

NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

Welcome Ceremony

Address: Professor Sibongile Muthwa
Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University
2 February 2019

Students, Parents and Families

Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans and Executive Deans of Faculty, Campus Heads, Senior Management, the Professoriate, Academics and Staff of Mandela University, Sanibonani, Molweni, Good morning, Goeie More, Dumelang

It is my great honour and privilege to welcome all of you to Nelson Mandela University this morning as we begin the 2019 academic year. I also extend this greeting to all of you who are participating in this event through live-streaming in 18 venues across our campuses, including our students, families and colleagues in George Campus, in the Western Cape. *Siyanamukela nonke bakwethu.*

2019 marks the beginning of my second year as Vice-Chancellor of Mandela, a position and role which I have found to be as demanding as it is fulfilling, and as daunting as it is exciting. I have become increasingly aware that our job as leaders of universities is exacting, but universities are also catalytic and impactful, at times capable of 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 a young life forever. It is with humility therefore, that I again this year stand here to welcome parents and students who are coming to join our Mandela University family for the first time in 2019.

I am truly inspired as I look out at all of you here with us today, from all walks of life and from all parts of South Africa and beyond the borders of our country. This year we are delighted to welcome approximately 7 000 first year students who were selected out of a pool of over 122 000 applications. You have done yourself proud in being selected to study at Mandela. We thank you for choosing this great University and we look forward to all your contributions to making it even greater.

Infrastructure and Facilities

We strive to provide modern, new age infrastructure on all our campuses. As you entered the various campuses today, we hope you will have seen some of our wonderful facilities. You will have seen in the photo-shots, images of many of our buildings – including the School of Engineering’s new buildings on North Campus; our new Science building; the High Performance Complex; the modern and well-equipped library at Missionvale Campus; and the Business School located at 2nd Avenue Campus, which opened in 2015 as the country’s first ever ‘green’ public building. Our newest, and 7th campus, the Ocean Sciences Campus here in Summerstrand, is our latest acquisition of which we are very proud.

As the techno-savvy generation, you will be pleased to learn that free Wi-Fi is available on all our campuses. There are 24-hour computer laboratories, great sporting facilities and many spaces in which you can relax and unwind.

As you may know, the main campus of Nelson Mandela University is in a 720-hectare nature reserve, so we are privileged to enjoy a free-space environment, where wild animal species roam free. Here in Summerstrand, the beach is literally across the road. I hope this will be an attraction for you, to explore the ocean, and try out some water sports. The George Campus is at the foot of the majestic Outeniqua Mountains, set in ancient indigenous forests.

Higher Education Sector: What Issues Are We Grappling With?

As you start your university journey, 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 morning.

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 our graduates long after they have left this institution.

Naming and Renaming of Spaces

One of the key initiatives we are striving to achieve is to create a stronger sense of social inclusion within the University through the naming and re-naming of various spaces and buildings in which we live, study and work. The consultative manner in which this exercise is unfolding serves as a powerful signal of our collective commitment to build a University that is keenly aware of its past, and which is therefore poised to engage with itself to work out, for itself, a decolonial pose. This exercise will frame the University character in line with our foundational values of humanity and social justice.

For us, the naming of buildings is more than symbolic change. Rather, it is about opening up spaces for much deeper self-reflection and contemplation, to drive the change we want to see at our university. It is at the centre of our intentions to foster a culture of social inclusion.

Gender Equality

At Nelson Mandela 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.

The higher education sector has been beset with unacceptably high levels of gender-based violence and cases of blatant gender discrimination. While we recognise that gender-based violence perpetrated against our students and staff is a sub-set of the manifestation of a social phenomenon in broader society, we are not deterred. We have created safe spaces of engagement and a reporting mechanism which fast tracks responses to, and resolution of, reported cases of sexual violence on campus. In addition, as part of our commitment to combat this scourge, we have put additional measures in place, including the *MEMEZA* campaign to blow the whistle on gender-based violence and discrimination.

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.

Student Life and Development

Mandela University seeks to catalyse dynamic, excellent, innovative and transformative student life, wellbeing 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

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 have fashioned a suite of programmes in amongst others, student leadership development, wellbeing, living and learning, community service and development. All these programmes are designed to enable our students to release their latent potential and to enhance their total development. 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 enjoin you, as new students, 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 students, 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 hope that families will:

- Provide 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.

We are deeply vested in student success. To enable this, as the University we promise the following:

- To continue to offer and invest in quality education through our various teaching, learning, and research programmes
- To provide support programmes that enable academic achievement and personal growth
- 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....

You have chosen to study at Mandela University. What our University stands for is a place that inculcates and reflects values of social justice and equality. It offers what we regard as breakthrough education, advancing scholarship that will contribute to the improvement of humanity, and which will diminish social exclusion. Our institutional posture is to promote inclusive engagement and we advocate for social and intellectual affirmation of diverse scholarly pursuits. Ours will seek at all material times to be a restless scholarship, and students will engage with and question established truths and push back the frontiers of received wisdom. We do this as a University that is aware that there is persistent inequality in the society that we live in. Therefore, we set out to instil values and develop student attributes that will enable each of you to leave this University confident, willing and able to contribute to a better society and a better world.

Today, you are embarking on a new and exciting chapter in your life story. What you write in this chapter is up to you. 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. *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 they join our family.

Thank you to each of you for taking the time to join us today.

Thank you for choosing Mandela University as your university of choice.