

NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

SRC Investiture

Professor Sibongile Muthwa

Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University

10:00 - 11:30, 13 February 2020, Conference Centre, North Campus

President and Members of the SRC
Student leaders from societies and formations
Deputy Vice-Chancellors and executive management
The Dean of Students
Executive Deans of Faculty
Staff and students

It is my privilege and is indeed a pleasure to address this august gathering today. I am humbled as I stand here in the presence of our student leadership collective. I would like to congratulate the SRC 2020 on your election, following robust but fair campaigning among our student community.

The investiture of the SRC is an extremely significant ceremony, as it confers upon each member the formal responsibilities of serving in this leadership capacity. Through your election, you now have placed on your shoulders a daunting and yet exciting responsibility of voluntarily serving

the students, the university and the communities beyond. As the leadership collective of 2020, you are at the forefront of the student life, student development, and ultimately student success. How you deploy your leadership needs to be catalytic and impactful. You need to have a deep awareness that your leadership, or lack thereof, is capable of changing the direction of a young person's life forever. Each of you as leaders can either open the door and invite students to pass through, or you can close the door, and lock a student out of a once-off chance for a better life and brighter and bold future. This is a noble responsibility and calls for mindfulness, a sense of purpose, a values-driven consciousness.

As the SRC, you are the custodian and champion of the university's six distinctive values. Mr President, I trust that you have ensured that each SRC member knows these values by heart. But more importantly, I am looking forward to hearing your plans to live out these values during your term of office, through active and vibrant means.

I call out the values, one by one, so that we can all take a moment to reflect on these and remind ourselves of their importance in making our university stand out as a university of choice on the higher education landscape.

Our values are:

- Diversity
- Excellence
- Ubuntu
- Social justice and equality
- Integrity

- Environmental stewardship

While we need to do the hard work to distinguish our university through living our values, as the leadership you also need to be very clear about what is unacceptable at Nelson Mandela University. I repeat what I said that the Welcome Ceremony for our first year students - the newest members of your constituency:

What we do not tolerate is discrimination, exclusion and “othering”. In our university, the ‘toxic human being’ is not welcome ... the sexist, the racist and the xenophobe should not feel at home here and must flee from our university. We are unequivocal about our commitment to gender equality and inclusion. We are equally intolerant of, and condemn all forms of exclusion and discrimination that undermine the rich diversity of our student and staff community. We believe that violence based on gender and gender discrimination will be eradicated by entrenching a culture of mutual respect and co-responsibility among genders and among staff and students. We call on male students, in particular, to be leaders of courage and of social change, championing gender equality and calling on other men to stop violence against women.

I expect each of you in your leadership role, to stand firm and reject these unacceptable practices. Your own lives need to be an embodiment of the values and principles that are the bedrock of Mandela University.

Leadership is not always easy. It is complex. It is multi-dimensional. It must be principled. It requires of us to think and act beyond ourselves. It must serve the greater good. It must stand the test of time. As a leader you must make judicious and sometimes tough choices. Your leadership is your legacy, and is how you will be known, both now and as you move into your life beyond the university after you graduate.

As student leaders, you shoulder a great responsibility to bear the name of Nelson Mandela, who stands as the person chosen by the global community to put a human face to our collective aspirations for a more socially just world. What does this mean for us as the university? And what does it mean to each of you as you execute your leadership responsibilities? What is your collective role in contributing to and advancing the legacies of Nelson Mandela?

First and foremost, for us as the university, it means that we have to execute our mandates with an ever-present awareness of the grand challenges of our time - the challenges that Mandela engaged with almost his entire life. They are well known, with poverty and inequality key amongst them. We need new interpretive schemes and practices to tackle these challenges. We must teach real-life programmes through which you, as students, and one-day graduates, make a difference in the lives of ordinary people. Our *work* must be the university's branding; it must be able to speak for itself. We must be seen to cultivate humanity, and put effort into engaging ourselves, and our communities, in as yet unimaginable ways. New forms and modes of thought, and new practices of producing, framing and distributing knowledge and its relationship to society need to emerge. This is the central task of the university, which

must embody and advance the scholarly formulation of the Mandela legacy, and do this in solidarity with our continent, and the global south.

How do you position yourself to be in service to society?

In consonance with our vision, mission and values, we want to create a distinct intellectual ethos that reflects the ideals that he stood for and to see this reflected both in our graduate attributes as well as in the lived experience and culture at Mandela University.

I would therefore challenge you as student leaders to reflect on what it means to be a student at Mandela University. Some of the questions you need to ask are:

1. What is your posture and tone as leaders – in your individual capacity and as a collective?
2. How as students do you plan to live the legacy in an impactful way?
3. What are the implications for student life – in other words how do we centre Mandela in all our student life programmes?
4. What kind of qualities should inform our engagement and interaction as university stakeholders?

I am sure there are also other reflective questions you may want to ponder.

I believe that as leaders, you need to serve students with humility, loyalty, commitment, and give of your best at all times. I call on you to place the interest of students and the collective and above your personal interests.

I hope that you will work together to develop amongst yourselves a shared vision, common mission, and abiding principles, which you will use as a bedrock for your unity. This can be made possible by collective leadership who are relentlessly committed to serving without expectation. This must stand out as the hallmark of your term in office.

It is very important to remember that you have entered into a covenant with students. In order to stay true to the contract you have entered with students, I call on you individually and collectively to reflect on how you have been true to your values, principles and the extent to which you have walked the talk. And how you actively build and carry forward the legacy of Mandela. You are the SRC serving in the centenary year of the birth of our university

namesake – what is going to be your contribution to gift to the next generation of students who will follow you? What is going to be your legacy as the 2018 SRC?

I offer the university's commitment to support and partner with you in carrying forward the needs and aspirations of ALL of our students, in all their diversity, all their creativity, all their innovation and to inspire students to succeed in their academic endeavours. Your leadership needs to be a shining beacon during the highs and the lows, the best of times and the times of difficulty and distress. Consistency, combined with agility are the defining characteristics of a leader.

Once more congratulations. I wish you all the best as you rise as leaders.

“we don't know exactly what's coming, but we can shape it”