

# Umlazi teen's unlikely road to Harvard

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An Umlazi teenager's desire to succeed and fulfil his mother's dream of his getting a good education has earned him a full four-year scholarship worth more than R4m to one of the world's top universities.



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Since hearing of his acceptance to complete a bachelor of arts and science degree at Harvard in the US, Mfundo Radebe, 18, has hardly been able to sleep.

"I will be studying government and African studies, with a particular focus on African governance. My ultimate goal in life is to make a difference in South Africa. I see this young democracy with so much potential, and I want to contribute to its development. I believe in South Africa," said the Crawford College matriculant.

Radebe applied to Harvard at the beginning of November, and had to submit his Grade 9 to Grade 12 trial exam results.

He achieved eight distinctions, in physics, maths, life sciences, history, accounting, English, Zulu and life orientation.

He said partying was not for him and he preferred debating and chatting to friends about history and politics. The secret of his success, he said, was consistent work.

"At midnight last Friday, thanks to the Boston-Durban time difference, I received an email confirming my acceptance. When I got this news, I started screaming and running around the house."

He was assisted with his application by the EducationUSA programme at the US consulate in Durban.

At a young age Radebe moved to live with his father's family in northern KwaZulu-Natal, where he attended Gingindlovu Primary School.

In Grade 11 he joined Crawford College La Lucia on an academic and compassionate scholarship after writing numerous times to the institution to give him a full scholarship as he could not afford the fees.

"My mom always wanted me to get a good education. I am thankful to my mom and stepdad, Lucky Zwane, for supporting me. If you see an opportunity for yourself, you should push ahead," he said.

In August, Radebe travelled to the UK, where his essay - "Limiting the powers of government: South Africa's Magna Carta" - won top honours in an international essay competition.

"It had an African central theme which underlined the hopes of African people throughout the continent.

"Accountability was a central issue, looking at government owning up to its mistakes and using them to learn and move forward.

"Also, to remember the people they are serving. This lavishness cannot stand in a country where so many people cannot afford bread. The government cannot spend on lavish holiday flights while the people cannot afford bread," said Radebe.

"If we can limit the powers of the government in the implementation of the laws, then the government can be held accountable."

Radebe's mother, Nobuhle Zwane, a nurse, described him as a special child. "I never had to check on his school work because he is always with his school books," she said.

Radebe leaves for the US in August next year. His message to other youngsters is to never feel ashamed of their roots, but to use their background to drive themselves to greater heights.

*Source: Sunday Times*