

RHODES: WHO WE ARE, WHERE WE ARE TODAY AND WHERE WE WANT TO BE IN 2019

Why there is a Rhodes

When new students arrive at Rhodes, I tell them why there is a Rhodes University and what we exist to do. I say that we serve three key purposes.

The first is to *produce knowledge*, so that we can advance understanding of our natural and social worlds and enrich our accumulated scientific and cultural heritage.

This means that we “test the inherited knowledge of earlier generations”, we dismantle the mumbo jumbo that masquerades for knowledge, we “reinvigorate” knowledge and we share our findings with others. We undertake research into the most arcane and abstract issues and the “most theoretical and intractable uncertainties of knowledge”. At the same time we also strive to apply our discoveries for the benefit of humankind. We “operate on both the short and the long horizon”. On the one hand, we grapple with urgent and “contemporary problems” and seek solutions to these. On the other hand, we “forage” into issues and undertake enquiries “that may not appear immediately relevant to others, but have the proven potential to yield great future benefit”.

As a university our second purpose is to *disseminate knowledge* and to cultivate minds. Our goal is to ensure that our students can think imaginatively, “effectively and critically”; that they “achieve depth in some field of knowledge”; that they can critique and construct alternatives, that they can communicate cogently, orally and in writing, and that they have a “critical appreciation of the ways in which we gain knowledge and understanding of the universe, of society, and of ourselves”. At the same time, we also seek that our students should have “a broad knowledge of other cultures and other times”; should be “able to make decisions based on reference to the wider world and to the historical forces that have shaped it”, and that they should have “some understanding of and experience in thinking systematically about moral and ethical problems”.

Our final purpose as a university is to undertake *community engagement*. On the one hand this involves our students’ voluntary participation in community projects undertaken through our Community Engagement office. On the other hand, it involves service-learning, in which through academic courses our students and academics take part “in activities where both the community” and we benefit, “and where the goals are to provide a *service* to the community and, equally, to enhance our *learning* through rendering this service”.

I say to students that they come to Rhodes University to embark on a voyage centred on the pursuit, making and sharing of knowledge; which is why we refer to Rhodes as indawo yolwazi - a place of knowledge.

I also remind them that Rhodes is guided by certain **values**:

- Upholding ‘human dignity, equality and equity, human rights and freedoms, and non-racialism and non-sexism.

- Not unfairly discriminating against anyone on any grounds, such as ‘race’, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

Key Developments

As Rhode we need to have carefully considered and formulated ideas on our academic and overall institutional trajectory and development if we are not to be simply shaped by historical patterns and contemporary currents and pressure, and are to proactively and consciously shape its future..

We are currently in the process of producing an **Institutional Development Plan** (IDP) which will

- Collate, consolidate and expresses our choices, decisions and goals and strategies with respect to academic programmes, enrolments, staffing, infrastructure and finances until probably 2025
- Be a *compass* that guides developments, prioritisation, decision-making and implementation at Rhodes while leaving room for pursuing new imperatives and exploiting possible new opportunities.
- Ensure that there is an alignment between enrolment planning, academic planning, staffing, infrastructure planning and financial planning, and that planning occurs on a longer-term horizon.
- Will ensure that Rhodes is financially sustainable taking into account its enrolments, academic programmes and operations, and its staffing and infrastructure requirements.
- Will help us to effectively address and pursue new social and educational imperatives, goals and strategies.

Informed by the IDP, a **Campus Development Plan** will be also finalised as a guide to the considered overall physical development and maintenance of the Rhodes University campus.

Enrolment Plan

Our target for 2013 was 7 645 students with 5 329 undergraduates, 2 273 postgraduates. Currently, our enrolment is 7 577 registered students, which is 99.1% of the 2013 target of 7 645 students: 5 283 undergraduates (a little short of our target), and 2 294 postgraduates – 21 more than our target.

We have just finalised our new Enrolment Plan for 2014-2019. The salient features of this Plan are:

- Total enrolment of 8 748 students by 2019 – 1 103 more students than in 2013, an overall average annual growth rate of 2.2%
- Add 597 undergraduate students, at a modest growth rate of 1.3% per annum;
- Gradually increase first-time entering undergraduates
- Add 504 new postgraduate students

- Continue the trajectory of growth at the postgraduate level, increasing the proportion of postgraduate enrolments from 30% in 2013 to 32% by 2019;
- Maintain the enrolment of women at 59%
- Maintain outstanding graduation and throughput rates, recognising that enrolling increasing numbers of under-prepared students and ensuring that they succeed requires additional resources and time.

In contrast with previous plans, which made no provision for the introduction of any new undergraduate academic programmes, this Plan leaves open the possibility of initiating three new programmes: a four-year Bachelor of Education (Foundation Phase) degree, a Diploma to produce Grade R teachers and a Pharmacy Diploma. The intention is to make a major contribution to improving schooling, especially in the Eastern Cape. The Pharmacy Faculty is open to the idea of a new Diploma, as a way of contributing to the pressing need for more professional personnel in this field.

Our Enrolment Plan expresses our intention of becoming a more postgraduate university and overall we seek to enhance further our contribution to knowledge production through research and scholarship. We are well-positioned for such a trajectory. We

- Take research seriously and strive to provide our academics with effective support;
- Have the third best research output per capita staff member;
- Have the second highest percentage of staff with PhDs (56%),
- Have very good postgraduate graduation rates and the best rates at the PhD level.

A document which makes numerous proposals on enhancing the quantity, the quality and the equity profile of postgraduates at Rhodes, and especially South African postgraduates, is in the process of being approved by the Senate and University Council. In all likelihood, we will create a new post of Director of Postgraduate Studies, who will oversee a new Postgraduate Studies Centre, to spearhead Rhodes continuing postgraduate efforts.

Academic issues

At the April graduation ceremonies

- We graduated 2 288 students, 948 students or 41% with postgraduate degrees
- We celebrated a new University record of 63 PhD's – a fabulous achievement for the smallest university in the country
- Our Science Faculty produced 35 PhD graduates, 83 Master's graduates and 132 honours graduates.

Despite being the smallest university in South Africa, and comprising only 0.8% of South Africa's university students and 1.9% of all full-time academic staff, we possess 7% (10) of all the prestigious SARChI research chairs.

The two most recent SARChI chairs were announced in the past month: for Marine Natural Products Research (Prof Rosie Dorrington) and Critical Studies in Sexualities and Reproduction (prof Catriona Macleod). The University will continue to pursue further chairs in proven areas of academic excellence.

We will also continue to give special attention to identifying potential new postgraduate and research niche areas and programmes, and developing the appropriate institutional arrangements to effectively support larger numbers of Honours, Masters and Doctoral students, as well further enhance their academic and social experiences.

Large new research and postgraduate development initiatives include

- The Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics, located in the University's outstanding Philosophy department and made possible by a five-year, R12.4 million grant from the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation
- UHURU – a new *Unit for the Humanities at Rhodes University* funded to the tune of \$ 900 000 over four years by the Mellon Foundation.
- A project to establish the Archives of the University and produce a history of Rhodes University. This will receive \$290 000 over three years from the Mellon Foundation
- A national project on enhancing postgraduate supervision undertaken by the CHERTL has with an award of 1 million euros from the Dutch agency Nuffic

Rhodes and CHERTL are also mobilising support for a R40 million national programme that will see us partnering with the Council on Higher Education to help build the teaching and learning capabilities of academics and universities in South Africa.

On the basis of our breadth and depth in water education and research, and in partnership with NMMU and Fort Hare we hope to become a key institutional hub on the African continent in this field and bid for a UNESCO facility in this area.

We also seek to build a cooperative projects in promotion of isiXhosa as a language in higher education initiative with Fort Hare, Walter Sisulu and other Eastern and Western Cape universities.

Infrastructure

Adequate infrastructure in the form of buildings, facilities, equipment and the like are important to our academic and support-staff operations. We have to give continuous attention to

- The available infrastructure for academic programmes, administrative and other support services, student accommodation, sports/cultural activities and housing academics
- The infrastructure backlogs we may have
- The implications of future enrolments and academic programmes for different kinds of infrastructure
- The capability and capacity of Makana Municipality to provide the necessary services to support larger enrolments and new infrastructure.

Since 2007 we have

- Built a spectacular new library, completely renovated the existing library and released academic space through the incorporation of some branch libraries into the main library – a cost of R75 million
- Built five new residences – cost of some R100 million

- Built a new environmental education building – cost of R12 million
- Built a new Desmond Tutu dining hall
- Added additional ICT bandwidth and speed with considerable future savings

Currently, a new building for teacher education is being completed at a cost of some R17 million.

During the next 30 months we will

- Build a new Life Sciences building at a cost of at a minimum R100.8 million - R86.2 million; our contribution is R14.6 million, giving a total of R100.8 million.
- Build a new School of Language building at a cost of at a minimum R31.3 million – R25.8 million; our contribution is R5.5 million
- Make improvements in Pharmacy facilities and equipment to the value of R24.2 million
- Build a new undergraduate residence and refurbish current residences at a cost of R30.9 million; our contribution is R5.9 million, giving a total of R36.8 million.
- Build new postgraduate residence, which will replace the current Oakdene House; it will have 40 postgraduate student rooms and cost R18.9m.
- Continue to refurbish our residences
- Spend R2.8 million in improvements in disability access
- Undertake a comprehensive audit of the state of all our buildings in order to develop a comprehensive maintenance plan – likely to cost over R1.0 million

The Council of the University confirmed to the DHET by 15 December 2012 that it approved the projects, and that it would meet the R28.7 own contribution that was required and would also ensure that our projects would satisfy all the stipulated conditions.

We continue to aspire to build a new indoor sports centre or to considerably expand the current one, given the increased student numbers and the burgeoning of sport at Rhodes.

New infrastructure development at Rhodes will be guided by a long-term Campus Development Plan, so that we remain a beautiful campus and also incorporate environmental considerations in our planning.