

Rhodes: 2008/2009 and beyond

Introduction

Another year has passed and this issue of *Rhodos* is an opportunity to share with alumni, staff, students and supporters of Rhodes recent and likely future developments.

Rhodes is committed to proactively shaping its future in accordance with its understanding of what constitutes a university and its institutional vision and goals. This is to be contrasted with being simply carried by current and popular notions of higher education which, while perhaps well-meaning, could denude universities of their core values, purposes and roles.

Rightly, Rhodes fundamental aspiration is to be *Indawo Yolwazi* - a place of knowledge, a place of learning; an institution

- That embodies a respect and love of knowledge
- That advances through fundamental and applied research the frontiers of knowledge and human understanding
- That through teaching and learning seeks to develop graduates as intellectuals, professionals and critical citizens with the requisite values, attitudes, knowledge, expertise and skills to contribute to the intellectual and cultural stock of humanity, economic and social development, and an equitable, just and democratic society
- That promotes through community engagement mutually respectful and beneficial relationships with diverse communities.

These aspirations are pursued within a commitment to

- Not resting content with past and current achievements but continuing to strive with imagination and creativity for excellence in everything that we do
- Valuing, affirming, respecting and embracing difference and diversity, whether in relation to knowledge and scholarship or race, gender, class, nationality, language, geography, religion or sexual orientation
- Building an institutional culture that embraces human dignity and respect, human rights, non-racialism and non-sexism and facilitates the development of all social groups that constitute the Rhodes community
- Attracting and producing a new generation of scholars and administrators who are also more representative of our wider society

- Putting in place the academic, residential and sporting infrastructure to maintain our position as an outstanding university
- Ensuring academic freedom, freedom of expression and a culture of open, honest and rational debate, discussion and critique, as befits a university
- Making wise and decisive choices and planning in a way that ensures financial sustainability in the decades to come.

Size and shape

With an agreement with the Ministry of Education to expand from 6000 students in 2007 to 6500 students in 2010, and to increase enrolments in the natural sciences and postgraduate study, recent developments represent significant though exciting challenges.

There were almost 9000 applications for enrolment in 2009. At the same time, there was a higher ratio of acceptances by students to offers of admissions made by the University. Both applications and acceptances indicate that Rhodes is a University of choice for South African and international students. As a result, student enrolment in 2009 is currently 6747 and likely to reach 6800.

From the perspectives of financial break-even and available academic and related infrastructure, Rhodes sought an enrolment of only 6420 students in 2009. However, honouring of offers made to eligible students and increasing the output of graduates required to enhance economic and social development were equally important considerations. Thus, while the additional 380 students represent a challenge, the University is confident that with the appropriate commitment, creativity and ingenuity it will sustain the high quality of teaching and learning and overall student experience for which Rhodes prides itself.

There are some significant features of the 2009 enrolments. For one, Natural Science enrolments have increased by 30% (172 students), Commerce by 15% (190 students) and Pharmacy by 13% (43 students). For another, the representation of black South Africans has increased from 24% in 2006 to 38%. Further, postgraduate enrolments are also on the increase (??- is this so). International student numbers and % - ???. Men and women?? First time black and white - ??

All these developments are in alignment with the University's enrolment planning.

Academic achievements

Rhodes continues to enjoy most favourable academic staff to student ratio among South African universities, which means that students are guaranteed easy access to academics and close supervision.

We also enjoy the distinction of having among the best undergraduate pass rates and graduation rates in South Africa, and outstanding postgraduate success rates - testimony to the quality of our academic provision, and to the commitment of Rhodes staff to student learning, development and success.

In addition, among South African universities we have one of the highest proportions of academic staff with doctoral degrees, and the best research output per academic staff member.

Significant recent achievements include:

- The award of the 2009 UNESCO/L'Oreal Award for the most outstanding woman scientist in Africa and the Arab States to awarded to Prof. Tebello Nyokong of the Chemistry department. This is only the fourth time that a local scientist and the first time that a life scientist has won this award. Prof. Nyokong is engaged in path-breaking cancer research and holds a prestigious Chair in Medicinal Chemistry.
- The award of a further prestigious Chair in Mathematics Education to Prof. Marc Schafer, to complement the two South African Research Chairs held by Prof. Nyokong and Prof. Christopher Mcquaid in Marine Science. The University is a strong contender for two further such chairs.
- The award by the South African Association of Botanists of a Senior Medal in Botany to Prof. Ted Botha; of cccccc to prof. Alan Hodgson, of

Decisions arising out of the lengthy academic planning exercise of 2007 related to new niche teaching and research programmes, especially at postgraduate level, continue to be pursued and bear fruit.

- R 90 million was received from state departments and science agencies, business and local and international donors for research and development activities

- The creation of the Centre for the Study of Democracy under the directorship of the respected political analyst Prof. Steven Friedman as a joint initiative of Rhodes and the University of Johannesburg. A branch of the Centre is to be established at Rhodes with support of \$500 000 from the Ford Foundation
- The creation of the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning and the establishment of a post to develop a doctoral programme in higher education studies and enhance postgraduate research and academic supervision capabilities
- The award to the Institute for Water Research of over \$800 000 by the Carnegie Corporation for water research in collaboration with universities in other parts of Africa
- The award to the School of Languages of R7.5 million for postgraduate bursaries in African language studies and Linguistics. This complements additional Norwegian support for the exciting Multilingualism project of the School
- The establishment of the Biomedical Biotechnology Research Unit to enhance promising research and postgraduate development in this field
- The launch of the Confucius Institute with the support of the Chinese Hanban to develop programmes in Mandarin and Chinese history and culture. Some 50 students have registered for Mandarin in 2009
- Awards of \$250 000 from the Mellon Foundation and R900 000 from the Rand Merchant Bank to support the International Library of African Music to digitize and make available on-line the treasure trove of African music housed by ILAM
- New chairs in the University's world-renowned School of Journalism and Media Studies in Media and Information Society sponsored by the Department of Communication, and in Media and Mobile Communication sponsored by MTN
- A first-time grant from the Kresge Foundation of \$900 000 to Rhodes to extend its successful accelerated development programme for women and black scholars and so develop a new generation of academics.

The University continues to pursue a number of exciting academic initiatives:

- An Astrophysics facility to support South Africa's astronomy and astrophysics programme, including the country's bid to win the international vote to construct the world's largest radio telescope
- A programme in Social Policy that combines research, postgraduate education and policy dialogue and co-operation

with universities in other African countries, Scandinavia and Oxford University

- The extension of the programme in Mining Geology to further enhance Rhodes contributions in this field
- A Masters programme in Integrated Development. Identified as a promising niche area, the University has been invited to bid for one of 15 world-wide \$1 million grants from the MacArthur Foundation
- A cluster in Biotechnology to maintain Rhodes pioneering work in this field and to develop into new areas
- A new post in Bioinformatics to link-up with related research in various disciplines
- Building academic and scientific relationships with select universities in India, China and other parts of the world in areas of mutual interest and benefit.

'Seed' funding has been made available to investigate the feasibility of various proposed new initiatives and 'strategic funds' have been allocated to facilitate select new initiatives. This includes the recently launched Schools Partnership between Rhodes, the local Department of Education, local historically disadvantaged secondary schools and a teacher trade union, which seeks to address the challenges of developing effective secondary schools in the historically black areas of Rhini/Grahamstown. At the same time, community outreach and the University's student volunteer programme continue to grow in strength, dovetailing with key community engagement initiatives.

Rhodes students continue to excel on a number of fronts:

- Two years in succession and in six out of eight years, the prestigious Flanagan scholarship for a woman student to undertake postgraduate study anywhere in the world has been awarded to a Rhodes student
- At least one or more of our students continue to win a Rhodes scholarship to study at Oxford University, helping to maintain one of the best track records among South African universities for the winning of Rhodes scholarships
- Exercising of dominance over the prestigious Mandela Rhodes scholarships awarded for postgraduate study at South African universities. 4 of the 28 Mandela Rhodes scholarships for 2009 were awarded to Rhodes students - the largest number awarded to a single university. Significantly, Rhodes students constitute only 0.8% of South Africa's university students yet won 14% of the Mandela Rhodes scholarships. All 4 students have chosen to continue their postgraduate studies at Rhodes.

Infrastructure development

Students, staff and the wider Grahamstown community will soon be the beneficiaries of a spectacular new four-storey library. Being constructed adjacent to the current library and due to be ready in early 2010, the new R90 million building will possess every facility essential for cutting-edge academic and research endeavours. At the same time the current library will also be extensively refurbished. The financing of the library requires the University to raise R40 million to complement the R50 million awarded by the Department of Education. To date R15 million raised has been raised and the University is energetically pursuing corporate, alumni and international donor support for the outstanding R25 million.

During 2009 students and academics will also be the beneficiaries of a significant investment that has been made in massively expanding internet bandwidth and speed. Collectively with other universities, \$20 million has been invested in purchasing a share in a new underwater sea cable. This will provide Rhodes with 40 times our current internet bandwidth and 3 times our current internet speed with great benefits for academic and research work.

Two new residences at a cost of R33 million and accommodating 208 students were opened at the start of 2009 academic year, with DoE support of R30 million. The University has responded to a new call from the DoE for applications for additional infrastructure funds for the period 2010-2012, and is confident that having received R80 million for the 2007-2010 period further support will be forthcoming for specific initiatives. 10% of any funds provided by the DoE will have to be raised by Rhodes.

The increased 2009 enrolments have given impetus to creatively and purposefully addressing academic and related infrastructure needs. To this effect a Task Team has been established

- To establish and collate the academic and related infrastructure needs of Rhodes University – backlogs, and needs arising from the 2009 student enrolments, future enrolments and current and proposed research initiatives
- To table proposals on addressing the infrastructure needs of Rhodes University

- To formulate choices and make clear recommendations *on* priorities related to infrastructure.

Conclusion

The University continues, despite various challenges, to develop in a manner that is congruent with its aspirations and commitments and in accordance with its goals.

In the coming months, special attention will be given to academic and related infrastructure to address backlogs and future needs, to the further development, refinement and implementation of strategies in pursuit of identified goals and to the mobilization of funds in these regards. The current economic and financial climate, of course, represents a significant challenge, especially in so far as corporate and donor support for research and new initiatives is concerned. While additional and welcome support for universities from the state may provide some cushion, considered choices and careful planning will be necessary to ensure that Rhodes will continue on a sustainable basis a special, distinctive and outstanding university.