

1.1 History of the Western Cape Chapter of ORSSA

The history of the ORSSA Western Cape Chapter is one filled with highs and lows — it has been one filled with numerous enjoyable chapter activities but has also been plagued by periods of dormancy and threat of continued existence. Despite the challenges, the chapter still remains a functioning part of the ORSSA body to this day. In this section, the Western Cape Chapter’s formation, together with some iconic moments in the chapter’s history, are reviewed.

1.1.1 Formation of the chapter

The first formal communication about the formation of the Western Cape chapter was on the 14th April 1970 when Mr JC Joslin was requested by the ORSSA Executive Committee at the time to write to Prof CJ Troskie about this matter [1]. To the committee’s delight, Prof CJ Troskie agreed to take up this challenge. By the 11th August 1970, Prof CJ Troskie and a further two advocates, Mr HID du Plessis and Mr MS Green, had formed a Steering Committee in the hope of establishing the Western Cape chapter before the 2nd Annual ORSSA Conference [2]. This, however, did not transpire due to difficulties in gaining member’s support within the Western Cape. The ORSSA Executive Committee attempted to assist Prof Troskie by sending him a list of all ORSSA members in the Cape Town and Stellenbosch area [3]. This certainly helped the Steering Committee in reaching out to fellow OR-enthusiasts and, as a result, gaining significant traction in their quest to establish a new chapter. On the 2nd November 1971, Prof CJ Troskie announced that the establishment of a Western Cape chapter of ORSSA could soon be expected [17]. It would, however, take the motivation of Mr J Miller and a further nine months before the establishment of the chapter [5].

The first formal meeting of the Western Cape chapter was held on the 14th August 1972 at the Sanlam headquarters in Bellville [14]. At this meeting, Prof R Tusenius, Director of the Graduate School of Business at Stellenbosch University, addressed the twenty attending ORSSA members with a talk entitled *Cost-effectiveness of operations research projects* [22]. After the talk and a short interval for tea, a constitution for the new chapter was proposed by Mr V Rademacher and unanimously approved by those present¹. The final duty of the day was to elect the first office-bearers who would oversee the day-to-day running of the chapter. A Chapter Committee made up of seven members was elected, as indicated in Table 1.1. The newly elected chairman adjourned the meeting and thanked those present for their attendance.

Table 1.1: The first Chapter Committee of the Western Cape chapter of ORSSA [15].

Name	Role	Organisation
V Rademacher	Chairperson	Caltex Oil
HID du Plessis	Vice-chairperson	Sanlam
G Geldenhuys	Secretary	Stellenbosch University
JC Lawton	Treasurer	Mobil Oil SA
MS Green	Additional member	Cape Town University
J Bennett	Additional member	Caltex Oil
S Smith	Additional member	Rupert International

1.1.2 Leadership and activities of the chapter through the years

Since the the Western Cape Chapter of ORSSA’s foundation in 1972, the objective of the chapter has been “to promote in the Western Cape region a wider knowledge of the techniques and practices of Operations Research” [23, 29]. As of 2018, there have been 18 distinct chairpersons bearing the chapter’s office. A list of these chairpersons may be viewed in Table 1.2. Through the years, the chapter has also

¹This constitution was subsequently submitted and applied for affiliation with the Operations Research Association of South Africa, and accepted on the 11th September 1972 [6].

Table 1.2: Chairpersons of the Western Cape Chapter of ORSSA during 1972–2017 [20].

Period	Chairperson	Years served	Period	Chairperson	Years served
1972-1973	V Rademacher	1	1987-1989	M Sinclair	2
1973-1974	HID du Plessis	1	1988-1990	(Vacant)	(2)
1974-1975	JC Lawton	1	1990-1991	TJ Stewart (convenor)	1
1975-1976	AH Money	1	1991-1994	(Vacant)	(3)
1976-1979	JH MacKenzie	3	1994-2001	TJ Stewart (caretaker)	7
1979-1980	K van der Poel	1	2001-2003	JH van Vuuren	2
1980-1981	ML Hart	1	2003-2012	M Louw (M Bester)	9
1981-1982	T Wegner	1	2012-2013	M van der Merwe	1
1982-1983	(Vacant)	(1)	2013-2015	DP Lötter	2
1983-1985	LA Visagie	2	2015-2016	T Schmit-Dumont	1
1985-1986	J Tredoux	1	2016-Present	SA van Heerden	1
1986-1987	TJ Stewart	1			

organised a total of 201 chapter activities, which includes 12 conferences (10 ORSSA conferences), 16 student competitions, 150 academic talks, 16 miscellaneous events, and 7 Lean Analytics meet-ups. A bar graph showing a yearly breakdown of these activities may be viewed in Figure 1.1.

The 6th Annual ORSSA conference in 1974 was the first ORSSA conference entrusted to the Western Cape Chapter. Mr AH Money was appointed as the convenor for the conference [24], while the national executive committee were responsible for all the conference financial matters and bookkeeping [28]. The University of Cape Town was approached with regards to the venue, and a conference hall was subsequently secured for the conference. Dr RB Johnson from IBM was invited as a keynote speaker to deliver two talks on invention: one of a technical nature, and the other acting as more of an overview [26]. A variety of other topics were also presented and included talks from the fields of simulation, environmental, forecasting, portfolio selection, and quadratic programming [25]. After the conference's completion, Dr Money was congratulated for the conference's great success and thanked by the Executive Committee for his outstanding organisational work [27].

In 1977, some debate was stirred up between the Executive Committee of ORSSA and other members of the Society about the way in which ORSSA can better promote the Society. The overall goal was to attract more interest and involvement in the Society's activities and encourage the practical application of OR. Prof HS Sichel proposed the idea to hold so-called *mini-symposia* at various times throughout the year to achieve this goal. The idea of these mini-symposia was to present a number of papers around a common theme instead of addressing the chapter with one paper. In just over a year, a total of three mini-symposia would be organised by the Western Cape Chapter, the first of which was a management science themed on the 1 June of that year [21]. This proved to be a tremendous success, attracting and entertaining over 60 ORSSA members. The next two mini-symposia were organised in the following year, where topics centred around containerization and forecasting attracted a total of 35 and 25 members, respectively.

The first student competition was organised by the Western Cape Chapter of ORSSA and held for the first time on 4th December 1980 in the B.P. Auditorium in Cape Town [18]. Five senior members of the OR community assembled to judge the submitted papers and presentations. All contributions were said to be of a high standard, well presented and interesting for an audience of about 50 with varied backgrounds and levels of experience in OR [12]. The clear winner of first prize and a cheque for R200 was Mr A Gilbertson from the Cape Town University for his project entitled *An exercise in production scheduling using linear programming*. The second prize of R100 was awarded to Mr C Swart from Stellenbosch University who spoke on *Optimum cultivation of tobacco*. Mr T Jones and Mr P Osborne were awarded third prize for their joint project on *Development of a bonus incentive scheme for Kings Kreations*, while the other finalists, Miss L Scott from Cape Town University and Mr P Richardson from Stellenbosch University, spoke on applications of LPs in finding an optimal hiking trail through the Cape Peninsula, and in chemical production, respectively. The general feeling of the present members was that it was a

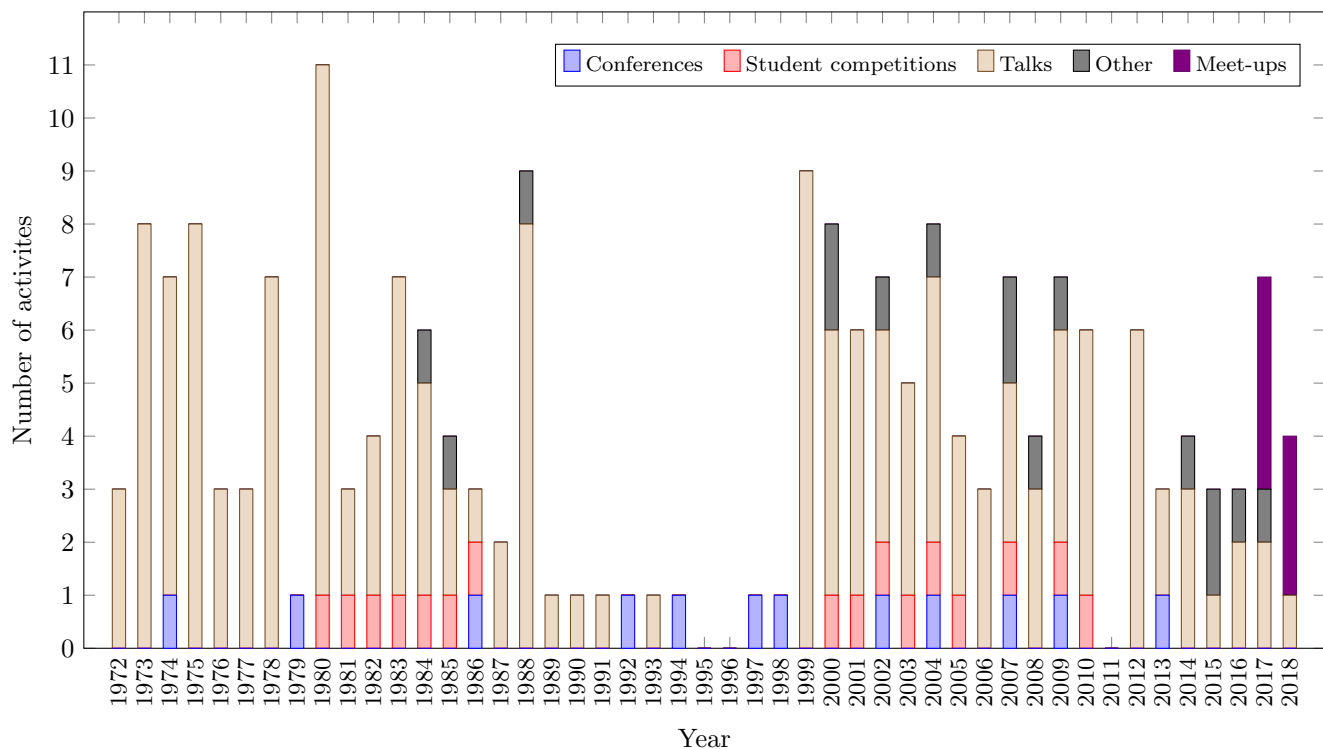


Figure 1.1: Activities of the Western Cape Chapter of ORSSA during 1972–2017 [21].

great success and should be repeated annually with more advance publicity for both students and the public [18].

At the beginning 1989, concern was raised with regard to the gradually diminishing attendance of ORSSA activities, despite the full program from the previous year. The general feeling from members working in industry was that the Society had become a body “run by academics, for academics” [19]. The Executive Committee attempted to address this matter by inviting practitioners of OR in the Western Cape to address meetings on the exposition of practical model building, implementation problems and the other areas of interest to practitioners. The attendance at this event was again quite dismal. A questionnaire was also sent out to non-academic members of which not a single reply was received. With the resignation of Mr M Sinclair as chairperson, the Chapter ultimately slipped into a state of dormancy.

In 1990, an informal chapter AGM was held to discuss the continued existence of the chapter. A committee (largely without specific portfolios) was set up to try and facilitate the revival of the Western Cape Chapter activities, where Prof TJ Stewart acted as the Chapter convenor [16]. It was decided that the thrust will be to provide a forum within which OR-related problems can be shared, and, in particular, to bring forth problems from industry and couple them with solutions in academics. The first such forum was planned for April of the following year, around the theme of forecasting problems. This, however, failed to materialise and the chapter again slipped into a state of dormancy. In 1994, Prof TJ Stewart agreed to act as the chapter caretaker until an enthusiastic executive committee could be found. The only notable events organised by members of the Western Cape Chapter during these periods were the MANSA and MCDA conferences in 1994 and 1997, respectively [21].

The revival of the chapter in 1999 was entirely due to the efforts of Dr JH van Vuuren, who shook up the chapter with a seminar series consisting of 11 seminars for the year, one of which was held approximately every 3 weeks [7]. Dr van Vuuren continued to stir up the chapter in 2000 by again organising a series of seminars throughout the year, as well as a workshop on project management and scheduling [8]. During this year, Dr van Vuuren also revived the much-loved student competition, which had not been held since 1986. Dr van Vuuren continued organising regular seminars together with the

annual student competition [9], subsequently taking over as chapter chairperson in October of 2001 [10], until bestowing the chapter responsibilities to his former master student, Ms M Louw (soon to be Mrs M Bester), in 2003.

Mrs M Bester has been the Western Cape Chapter's longest serving chairperson, bearing office for 9 consecutive years. During this time, Mrs M Bester organised 47 separate chapter activities which included a number of talks from people in academics and industry, 6 student competitions, a workshop demonstrating the capabilities of the AIMMS software, and industry visits to South African Breweries and Chevron. Upon her resignation at the end of 2012, she thanked Prof JH van Vuuren, Prof WR Gevers, Prof TJ Stewart and Ms I Nieuwoudt for their continuous support throughout her time as chairperson [11].

Following on the success of the Lean Analytics² meet-up groups in the Johannesburg and Pretoria Chapters, the Western Cape Chapter decided to establish their own meet-up group in June 2017 [13]. The purpose of this group was to engage with Stellenbosch-based enthusiasts around topics related to operations research, together with the related disciplines of statistics, data mining, and computer science, as well as promote upcoming national and chapter ORSSA events. The group also aimed to act as a forum for people to network and share expertise, passion or even struggles, be it quality improvement, cost reduction, analytical insights, or process optimisation, to name but a few. An extremely positive response was received from the surrounding community and, as a result, this meet-up group is still a functioning part of the Western Cape Chapter.

As of 2018, the Chapter still remains an active part of the ORSSA body. The chapter will no doubly continue it's goal of promoting a wider knowledge of the techniques and practices of Operations Research in the Western Cape.

²The Lean Analytics meeting format is one in which no formal topic is stipulated beforehand. Rather, participants bring their own topics to the meeting and those attending vote on which will be discussed.

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