

PLANNING THE YEARS AND DECADE AHEAD

After a dull and wet 2010 Christmas, warm and summery weather greets new and old students as they arrive at Rhodes and Grahamstown in the early weeks of February to begin the 2011 academic year.

New or old, the students can be confident about the quality of the educational and social experience that they will encounter during their stay at Rhodes, given Rhodes' deserved international reputation for academic scholarship and quality.

The preservation and further enhancement of reputation are not matters that one can be complacent about or can leave to chance.

Myriad challenges face all universities, including Rhodes, and effective institutional planning underpinned by an open, participatory and critical culture is necessary for identifying and addressing challenges, building on strengths, exploiting available opportunities, overcoming weaknesses and ensuring dynamic and sustainable institutional development. All areas of institutional life and activities including, fundamentally, academic provision, require deliberation and conscious policy- and decision-making.

Planning

Institutional planning is not in competition with academic freedom, autonomy and a collegial culture. It is possible to imaginatively create structures, mechanisms and processes that permit planning in a manner that holds fast to core academic values.

Planning must accord to academic faculties and departments substantial autonomy and guarantee scholars academic freedom with regard to teaching and research. It must also guard against producing an institutional culture of dull, plodding conformity that stifles imagination, creativity and innovation. There must be space for academic and research programmes with different purposes, methodologies, pedagogies and modes of delivery, and that respond in distinct ways to our varied and changing intellectual, social, and economic needs.

As a university we must be able to analyse our changing context, to monitor, evaluate and interpret economic and social dynamics, trajectories and trends, and to read the nature of policies and policy signals. The political terrain, economic conditions, macro-economic policy, the high-level knowledge and skills requirements of the labour market, budgets for higher education, including student financial aid, secondary school outputs all warrant close analysis for they impact on the work of a university and have implications for our institutional development. We should not be purely determined by our context, but must also engage pro-actively to shape and modify our context.

Integral to planning is inspiring, conceptualising, managing, communicating and effectively implementing change. Institutional change is a demanding undertaking, whose complexity and enormity is not always fully understood. It requires sober,

careful, detailed and realistic planning, that gives attention to strategies, structures and instruments, available financial resources, sources of expert staff, time frames, and so on.

At the same time that change is being undertaken in certain areas, various other areas of institutional activity have to continue to be steered, supported and maintained. Thus, institutional change and institutional maintenance have to be managed simultaneously (not consecutively). If not managed effectively, parts and aspects of the University that function relatively well could become dysfunctional and create new problems.

The *purposes* of planning are threefold. One is to ensure that Rhodes has carefully considered and formulated ideas on its academic and overall institutional trajectory and development. Another is that we are not simply shaped by historical patterns and contemporary currents and pressures but proactively and consciously shape our future. And, finally, that choices and decisions are made with respect to knowledge production, teaching-learning and community engagement.

These choices include the balance between undergraduate and postgraduate provision, the breadth of qualifications and programmes, the nature of programmes (the mix between general formative, vocational, professional, etc.), the mode of provision (contact, distance, e-learning) and the like. Regarding knowledge production, there are choices on different kinds of scholarship (discovery, integration, etc.) and the nature of research (fundamental, applied, strategic, developmental). Community engagement involves issues such as relations with different kinds of communities (mining, manufacturing, agriculture, commerce, government, non-governmental organisations, social movements), which operate in different spaces (national, provincial, regional, local), and have different requirements (research, teaching).

Certain values, principles, purposes, goals and strategies, may stand in a relationship of intractable tension in so far as, for good social reasons, we wish to pursue them *simultaneously*. Paradoxes have to be creatively addressed and policies and strategies devised that can satisfy multiple imperatives, *balance* competing goals, and enable the pursuit of equally desirable goals. If trade-off's are necessary, they must be made deliberately with respect to their implications for vision and goals, and also transparently. Such trade-offs and choices must be communicated in ways that build understanding and secure support from important constituencies.

Allied to the need to make difficult choices, priorities have to be established with respect to institutional goals - more easily asserted than accomplished in practice. Yet some basis for prioritising, for establishing first order, second order and third order priorities, and for determining what changes are essential concurrently and what changes can be sequential, is crucial if an institutional development agenda is to be effectively pursued.

C. Wright Mills (1959) has written that

Freedom is not merely the chance to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them - and then, the opportunity to choose.

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).

Mills wonderfully captures significant challenges. This also points to the necessity for an institutional culture and internal governance that hold fast to the values of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and democracy, the need for public accountability, and the need to avoid an ideology and culture of 'managerialism' (while acknowledging that effective management is indispensable).

The intended *outcomes* of planning are an Institutional Development Plan, which is not a cast-in-stone invariant blueprint, as much as a *compass* that guides developments, prioritisation, decision-making and implementation at Rhodes while leaving room for pursuing new imperatives and exploiting possible new opportunities; that Rhodes is financially sustainable taking into account its enrolments, academic programmes and operations, and its staffing and infrastructure requirements; that we are able to effectively address and pursue new social and educational imperatives, goals and strategies; that there is an alignment between enrolment planning, academic planning, staffing, infrastructure planning and financial planning, and that occurs on a longer-term horizon than has hitherto existed.

Enrolment plan, 2011-2013

Following discussions with the Department of Higher Education & Training, Rhodes University's enrolment plan for 2011-2013 has been finalised.

With 7 192 students last year, Rhodes target enrolments are 7 390 in 2011, 7 576 in 2012 and 7 645 in 2013, an overall growth of 2.2% over 2011-2013. These enrolments mean that we will remain the smallest university in South Africa by far.

Provision has been made for an intake of 1 500 first-time entering undergraduates during each of the next three years, meaning a very modest overall growth in undergraduate enrolments of just 0.1% - from 5 309 students in 2010 to 5 329 students in 2013.

Much of the new enrolment growth in coming years is targeted at postgraduate level. Growth of 8.2% is planned to occur – an increase in postgraduate numbers from 1 840 in 2010 to 2 273 in 2013. If these targets are realized, postgraduate enrolments at Rhodes will increase from 26% in 2010 to 30% in 2013

Women as a proportion of the total student body are projected to remain at 59% and international students at 20%. The number of black students will increase; the extent to which the proportion of black students (currently 58%), and specifically black South African students, especially from the Eastern Cape, will increase will depend on the availability of state financial aid and the ability of the University to mobilise donor funds to support needy deserving students. In recent years Rhodes has devoted substantial amounts of its own core funds (that is, non-state and donor financial aid funds) to financial aid, but has now reached the limits of its own internal financial allocations.

Finally, the current proportions during 2011-2013 in terms of fields of study is intended to remain constant: at 26% natural sciences/pharmacy, 12% commerce, 6% education and 56% arts, humanities, social sciences and law.

A number of considerations underpin the 2011-2013 enrolment plan. One is the need to consolidate the considerable undergraduate growth that occurred between 2007-2009, when some 800 new undergraduates entered Rhodes. This will also provide the space to investigate key long-term institutional growth issues, including within the Grahamstown context. Another is to give effect to Rhodes' overall institutional development strategy of increasing further the current postgraduate and research-orientation of Rhodes.

Academic Planning

The very modest increase in undergraduate enrolments during 2011-2013 signals that there are no plans to introduce any new undergraduate programmes. Instead, our tasks will be to

- Maintain our status of possessing the best undergraduate pass rates and graduations rates among South African universities
- Ensure that we provide effective support to all our students, and especially black South African students who are from historically disadvantaged public schools
- Decide on the appropriate balance between face-to-face teaching-learning and other forms of teaching-learning that harness the potential of new information and communication technologies
- Finalise, informed by a recent review, an appropriate model for extended studies programmes for students that do not meet our usual entrance requirements but display talent and potential.

Much attention will be given to

- Identify potential new postgraduate and research niche areas and programmes
- Decide on such areas and programmes and ensure there is effective planning and implementation
- Support the Humanities Faculty to ensure that it increases its contribution to postgraduate and research outputs
- Develop appropriate institutional arrangements to effectively support larger numbers of Honours, Masters and Doctoral students, as well further enhance their academic and social experiences.

Currently, five prestigious South African Research Chair's awarded by the National Research Foundation exist in Medicinal Chemistry, Marine Science, Astronomy and Mathematics Education (two). The University will continue to pursue further chairs in proven areas of academic excellence.

This year will see the introduction of three new postgraduate and research focus areas funded by the Mellon Foundation: in *Southern African Literature*; in *Critical Sexual and Reproductive Health Studies*, and in *Visual and Performing Arts of Africa*. Funds permitting, there will be hopefully a fourth focus area on Media and Democracy under Prof. Herman Wasserman of Journalism and Media Studies. We have also set aside funds for a new postgraduate and research focus area in another Faculty.

New Masters programmes will begin this year in Creative Writing, Social Policy, Bioinformatics and Applied Computer Science, as well as a new Honours specialisation in Health Journalism in partnership with Discovery Health. There will be continued expansion of the new Doctoral programme in Higher Education Studies that was initiated last year.

Other new postgraduate and research programmes to consolidate our excellence in water, isiXhosa and multilingualism, medicinal chemistry and fisheries science are intended to follow. On the basis of our breadth and depth in water education and research, we hope to become a key institutional hub on the African continent in this field.

To give impetus to our plans and support strategic new academic initiatives the University's Council and Board of Governors have agreed to create the Sandiswa *Imbewu* ('We are growing/multiplying our seeds') Fund.

R 12.5 million has been pledged over the next five years as seed funding for new initiatives. The Fund is intended to help consolidate and enhance current areas of academic excellence at Rhodes; facilitate ventures into new academic and research areas, especially at the postgraduate level; support Rhodes to exploit new opportunities that can develop research and knowledge production, and further enhance the quality of graduates produced.

Key, of course, to institutional and academic quality are committed staff. In this regard, attention will be given to:

- Improving teacher: student ratios overall and in specific areas
- Improving the equity profile of academic and senior support staff
- Continuing to build the next generation of academics, and especially black and women academics
- Effectively supporting new and emerging scholars academics
- Finalising, after consultation with staff unions, a remuneration policy
- Systematically moving to remunerate all staff on the 50th percentile.

Infrastructure planning

Supported by R 142.5 million of government Infrastructure and Efficiency Funding, donor funding and alumni support, recent years have seen the construction of a spectacular new library, five new residences and a dining hall, a environmental education learning centre, and new equipment for life sciences. This year, construction will begin on a new teacher education building.

The new 8000 square metres Library with its state of the art and technology facilities will help further cement Rhodes' standing as one of Africa's leading teaching and research institutions.

It embodies our determination to continue to provide a high quality education and experience to our students who come from diverse social and national backgrounds; to continue to push forward the frontiers of knowledge and understanding, and to continue to possess the best undergraduate pass rates, among the most outstanding postgraduate graduation rates, and among the highest per capita research outputs of any South African university.

Supported by staff who are being trained locally and in the United States as research librarians, the Rhodes and wider Grahamstown community will have at their fingertips extensive print holdings and the latest digital research databases for engaging with current knowledge and for creating new knowledge.

Our R75 million investment in the library extends well beyond the bricks and mortar of this impressive new infrastructure. More importantly, it embraces the tasks of cultivating new generations of graduates, professionals and critical citizens, and of producing knowledge, the lifeblood of human development in the 21st century.

The initial budget for the new library was R97 million. We settled with contractors on an all-inclusive cost of R 86 million. The final bill was R75 million, some 13% below the original estimate, achieved through disciplined and honest project management.

We understood that we were using gifts and citizen's taxpayer public funds that had to be accounted to the last cent. We pledged to donors that we would use their investment scrupulously, creatively and wisely, and we discharged our pledge with grace and style.

During 2011, there will be an opportunity to apply for new Infrastructure and Efficiency Funding for 2012-2014. We have great need for a new life sciences building, expanded medicinal chemistry facilities, a postgraduate centre, and new postgraduate residences and we will strongly motivate for generous government support for these. In addition, a new indoor sports centre or the considerable expansion of the current one is now overdue, given the increased student numbers and the burgeoning of sport at Rhodes.

New infrastructure development at Rhodes will be guided by a long-term Campus Development Plan, so that we remain a beautiful campus and also incorporate environmental considerations in our planning.

Finally, this year we celebrate a number of important anniversaries. One is the 100th anniversary of the History Department. Another is the centenary of the Old Rhodian Union, founded in 1911 by Professor Cullen Bowles and Sir George Cory to form a link between alumni and their alma mater. And the Rhodes Student Representative Council celebrates its 101st anniversary this year. Various activities are planned to celebrate all the anniversaries.