

NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship 2019

Congratulatory message and Address by

Prof Sibongile Muthwa, Vice-Chancellor: Nelson Mandela University

Students, Parents and Families ... Principals and school representatives as well as representatives from the Department of Education. Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans and Executive Deans of Faculty, Campus Heads, Senior Management, Academics and Staff of Mandela University.

It is indeed my great honour and privilege to welcome all of you to Nelson Mandela University, Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship event this evening as we celebrate the achievements of these exceptional young minds. We have received more than 520 applications from some of our country's poorest as well as most affluent schools for the 2019 Scholarship awards. A very rigorous selection process was undertaken by the Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship Committee consisting of all Deputy Vice-Chancellors, representatives of Deans, student representation as well as other support staff to select the 24 candidates for the 2019 VC Scholarship awards from a shortlisted group of 150 applicants.

The scholarship was introduced in 2009 with the main objective of attracting top performing school-leavers from a diversity of schools, including those in the lower quintiles, across the country.

This scholarship boasts a total 68 scholars who are currently in the system. The scholarship has also yielded more than 200 alumni who now hold positions in government, financial sector, education to name a few. It is with certainty that I say that through the Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship, all of them have gone on to make successes in their respective careers.

Through this Scholarship, we wish to contribute to changing the direction of a young person's life forever. We cannot, therefore, act recklessly as ours is a noble responsibility to mould the minds of young people, and contribute to their appreciation of what it is the University can do to impact on society. It is with humility therefore, that I again this year stand here to welcome Vice-Chancellor's Scholars who have joined our institution in pursuit of changing the world!

Scholar Support

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the role of the systems of support that have assisted in grooming these young thought leaders – Parents, Guardians and Educators.

The African proverb says "it takes a village to raise a child". In a South African context this proverb is extricable linked to the value "Ubuntu". Although different interpretations to this saying exist, the key message is that no one is an island and we should care for the welfare of others like we do for ourselves. Surely if it takes a village to raise a child, the obvious implication is that the success of the child depends on the community. Nowhere is this more important than in education.

Parental encouragement and support for learning activities at home combined with parental involvement in schooling is critical to the education of children. They enlarge parental and community capacity; they create conditions in which children learn more effectively.

In front of me this evening, sits students from all walks of life, many from beyond the borders of the Eastern Cape and we are delighted to welcome you! Amidst us are recipients from Nkandla in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Bethlehem in the Free State as well as Makhado in Limpopo. We

welcome you to our beautiful Eastern Cape.

This year, we welcomed 7 000 first year students and you can be extremely proud of your achievement. Please be assured that by deciding to study at Nelson Mandela University, you have chosen a place that stands for, inculcates, and reflects values of social justice and equality...values which we pride.

Higher Education Sector: What Issues Are We Grappling With?

As you start your journey as a Vice-Chancellor's Scholar, there are a number of prevailing issues in the higher education sector, including our own University, of which many of you would be aware, and which I would like us to reflect on briefly this evening.

Social Inclusion and Affirmation

The first issue I want to mention relates to social inclusion and a sense of belonging. At this University, like many of our counterparts, we receive students from all walks of life. Whilst the doors of learning have been widely opened the question we have been asking ourselves is how all of our students can have a better sense of belonging?

It is imperative for us to build a university in which all students feel a sense of belonging. We are critically aware that experiences of social exclusion can impact negatively on academic performance. We are focused on building a socially inclusive culture, as the bedrock of student success.

It is this associational congruence as well, which we believe will engender a permanent relationship with you long after you have left this institution.

This includes our commitment to gender equality and inclusion and we condemn all forms of exclusion and discrimination. We as an institution denounce all forms of gender based violence and discrimination.

Holistic Development

Mandela University seeks to catalyse dynamic, excellent, innovative and transformative student life, well-being and development.

At the heart of this work is a student-centred approach which we have conceptualised as an ecosystem of integrated, excellent services purposefully designed with and for students to enable, expose, engage and empower them as human beings to realise their life aspirations through the pathway of Nelson Mandela University.

As a Vice-Chancellor's Scholar, you will have access to **Holistic Development** programmes developed under the auspices of HEADS (Higher Education Access and Development Services), Faculties and Student Affairs.

This support is central to your success as it seeks to ensure that your full academic and leadership potential is optimised.

Participate unreservedly in these developmental initiatives and be assured that these are intended to enable you to release your emergent potential and to enhance your comprehensive growth.

They are also meant to instil the values of respect, authenticity, human solidarity, hard work, self-reflection, self-correction, independence and ownership of the consequences of their actions.

We firmly believe that the educational experience must give meaning to the context of those who are its subjects. It is against this backdrop that the mode of delivery of our student life and development programmes seeks to involve and place the student at the centre. Our student centeredness views students as human beings and our engagement with them is informed by, and seeks to promote and advance human values.

We encourage you, to participate in these programmes as these enrich the quality of your learning experience here at Mandela.

Student Attributes We Desire

While studying here at Mandela, I want to encourage each and every one of you to think of supporting a cause greater than yourself. We encourage you to join a student society, play sport, to pursue your academic work with a mindset that is socially conscious and seeks solutions to real-life problems that people face in communities every day. Embrace the opportunities for democratic participation as these present themselves in student life. Practice and deploy your social citizenship.

Our aim is that when you graduate, you will have used your time here at Mandela to develop and hone your capabilities such that you display what we regard as the defining attributes which set Mandela graduates apart in society. The hallmarks of a Mandela graduate are:

- Social awareness and responsible citizenship
- Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurial thinking
- Critical thinking
- Adaptive expertise
- In-depth disciplinary and inter-disciplinary knowledge
- Excellent communication skills, and
- Excellent inter-personal skills

Mutual Expectations

I now turn to what we at Mandela University expect of you as our new Vice-Chancellor's Scholars, and what we expect of parents, guardians and families. These tips have over the years proved of immense value, and they are a cornerstone of student success.

We expect students to:

- Attend lectures, practicals, tutorials and other academic activities – this is non-negotiable
- Work consistently every day
- Ask questions, be inquisitive, stretch the boundaries of intellectual inquiry
- Meet deadlines for assignments
- Use the library, on-line teaching and learning tools, and internet facilities
- Make use of our student support services
- Give back to the community through engagement projects
- Manage your finances carefully
- Find that important balance between studies and social activities, and
- We would wish you to commit to lead a healthy life-style.

We expect of parents and guardians, and hope that families will:

- Provide the necessary emotional and psychological support throughout the year
- Be inquisitive about academic progress of their children and have regular chats about what is happening in their lives at University
- Encourage them to seek advice and deal with uncertainties as early as possible

- Be objective in assessing the rights and responsibilities of your son or daughter
- Adapt the home environment as much as possible to be conducive to learning, and
- Contact the Dean of the Faculty should you have any major concerns.
- To facilitate engagement opportunities that foster all round development of socially aware and responsive graduates, and
- To produce knowledgeable, compassionate and enterprising graduates capable of becoming leaders and entrepreneurs in chosen fields and professions.

In Conclusion....

As you embark on your Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship Journey, a new and exciting chapter in your life story begins. I urge you to use this platform to emerge as a well-rounded citizen, socially aware on a global scale, ambitious, positive and set on your individual path to make a difference and change the world. With opportunity comes responsibility to be role models, ambassadors and change agents. Receiving the scholarship is an acknowledgement of your efforts thus far, but your life journey is only starting and we have great confidence that further achievements will follow.

I have no doubt, that you all have bright futures ahead of you and that you will become outstanding ambassadors for our University.