

NEW STAFF WELCOME

13 August 2008

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor's, Deans, academic and administrative colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, molweni, good evening and welcome to the new staff party.

It is my great pleasure to extend a warm welcome to the Rhodes community of scholars, administrators, support staff and students to all our new staff and colleagues, and also to your partners and family.

This evening is an official welcome of our new colleagues to Rhodes (perhaps to iRhini/Grahamstown, and in some instances even to the Eastern Cape and South Africa).

It is, however, also an opportunity for new colleagues to meet one another and also other staff members, to share initial experiences of Rhodes and iRhini/Grahamstown, exchange among yourselves tips and advice on how to cope with the new environment in which you find yourselves, and to also share with us how as an institution or as administrators and academics we might better support you settle into Rhodes.

57 new staff members have joined Rhodes University in the past 6 months – 15 academics and 42 administrative and support staff. Whoever you may be – a new academic, administrator, technician, warden, messenger, cook, cleaner, or gardener – and for whatever reason you have joined Rhodes, I hope you find Rhodes University a stimulating and hospitable environment in which you are able to develop intellectually, socially and personally, make new friends and in some cases even life-long partners.

It is worth emphasising that you are joining an institution that is first and foremost *Indawo Yolwazi* - a place of knowledge, a place of learning. This means that everything that we do must ensure that Rhodes is an environment that is conducive to the production and dissemination of knowledge and the intellectual, cultural, social and physical development of students, academics and, more generally, all members of Rhodes.

This means each of us embracing a commitment

- To developing, through our teaching and learning, administrative and support services, high quality graduates who are intellectuals, professionals and critical citizens with the values, knowledge, expertise and skills to make a significant contribution to economic and social development, and an equitable, just and democratic society
- To pushing forward, through fundamental research and discovery and applied research, the frontiers of knowledge and human understanding, and
- To advancing, through community engagement mutually respectful relationships with local and other communities in a way that benefits both them and us.

In as much as we seek to be a small university – and with 6 250 students we are by far the smallest university in South Africa – our ideals and goals are not small or modest. We also wish to be an outstanding African university, which maintains its excellent pass and graduation rates, its unsurpassed research output per academic staff member, and its commitment to making it possible for students to obtain a broad-based education in the midst of dedicated and excellent scholars and researchers.

Like every other university in South Africa today, we face many challenges which are simultaneously intellectual, social, cultural and financial.

These means:

- That we must not rest content with our current achievements but must continue to strive to do better and become better in everything that we do
- That we must value, affirm, respect and embrace difference and diversity, whether this is in terms of knowledge and scholarship or socially in relation to diversity of 'race', gender, class, nationality, language, geography, religion or sexual orientation

- That we must address the needs of all the social groups that constitute the Rhodes community and ensure that in terms of its institutional culture we work to create a Rhodes that is a home for all
- That we must rise to the challenge of attracting and producing a new generation of scholars and administrators who are also more representative of our wider society
- That we must strive to put in place the physical infrastructure – a new library, new residences, additional research and teaching facilities, accommodation for staff, etc. - to secure into the future our position as a leading university
- That we must make wise choices and plan in a way that ensures we remain financially sustainable in the decades to come.

All these challenges need us to be imaginative, innovative and effective and efficient in what we do. And they also require of us a culture in which there is the space for open, honest and rational debate, discussion and critique, as is befitting a university.

As a community we will continue to excel and thrive if we individually and collectively

- Uphold our fundamental social purposes as a university, which has to do with advancing knowledge and learning
- Embrace and practice the values of respect for human dignity and human rights, non-racialism and non-sexism, and actively reject and counter any and all forms of prejudice and intolerance
- Conduct our dealings with one other with integrity, and
- Discharge our responsibilities to the best of our abilities, while being open to think critically about our work and performance and how we could improve.

As you settle in, I hope that you will make use of the wide-range of opportunities that the University provides us to improve our knowledge expertise and skills – from beginners classes in isiXhosa, to courses in leadership and to registering for various short courses and also diplomas and degrees. There are also many activities

during the lunch hour, in the evenings and over weekends of an educational, cultural and sporting nature and I also urge you make use of these.

One of the great advantages of being a small university is that there are many opportunities for informal interaction. At the same time, my door and those of the DVC's, Deans, HoDs, managers and supervisors are always open to you should you wish to discuss anything – whether it is to raise concerns, make suggestions, seek or, even better, to provide advice.

In closing, a warm welcome, once more, to Rhodes University to you, your partner and your family.

I wish you a long, productive, fulfilling, and successful career at this University.