

# Critical Reflections on Rhodes, 2006-2011

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# Introduction

**Critical Reflections** on Rhodes document attempts to do two things:

- To provide a **review** of developments between the University imbizo of July 2006 and this imbizo.
- To **critically reflect** on key aspects of the past five years at Rhodes.

**Purpose** - to facilitate an open and critical conversation on current realities and how we may wish to proceed in coming years; to ground an engagement with where we are now that is undertaken in a spirit of openness, honesty, critique and self-criticism.

We need to together to chart the way forward, by boldly identifying our weaknesses and shortcomings, **setting out an agenda and priorities, imaginatively making choices and decisions, and creatively devising interventions and effectively implementing them.**

# Framing issues

- **Values and purposes**

- ✓ The 1996 South African *Constitution* and *Bill of Rights*:
- ✓ The 1997 *White Paper* on higher education
- ✓ The core purposes of universities

- **Institutional change**

- ✓ Having clarity about the nature of change that is needed and must be pursued
- ✓ Understanding change as occurring ‘within the framework of possibilities and constraints’ of a complex institution, and having to take ‘into account the contradictions, possibilities and constraints’ of existing conditions

## Paradoxes

- ✓ Change agenda will have paradoxes, in so far as we seek to pursue *simultaneously* a number of values and goals that may be in tension with one another.
- ✓ Pursuit of particular goals and strategies *simultaneously* gives rise to *difficult dilemmas* and *unenviable choices and decisions*, and could *necessitate trade-offs*, especially in a context of scarce financial resources.
- ✓ Paradoxes have to be creatively addressed and policies and strategies devised that can satisfy multiple imperatives, *balance competing goals* and enable the pursuit of equally desirable goals
- ✓ If trade-offs are inevitable, they must be made *consciously* and *transparently* and their implications for values and goals (short-, medium- and long-term) must be confronted.

# The 2006 imbizo and post-imbizo developments

- Chart the developments since 2006 in each of the seven areas discussed at the 2006 imbizo:
  - ✓ Values, purposes and identity: Rhodes' vision and mission
  - ✓ Shape and size of Rhodes
  - ✓ Sustaining and enhancing excellence! Where leaders learn?
  - ✓ Recruitment and access and support and success
  - ✓ Community engagement
  - ✓ Institutional environment and culture: A people-centred institution/A home for all
  - ✓ Institutional planning, policy and decision-making structures and processes

# Key Challenges

## *A. Transformation*

- **Social equity** - becoming demographically representative of the South African population, especially at the levels of academic and senior and middle-level support staff
- **Institutional culture** – creating an enabling academic and social environment which is free from prejudice and intolerance in which difference and diversity - whether epistemological, methodological, class, racial, gender, national, linguistic, religious or sexual orientation - are appreciated and all feel respected and affirmed

- Strong *laissez faire* culture - which equates a laissez faire approach with safeguarding academic freedom and organisational autonomy - an aversion to *any* real democratic and peer accountability?

## ***B. Modernisation***

- Challenge of *modernisation* – very evident in certain areas of institutional life - lack of systems, documented protocols and effective and efficient procedures, the lack of innovation, the lack of proactive engagement and responsiveness, and inflexibility
- Means *inadequate information* to effectively inform policies and decisions and to effectively monitor critical areas and issues,
- Means *inefficiencies* and waste of time and resources an



- Amateurish approach to issues and the absence of nimble support services - give rise to unnecessary bottlenecks and frustration for staff
- *Modernisation* is long overdue in a number of areas

## Other challenges

- ✓ **Becoming more postgraduate and research-oriented** – pursuing our enrolment plan which says we will become 30% postgraduate by 2013 (currently 27%); developing appropriate institutional arrangements to enhance the quantity, the quality, the academic and social experience and the equity profile of our postgraduates, and especially South African postgraduates; new postgraduate and research niche areas and programmes, fund-raising
- ✓ **New infrastructure** – teacher education building; life sciences building; computer sciences building; postgraduate centre; postgraduate residences; remaking of postgraduate village as professional and continuing education village; indoor sports centre

- **Staff planning**

- ✓ Improving the **equity profile** of academic and senior and middle-level support staff
- ✓ **Retaining black staff** through attending to certain aspects of institutional culture
- ✓ Continuing to **build the next generation of academics**, especially black and women academics
- ✓ Effectively supporting **new staff recruits** in settling into Rhodes and in Grahamstown
- ✓ Systematically and sustainably addressing remuneration
- ✓ Finalising a **remuneration policy**

- **Overall institutional development planning**
  - ✓ Finalising an **Institutional Development Plan**. The IDP has to be informed by and also underpinned by Faculty- and Division-level plans. There has to be a specification of the institutional arrangements, concrete strategies, funding and time frames for the realisation of goals.
  - ✓ Informed by the IDP, the **Campus Development Plan** needs to be also finalised as a guide to the considered overall physical development and maintenance of the Rhodes University campus.

- **Institutional planning and implementation**

There exist various shortcomings which have adverse implications for the achievement of institutional goals, inclusive participation, and effectiveness and efficiency:

- ✓ **Non- or non-timeous or inadequate engagement** or/and responses on the part of structures and Offices with critical issues - compromises inclusive processes of policy- and decision-making, delays decision-making and implementation with various negative consequences
- ✓ **Inordinately lengthy time period** for ideas to become concept documents and full proposals – as a result there are **missed opportunities**

- ✓ Tardy and/or **ineffectual implementation** of programmes, projects and initiatives despite available funding. Where funding is from donors, the consequences are possible reputational damage, delays in potential further funding, and compromising of particular goals and strategies
- ✓ Insufficient attention to the **planning of implementation**, evidenced in inadequate clear specification of roles and responsibilities, lack of adherence to time frames and the like
- ✓ The absence of or ineffectual ***monitoring of implementation***

## Conclusion

- In 2008 we made a very important public declaration. Our acknowledgement of shameful actions and public apology in 2008 both freed us to, and expressed our commitment to, remake and renew Rhodes as a small but outstanding African university
- We committed ourselves to resolutely pursue knowledge, understanding, critique and reason; to steadfastly continue to promote human dignity, equality, non-sexism and non-racialism, critical citizenship and all the human rights and freedoms that our Constitution proclaimed, and to courageously and boldly to protect and assert the core values and purposes of a university, including advancing the public good, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability.
- **These public pledges we made illuminate our tasks and should guide all our actions.**