

**OUR SOCIETY, OUR UNIVERSITY,
OUR CHALLENGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

**INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR OF
RHODES UNIVERSITY, DR SALEEM BADAT**

27 September 2006

The Chancellor; Chairperson of Council, Judge Jones; the national Minister of Education, minister Naledi Pandor; Premier of the Western Cape, premier Ebrahim Rasool; the Mayor of Makana Municipality; members of the Rhodes University Council; Chairperson of Convocation; fellow Vice Chancellor's; senior government officials; the Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Higher Education; the Chairperson of the Higher Education Quality Committee of the CHE; the Chief Executive Officer of Higher Education South Africa; the Vice Principal; Deans; the SRC president; the chairperson's of NEHAWU and NTESU; academic and administrative colleagues; support staff and workers; principals of local schools; citizens of iRhini/Grahamstown; my immediate and extended families; my dear friends and comrades, good evening, molweni.

My sincere appreciation to all of you, and especially those of you who have come from other parts of the country and from overseas, for being present this evening.

In any one's life a ceremony like this inauguration is a great occasion. In Xhosa culture, however, such a ceremony, known as ukuthweswa isidanga, has especially profound meaning.

Ukuthweswa isidanga acknowledges that you are a living symbol who has a particular biography and who has made history. It recognises that your commitments and vision mean that you are also on the threshold of making more history. In accepting the blanket, you confirm your willingness to assume a new identity and mantle and to take on new and greater responsibilities. With the feast that follows, you enter into a new covenant with your community.

So drawing on the rich meaning of ukuthweswa isidanga, this evening is a good occasion to address the issue of covenant and responsibilities in relation to the mantle of Vice-Chancellor, the Rhodes University community, and the University's wider community, and to also link responsibilities to history, biography and identity, to values and vision, and to context and its challenges.

Bertolt Brecht writes of the 'struggle of the mountains' and the 'battle of the plains'. If the vote and citizenship for all are the mountains, they have been largely won. It is now the infinitely more arduous and protracted 'battle of the plains', of creating an equitable, just, and humane society that must be joined and won.

It is said that a people without an understanding of its history and past has no future. Yet, the historian Eric Hobsbawm cautions that

Political pressures on history...are greater than ever before...More history than ever is today being revised or invented by people who do not want the real past, but only a past that suits their purpose (2002:18-19).

This is a timely warning about a growing amnesia about our 'real past'. We must guard against sanitized and 'whitewash' histories and biographies of the kind that make us wonder how it was possible that colonialism and apartheid were able to survive so long, if prior to 1994 there were no supporters of apartheid, no opponents of equality and freedom, and no opponents of justice and democracy. Instead, we must ensure that South African history cultivates understanding of the 'real past', for this is the only basis upon which we can create our future.

The great African patriot Amilcar Cabral has written that we should always proceed with our feet firmly on the ground, from what is, what exists. That is to say, that we should be deeply aware of our historical context as we pursue our visions and goals.

Jody Kollapen, the Chairperson of our Human Rights Commission, eloquently captures one dimension of our context when he observes that:

...the reality remains that for millions of people the promise of human rights and the vision of a just and caring world remains an illusion. Intolerance, war and impunity; starvation and greed; power and powerlessness all combine in a conspiracy of the powerful against the weak that invariably deepens the faultlines that exist in the world and within nations.

(T)hese millions... see a world where disparities in wealth, resources and opportunities have grown, where human rights norms and values seem invariably to yield to the dictates of the rich and powerful; which expresses shock and outrage at

arbitrary killing but at the same time is complicit in the killing of many more thorough hunger and disease – which could have been avoided (Kollapen, 2003:26).

We have much to celebrate, to be proud of, for the achievements of the past twelve years of democracy are real and considerable. As a free South Africa we are not plagued by some of the ills that Kollapen so vividly describes. But, if we are brutally honest, we are not entirely spared from all of them.

We face the enormous challenge of pursuing *economic growth and social equity*, and doing this within a *democratic framework*, and in a way that is *environmentally sustainable*. This is an unprecedented challenge. For political and social reasons we cannot sacrifice or postpone one or other of these elements of our challenge or tackle them in sequence. They have to be confronted, by and large, *simultaneously*. This requires a strong developmental state and imaginative economic and social policies and strategies that balance our different needs.

We continue to be one of the most unequal societies on earth in terms of 'disparities' in wealth, income, opportunities, and living conditions. The 'faultlines' of race, class, gender and geography are still all too evident. Hunger and disease, poverty and unemployment continue to blight our democracy. Millions of our fellow citizens are mired in desperate daily routines of survival while, alongside, unbridled individualism and crass materialism, and a vulgar mentality of "greed is cool" and "get what you can and screw the rest" runs rampant in our society.

Yet for the sake of social justice and our humanity, we must refuse 'to accept the logic of inequality and the repression that it involves', and continue to 'search for human agency, for the means through which inequality can be undone' (Hammami, 2006:32).

Or, as Kollapen puts it:

We need to be creative and bold...to challenge poverty and inequality, to reshape the way society is structured and does its business and, importantly, to ensure that the concept of the 'oneness of humanity'...comes to mean just that (2003:26).

I am a proud South African and African. Through the acquisition of knowledge and discovery, in which I have been assisted by remarkable South Africans, black and white, men and women, intellectuals, scholars and workers, I have come to develop a passionate love for my birth-place, my country and the African continent.

I take immense pride in the intellectual creativity, imagination, ingenuity, strategic acumen, and stolid courage and purpose that we displayed to rid ourselves of tyranny and to fashion our new democracy.

I take especial pride in our *Constitution* and *Bill of Rights* which have been spawned by our democratic struggle. Our *Constitution* is the fundamental bedrock that informs my responsibilities, guides my conduct, and animates my social relationships and existence.

I am deeply committed to the assertion of the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of non-sexism and non-racialism and the human rights and freedoms that the *Bill of Rights* proclaims. I consider it my responsibility to 'respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights' embodied in the *Bill of Rights*.

My commitment to non-racialism is as much ethical as it is rooted in personal experience. Twenty three years ago while I was in political detention, I was dragged in the very early hours of a bitter cold Boland morning into the Robertson police station, clothing in tatters, manacled, bloodied, battered and bruised, the result of torture by a team of security policemen at a deserted railway siding between Worcester and Robertson. Yet in the most unlikely of places, human compassion, decency and courage came shining through to lift my spirit and faith in humanity.

A grandfatherly, white, station commander summoned medical assistance, and set into train a chain of events that prevented further assaults, provided compelling evidence for a lawsuit against the security police, and for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to be able to later confirm the violation of my human rights.

Were it not for the intervention under repressive conditions of this decent and courageous man, my life could have taken a very different turn. This incident confirmed to me that human goodness knows no colour and can be found in surprising places, and instilled in me an indomitable commitment to non-racialism.

I am also deeply committed to non-sexism. Patriarchy and sexism stifle the realization of the talents of girls and women and the contribution they can make to the development of our society. The rape and abuse of women is a pervasive, morbid ill that wreaks havoc in our country.

It is my deep conviction that none of us can be truly free unless all South Africans, and especially the urban and rural poor, the impoverished and unemployed, possess not just political rights, but also the social, economic and human rights that are fundamental to living full, decent, productive, rich and rewarding lives; unless 'those who were (and continue to be) disadvantaged can assume their place in society as equals with their fellow human beings without regard to colour, race, gender, age or geographic dispersal' (Mbeki, TM,1996).

I have been challenged about joining Rhodes, 'that "elite" university'. The charge of elitism is based on a perception that Rhodes seeks to be an enclave for students from only economically and socially privileged backgrounds.

I openly declare a commitment to Rhodes as an institution of intellectual values and academic excellence. At the same time, I am also unequivocally committed to determinedly and tirelessly working to ensure that socially disadvantaged students also benefit from the academic excellence of Rhodes. I am clear that in the context of our legacy social equity is an imperative of all our universities.

For much of their history, progressive political movements in South Africa have advanced a *politics of equal recognition*, whether in relation to 'race', gender, ethnicity, or disability. The Freedom Charter statement that 'South Africa Belongs to All', and its declaration that 'All National Groups Shall Have Equal Rights', is one manifestation of this commitment to a politics of equal recognition. With the advent of democracy, this politics was translated into a *Constitution* that guarantees equality in all spheres of society.

A politics of equal recognition cannot, however, be blind to the effects of the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Nor can it blithely proceed from a notion that the advent of democracy is in itself a sufficient condition for the erasure of the structural conditions, policies and practices that for decades have grounded and sustained inequalities in all domains of our social life.

It is precisely this reality that gives salience to the ideas of social equity, social justice and redress, that treats them as social imperatives, and that makes them fundamental and necessary

dimensions of university transformation and social transformation in general.

It is important to emphasize that implicit in a politics of equal recognition is an appreciation also of diversity and difference, whether these are social, cultural or linguistic. Diversity and difference are well springs of great vitality and strength. It is the intolerance and elevation of difference and harnessing it to serve chauvinistic aims that lead to the tragic massacre camps of Sabra and Shatila, the bloody streets of Kosovo, and the killing fields of Rwanda and Darfur.

Chancellor, we inherited a higher education 'system' profoundly shaped by social, political and economic inequalities of a class, race, gender, institutional, and spatial nature. Research and teaching were extensively shaped by the socio-economic and political priorities of the apartheid separate development programme. The apartheid legacy continues to manifest itself in various arenas of our universities.

Despite opposition at various times and in different forms, both historically white and historically black universities are products of apartheid planning that were designed to essentially reproduce the apartheid order. Hence, all our universities need to be liberated from such a past and transformed to enable us to become *South African* and *African* institutions and to meet new societal goals.

My vision and understanding of my responsibilities are shaped by my idea of a university, by the internal and external contexts of Rhodes University, and by the South African *Constitution*.

The former Principal of Edinburgh University, Lord Sutherland, writes that we need to define our identity in the changing and 'new diverse world of higher education'. 'The most essential task', he suggests, is to create 'a sense of our own worth' by fashioning 'our understanding of our identity' – our understanding of what it means to be a university (cited in Graham, 2005: 155).

However, as the philosopher Gordon Graham notes, we 'cannot have a satisfactory sense of (our) worth if (we have) no sense of what (our) purpose is' (Graham, 2005:158). He usefully also cautions that 'but equally, no sense of worth will be forthcoming if (we aspire) to an ideal which (we) cannot attain' (ibid:258).

How, then, do we create 'a satisfactory sense of (our) worth'? In what purposes are we to root our 'understanding of our identity' and what it means to be a university?

The meaning of a university is not to be found in what we teach and research, or how we do these. Instead, the core characteristics of a university are four-fold.

- A university produces and disseminates knowledge which advances our understanding of our natural and social worlds, and enriches our accumulated 'cultural inheritances' and heritage
- A university cultivates and forms the cognitive character of students so that they: 'can think effectively and critically'; have 'achieved depth in some field of knowledge; have a 'critical appreciation of the ways in which we gain knowledge and understanding of the universe, of society, and of ourselves'; have 'a broad knowledge of other cultures and other times; are 'able to make decisions based on reference to the wider world and to the historical forces that have shaped it'; have 'some understanding of and experience in thinking systematically about moral and ethical problems'; and can 'communicate with cogency' (The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000)
- A university is committed 'to the spirit of truth', and allows intellectual inquiry 'to go where it will' without any 'boundaries' (Graham, 2005:163), and
- A university possesses the necessary academic freedom, self-rule by academics, and institutional autonomy to effectively produce and disseminate knowledge.

Indeed, academic freedom and institutional autonomy are necessary conditions if universities are to advance the public good and to be publicly and democratically accountable. President Mbeki has acknowledged that universities 'must be accorded recognition as a space for unfettered intellectual enquiry' (2004). However, as Ruth Jonathan (2006) argues, academic freedom and institutional autonomy must be understood as values in which both rights *and* duties inhere.

In this regard we must recognize, as Andre du Toit urges, 'the legacies of intellectual colonisation and racialisation as threats to academic freedom' (2000); and that 'the powers conferred by academic freedom go hand in hand with substantive duties to deracialise and decolonize intellectual spaces' (Bentley et al, 2006).

In as much there is value to holding onto the above idea of a university, we must recognise that there are many conceptions and models of the 'university' and that these have changed over time.

We must also accept that the 'name "university" now applies to institutions with widely different functions and characters' (Graham, 2005:157), and that this means that the 'ideals each can aspire to' will be different (ibid:258)

Honourable Minister, our universities admit students with different abilities. Beyond the minimum standards that we all adhere to, our qualifications are of different standards and our programmes differ in content and purposes. The pool of academics available to us means that not all departments at all our universities can offer postgraduate programmes, and especially doctoral programmes. It also means that not all academic departments and scholars at all our universities can undertake the 'scholarship of discovery' in contrast with the 'scholarship of teaching' (Boyer, 1990). It is, therefore, simply not true that all our academic departments and all our universities are the same in all respects.

As South African universities, we *are* different from one another – not better or worse – but different. This is a source of strength, because the economic and social needs of South Africa and our continent are highly diverse and call for a diverse spectrum of institutions that are differentiated in terms of their missions, qualifications and programmes, kinds of research, entrance requirements, and so forth. There is no virtue in homogeneity, where every university seeks to be the same and to undertake exactly the same purposes and functions. We need to honestly acknowledge that we are different, and that there is virtue in being different. We should avoid aspiring to 'ideal(s) which (we) cannot attain'. Otherwise, 'no sense of worth will be forthcoming' and we can have no 'proper self-confidence' (Graham, 2005:157).

In so far as Rhodes University is concerned, based on my understanding of our qualities and sensitive to the ideals we can attain, I consider our tasks to be three-fold.

1. First, we must provide imaginatively, thoughtfully, and rigorously conceptualised, designed, and implemented teaching and learning programmes and qualifications that take into account three issues.

One is the kinds of knowledge, competencies, skills and attitudes that our graduates require to function in a rapidly changing society, continent and world. Our programmes must enable our students to graduate as professionals who can think theoretically and imaginatively; gather and analyse information with rigour; critique and construct alternatives and communicate effectively orally and in writing.

We must, however, keep in mind is that our society requires graduates who are not just capable professionals, but also conscious and sensitive intellectuals and critical citizens. Our academic programmes together with our institutional culture and practices must therefore ensure that we keep ethical questions in sharp focus, and that we advance a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights conducive to critical discourse, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, just, non-racist and non-sexist social order.

As Prof. Brian O' Connel, Vice Chancellor of the University of Western Cape, puts it with his usual intelligence and passion, we are 'tasked with the arduous formation of a critical, creative and compassionate citizenry. Nothing less will suffice' (2006).

The third issue we must consider is the social and educational experiences of Rhodes students who, because of the imperative of social equity, must come from increasingly diverse social backgrounds. Our students must be afforded not simply equity of access, but also equality of opportunity and success, through effective teaching and learning and academic development and mentoring programmes.

Prof. O' Connel is again pertinent here when he states that universities

cannot rest on their laurels...and simply teach the same curricula...year after year with minor changes and presume that this is sufficient. If the demands made on students by a fast-changing world are greater, so too are the demands on lecturers and researchers. We have constantly to unpack the assumed constants in our respective fields to encourage students to interrogate what we and they have learned to take for granted' (2006).

If a premium is put on excellence in teaching and learning, then necessarily there should be appropriate support and resources for the pursuit of such excellence, together with due recognition and reward of academics in this regard.

2. The second task of Rhodes is to produce knowledge through different kinds of imaginative research and scholarship, including the pursuit of truth and critique without fear of reaction.

On the one hand, research must engage with the huge and varied developmental challenges of our province, country and continent.

On the other hand, we must also support and mobilise funds for basic scholarly research. That is to say, we must not judge the value of research in solely instrumental and utilitarian terms, and must not sacrifice basic scholarly research at the altar of 'relevance', defined in the most parochial manner and reduced, ultimately, to market or economic relevance.

3. Finally, Rhodes must undertake community engagement through mutually respectful, reciprocal and beneficial partnerships with various communities.

Carefully conceptualised and planned, such engagement can create and advance economic, social and cultural opportunities and development respectively. In turn, it can enrich and enhance research and learning and teaching, and facilitate the development of critical consciousness, citizenship and new competencies and skills.

In pursuing our purposes and tasks we must be alive to the state of disciplinary knowledge, the abilities and needs of our students, and the social, cultural and economic contexts in which research, learning and teaching, and community engagement take place. Necessarily, therefore, Rhodes must engage with the challenges of our local, national, and wider African contexts.

These challenges include the imperatives of economic growth and development; the requirement to compete globally; job creation and the elimination of poverty; the effective provision of social services; and the threat of HIV/AIDS, and other diseases that ravage our land.

They also encompass the imperatives of social equity and redress; social justice, the building of a substantive democracy, the defence and advancement of a culture of human rights, and ensuring a vibrant civil society that is characterized by vigorous and critical public intellectual debate.

It is, however, not a matter simply of us being responsive to development challenges. It is also a question of intellectual visibility - about our proactive engagement with our society at the intellectual and, more generally, cultural level, and about contributing to the intellectual and cultural development of a critical citizenry.

Beyond communicating with peer scientific communities, we have the responsibility to also, in the words of Stephen Jay Gould, 'convey the power and beauty of science to the hearts and minds of

a fascinated, if generally uninformed, public' (2006). As Gould notes, there is a 'long and honourable tradition of popular presentation of science', and we should not make the 'mistake' of 'equating popularization with trivialization, cheapening, or inaccuracy' (Gould, SJ, 2006). He rightly states that 'the concepts of science, in all their richness and ambiguity, can be presented without any compromise, without any simplification counting as distortion, in language accessible to all intelligent people' (ibid:2006).

To raise the issue of communicating beyond the confines of universities and scientific communities is to also pose whether our universities and scholars are engaging sufficiently with the South African public and serving adequately as catalysts of critical public education and intellectual debate, as part of our rationale of advancing the public good.

There is no shortage of contemporary economic, political and social issues that public scholarship could pursue. Great leadership in this regard has been provided by University of Cape Town Vice Chancellor Prof. Njabulo Ndebele whose masterful social commentaries make for compelling reading and have triggered considerable public debate. I share Prof. Ndebele's anxiety regarding some of the recent popular discourse around dogs, and agree wholeheartedly that dogs are wonderful creatures and companions. All strength to his idea that 2007 should be the 'year of the dog'!

What is involved here is more than simply transmission of some established body of knowledge to users in the wider society, but a matter of the involvement of scholars in reflexive communication - an argumentative, critical and thoughtful engagement that shapes the very constitution of knowledge (Delanty, 2001:154). Moreover, such public scholarship permits scholars, in the words of Edward Said 'to speak the truth to power' with the goal being 'mainly to project a better state of affairs and one that corresponds more closely to a set of moral principles - peace, reconciliation, abatement of suffering - applied to the known facts' (cited in Asmal, 2005). We need as universities to give attention to creative strategies and mechanisms to promote and facilitate such public scholarship.

It is true that there are sometimes misguided expectations and unreasonable demands placed on universities that have the danger of eroding the value and core purposes of universities.

Yet, equally, there are also perfectly legitimate expectations and demands. The fact that such expectations and demands are voiced more stridently and frequently is a growing indication of the wider and deeper understanding of universities as important engines of economic and social development and contributors to the public good.

We must be conscious of the great expectations that communities and citizens have of us as universities and scholars. It is to us that they look for intellectual engagement with the pressing economic and social challenges of our country and continent.

It is to us that they look for an intellectual critique of globalisation and its effects on our country and communities; a critique of well-intended policies that nonetheless have negative social consequences; and a critique of tardily and poorly implemented policies that unnecessarily cause death and prolong human suffering.

It is, above all, to the universities and scholars that communities and citizens look for intellectual vision and for an intellectual contribution to the development of an equitable, just and humane democracy.

This requires our universities to be dynamic, vibrant, and innovative incubators of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination, and of the formation of new generations of professionals, thinkers and actors.

The particular contribution of any university will necessarily be the product of the complex intersection of its institutional history and biography, institutional choices and decisions regarding principal purposes and roles, goals and strategies, social structure and conjuncture, national policy goals and imperatives, the market, state steering, and the nature and extent of public support.

However we define our missions, our contributions must be testimony to and strengthen public appreciation of the pivotal and vital role of universities in a changing South Africa.

Chancellor, I take pride in the solid academic foundations of Rhodes University – in the fact that we have the best undergraduate pass rates in South Africa, the best undergraduate graduation rates, are highly successful in producing postgraduates, and have the best research output per staff member. I am committed to sustaining

and further enhancing our excellence and contribution to our society in these regards.

I warmly embrace the commitment of Rhodes to provide its students with a high quality education and social experience in an environment in which they can develop and realise their potential.

I welcome that some 25% of our students are from the rest of Africa and other parts of the world. They enrich our educational and cultural life and through them we contribute to developing the intellectual and professional cadres of the African renaissance.

Our increasing numbers of academics from the rest of Africa is also a source of vitality. They enhance the quality of our academic programmes, challenge us to think more critically about our curricula, connect us to knowledge and expertise networks on the rest of the continent, and help us to overcome our decades of isolation from the rest of Africa.

I see academics, administrators, workers and students around me who have wonderful values, are hard working, deeply caring, and committed to progressively realizing the values, ideals and goals of Rhodes University, our *Constitution* and *Bill of Rights*.

I draw inspiration from the loyalty of our staff and the extraordinary commitment with which they serve Rhodes; from the recognition that our academics enjoy in the worlds of science, humanities, arts, commerce and education; from the self-organisation, creativity and determination of women in the Women's Academic Solidarity Association; and from the spirit of student volunteerism that is ably harnessed by our Community Engagement office.

However, like universities everywhere, as Rhodes University we must also grapple with a number of issues.

1. The artist Anton Brink writes that 'our personal, social, political and cultural dogmas have made a kind of comfort zone for the mind, free of the responsibilities of choice', which, he says, means that we conspire to make a particular kind of 'world, yet we regard ourselves as being "not involved"' (Brink, 2006:69).

It is vital that we guard against conduct, practices, self-fulfilling prophecies, self-comforting perceptions, and dangerous platitudes that can induce inertia, complacency and insularity, and stifle innovation, improvements, transformation, and development.

As befitting a university, we must be open to interrogating what we consider to be self-evident, and the trite notion that 'if it ain't broken, don't fix it'. We must subject to critical scrutiny what we consider to be 'tried and tested' ways. Are the 'tried and tested' ways appropriate to our rapidly changing context? Are they congruent with our professed goals, such as changing the social composition of our students? From the perspective of whose values and identity ain't it broken?

As important as pass and graduation rates, publication outputs, and good governance and management are, they cannot be the sole measures of higher education transformation and development.

Transformation also involves much more than simply changing demographics, numbers and proportions, and pursuing and achieving 'race', gender and disability equity goals, fundamentally important as these are given our apartheid legacy.

Transformation is fundamentally about a revolution of the mind, a revolution in thinking. It means being open to rethinking, and changing, how we *think* – about ourselves and about the 'other'; about what we deem 'natural', and 'normal'; about what are supposedly self-evident characteristics of academic quality and excellence; about what and whose knowledge counts; about our curriculum, pedagogy, and learning-teaching, and our research questions; about universities and their purposes and roles; and about our society and its challenges.

This revolution in thinking must provide the courage to act and do things in new and different ways; to recast old social relations and build new social relationships that help us to transcend our fractured past and the lingering divides of our society; and to embrace changes that are necessary in our institutions as a consequence of new constitutional and ethical imperatives.

To the extent that we open to a revolution in thinking, we create the prospects and potential for our ongoing development as scholars, administrators, citizens and people, and for our existence as an open, vibrant and dynamic institution.

In transforming, we should make a clear distinction between transformation and *development*. Development and transformation are not always parallel vectors. We must therefore consciously and purposively link transformation and development, otherwise there is the danger that we may

transform without developing, or without laying the basis for development.

2. Second, I am most partial to the idea of Rhodes University being a distinctive university. However, what our distinctiveness resides in or should reside in needs greater discussion, as does our self-characterisation as a 'liberal arts institution'.

Perhaps what should be a defining feature of Rhodes University is a commitment to a 'liberal education'. The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca, with whom the concept of a 'liberal education' is associated, considered 'liberal education' to be one that 'liberates the students mind, encourages him or her to take charge of his or her own thinking, leading the Socratic examined life and becoming a reflective critic of traditional practices' (Nussbaum, 2006:4).

As Martha Nussbaum argues, a liberal education is intimately connected to the idea of democratic citizenship, and to the cultivation of humanity. 'Three capacities, above all, are essential to the cultivation of humanity' (ibid, 2006:5).

'First is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions – for living what, following Socrates, we may call the "examined life"....Training this capacity requires developing the capacity to reason logically, to test what one reads or says for consistency of reasoning, correctness of fact, and accuracy of judgement' (ibid, 2006:5).

The 'cultivation of humanity', according to Nussbaum, also requires students to see themselves 'as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern' – which necessitates knowledge and understanding of different cultures and 'of differences of gender, race, and sexuality' (Nussbaum, 2006:6).

Third, it is, however, more than 'factual knowledge' that is required. Also necessary is 'the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have' (ibid, 2006:6-7).

In short, what Nussbaum is pointing to is the 'cultivation of sympathy'. As Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian educator put it: 'We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fullness by sympathy' (cited by Nussbaum, 2006:7).

In the kind of world that we live in the immense value of the liberal education that I have just described should be obvious. The vital role of the humanities, art and performance in cultivating humanity and sympathy should be equally obvious.

3. Third, I am enamoured with the Rhodes slogan 'Where Leaders Learn'. However, I believe that with greater imagination we can do far, far more, that we should connect this idea to a 'liberal education', and that we should be determined to make it a substantive feature of a Rhodes education.

The leaders that we produce should personify the dictum of the Jewish sage Hillel: 'If I am not for myself, who will be? But if I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?'

Our country and continent cry out for leaders of this kind.

4. Fourth, it is widely and openly acknowledged that we have significant social equity challenges at the levels of both academic and administrative staff and students.

The conventional wisdom appears to be that increased enrolments, equity and redress must necessarily result in the reduction of the quality of provision, qualifications and graduates. There may be an intractable tension between the simultaneous pursuit of equity and quality, but there is no inevitable conflict between quality and equity. Enhancing social equity does not mean a diminution of quality and the compromise of standards, appropriately defined.

We can and must, without compromise, pursue social equity with quality, and quality with social equity. Without quality, social equity is meaningless. So-called quality to the exclusion of social equity means that we preclude the possibility of social advancement through our universities, that we reproduce the occupational and social structure of our apartheid past, and we compromise the substance of our democracy.

5. Fifth, we must purposefully create and institutionalize a culture that embraces difference and diversity, and sees these as strengths and powerful wellsprings for personal, intellectual and institutional development.

Culture and traditions are important. But they can also ossify in unfortunate ways, imprison our thinking, induce blind spots, and generate practices that are alienating, discomforting and exclusionary. We need, in the words of Dunbar Moodie, traditions

that 'we carry with us as sheet anchors, providing ballast but not direction, keeping us into the wind but not precisely defining our course', that are more open and let us grow (Moodie, 2005: 141).

Andre du Toit very importantly links institutional culture to academic freedom. He notes 'that the enemy' in the forms of colonial and racial discourses 'has been within the gates all the time', and endangers 'empowering intellectual discourse communities'. 'Ongoing transformation of the institutional culture' is therefore a necessary condition of academic freedom (du Toit, 2000: 103)

The values that are the bedrock of our institutional culture must be clearly distinguished from the historical cultural traditions and practices that could serve as impediments to a more open, vibrant, democratic and inclusive intellectual and institutional culture.

Our task is to respect, affirm and embrace the rich diversity of the people that today constitute and must increasingly constitute Rhodes University.

6. Sixth, as a university our academics are precious and must be treasured. We have to work creatively and diligently to retain our outstanding academics, and also to cultivate a new generation of academics.

Honourable Minister, you have yourself recognised that the adequate remuneration of academics is a pressing issue. Unless we remunerate them appropriately and also address their need for affordable housing in iRhini/Grahamstown, we will be failing to secure the reproduction of our university.

7. Turning to community engagement, we need to consider whether we are not working on too diverse a front with the result that our energies are dissipated and our effectiveness is compromised.

A few focused long-term initiatives and partnerships could be more rewarding.

One is an iRhini/Grahamstown schools partnership that involves Rhodes University, the historically disadvantaged schools, the 'Model C' and private schools, non-government organisations, the Department of Education, the teacher unions and donors, and has as its goals systematically building the capabilities of the historically disadvantaged schools so that they can realize the potential of their students, and graduate significantly larger

numbers of students that can attend universities, including Rhodes.

The other is a partnership with Makana Municipality in which we draw on our knowledge and expertise to support the municipality in its efforts to enhance economic and social development and provide effective basic needs to people.

In both cases, it is about mutually and clearly defining our working principles and goals, and ensuring greater and more effective co-ordination of activities in which we may be already involved. Undertaken successfully, both partnerships could yield tremendous mutual benefits for iRhini/Grahamstown and Rhodes.

8. Eighth, we need to mobilize the necessary funds to ensure that our academic infrastructure and our facilities for students are appropriate to our determination to remain a high quality university. The extension and renewal of our library, various other academic facilities, additional residences for students, are all urgent needs. At the same time, we may have to critically ponder the current trajectory of our infrastructural development. We have a beautiful campus and environment that we hold in trust for future generations. Our physical planning must carefully consider how we impact on our environment.

9. C Wright Mills (1959) writes in *The Sociological Imagination*, that

Freedom is...the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them - and then, the opportunity to choose. That is why freedom cannot exist without an enlarged role of human reason in human affairs. ...(T)he social task of reason is to formulate choices, to enlarge the scope of human decisions in the making of history. The future of human affairs is not merely some set of variables to be predicted. The future is what is to be decided - within the limits, to be sure, of historical possibility. But this possibility is not fixed, in our time the limits seem very broad indeed.

Beyond this, the problem of freedom is ...how decisions about the future of human affairs are to be made and who is to make them. Organisationally, it is the problem of a just machinery of decision. Morally, it is the problem of political responsibility. Intellectually, it is the problem of what are now the possible futures of human affairs (1959:174).

Prof. Barney Pityana, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa, notes in similar vein that

Never have our institutions had (the) freedom to imagine as well as to determine our futures and in such variegated forms. This has to be seen as an opportunity...where our institutions...are not curtailed by historical inevitabilities but are invited to assume new, more powerful identities shaped by existing and potential strengths within the institution, as well as by the contexts within which each must operate (2006).

Wright Mills and Pityana wonderfully capture significant challenges. In a nutshell, how do we as Rhodes University 'formulate the available choices' and chart our future, and through what 'just machinery' that provides the 'opportunity to choose' and to make decisions.

Our future is by and large in our hands. Instead of reactive responses to government policy and planning frameworks we should, with a profound sense of our own worth and identity as a university and with self-confidence and self-assurance, proactively shape our future.

We must clarify our values, including the important ideal of developing an 'African identity'. These values, which must incorporate the values of our *Constitution* and the *White Paper* on higher education (Department of Education, 1997), must shape our activities and guide our actions. They must be lived!

We must elaborate our goals - our desired rate of growth and size and social composition in terms of students; our preferred shape in terms of faculties, departments, and kinds and levels of qualifications and programmes; the academic benchmarks that we seek to achieve; the size, nature and composition of staff that we wish to have; our commitments with respect to their remuneration and accommodation; and the infrastructure that we desire.

In the context of our available financial and other resources, we must responsibly make choices, and take decisions about our priorities, understanding that trade-offs will have to be made between competing goals and priorities.

Above all, we must strategise, plan and act within longer (3-5 years) time frames in order to be able to progressively realise our goals.

I am committed to democratic, transparent, and participatory policy and decision-making and planning that ensures a strong academic voice. In the months to come I will continue to engage with academics on the institutional structures, mechanisms and processes through which such a voice can be ensured.

In summary, my goal is a Rhodes University which, as a South African and African university

- Simultaneously strives to be an outstanding undergraduate university and an excellent research university
- Produces critical, socially committed and sensitive undergraduates and postgraduates with the knowledge, competencies, skills, attitudes and ethics that are befitting of leaders that must engage with the challenges of our society and continent
- Produces and disseminates knowledge and understanding of our natural and social worlds, and enriches our heritage and cultural inheritances through the scholarship of discovery, integration, application and teaching
- Engages with various communities on the basis of partnerships that are mutually respectful, reciprocal and beneficial
- Looks outwards and is attentive to the challenges of its specific historical, cultural and educational context, and of the wider social context
- Strives to social equity and diversity in its student and staff composition and an institutional culture that affirms diversity and promotes core constitutional values
- Is committed to democratic governance and ensuring there are institutional structures, policies and processes in this regard
- Makes a pivotal contribution to the economic, social, cultural and intellectual life of our country and continent.

In so far as institutional innovation and change are necessary in our universities it is values, vision and goals, as well as institutional conditions that should determine the scope, nature, trajectory and pace of change.

We must steer clear of two dangers. One is an overriding concern about inherited and given institutional conditions. In this case, the results could be little or no changes or an extremely slow pace of change, in which unacceptable vested interests predominate and the status quo remains intact. Such an outcome is bound to be unacceptable to significant constituencies.

The other danger is an exclusive concern with vision and goals. Here there can be a voluntarism that seeks far-reaching

institutional changes immediately or extremely rapidly. In this case, the university can be seriously debilitated, the changes may not be sustainable, and academic quality and excellence can be seriously eroded.

Our universities are precious but fragile institutions. Ill-considered and frenetic change without continuities has the danger of rendering a university dysfunctional. Yet, equally, an unwillingness or inability to change can render a university moribund. A deliberate, bold, and resolute, and yet sober path has to be navigated, with continuities and discontinuities as appropriate to given and changing institutional conditions.

Honourable Minister, not too long ago, many of our institutions were steeped in the practice and rationalisation of racism, inequality and authoritarianism. To the extent that discourses of equality and democracy and transformation have been embraced this is to be welcomed.

Yet, we must be vigilant that bold declarations about equity and transformation are not accompanied by only the most modest notions of transformation, and timid practices that can ultimately undermine and inhibit the kinds of changes that our universities and society need.

History and biography

Contemplating the extraordinary honour of the post of Vice Chancellor that you bestow on me this evening, I have naturally reminisced on the defining actors and moments in my life. I do not consider myself to be in any way exceptional. Instead, it is the privilege of various opportunities and the intersection of historical circumstances and biography that have made me who I am and have led me to Rhodes University.

My parents, despite having only ten years of formal education between them, instilled in me a love for reading and were models of integrity and humility. My partner, Shireen, sons, Hussein and Faizal, and family and friends have enriched my life and supported me in countless ways over the years. Since all my jobs have been opportunities to give expression to my values and social commitments, I deeply regret that we have been kept apart all too often.

I acquired my abiding interest in the history and geography, and the philosophy, sociology, and economics and politics of higher

education as a national student leader in the late 1970s and early 1980s, working alongside some remarkable individuals who today are leaders in many fields.

Throughout the 1980s I had the great privilege of a marvellous schooling in ethics, discipline, politics, social commitment and strategy and tactics through interaction with many extraordinary people, who either fell in struggle or today occupy key positions in government, civil society and business.

From the workers in the emerging radical trade union movement I learnt the vital and rewarding culture of democratic practice. It was through these workers, and poor Xhosa and Afrikaans-speaking township men and women, youth and students, that I developed a passion for educating, and that I learnt about teaching and learning, pedagogy and curriculum, as I grappled with the exciting challenge of engaging with them on economic and political theory, South African history and political economy, and the experiences and lessons of freedom struggles around the world.

My late mentor, friend, and comrade, Harold Wolpe, contributed powerfully to my intellectual and scholarly development, and to my uncompromising view that we must never sacrifice research and science to politics, and that we must fiercely guard the autonomy of intellectual work against any attempts to harness it to narrow political ends. On the tenth anniversary of his death, I continue to look to him for wise counsel, guidance and inspiration.

In the past seven years, as the Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Higher Education, I have had the great privilege of contributing to the shaping of national higher education policy alongside tremendous intellectuals, and of being guided by some dynamic, sage, farsighted and outstanding South Africans.

Finally, I must acknowledge the University of Western Cape (UWC), and in particular Prof. Jakes Gerwel who persuaded me to join UWC. For a decade, UWC was an exhilarating environment that afforded me opportunities for teaching, research, intellectual development, and leadership of a nature that few other institutions would have offered a young Black scholar.

Chairperson of Council, you have agreed to my requests to be remunerated at a lower level than what was generously offered to me and to also relinquish certain benefits, and for these savings to be contributed to a scholarship fund.

These savings which will be some R 200 000 per annum enable me this evening to announce the establishment of the *Jakes Gerwel Rhodes University Scholarship Fund*.

Chancellor, born in Somerset East in the rural Eastern Cape, you are a product of historically disadvantaged schools. Like most black South Africans you had to work hard to triumph over the Verwoedean dictum that there was no place for blacks beyond being hewers of wood and drawers of water.

In a province deeply challenged to improve educational provision so as to realize the potential of students, your example of success under adverse conditions is a source of inspiration. You serve as a role model to young people who struggle under the weight of inadequate educational resources and opportunities.

You are to me, sir, also a magnificent symbol of intellectual, academic, social and personal integrity, professionalism, specialist expertise, courage and human good. You have contributed a powerful legacy of ethical leadership, critical scholarship, commitment to social justice and a humane society, and social action towards these ends.

You have long been an inspirational role-model for me and it gives me great pleasure to establish this scholarship fund in your honour.

Inspired by your life and example, the *Jakes Gerwel Rhodes University Scholarship Fund* will provide on the basis of financial need and academic potential five full scholarships per annum to Eastern Cape students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

In this way, we will provide an opportunity for economic and social advancement through a degree at Rhodes University to those whose aspirations are limited only by social circumstances.

I am committed to energetically working to increase the *Scholarship Fund* so that a larger number of students can receive full scholarships, and on a sustainable basis.

I trust that individuals, organizations and businesses will readily recognize your outstanding contribution to our society and democracy and will contribute generously to the *Scholarship Fund*. This will be an investment in future leaders of your character and calibre, at a university that is determined to be an institution 'where leaders learn'.

Conclusion

Chancellor, in closing, our task is to cultivate what Harvey Kaye calls a 'prophetic memory' (Kaye, 1996) - *remembrance* of our traumatic past; *critique* of the injustices that continue to blight our democracy; *consciousness* that our history teaches that nothing is gained without creativity, boldness and determined endeavour; *imagination* to conceive of new ways of being and acting; and the *desire* to shape our destiny and remake our universities and our country.

Dr. Mampela Ramphela has commented that I have fire in my heart and ice in my head. I take this as a compliment. Too much of what I see around me fills me with shame, affronts my sensibilities, and means that there will always be fire in my heart. But equally, my conviction that the path we navigate must not only be bold and resolute but always also deliberate and sober means that there will always also be ice in my head.

President Mbeki has noted that 'effectively to give birth to the new, we must be angry at our past'. He, however, recalls the wonderful Sotho proverb that says: 'No matter how hot your anger may be, it cannot cook', and challenges us that 'the African university should make the real fire that cooks' (2004).

I declare tonight my loyalty and commitment to making Rhodes University one of the great African universities that makes 'the real fire that cooks'.

Enkosi/Thank you.

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