

ADDRESS TO PARENTS EVENING

Johannesburg, 6 November 2008

Fonane, Molweni, Good evening.

Thank you for your attendance.

It is a privilege to be with you this evening at this special event for family of prospective Rhodes University students.

1. If any of you are wishing to send your daughters and sons to Rhodes University for a degree in engineering, architecture, quantity surveying, medicine or veterinary science we unfortunately don't have a reputation in any of these fields – only because we don't offer any of these degrees. If we did, it would be quite another matter.
2. If any of you also wish for your daughters and sons to be at a large university, then again Rhodes University is not for you.

We are a very small university – in fact, with only 6 300 students, the smallest university in South Africa.

3. Finally, if you wish for your daughters and sons to be in a big city with mega shopping malls, hectic rush hour traffic, and McDonalds and the like, again Rhodes University is not for you.

We are in small town Grahamstown, where our excitement is four seasons in a single day, the joy of clean fresh air, and where the excuse of being held up in the traffic would be the most lame and unimaginative excuse for being late for classes or work.

4. If the things that I have mentioned are not priorities for you, then you have chosen well to send your son or daughter to Rhodes University. And, if any of you still have

any doubts, I hope that by the end of the evening we will have persuaded you otherwise.

5. It is, of course, vitally important that you and your son or daughter choose wisely and choose well.
6. A university education and degree is increasingly the foundation for the learning and knowledge and expertise associated with economic and social well-being. It is also, regrettably, expensive. However, as our renowned professor of taxation, Matthew Lester will say, it is the best investment that you can make.
7. So why Rhodes University?
8. Let's begin with the overall institutional environment.
 - We are the smallest university in South Africa – just 6 300 students. This provides many academic and other advantages to our students.
 - 58% of our students are women, which means that they have real opportunities for intellectual and social development and success.
 - Almost 25% of our students are international students – the highest proportion of any South African university. This makes us cosmopolitan, enriches our institutional culture and enhances the intellectual development of our students.
 - 1 in 5 of our students is a postgraduate. Our postgraduates are outstanding students, which means undergraduates have excellent tutors and also role-models who can inspire them to continue with postgraduate study
 - Almost 1 in 2 of our students lives in our 44 comfortable residences.
 - ✓ Each residence is no more than about 80 students
 - ✓ They have 3 good meals in one of our 10 dining halls

- ✓ Each residence has a supportive warden, who is an academic or administrator, and lives in the residence, and also student sub-wardens and house committees.
 - This residence culture is a special and distinctive feature of the student experience at Rhodes and an important factor in our academic success.
 - Anyone who has been to Rhodes will know or tell you that we take great pride in the physical state of our lovely campus. We are proud of the beauty of our campus and we work hard to maintain our pleasant walkways, lawns and gardens, beautiful old buildings and facilities in good condition.
 - We also put great emphasis on ensuring the safety and security of our students, through our own dedicated Campus Protection Unit, designating safe routes, and being part of community policing
 - Finally, aside from its strange weather, Grahamstown is a quaint little town with particular charms and is relatively safer than many other places.
9. While the overall institutional environment is important, the academic environment should be an equally important concern of any parent.
10. Here too, you are choosing most wisely to send your son or daughter to Rhodes.
- With reference to all key academic indicators and benchmarks, Rhodes is a university with a well-deserved reputation for excellence in teaching and learning and research, and is renowned for producing high quality graduates.
 - We have the best undergraduate pass and graduation rates in South Africa, paralleled by outstanding postgraduate pass and graduation rates

- We enjoy the best research output per academic staff member and are South African, African and world leaders in a number of fields.
- We have the lowest academic staff to student ratio in the country – an average of 1 academic per 15 students, and in the natural sciences as low as 1 academic to 9 students.

This means that our students are guaranteed close contact with and access to our academic staff, and are able to have close supervision for their projects and research, even at undergraduate level.

- We have loyal and committed academics and administrators who understand that our purpose is to create an enabling and stimulating environment in which our students can develop as intellectuals and professionals through excellent academic programmes, research and community engagement.
- Rhodes is one of the very few universities that strive to permit students maximum choice of undergraduate major subjects and to graduate with combinations that are of special interest to them.

English and physics, philosophy and botany, linguistics and computer science, chemistry and law, music and computer science – and why not!

Let your sons and daughters choose in accordance with their interests. It is not the combinations that you should worry about but the quality of the overall degree. At Rhodes you are assured a high quality undergraduate degree, which continues to open doors to all fields of employment.

- Not surprisingly, we have produced more Rhodes scholars to Oxford than any South African university, and continue, proportionally, to do so. Already, we are beginning to dominate in the annual competition for the prestigious Mandela Rhodes scholarships. 4 Rhodes students out of 28

students nationally will have Mandela Rhodes scholarships next year and all 4 have chosen to remain at Rhodes. Not bad for a small university!

- Finally, it is for good reason that our slogan is 'Where Leaders Learn'. This expresses our commitment to not only graduate students who have knowledge, expertise and skills relevant to their professions and careers, but to also prepare our graduates for life.

We seek to produce leaders, who are ethical, caring, compassionate and decent humans who lead and stand out in all walks of life, who are critical and prepared to speak out about what is wrong and unjust in our society, and who understand there is more to life than material wealth and that happiness and fulfilment come from service and contribution to society.

11. For this reason, we pay a lot of attention to the extra-academic environment so that our students have a rich all-round experience while at Rhodes and can develop valuable expertise and skills

- We have a very active Community Engagement office that provides students the opportunity to become involved in scores of community development projects in Grahamstown.

Our students are not only encouraged to perform well academically but also encouraged to be committed to the development of those who are less fortunate. Indeed, we have the highest proportion of student volunteers of any university – which is a source of great inspiration to us.

- Our students are also afforded the opportunity to develop leadership skills through participation as sub-wardens, and house committee members, through running sports clubs and educational and cultural clubs and societies, and through the SRC, whose members participate in all the key decision-making committees of the University

- We are also continually expanding our international linkages so that our students can benefit from academic exchanges with overseas universities.

12. In closing

- We are a small, special, and distinctive university. We are happy to remain so, with no great desire to become large
- We take academic excellence and quality very seriously and are not prepared to and will not compromise on these
- We are committed to ensuring that our students have every opportunity to realise their talents and potential and graduate with a high quality degree
- We guarantee your daughter and son a high quality higher education in a stimulating, supportive and pleasant environment
- And, we are committed to being a university 'where leaders learn'!

My last words are these: Today, it is becoming fashionable to call students customers and clients. At Rhodes, your daughter and son *is not* a customer or client of the University, for we *are not* a supermarket, bank or insurance company.

We don't have product lines of Chemistry A at R100, Chemistry B at R70 and Chemistry C at R20. We are a place of knowledge that takes knowledge and education seriously – very seriously.

To us, knowledge matters and education of high quality matters – they are the basis of personal, social and economic development. Anyone who views a student as a customer or client fundamentally misunderstands the purpose, meaning and nature of a university education.

Your daughters and sons are our *partners* in learning and the quest for knowledge and understanding of the mysteries and complexities of our country, continent and world.

When they join us at Rhodes they embark on an exciting, but also challenging, journey so that we together push the frontiers of knowledge, understanding and the wisdom that comes with experience. Unless they undertake this journey, with all its ardours, they will not grow and develop as people, intellectuals, professionals and citizens.

If that is how you see the purpose of a university and a university education, then Rhodes is the university for your daughter and son, and we look forward to welcoming them at Rhodes next year.