

Roundtable on critical issues in Higher Education

There is a dearth of intellectual spaces in South Africa for sustained scholarly debate on critical issues on higher education. This is a serious problem for South Africa as a whole, and not merely for academics and students, given the challenges that Higher Education faces in our new democracy and the pivotal role that universities and other post-school institutions should ideally play in making a better future possible.

That is why, commencing in 2010, Rhodes University has decided to embark on the project of hosting a yearly roundtable dealing with critical issues in higher education.

Prof. Pedro Alexis Tabensky, from the Department of Philosophy at Rhodes University, with the support of the Rhodes University Centre for Higher Education, Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL), is the roundtable series coordinator.

The first three roundtables, two of which have been held this year, are generously being supported by the Ford Foundation.

When discussing the possibility of funding with the Foundation, we indicated that there was no shortage of vitally important issues that a Roundtable Series could and should address.

After the second roundtable drew to a successful conclusion, it has become clear that it is imperative that an ongoing yearly forum be created where these issues are critically addressed by leading scholars in the field and also by those who have the power of influencing the future directions of the sector.

It is also imperative that the concerns addressed in the roundtables be disseminated widely, so we welcome the interest that the *Mail & Guardian* has shown in the project.

The first roundtable, held earlier this year, dealt with the issue of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. The starting point for the debate was the 2008 Council on Higher Education task team report on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and Public Accountability in South African Higher Education.

Although the originally planned topic for the recently concluded second roundtable was not the aims of higher education, it became clear that this issue had to be discussed in order properly to get a hold of the ideas of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The second roundtable was extremely successful and the issues discussed are summarised in the articles in this special supplement. We hope that such debates will make a vital contribution to our understandings of the higher education sector and ideally also to the shaping of its future.