

The future direction of Rhodes University

The University has spent the best part of the last year, reviewing its goals, structures and future strategies. This period of introspection has tested our role and anticipated contribution in both a national and a local context and has resulted in greater clarity in terms of important issues such as size and shape, the infrastructural needs required to support this future size and shape as well as the challenges and opportunities which will affect our ability to reach our goals.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of you who have contributed to these discussions thus far. Whilst there are a number of studies and investigations still under way, we have resolved a number of the key issues and I would like to use this opportunity to inform you of some of these:

- We have identified our ageing academic population as a major threat and a concerted effort will be required to recruit replacement staff for key positions. Important in this process will be the need to also address historical equity imbalances.
- Barriers to entry for many who are contemplating entering the academic profession are the low salaries as well as the affordability of suitable housing in our city. Significant work has already been done in addressing these issues which may very well require innovative and creative solutions if we are to resolve the situation in the immediate future.
- The reliance of the city on the University and the University on adequate and reliable service provision by the City has led us to establish close and collaborative relationships with the Makana Municipality and the Business Chamber. We believe it to be our joint responsibility to address issues of common concern such as infrastructural deterioration, capacity building and living standards.
- How we contribute as a higher education institution to South Africa and beyond has raised questions around our academic offerings, what is meant by concepts such as 'Where Leaders Learn', 'An African Identity' and, most critically, what our size and shape will be. Many of these issues will be addressed on an ongoing basis. However – and as a direct result of the work we have done in the past year - there are a number of critical decisions which we have already made including:
 - We will grow the University to no more than 6 500 students by 2010, a maximum growth rate of 3% per annum. As far as possible within these parameters we will be seeking to optimise the make-up of our departments and faculty's to ensure that we are providing graduates equipped with relevant knowledge and skills.
 - We will pursue a trajectory of increasing our postgraduate to undergraduate ratio.
 - In order to attract more black South African learners – some of whom we hope will be retained to provide for the next generation of young academics, we will need to provide extensive financial aid. This issue is critical to the University's drive to become more representative and I have directed our Development office to view this as a priority fundraising project.

- Allied to increasing the accessibility of the University to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds will be the need to provide suitable accommodation and we will be building a number of new residence complexes over the next few years. Innovative financing solutions to cater for this need are under discussion at present. In addition, and tied to the concept of “the Rhodes experience”, we will attempt to cater for all first-year undergraduate students who wish to be accommodated on campus.
- Critical to the future of any university is the quality of its teaching and research. In an effort to retain and attract young academic’s to replace our current staff, we will seek innovative ways in which to assist them to enter the housing market in Grahamstown.
- Teaching, research, interaction and collaboration are critical activities at any University – many if not all of these tasks taking place in the modern library. It is clear that we cannot hope to attract the best students, the best academics and exploit research opportunities if we do not invest immediately in this core asset. Therefore we will re-furbish and extend the main University library which will involve a substantial capital investment backed by extensive fundraising activities over the next few years.
- Finally, and recognising our responsibility to our stakeholders, we will strive for greater efficiencies in all our activities, including the utilisation of our physical infrastructure and facilities. Whilst this may require compromises to be made, this will not be done at the expense of academic quality – an aspect of this University which I am sure we are all very proud of.

As stakeholders, and hopefully active participants in the future development of the University, I wish to thank you for your contribution to our planning processes and look forward to your continuing support to the University in whatever way possible in the exciting years ahead.

Saleem Badat
Vice Chancellor
Rhodes University
July 2007.