

## **NEW STAFF WELCOME**

12 February 2009

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor's, Deans, academic, administrative and support staff colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, molweni, good evening and welcome to the new staff party.

It is a great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to all our new staff members and colleagues, and your partners and family, to Rhodes University.

This evening we officially welcome you to Rhodes, perhaps to iRhini/Grahamstown, and in some instances even to the Eastern Cape and South Africa.

It is, however, also an opportunity for new colleagues to meet one another and also other new and current staff members, to share initial experiences of Rhodes and iRhini/Grahamstown, exchange among yourselves tips and advice on how to cope with the new environment in which you find yourselves, and to also informally share with us how as an institution or as administrators and academics we might better support you settle into Rhodes.

104 new staff members have joined Rhodes University in the past 6 months – 27 academics, 6 wardens and 71 administrative and support staff. 44 of you are men and 60 are women, 97 are South African and 7 are nationals of other countries.

Whoever you may be – a new academic, administrator, technician, warden, messenger, cook, cleaner, or gardener, and for whatever reason you have joined Rhodes, I hope you will find Rhodes University a stimulating and hospitable environment in which you are able to flower intellectually, socially and personally, make new friends and in some cases even life-long partners.

It is worth spending a few minutes on the history, geography, economics and statistics of the institution that you have joined.

For one, founded in 1904 we are one of the oldest universities in South Africa, and, indeed Africa. We are also the smallest university in South Africa, with the expectation of being some 6 800 students this year. Almost 59% of our students are women, 25% students are postgraduate, and 18% come from over 45 countries in the rest of Africa and other parts of the world. Almost 3 000 of our students live in 48 residences on campus and eat in 11 halls.

About 1 250 people work at Rhodes on 140 hectares of land and in 220 buildings, of whom about 350 are academics and researchers. Together with an annual operational budget of R 450 million, this makes us the biggest institution in Grahamstown, shown by the fact that we contribute 65% of the GDP of the town.

We are also a voracious consumer of the town's bulk infrastructure – we consume 45% of the town's electricity and water at a cost of R1 million per month. This means we have a special

responsibility to the town and for various reasons our well-being and future is inextricably tied to the well-being future of the town.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen; you are joining an institution that is first and foremost *Indawo Yolwazi* - a place of knowledge, a place of learning.

Our institutional vision is to be 'outstanding internationally respected' university; one that 'affirms its African identity'; and is 'committed to democratic ideals, academic freedom, rigorous scholarship, and social responsibility'

Our institutional mission directs us to 'produce outstanding graduates'; 'to strive, through teaching, research and community service, to contribute to the advancement of international scholarship and the development of the Eastern Cape and Southern Africa'

Our motto is Vis Virtus Veritas = Strength Virtue Truth and our slogan - 'Where Leaders Learn'. These must not just be words to which we pay lip-service but must animate our existence and guide our conduct and endeavours.

This requires each of us to embrace the commitment

- To developing, through our teaching and learning, administrative and support services, high quality graduates who are both intellectuals, professionals and critical citizens and also possess the values, knowledge and expertise to contribute

to economic and social development, and build equitable, just and democratic societies

- To pushing forward, through fundamental research and discovery and applied research, the frontiers of knowledge and human understanding, and
- To advancing, through community engagement, mutually respectful relationships with local and other communities in a way that benefits both them and us.
- To building an institutional culture that values all and upholds the dignity and rights of all.

To the extent that any aspects of our institutional culture constrain or frustrate the development of a vibrant academic culture, academic freedom, the pursuit of human rights, social equity and justice, and an inclusive and embracing institutional culture that affirms and respects difference and diversity, they should become objects of change.

In as much as we seek to be a small university our ideals and goals are not small or modest. We also wish to be an outstanding African university, which maintains its excellent pass and graduation rates, its unsurpassed research output per academic staff member, and its commitment to making it possible for students to obtain a broad-based education in the midst of dedicated and excellent scholars and researchers.

Like every other university in South Africa today, we face various challenges which are intellectual, social, cultural and financial, as well as related to our past as a historically white university.

This means:

- That while we must take pride in our performance we must guard against complacency and resting content with our current achievements. Instead, we must continuously strive to do better and become even better
- That in the light of our fractured and painful past and our ongoing challenge of forging social cohesion, we must value, affirm, respect and embrace difference and diversity, whether this is in terms of knowledge and scholarship or socially in relation to 'race', gender, class, nationality, language, geography, religion or sexual orientation
- That we must energetically address the needs of all the social groups that make up the Rhodes community and ensure that we work to create an institutional culture that makes Rhodes a home of all and for all
- That we must meet the challenge of attracting and producing a new generation of scholars and administrators who are also more representative of our wider society
- That we must strive to put in place the physical infrastructure – a new library, new residences,

additional research and teaching facilities, accommodation for staff, etc. - to secure into the future our position as a leading university

- That amidst myriad desires and needs we make wise choices and plan in a way that ensures we remain financially sustainable in the decades to come.

All of these challenges require us to be imaginative, innovative and effective and efficient in what we do.

And imagination and creativity require of us a culture in which there is academic freedom and freedom of expression and the space for open, honest and rational debate, discussion and critique, as is befitting a university.

As a University and a community we will excel and thrive if we individually and collectively

- Uphold our fundamental social purposes as a university, which is to advance knowledge and learning
- Embrace and practice the values of respect for human dignity and human rights, non-racialism and non-sexism, and actively reject and counter any and all forms of prejudice and intolerance
- Conduct our dealings with one other with integrity, and

- Discharge our responsibilities to the best of our abilities, while being open to think critically about our work and how we could improve.

As you settle in, I hope that you will make use of the wide-range of opportunities that the University provides us to improve our knowledge expertise and skills – from beginner's classes in isiXhosa, to courses in computers and leadership, and to registering for various short courses and also diplomas and degrees. There are also many activities during the lunch hour, in the evenings and over weekends of an educational, cultural and sporting nature and I also urge you make use of these.

One of the great advantages of being a small university is that there are many opportunities for informal interaction. At the same time, my door and those of the DVC's, Deans, HoDs, managers and supervisors are always open to you should you wish to discuss anything – whether it is to raise concerns, make suggestions, seek or, even better, to provide advice.

In closing, a warm welcome, once more, to Rhodes University to you, your partner and your family.

I hope that each of you will have a long, productive and intellectually, academically and personally enriching and rewarding stay at Rhodes University.