

## **ADDRESS TO PARENTS EVENING**

**Johannesburg, 6 November 2010**

Ladies and gentlemen, dumelang, goeie naand, sanibonani, good evening.

On behalf of Rhodes University, I extend a warm welcome to you all to the Johannesburg Parents Evening.

It is a privilege to be with you at this special event for family and guardians of prospective 2011 Rhodes University students.

If you are intending to send your daughters and sons to Rhodes University for a degree in engineering, architecture, quantity surveying, medicine or veterinary science, in all honesty please don't do so as we don't have much of a reputation in any of these fields.

But that is only because we don't offer any of these degrees. If we did, it would be quite another matter, and you could send your loved ones with great confidence that they would receive a high quality education.

If any of you also wish for your daughters and sons to be at a large university, or if they wish to be at such a university, then again Rhodes University is not for you or for them.

We are a very small university – in fact, with only 7 000 students, the smallest university in South Africa, and that too by far.

We love being a small university and the smallest in South Africa and we have no envy our larger sister universities.

Finally, if your wish is for your daughters and sons to be in a city with bustling pavements full of people, mega shopping malls, hectic rush hour traffic, 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.

If the things that I have mentioned are not priorities for you, then you have chosen very well to send your son or daughter to Rhodes University.

And, if any of you are still in any doubts about your choice, I hope that by the end of the evening we will have persuaded you otherwise.

It is, of course, vitally important that you and your son or daughter or guardian choose wisely and choose well.

A university education and degree is the foundation for the learning, knowledge and expertise that is associated with economic and social well-being.

Most regrettably, it is also, expensive. However, as our renowned professor of taxation, Matthew Lester will say, it is still the best investment that you can make.

So why Rhodes University?

Let's begin with the overall institutional environment.

- We are the smallest university in South Africa – just 7 000 students. This provides many academic and other advantages to our students.
- 59% of our students are women, which means that they enjoy real opportunities for intellectual and social development and success.
- 20% of our students are international students from almost 50 countries around the world. This makes us a cosmopolitan institution, enriches our culture and enhances the intellectual and social development of our students.
- 26% or 1 in 4 of our students is a postgraduate. Our postgraduates are outstanding students, which means undergraduates enjoy 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 49 comfortable residences.
  - ✓ Each residence is generally no more than about 85 students

- ✓ They have 3 good meals in one of our 11 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.

While the overall institutional environment is important, the academic environment must be an equally important concern of any parent.

Here too, you are choosing most wisely to send your son or daughter to Rhodes.

- With respect 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 among 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 17 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. We were the first university to win 4 Mandela Rhodes scholarships for 2009, and again for 2011 we have won 4 out of the 27 scholarships awarded.

Not bad, you will agree, that a university that only has 0.8% of South Africa's university students wins almost 15% of Mandela Rhodes scholarships!

- 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.

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.

In closing

- We are a small, special, and distinctive university, happy to be so, but certainly not smug and complacent
- We take academic excellence and quality very seriously and are not prepared to and will not compromise on these
- Indeed, we are committed to ensuring and maximising our students opportunities to realise their talents and potential and graduate with a high quality degree
- We can confidently guarantee your daughter, son or guardian 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. Let distance Rhodes from such a misguided fad. 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.