requirements

A complete application must include:

- Completed application form (online)
- Academic transcript
- Motivational letter
- Valid passport copy
- Two reference letters

6.1 The Selection

A panel will be composed at the discretion of the Executive Director: Student Affairs will shortlist and interview all prospective delegates.

After shortlisting and interviews, the students will enter the last segment of selection. They will have to pass a designed course (inclusive of key information about Eswatini, Mozambique & Rwanda) with a minimum of 60%. This course will be designed, presented, and assessed by the Program Director: Africa Studies, Dr. Leshoele.

7. Return on Investment

Upon their return, these students are expected to actively engage in campus life by participating in student-life programmes, investing skills and time in volunteer initiatives, and establishing mentoring schemes for their peers. For the partnered institutions, they represent an ideal cohort for conducting diverse empirical research that can not only advance the university's internationalization agenda, global south internationalization knowledge pool but also generates meaningful societal impact.

8. Conclusion

The UFS DSA Global Citizenship Programme represents a strategic, values-driven and future-oriented investment in the development of African student leaders. Rooted in shared institutional commitments to excellence, ethical leadership, innovation and societal impact, the programme translates institutional strategies into lived student experiences that foster intercultural competence, critical thinking, responsible citizenship and transformative leadership. Through partnering with UNESWA, EMU & UoK, UFS pave a pathway to African-centered model of inter-university engagement. A model that prioritizes regional collaboration, reciprocal learning and sustainable societal futures.

Through a rigorous selection process, structured developmental phases and intentional return-investment, the programme ensures meaningful impact not only for participating students but for the partners' broader university community. This initiative places UFS on the right pathway to being a leader in cultivating globally aware, socially responsible graduates who are equipped with 21st century skills for navigating diversity, contributing to African development and serving as agents of change in an interconnected world.

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