

**Welcoming Ceremony Address**

Professor Sibongile Muthwa, *Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University*  
25 January 2020

Students, Parents and Families  
Deputy Vice-Chancellors  
Executive Deans of Faculty  
The Dean of Students  
The Acting Dean of Learning and Teaching  
Executive and Senior Management  
Professors, Academics and Staff of Mandela University,

Sanibonani, Molweni, Good morning, Goeie Môre, Dumelang

It is indeed my great honour and privilege to welcome all of you to Nelson Mandela University this morning. I particularly acknowledge everyone who is participating in this event through live-streaming in venues across our campuses - including our students, families and colleagues at our campus in George.

*Siyanamukela nonke bakwethu.*

Today signals the beginning of the 2020 academic year. It is the day that each of you is embarking on a new and exciting chapter in your life story. What you write in this chapter is up to you. You are the principal author of this chapter, and will determine the direction, the plot and the tempo of your story. As you sit here today, ask yourself: *what will my story be as I cross the stage on my graduation day?*

We thank you for choosing this great University. As our student, you join us in the honour of bearing the name of Nelson Mandela, who symbolises the human face of global aspirations for a more socially just world. Our response to this honour and responsibility, is to position Nelson Mandela University as a university in service of society. We firmly believe in Nelson Mandela's famous statement that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

As a first year student, you will face many transitions as you adjust to university life. It is very different from school. University is a much less structured environment, which brings greater freedom but with that, greater responsibility. You will need to become more self-reliant. You may feel that you are invisible at first, and may not feel sure about how to make a start and how to get traction. I ask you to find your voice, reach out and ask. Actively seek out support.

Responsibility for your life now rests squarely on your shoulders. You need to manage your time, your budget, your study commitments, your social activity, your personal safety, your health, your food choices, and your mental and physical wellness. I urge you to think judiciously, and act carefully. It is quite normal to feel a bit overwhelmed. Students across the world report struggling to adjust and adapt to the university environment. If you start to feel anxious, stressed and unsure, talk to a classmate or someone in residence or your off-campus accommodation. Seek support through the services available on campus, such as academic

success coaches in your Faculty; your lecturers; student counselling services; and student health facilities.

Here at Mandela, you will meet students from all walks of life, from various places across the country and from different parts of the world. Last year 5% of our students were international students from 87 countries across the globe. We welcome and embrace this diversity. We expect students to respect each other and to show respect to all staff members too, irrespective of what work they perform, and where they come from.

University education is now accessible to many more students due to increased state financial support. The question we have been asking ourselves, is how to build a university in which all students and staff feel a sense of belonging. We are critically aware that experiences of social exclusion can impact negatively on academic performance. We are thus keenly focused on building a socially inclusive culture, as the foundation of student success.

What we do not tolerate is any form of discrimination and exclusion. In our university, the 'toxic human being' is not welcome ... the sexist, the racist and the xenophobe will not feel at home here. 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. We call on male students to be leaders of courage and of social change by championing gender equality.

We are a values-driven university. I trust that in the past week here on campus you have already familiarised yourself with our six distinctive values:

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

These inform our institutional posture and identity.

At this University we have designed our support ecosystem with you, the student, at the centre. The heart of this is a suite of programmes tailored to enable you to release your potential and to enhance your optimal development. These programmes include student leadership development, living and learning, community service and engagement to name a few. They are also intended to instil an ethos of respect, authenticity, human solidarity, hard work, self-reflection, independence and responsibility.

We enjoin you, as new students, to participate in these programmes as they will certainly enrich the quality of your learning experience here at Mandela.

I now turn to what Mandela University expects of you, as our new students, and what we expect of parents, guardians and families. These tips have over the years proved of immense value, and they are the cornerstone of student success.

***We expect students to:***

- attend lectures, tutorials and all other academic activities
- ask questions, be inquisitive, stretch the boundaries of intellectual inquiry
- work consistently every day - a bare minimum is 20 hours per week of self-study

- meet deadlines for assignments and projects
- make use of our student support services
- become active in student activities, including giving back to communities through engagement projects, and to
- be conscious of your personal safety.

As you find your feet we would like you to also think about your role as a student in contributing to and advancing the legacy of Nelson Mandela. How do you position yourself to be in service to society? Treasure the opportunity higher education presents. Give your best every day to complete the journey and graduate. In this way, you will develop the capability and expertise to be able to give back to your family, your community and the whole of society.

***We expect of parents, and ask families to:***

- provide emotional and psychological support throughout the year
- be inquisitive about the academic progress of your child and have regular discussions about what is happening in their lives at University
- encourage them to seek advice and deal with uncertainties as early as possible, and to
- contact the Dean of the Faculty should you have any major concerns.

Mandela University is deeply invested in student success, which is dependent on all of us - staff, students and families - working together towards this shared goal.

**Conclusion**

In concluding, I urge you to use your time at Mandela to emerge as a well-rounded citizen, socially aware on a global scale, compassionate, ambitious and set on your path to make a difference and change the world. *Kuni ndithi, 'phambili mbimbi lweAfrika phambili.'*

I thank the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, all the Deans and the academic community who stand at the forefront of your academic success as a student.

I also thank the How2Buddies, our cadre of student guides, for volunteering time to introduce and ground our first-year students as you join our family. Thank you for choosing Mandela University as your university of choice. Your dream of graduating from this great university, is our dream too.