

Rhodes, the HESA Declaration and non-racialism

Rhodes University is a member of Higher Education South Africa (HESA) and the Vice-Chancellor serves on the Executive Committee of HESA.

Rhodes therefore aligns itself with the HESA Declaration and in particular the commitments expressed in the Declaration.

With respect to Rhodes University's own commitments, a constant theme of the University leadership is:

- That conduct, relationships and responsibilities at Rhodes must be guided by the constitutional commitment to 'establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights' and the values of our *Constitution* and *Bill of Rights* – respect for human dignity, human rights, equality, non-sexism and non-racialism
- That Rhodes University embraces its constitutional 'obligations' to 'respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights' embodied in the Constitution, and to prohibit 'conduct inconsistent with its provisions'
- That everyone at Rhodes - students, academics, tutors, administrators, technicians, wardens secretaries, cooks, catering and cleaning staff and grounds and garden staff - deserves respect and must be accorded dignity
- That Rhodes University must be a 'home for all' and must recognise, respect and affirm difference and diversity.
- That Rhodes must purposefully create and institutionalize a culture that embraces difference and diversity, and see these as strengths and powerful wellsprings for personal, intellectual and institutional development.

Rhodes is cognisant that racism, sexism, intolerance and discriminatory behaviour and practices continue to endure.

Last year an equity workshop identified key challenges and mechanisms and strategies to protect and advance constitutional values and imperatives. In addition, a gender imbizo was held to address gender issues, and intersecting issues of 'race', gender and class and challenges in these regards.

Arising from these meetings an equity action plan is currently being discussed. In addition, a new employment equity policy is in the process of development, and a sub-committee of the Employment Equity Committee is reviewing all Rhodes policies to eliminate any that could be discriminatory and prejudicial. Education programmes around diversity issues have been introduced for House Committees and first year students. A hate speech clause has been incorporated into the Student Disciplinary Code (Clause 15.27).

However, it is recognised that more needs to be done and that policies, while important, are not enough. To promote social justice and social cohesion, critical yet empathetic spaces for open discussion on issues including race, class, gender and sexual orientation need to be created.

All constituencies - students, academics, administrators and support staff – and university structures and organised formations must understand their constitutional obligations.

Further, as part of its role of educating and as a University that seeks to be an institution 'where leaders learn', Rhodes must think creatively about a higher education that is intimately connected to the idea of democratic citizenship and the 'cultivation of humanity'.

These are all critical challenges that must and will receive due attention.