

## **Rhodes University Triversity discussion forum**

**18 February 2008**

Good evening, molweni.

I wish to begin by indicating my appreciation to the Dean of Student's Division for setting up this discussion this evening on the future of Triversity.

It is a pity that this discussion on Triversity must occur in the circumstances that it does. It is nonetheless a good opportunity to clarify certain matters related to Triversity, to deliberate about its future and, to the extent that we wish to continue with Triversity, to explore what must be done to put Triversity on a different footing especially in so far as Rhodes University is concerned.

Let me begin by reaffirming certain basics.

- First, Rhodes University is committed to creating an environment in which students can realize their talents and potential and graduate as intellectuals, professionals and critical citizens. Our slogan, 'Where Leaders Learn', attempts to capture the kind of people we seek to graduate from Rhodes.
- Second, the environment that we wish to create is not just of an intellectual and academic nature, but also cultural and sporting so that the conditions and opportunities exist for the all-round development and well-being of students.
- Third, there is a healthy rivalry among South African universities with respect to academic performance, research outputs and the attraction of students. As long as such rivalry is not destructive and contributes to ensuring that our universities are vibrant and high quality knowledge producing and disseminating institutions, there is nothing wrong with such rivalry. For a long time, such rivalry has also extended to the cultural and sports arenas

through, for example, national debating championships and national and regional sports competitions that involve all or some universities.

- Finally, the point about such sport competitions, and specifically Triversity which has been held for a decade, is that it is a mechanism for:
  1. Organised healthy competition Rhodes, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan and Fort Hare represented by their respective sportsmen and sportswomen
  2. Providing the sportspersons of the three universities to compete against one another and as part of this to train, perform, test their abilities and achieve
  3. Building and deepening relationships between Rhodes, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan and Fort Hare – as institutions, and at the levels of University administrators, Dean of Student's divisions, sport administrations, SRC's, sportspersons and students.

It must be appreciated that apart from the efforts put in by our sportspersons a tremendous amount of time and effort is put in by University administrators, sports administrators, security officials, and the SRC with respect to the organising of Triversity – organising of the competitions, mobilising finances, including sponsorships, attending to transport, and ensuring safety and security of participants and student supporters.

I have thus far experienced two Triversity's and let me reflect on these.

- The 2006 Triversity was held at Rhodes and I was extremely pleased that after a long time we won the Triversity through the great performance of our sportspersons ably supported by our sports coaches and administrators.

In general, the Triversity was successful and went off

smoothly. Rhodes students, adorned in a splash of purple clothes, clothing sprayed purple, purple faces and purple hair, came out in large numbers to support our sportspersons.

There was, however, one area of concern - the extent to which certain students treated the Triversity is an opportunity for a booze-up. I have no problem with students partying, consuming alcohol responsibly, and having a great time, without bring themselves and the University into disrepute. However, the conduct of some students left a lot to be desired.

I personally witnessed some women lying on the ground utterly drunk and almost comatose and had to intervene to ensure that they were taken care off and safely escorted back to their residences or digs. I saw some men so drunk that they could not walk and had to be either carried or crawl on their knees back to their rooms.

- Last year's Triversity was held at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan in Port Elizabeth. We didn't win, but again our students, in purple, were at the stadium in considerable numbers. Indeed, if it were not for the presence of our students, who made up the majority of spectators and fans, there would have been little atmosphere.

On this occasion, my partner, Shireen and I were there not just to support our sportspersons and to observe, but were also guests of the NMMU Vice-Chancellor.

We came back to Rhodes deeply concerned and distressed by some of what we observed.

- ✓ First, some students were again on their backs from alcohol intoxication.
- ✓ Second, some students were vomiting in the stands and passages, in full view of myself and officials from NMMU.
- ✓ Third, some students were being uncooperative with and

disrespectful of the security officials that were in place to ensure safety and security

- ✓ Fourth, some students climbed onto a high ledge at the back of the stadium constituting a threat to their safety and had to be escorted down by security officials
- ✓ Fifth, I had to become involved in an unpleasant altercation with a security official and his supervisor. This official had been escorting one of our misbehaving students out of the stadium. In the process there was an altercation, the student was wrestled to the ground, and the security official kicked the student on the side of the head.
- ✓ Sixth, Shireen and I had to go around to some of our students to caution them that if they owned cars they were not to drive unless they were sober.

Needless to say, the NMMU Vice-Chancellor and his partner were flabbergasted by some of the behaviour and conduct of our students that they witnessed, and I equally was ashamed and also embarrassed by the disrepute that a certain number of our students had brought onto Rhodes.

It was in the immediate aftermath of last year's Trivarsity that the questions were raised whether it served any purpose, whether it was worth continuing with the event, and also what could need to be done if Trivarsity was to have a future. It was in this context that meetings were held between officials of Rhodes, NMMU and Fort Hare to deliberate on these matters and also decide on the 2008 Trivarsity

I have views on these issues, but I wish, for the moment, to keep these to myself and instead hear the other speakers and other views and introduce these views during open discussion.

## **VC's views**

1. Given that we seek to create an environment in which there can be all-round development of student talents and potential; to ensure that there are opportunities for our students to develop their sporting abilities and to compete, perform and achieve and represent Rhodes in sports events, and to deepen relationships between Rhodes, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan and Fort Hare at all levels it would be a great pity if incidents of the kinds that I have noted, and which are a matter of grave concern, were to scuttle the Trivarsity.
2. The termination of Trivarsity and other similar sporting events would be an unfortunate diminution of opportunities for our sportspersons, their opportunity to represent Rhodes and for prestige for Rhodes in the sporting arena.
3. Moving forward we need
  - To be clear and reaffirm why we have Trivarsity
  - To be uncompromising on rooting out and eliminating the kinds of behaviour and conduct that jeopardise events such as Trivarsity and bring opprobrium on our students and tarnish the reputation of Rhodes, and
  - To ensure that we put in place effective safety and security measures for the periods immediately before, during and immediately after Trivarsity