

**English Olympiad Address Teachers of Southern Africa Annual Conference**

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**The Monument**

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## Introduction

Molweni, good morning, goeie more, dumelang

Rhodes University is very pleased to be associated with the English Olympiad and the Grahamstown Foundation.

The English Olympiad promotes and celebrates excellence in the use of the English language. As a university we promote and value excellence in the production of knowledge and in the graduates that we produce for our country and the African continent.

107-years old this year, we are the smallest university in South Africa, and take pride in a number of features of Rhodes.

59% of our 7 300 students are women; 26% are postgraduates and 21% are international students from some 45 countries around the world. This national, linguistic and cultural diversity makes us an exciting and cosmopolitan place and enriches our institutional culture and lives.

Among South African universities we possess among the best pass and graduation rates and among the best research outputs per academic staff member.

We only have 0.8% of South Africa's university students, yet we win almost 15% of Mandela Rhodes scholarships. And each year, our students win Rhodes and other scholarships to universities in the UK and elsewhere.

We are able to do all of this because we take learning, scholarship and knowledge very seriously, and we work hard to create a vibrant and dynamic university in which the mind can be developed and people can thrive.

Each year, we offer the top 50 English Olympiad awardees the opportunity to come to Rhodes on free tuition for the first year – which is a scholarship that, depending on what you study, is worth R 28 000 – 30 000.

You don't have to study English. However, if you do have a love for English language and literature then Rhodes is the place to come to.

At Rhodes we boast an outstanding department of English and an excellent department of English Language and Linguistics.

We are also the home of the well-known Institute for the Study of English in Africa, which has just introduced a new Masters programme in Creative Writing. We also have at Rhodes the Dictionary Unit on South African English, which last year published a massive new English dictionary.

We also undertake innovative research and teaching in English-language education in our Faculty of Education.

Finally, we have a strong relationship with the National English Literary Museum, which is located here in Grahamstown.

Six good reasons, then, why if English language and literature excites you, you should be filling in your application forms to come to Rhodes.

There is one more reason. We are one of the very few universities, if not the only one, that gives our students an incredibly wide choice of combinations of courses and majors.

It is not unheard of for our students to major in English and Physics, Music and Computer Science, and Chemistry and Accounting. It is also not unknown that some of our students when they proceed to Honours face the dilemma of deciding whether to do Honours in English or Chemistry.

Some people, especially parents, think these are 'weird' combinations. We think it is fantastic that our students can combine such courses. Increasingly, great discoveries and innovations are at the boundaries of disciplines and fields.

William Butler Yeats, the great Irish poet and Nobel Prize winner, has written that 'Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire'. Rhodes University strongly embraces this idea.

We want to kindle in you the desire to question, to discover and to wonder, even if we pursue knowledge as a way of also freeing ourselves from wonder.

When you come to Rhodes University you will begin a new life journey, a voyage that is centred on the pursuit, making and sharing of knowledge. This is why we refer to Rhodes as indawo yolwazi - a place of knowledge.

This journey is at the same time also one of self-discovery. Your time at Rhodes will be an opportunity to discover who you are.

It is said that ‘you are who you are’. That’s not entirely true. You are who you learn to become. We at Rhodes University are here to support you to learn, and to learn to become. It is as Mahatma Ghandi has said: ‘We *must* become the *change* we want to see.’

Through Rhodes you will not only come to possess knowledge, expertise and skills, but you will also become someone who is a sensitive, cultured, caring and ethical intellectual and citizen – a person who thinks about questions of social justice, democracy, and the common good.

My congratulations to all the award winners and I look forward to welcoming you to Rhodes in February next year.