

## **Message to the Toronto Old Rhodian Reunion**

12 October 2007

Dear Old Rhodians

Warm greetings on your reunion! As you meet in Toronto, my partner Shireen and I will be hosting an Old Rhodian reunion in Port Elizabeth, already having hosted similar functions in the past few weeks in Cape Town, Durban and George. In coming weeks there will also be reunions in Johannesburg, Bloemfontein, Kimberly and East London.

I trust you will have an enjoyable time as you reunite as Old Rhodians and reminisce on your time at Rhodes. But please do also find a moment to talk about how you can contribute to your alma mater's ongoing development.

It is my aim as the new Vice-Chancellor to maintain and further enhance the academic excellence associated with Rhodes University. I am especially committed to ensuring that Rhodes is at the forefront of the dissemination and production of knowledge; is indeed a place 'where leaders learn', and which nurtures and harnesses the potential of all the members of its community.

Rhodes is entrusted with nurturing and cultivating the most intellectually talented of our society, women and men that have the potential to make a significant contribution to equity, social justice and social, cultural and economic development.

We are also entrusted with producing knowledge that can both foster understanding of our natural and social worlds, and also inform the interventions and policies that are required to advance social equity, social justice and development.

My principal responsibility is to create the optimal environment for the creation of knowledge, the sharing of knowledge and the cultivation of the intellect, and for social engagement with a variety of communities.

I am committed to ensuring that there is the necessary environment, culture, structures, high quality academic programmes, and facilities to support learning on the part of students, and that we strive for academic excellence and to produce high quality graduates.

Although we are by far the smallest university in South Africa with only some 6 000 students, almost 25% are postgraduates and 25% are international students from over 50 countries around the world. Currently, we have the 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 enjoy the distinction of having among the best undergraduate pass and graduation rates in South Africa, and outstanding postgraduate success rates. This is testimony to the quality of our academic provision, and to the commitment of Rhodes staff to student learning, development and success. We also have the best research output per academic staff member of any university in South Africa, which means that students learn with academics that are often leaders in their fields and disciplines.

Almost 50% of all Rhodes' students live in the University's 42 residences and are associated with its 11 halls. The residences are an important part of the student culture at Rhodes and through a well-established structure of wardens, sub-wardens, and house committees the residences play an important role in supporting student development and success.

We are finalising our strategic plan for the coming years. This will see us grow at about 2.5% per year to become 6500 students in 2010. We are also committed to becoming more postgraduate and to introducing a range of new academic programmes, especially at the postgraduate level. We also seek to promote mutually beneficial international partnerships with universities around the world, and especially in the rest of Africa and Asia.

In terms of our plans, we are challenged to build a new library and refurbish the current one, which was constructed in 1961. This will cost R108 million and be a three-year building project that will provide us a state-of the art (or should I say technology) library that is befitting the kind of university Rhodes is and seeks to be.

The pressure on residence accommodation for students has already resulted in us building two new residences this year at a cost of R32 million, and a decision to build two more in 2008, and possibly more in future years.

We also have to address the desperate need for affordable accommodation for our academics in Grahamstown, where property prices and building costs have sky-rocketed, as South Africa gears up for the 2010 soccer world cup, and have made home ownership out of the reach of many of our academics.

In as much as we seek to be a great small university we are, alas, a relatively poor university. However, as a sign of its confidence in us and an acknowledgement of the quality of graduates that we produce, the government has provided us a special grant of R80 million, with R30 million for the new residences for 2008, and R50 million towards the library. Our Board of Governors have also committed R 35 million towards the library.

We now look to raising the remaining R 23 million needed for the library from donors, friends and alumni of Rhodes, all of whose support is vital to our ongoing institutional development. In this regard I urge you not to forget your alma mater and to contribute in whatever way you can.

I look forward to the opportunity to meet with you sometime in the future, to update you on life and development at Rhodes, and to especially discuss how you could contribute to your alma mater's future development.

With best wishes

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