

RHODES UNIVERSITY
POSTGRADUATES ORIENTATION WELCOME

18 February 2011

Molweni, good evening

To our new postgraduates, a warm welcome to Rhodes University, and to those who are transferring to Rhodes from other universities, a special welcome!

You have made a wise choice and I am confident that you will confirm this in the coming month and years.

Those of you who are beginning postgraduate studies now embark on a new phase of professional and intellectual development, which involves grappling with higher levels of knowledge, greater challenges to your intellectual and organisational abilities, and requires a greater autonomy of learning and discovery.

I trust you will find your postgraduate degree and programme intellectually challenging, stimulating and rewarding.

This year at Rhodes, 2 018 out of 7 390 students will be postgraduates. More specifically, 834 postgraduates will be honours and postgraduate diploma students, 844 will be Masters students and 330 will be doctoral students.

In all likelihood, 52% of you postgraduates will be women and 29% will be international students.

Overall, as postgraduates you will make up 27% of the Rhodes University student body.

This proportion of postgraduates is a proud feature of Rhodes, and makes us distinctive among South African universities.

Also distinctive about Rhodes are the following: among South African universities we have excellent postgraduate graduation rates; the third best research outputs per capita staff member, and also the third best qualifications among academics – 50% of our academics have PhD's.

Another healthy feature is that our postgraduates come from numerous countries in the rest of Africa and from other continents. The presence of international postgraduates is a very important and welcome feature of Rhodes. It helps to make us cosmopolitan, contributes to the intellectual and social diversity of Rhodes, and also enriches our institutional culture.

A key feature of the growth of Rhodes in the next decade will be the enhancement of research and expansion postgraduates - both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the total student body. In 2012 our target for postgraduates is 29% (2 204 students) and in 2013 30% (2 273 students).

Of course, declaring an intention does not mean it will be achieved.

This means that as a University we have to develop effective strategies to pursue our goal, create new areas of postgraduate studies, ensure that we develop new infrastructure in the form of buildings, laboratories, library holdings and the like, and mobilise additional funds for scholarships and bursaries.

Already, on the understanding that a vibrant and well-equipped library is indispensable for the pursuit of knowledge, we have spent R75 million on a spectacular new Library with state of the art and technology facilities. Included here, is a Research Commons dedicated exclusively to masters and doctoral students and academics. This is the coolest place at Rhodes, and is the newest and only one of four in South Africa.

Here, you will have at your fingertips extensive print holdings and the latest digital research databases for both an engagement with current knowledge and for the creation of new knowledge.

The Library embodies our determination to continue to provide you a high quality education and experience, and to continue to push forward the frontiers of knowledge and understanding.

This year and in coming years, we will give much attention 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
- Supporting Faculties to increase their contribution to postgraduate and research outputs, and
- Develop appropriate institutional arrangements to effectively support larger numbers of Honours, Masters and Doctoral students, as well as further enhance your academic and social experiences.

Currently, Rhodes has five prestigious South African Research Chair's, which are awarded by the National Research Foundation: in Medicinal Chemistry, Marine Science, Astronomy and two in Mathematics Education.

The University will continue to energetically 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*, headed by Professor Dirk Klover of the English Department; in *Critical Sexual and Reproductive Health Studies*, headed by Professor Catriona Macleod of Psychology and Prof. Louise Vincent of Politics and in *Visual and Performing Arts of Africa*, led by Professor Ruth Simbao of Fine Art.

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.

Four new Masters programmes 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, fisheries science and other areas are intended to follow.

On the basis of our breadth and depth in water education and research, we hope to bid for the status of UNESCO Institute for Water Education and Research and become the key institutional hub on the African continent in this field. This is a R120 million initiative.

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, are outstanding scholars, and you will indeed work with and among many outstanding scholars, many of whom are nationally and internationally renowned and world leaders in their fields and disciplines.

Importance

As postgraduates, you play an immensely important role at Rhodes and make a valuable contribution in at least 5 ways.

1. First, as postgraduates you serve as tutors and so contribute to supporting academic programmes and enhancing undergraduate student development. Of course, this is also a valuable mechanism for you to advance your own intellectual and academic development.
2. Second, you serve as role models for undergraduates, hopefully inspiring them to consider postgraduate study.
3. Third, you potentially act as catalysts of the production of new knowledge through hopefully inspiring and innovating new and fresh approaches to the development of knowledge or through helping to push knowledge production into new areas
4. Fourth, you sometimes provide valuable support to our leading scholars and researchers, assisting them in their research in various ways and also potentially growing to become their collaborators
5. Fifth, you are also potentially apprentice academics and the new generation of lecturers and researchers.

Postgraduate Student Liaison Committee

During this year, I urge you to give attention to strengthening the Postgraduate Student Liaison Committee (PGSLC). This is your representative body and an important vehicle for your participation in the governance of Rhodes University.

I have indicated that we are on a trajectory to become more postgraduate. This will require much discussion, making of choices and decisions.

Among the issues we will need to consider are: whether we need a postgraduate centre as a hub of various postgraduate activities; whether we need a Director of Postgraduate Studies to help Deans and faculties around academic and administrative coordination and to and further develop and enhance the quality postgraduate studies at Rhodes; what goals should we set and commitments can we make to postgraduates regarding work space, facilities, and equipment; whether we need new dedicated postgraduate residences and of what kind; and more immediately, whether and how Level zero of the library can and will be put to effective use by postgraduates;

Through your PGSLC, you have the opportunity to express your views and to shape the nature and direction of the University, especially in so far as the future of postgraduate studies is concerned.

The PGSLC has an open door to the DVC of Research and Development, Dr. Peter Clayton, to the Director of Research, Ms. Jaine Roberts, to the Dean of Students, to other Deans and to me.

We are all very happy to engage with you on any matters related to your postgraduate experience, and especially how we can enhance it further.

In closing I wish you a stimulating, productive and great year, and I look forward to your contribution in maintaining and further enhancing Rhodes University as an outstanding postgraduate institution.