

Dr D.S.H. Henderson, Vice-Chancellor, Rhodes University
Talk to first-year students, Tuesday February 15 1977

My first and most agreeable task this afternoon is to offer you all, students here for the first time, a most hearty and sincere welcome to Rhodes University. A particular word of welcome is offered to the black students amongst you. While still little more than a handful in numbers - about a dozen or so - your presence here is indicative of a certain relaxation of the hard and rigid attitudes of the immediate past. We hope too, and I have reason to believe there is room for guarded optimism in this respect, that you are the forerunners of many more students of all race groups that we shall be able in the future to admit to our ranks.

Rhodes University is generally regarded as being a very happy place - I have yet to meet an Old Rhodian who ~~did not~~ enjoy his years in Grahamstown. One of the reasons for this, I am sure you will concur, is that the Rhodes student tends to regard himself as a cut above lesser mortals who did not have the wisdom and foresight, or maybe just plain luck, to enrol here in preference to other less well favoured institutions. Whether the Rhodes student is entirely justified in his superior attitude may well be a matter for debate. What surely is not a topic for speculation is that you as new Rhodians will strive to ensure, not only that you enjoy yourselves, but that you profit from your years here, and that you produce valid evidence to confirm the high expectations you have of yourselves and that we older members of the university also have of you.

The Vice-Principal, the Registrar and the Deans of Faculties are here as representatives of the senior members of the university in welcoming you, and in expressing our good wishes for a good year ahead, as laying the foundations for a successful student career.

After these words of welcome and introduction I must turn for a while to more sober, even sombre, matters.

We hardly need reminding that 1977 is going to be a difficult, even a watershed year for Southern Africa. It will undoubtedly be a year of necessary, and probably painful, adjustments in the social, political and economic spheres. That these adjustments are long overdue will not make them any the more palatable. Even in the comparative tranquillity of a university in a rural setting we shall not escape unscathed. Even though we must be prepared to anticipate and accommodate ourselves to the social and political upheavals that lie ahead, the most immediate effects we at the universities shall perceive will be the economic ones.

To set the stage let me give you a brief synopsis of the university's finances.


General running expenses	R5,5 million
Other expenses (capital expenditure, housing subsidies for staff etc)	R2,0 "
Residences	R1,2 "
Miscellaneous (including research)	<u>R0,5 "</u>
Total	<u>R9,2 million</u>

Say of the order of R9 million, of which student fees, academic and residence, contribute just over R2 million. The rest? Almost all from the tax-payer via the State. R9 million is a lot of money, even in these inflation-ridden days. What, you might well be asking yourselves, do such large amounts of money have to do with me, the individual student? In normal circumstances, very little, but as I shall proceed to indicate, unless we all, students and academic and administrative staff alike, exhibit the utmost frugality, we shall not have the income to match these expenses. The matter was well summed up over a century ago by Dickens's immortal character Mr Micawber: 'Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.'

The chief causes of concern, apart from general inflation, are:

1. The new pension scheme, which I am happy to report all our staff, black and white, will benefit from, for which the expected Government support has been unexpectedly meagre.
2. A sudden very steep rise in electricity costs.
3. An unexpected and last-minute 2,3% cut in our Government subsidy for 1977.

This sombre financial outlook for 1977 brings me right to the heart of my main theme. In January I attended a seminar on more effective management of universities. The participants were broken up into discussion groups and posed the question: 'In the last 10 years what single factor of change has most affected South African universities?'



The virtually unanimous answer was not, as one might have expected, student unrest, student clamour for more effective say in affairs, changes in social mores, or political interference, but one single word - ACCOUNTABILITY.

In the last 10 years student enrolments have more than doubled, so that now one matriculant in four comes to university. One white male in 50 is a university student. Better than one white female in 100 is a university student. Much larger sums of money are being spent on buildings and equipment than previously. Universities are no longer cloistered backwaters; they are big business. The taxpayer, through the State, is spending well in excess of R100 million a year on them. He is demanding more and more the right to know what is happening on campus and whether his money is being wisely and effectively spent.

We are all of us, administration, academic staff and students, being held accountable for our actions. The administration must strive, with the active co-operation of every member of the university, to manage the university more professionally; to learn and apply management techniques; to plan more effectively; to eliminate any wasteful practices. Action already taken includes the appointment of a business manager and a physical planning officer.

Is it justifiable to hire more people in a time of stringency, one might well ask? In this one area, yes. Otherwise, how do we recognise and eliminate those areas where our performance can be most dramatically improved?

Two areas where students can be of most assistance are those of food and consumption of energy. We have budgeted raw food costs of just over R1 per student per diem, nearly half of which goes on meat. We simply must adhere to this. This could mean more careful portion control, less expensive meat cuts, elimination of waste by knowing exactly how many people to expect for each meal. Energy costs, horrifyingly enough, thanks in no large measure to Escom surcharges and concomitant rises in oil and coal costs, will consume 80% as much as food. I have set a goal of reducing energy costs by 10%. This means, for example, four-minute and not 10-minute showers; 10-cm and not 20-cm baths; turning off lights when they are not in use; responsible use of electric heaters; more frugality in what you send to the laundry.

In the next few weeks I hope to have these goals translated into concrete budgets for each hall committee to ponder over. As soon as we can instal the instrumentation we hope to be able to hold each hall, possibly each house, accountable for its consumption. Those who will not meet their targets might find their surcharges being passed on to them.

How does accountability affect academic staff? The most obvious way is in a much deeper commitment to effective teaching. In this respect I am proud to report that last week 80 of your lecturers and professors voluntarily gave up three days to attend seminars and discussions on improving all aspects of their teaching. This is most impressive evidence of a deep commitment to this goal. It is just a beginning. Nothing would please me more than to have a teaching methods unit offering guidance on lecturing craft, preparation, curriculum design and evaluation techniques - but this must wait until we have the resources, probably assembled by eliminating wasteful and redundant marginal activities.

You as students are not going to escape the scrutiny of this more urgent emphasis on accountability. Just as the administration must learn to manage more professionally, academics to lecture more effectively, you are going to have to accept a deeper commitment to study more cogently. In this respect Rhodes has the best record of any South African university. Over 75% of our first-year students achieve the minimum expected of you - to pass in at least two academic subjects in your first year of attendance. This, however, is a very modest hurdle, and there is obviously room for a great deal of improvement. A regrettably high proportion are prepared to trundle idly through, for example, a three-year bachelor's degree at the snail's pace of two successful courses a year, and take five years over a three-year task.

This is all very well in more leisurely days, leaving ample time for more gentlemanly pursuits at your favourite New Street watering place, on the rugby fields and on the dance floor. But in these dark days of 1977, is there any guarantee that five years of repose and tranquillity will be vouchsafed you? Better rather to make sure of that degree before the opportunity is rudely snatched away from you. As a further spur, by the time you graduate you may not have a privileged position on the job market. This realisation had a salutary effect on American campuses.

Let us borrow a very expressive word from the 'Woord en Daad' people of the Calvinistiese Beweging at Potchefstroom University. We must accept the necessity of being 'konsekwent' - of accepting the logical consequences of our beliefs and actions. An admirable first step is a general assent to such a laudable goal as either preparing ourselves academically or professionally for building up a better South Africa for all its people; or being in a position to face the competition elsewhere if events unfold so that there is no place for you in the South Africa to come.

However, just as a general goal of saving 10% of our energy is not 'konsekwent' unless translated into detailed hall budgets, your commitment is not serious unless translated into weekly, even daily budgets of your time.

If you remember only one thing from my talk this afternoon I hope it will be this:

Unless you spend at least four hours a week of private effort on each of your courses, starting next week at the very latest, you are fooling nobody but yourself. Don't wait to find out the truth of this statement the hard way in June or even in November, but accept it on trust now.

That is your prime and fundamental commitment. You should regard it as a contractual obligation, part of the price of being here. We are all agreed, however, that life at varsity is a great deal more than studying. Once you have fulfilled your basic commitment there is time for enough sport to keep fit and to learn civilised competition and co-operation with our fellows, and for cultural relaxation, for music, drama, debate and to pick up something of the history and background of this rich and humanly diverse Eastern Cape area. Yes, too, and to commit yourself in so far as opportunity presents itself to do something concrete for the well-being of those in circumstances less auspicious than your own.

These activities will contribute to your becoming a balanced, well-rounded human being capable of exercising your critical faculties constructively. Hopefully, in addition to what you learn at Rhodes via your chosen professional or academic discipline, you will also have learned to distinguish propaganda, slogans and claptrap from close reasoned argument.

You will have examined values and value-systems, including those you arrived with, and you will have determined by what lights you intend to regulate your conduct and for what reasons. You will have learned to resist the pressures to conform too closely to the prevailing orthodoxy, merely because it is the orthodox.

One type of orthodoxy is easy to detect, that of the much-maligned 'establishment,' but there is another type, even more slavish in its insidious blandishments. I refer to the phenomenon of peer pressure, or as George Orwell so pithily described it, 'Group Think.' Because your friends are prepared to do something idiotic like driving a car when under the influence of alcohol, or allowing themselves to be driven when the driver is in that state; or accepting an invitation to an undefined destination in dubious company; there is no logical reason for you to do the same. In short, a student worthy of the name should behave like a sentient human being, and not a lemming, who jumps off a cliff so as not to be different from all the other little lemmings.

In spite of the sombre points I have made, let us not look at the shadows only. The obverse side of these problems is the opportunities you will find. Rhodes in 1977 is a stimulating and exciting place. Last year we had a fantastic Rag and we won the intervarsity against the University of Port Elizabeth. At both events Rhodes students behaved like ladies and gentlemen. There is a challenge to do better this year.

We have a new Students' Representative Council. There is a new system of hall committees, on which students sit, which will have a hand in running autonomous halls of residence. Winchester and Canterbury, former Training College residences which are now part of the university's St Peter's campus, have been opened as part of an extensive residence remodelling programme. One gets the feeling that things are happening, like sap rising after a long winter.

To return to the idiom of 'Woord en Daad,' dare to be konsekwent - to think through and accept the consequences of your actions. Only steady work, according to a timetable and a plan, will lead you to that coveted degree in regulation time.

Let us not, however, be shallow certificate worshipers. The degree is only a means to an end. The end is that of being a citizen - not an Agterryer - with a career or vocation fulfilling to yourself and of service to your fellow men. A mature, considerate, level-headed and urbane citizen, impervious to the cheap, easy solutions of the mindless fanatics of the Left or the Right. Not an easy goal to be sure, but a worthy one for every Rhodian and one of the most worthwhile prizes of a mature and disciplined approach to education.

Bon voyage on the first stage of the great adventure that lies before you.