

THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY THE FIRST VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA - PROF THOKO MAYEKISO

INTRODUCTION

May I start by expressing my heartfelt greetings to each one of you present today. “Sanibonani, Molweni, Dumelang, Good afternoon, Goeie middag, Guten Tag, Ndi masiare”.

You all are special guests at this milestone event, in the life of any University. It is a singular privilege to address you on this significant occasion, in my own life, and indeed, that of the University of Mpumalanga.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the outset, it will be important to pay a debt of gratitude to so many who contributed significantly to all my endeavours, resulting in me standing before you at this time.

There are countless people along my journey-who encouraged, motivated, inspired, taught, cajoled, nudged, mentored, and coached me along life's path.

My late parents, Sitututu and Nozipo laid a firm foundation, and instilled in me the importance of education. My parents played sport, and my father reached the highest levels possible at the time in Cricket and Tennis. They imbued me with the love for reading and piqued my own interest in sport. They encouraged me to focus on tasks at hand and stay disciplined in all that I do. They inculcated in me, values as well as political discretion that turned out to be useful throughout my leadership journey. As they did this, they allowed me space to grow and discover for myself principles and practices germane to growth and development. They modelled for me the importance of supporting people judiciously. This story narrated by Ruth Sanford, a Person-Centred Psychotherapist will illustrate my point.

A passer-by found a young butterfly struggling to get out of the cocoon. A sine qua non for optimal development in the life of a butterfly. He thought he was helping the butterfly, by prising the cocoon open. Unbeknown to him though, was that this struggle to wriggle out of the cocoon, was nature's way, to strengthen the wings of the butterfly, in order that it can fly.

The butterfly did get out after the intervention of this empathetic passer-by, sadly though, unable to fly-because it was denied the chance to struggle, wiggle and wriggle out.

Let me conclude family acknowledgements, by recognising the contributions and support from my brother, Dr Monde Mayekiso, and my children, Dr Avela Mayekiso, and Siyanda Mayekiso.

Let me proceed with my acknowledgements, to other key contributors to own growth and development.

Many illustrious professors, both here in South Africa and Germany deserve my thanks. They shaped my thinking, and nurtured my early endeavours, as a fledgling scholar. Coming to mind here are, Prof Hildebrand Nilshon, my PhD promoter (doktoren vater) at the Free University Berlin, Germany, and **Prof Themba Mjoli** who guided my earlier efforts as an emerging academic at the University of Transkei. **Prof Loyiso Nongxa**, who was the Vice-Chancellor at WITS, **Prof Rolf Stumpf**, former Vice-Chancellor and **Prof Derrick Swartz** current Vice-Chancellor at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University created a conducive climate in which to thrive, innovate and be creative.

The Clinical Psychologists who shared their insights, and infused me with curiosity, imbued me with zeal, and made me appreciative of the complexity of human nature.

As I worked through the chapters and noted the inputs of all the contributors, the timeless perennial truths came back to me: We as humans are complex beings. To foster mental health, therefore, requires an all-encompassing multifactorial, and multivariate integrative models. When that is the case, the right pattern of solutions, for the right person at the right time emerges.

The students who brought to the classroom curiosity, vibrancy, enthusiasm and vitality are worthy of note. Many of the students over the years, were first generation students, and truly celebrated the new milieu. They were very talented, obviously a product of natural selection. They were also quick to react though, if they thought the ecologies we were providing militated against their personhood, and violated their essence, and their being.

Colleagues at the various universities at which I served deserve to be acknowledged. They continued to reinforce lessons learned and wisdom earned in earlier years- namely that, none of us is an island. We are part of the greater humanity. We are as strong or as weak, as the teams in which we find ourselves. Vital lessons about teams, are provided in all sporting codes such as the recently completed Cricket World Cup, co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand, and the FIFA Soccer World Cup held in Brazil in 2014.

Planning together; playing for each other; sloggng for one another; having a game-plan; doing a thorough study of the opposition; doing your homework, watching video after video, and analysing how the opposition plays; getting the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing team.

Having a clear objective, staying hungry, and never allowing success to get to our heads; picking one another up after humiliating defeats, yet celebrating together after resounding victories; motivating the team, and rewarding hard work, managing performance, and holding one another accountable, are key insights we learn from successful teams.

All the foregoing experiences formed, and shaped my understanding of the higher education landscape and my intention is to share these with my team, but also to learn from them. Universities are multi-layered, and require multi-pronged approaches to lead and manage them.

Let me express appreciation to Council, for showing confidence in me, to lead the new University as Vice-Chancellor. I value this confidence shown in me, and I will do my utmost, to reciprocate, by delivering on the mandate given, and exceed expectations.

We are grateful to Prof Andy Mogotlane, the Interim Head of the University and the Interim Council of the University, under the leadership of Dr Madoda Mabunda who contributed to the noble efforts to set up the University of Mpumalanga.

We will be remiss, not to recognize the vision of the Minister of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, who responded to the clarion call by the provinces of Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape. Heeding the calls, the University of Mpumalanga and Sol Plaatje University were established. These communities and ourselves, have to work together, to ensure that these universities succeed beyond measure.

POSITIONING THE UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA

To members of Council, staff and students of the University of Mpumalanga, we are all like a band of pioneers with free hands to start something new and exciting.

We are at the dawn of something yet to be delivered, against the backdrop of great expectations, and the realities of our time. Those who have charged us with the

responsibility to be the pioneering staff at this University, have entrusted so much in our hands, and have shown confidence. We are embracing this trust as a privilege bestowed upon us, yet fully mindful of the responsibility it places on all our shoulders. Our Principals have provided us with resources to establish a new University, build a firm foundation, put systems in place, have guiding policies and procedures, and create a conducive ecology for all of us. This all in order to have an environment where we can be creative, innovative, and responsive to the needs of students and all the stakeholders in our province of the “rising sun” (Mpumalanga) and beyond.

The rays of the sun are a powerful symbol for the University, representing life, warmth, and energy. They provide light and symbolise growth. Let us always keep this in mind to spur us on.

Concomitant with all the foregoing though, come great expectations. We have to hit the tarmac running, because higher education and training is results oriented, and demands the best from all of us especially because of apartheid related deficits. Whilst there will be patience and understanding in the initial stages from the Department of Higher Education and Training, and the citizenry in general out there, we as staff cannot afford to drink what Dr Martin Luther King called “the tranquilising drug of gradualism”. There is no room for complacency, or space to drag our feet. Pioneers have to build a firm foundation, mindful that what they are creating should be durable, marketable, sustainable and enduring. Generations yet unborn, must find a thriving University, one they will be proud to join, because we who pioneered it, laid a firm foundation, and got into this immense project with body, mind and soul.

The social cohesion and transformation agenda should be part of what we understand and engage in, for the betterment of our country and the region specifically. As an engaged university, our institution places great value on partnerships / collaboration / linkages and networks and we have identified partnerships as both drivers and enablers in achieving our vision to be **“An African University leading in creating opportunities for sustainable development through innovation”**. Our vision while unashamedly aspirational is also realistic, capturing our desired identity and ethos as a university. We understand that we are just one of the important stakeholders in the innovation value chain.

We seek to establish North-South as well as South-South partnerships, characterized by reciprocity and mutuality.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH INNOVATION

The world out there is forever seeking solutions to many of its complex challenges. The

University of Mpumalanga needs to be constantly seeking out innovation ventures. Let us remind ourselves that innovation as defined, is the process of translating an idea or invention into a good or service, for which benefits accrue to the innovator, and the greater society.

Through our research and development efforts, indeed throughout their studies at the University of Mpumalanga, our students should have the eye for innovation. At the University of Mpumalanga emphasis will be put on encouraging people to do what they love, to strive to make a dent on the universe, to sell dreams not products, to create great experiences, to focus and to master the art of identifying new opportunities. When we are strong on innovation, opportunities for development will be many. Innovation, entrepreneurship, technology should not just be buzz words. They should be what we live by, and practice as the University of Mpumalanga community. Our innovation endeavours should move from inside out, and from outside in. We are committed to the development of an innovative culture and to playing a catalytic role for innovation in industry and for the society at large with a definite bias towards Africa.

OUR VALUES

The African life ethos of Ubuntu, referring to our orientation to and expressions of humanity to others, forms the broad and overarching framework for our values.

The values of the University serve as a basis for all our interactions with students, staff and all other stakeholders. As such these values form an abbreviated code of conduct that should shape the behaviour of all the institutional constituents and to which the University subscribes.

Excellence

We commit ourselves to uphold the highest standards of excellence in all its actions, functions and services.

Integrity

At all times and in all situations the actions and interactions of the University will be characterised by undeviating honesty, by utmost fairness, caring for one another as fellow human beings, and treating one another with the utmost respect.

Diversity

Diversity is valued and celebrated in unlocking a range of interactions, and enhancing exposure to a wide variety of diverse cultures, backgrounds, views and opinions.

Collaboration

As an engaged institution the University of Mpumalanga will actively seek out opportunities for collaboration with all its stakeholders in maximising the development of human potential and socio-economic development.

Adaptability

We acknowledge our ever changing knowledge contexts, institutional environments, and social situations and therefore the need to promote and foster adaptability.

Relevance

We endorse the need for its academic programmes, research activities, and engagement projects to respond to its context.

Inspiration

We value inspiration that allows and encourages others to be more and do more than what at first seems possible.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The University of Mpumalanga, as a comprehensive University, understands that its academic project must combine both the creation and transfer of knowledge and skills and the development of students as independent and critical thinkers with a passion for knowledge and its application.

Our teaching will be theoretically informed, pedagogically appropriate, and sensitive to diversity in all its forms in the educational environment. Our teaching will emphasize the interconnectedness of teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and engagement. The development of our qualifications and curricula will be context sensitive. Our curricula and extra curricula activities will expose students to different ways of knowing and to the value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

Our academic staff will be reflective and reflexive practitioners who use information communication technologies to foster and enhance learning, which will occur in a diverse range of formal and informal settings. Development programmes for academic staff and student support programmes will support a broadening of access, with increased levels of student success.

INTRODUCING THE VICE-CHANCELLOR'S SCHOLAR PROGRAMME

We will introduce from 2016, the Vice-Chancellor's Scholar Programme which will be a unique three / four-year scholarship and personal development programme designed to identify a limited number of outstanding students in order to foster their intellectual development, refine their leadership skills and enhance their relationship with the

University of Mpumalanga and the community. The programme will recognize first year students who have demonstrated excellence and potential in academic achievement, leadership ability and community service.

ENGAGING OUR STUDENTS

In addition to providing full tuition and residence fees, the Vice-Chancellor's scholars will be engaged in continuous leadership training facilitated by talented academic staff and community leaders and also participate in international leadership seminars and workshops.

We will be engaging our students, especially because they are ambassadors, and co-creators of this new University, so that they can be formidable and committed alumni of the future. We would like our students to embrace diversity and inclusion; be averse to racism and xenophobia; be sensitive and tolerant, ethical in inclination and conscious of their civic responsibility. In addition, all our first year students will enrol for a grounding module on the geological history of the province. This is done in order for them to appreciate the fact that South Africa has one of the oldest and most complex geological histories on earth. It also has one of the richest mining legacies with a wide range of precious and semi-precious minerals.

Building self-confidence, modelling positive behaviour, providing psychological nurturance, building self-esteem, and encouraging the development of what Angela Duckworth calls "mental toughness" will constitute some of our attempts to provide an optimal environment for our students to self actualize and become the best they can be.

We want to encourage our students to follow their dreams. Dreams are important because they allow us to embark on a serious journey, in pursuit of those dreams. Without a dream, we may struggle to see potential in ourselves because we don't look beyond our current circumstances. But with a dream, we begin to see ourselves in a new light, as having greater potential and being capable of stretching and growing to reach it.

ICONIC INFRASTRUCTURE

The envisaged iconic infrastructure will provide a multifaceted environment inspiring both social and intellectual exchange in an atmosphere that is unconventional, original and creative.

We will create social spaces for crucial conversations with both internal and external

stakeholders. Thereby create a modern, stimulating and inspiring environment that promotes and rewards academic excellence.

CONCLUSION

The enormity of the task does not escape me and my commitment to the pioneering role is unwavering. The road ahead beckons. New challenges lie ahead as it will inevitably happen, success should bolster our confidence to take on more challenges. Paradoxically, it is the same success which may trap us if we are not careful and visionary. We should, therefore, never lose focus.

We will revisit and revise our initial strategies against the backdrop of the lessons we would learn along the way. We need to remain forever vigilant to ensure that we do not become oblivious to new avenues as they arise. Agility, flexibility, openness to embrace change should be what we always strive for.

For our sake, and for the sake of generations yet unborn, let us join hands, to build a relevant, creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial University, which will serve the needs of this province, those of South Africa, then Africa, and indeed, those of the world generally.

Ndiyabulela, Ke a leboha, Ngiyabonga, Ngiyathokoza, Baie Dankie, Vielen Dank, Ndi a livhauwa, Thank you!