



RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

LANGUAGE POLICY

1. POLICY PARTICULARS

DATE OF APPROVAL BY RELEVANT COMMITTEE STRUCTURE:

Academic Planning and Staffing Committee: 16 August 2005

Quality Assurance Committee:

DATE OF APPROVAL BY SENATE: 2001; 3 October 2005

DATE OF APPROVAL BY COUNCIL: 2001; 06 October 2005

COMMENCEMENT

DATE: 2001; 1 January 2006

REVISION HISTORY: 1st revision 31 March 2003

2nd revision 2 August 2005

REVIEW DATE: 3-yearly

POLICY LEVEL: All University staff and students

RESPONSIBILITY [Person/Division/Committee accountable for]:

- IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING:

- * The Vice-Principal, through the Quality Assurance Committee, will ensure that the various strategies outlined in this policy are implemented.
- * Deans will monitor the broad implementation of the policy in their respective Faculties
- * Specific task-linked responsibility rests at several levels, as follows:
 - Language of teaching and learning and development of Academic Literacy: Academic Development Centre and the Registrar's Division.
 - Promotion of multilingualism and sensitivity in language use: Academic Development Centre and Communications & Development Division.
 - Support for South African languages and the study of foreign languages: School of Languages, Department of English Language & Linguistics; Department of English, Human Resources division.

Each of these divisions will submit a report every three years to the Vice Principal with respect to their areas of responsibility.

- REVIEW AND REVISION:

The Language Policy as a whole will be reviewed by the Quality Assurance Committee every three years.

REPORTING STRUCTURE: Vice-Principal → Quality Assurance Committee → Senate → Council

2. POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 POLICY DECLARATION:

The language of teaching and learning at Rhodes University is English. However, the University supports the national commitment to ensuring that language should not act as a barrier to equity of access and success. The University further recognises the multilingual nature of the University community and the country, and aims to adopt a wide range of strategies which will create a higher education institution whose identity is multilingual and proudly South African.

2.2 POLICY OBJECTIVES:

The University language policy accordingly presents strategies for:

- promoting proficiency in English, its designated language of teaching and learning
- recognising and advancing the academic viability and status of the three major languages of the Eastern Cape Province: isiXhosa, Afrikaans and English
- the promotion of multilingualism and sensitivity in language usage in such a way as to create and foster a supportive and inclusive, non-sexist and non-racist environment in which all members of the University can feel they belong
- advancing the study of foreign languages by offering students the choice of a range of languages to study
- providing appropriate support for the development of academic literacy.

2.3 DEFINITIONS:

Academic literacy: The ability to demonstrate membership of an academic community by reading, writing and thinking in ways that conform to the values and attitudes of that community.

Foreign language: A language which is not official in the country and which is generally not widely spoken by the indigenous people in the country.

Multilingualism: Having command of more than two languages.

3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 THE ACTIONS AND PROCESSES BY WHICH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY WILL BE ACHIEVED:

The policy will be widely distributed to all members of the University community, included in the University Calendar and displayed on the web-page.

A. Language of Teaching and Learning:

In order to ensure that language does not act as a barrier to equity and access for students from all linguistic backgrounds, Rhodes University aims to strengthen existing English language support structures and put additional measures into place that will improve competence in English. Accordingly,

The Academic Development Centre will:

- *Further develop the extended studies programmes in which the use of English as the language of learning and teaching is supported;*
- *Continue to promote awareness of the crucial role of language competence as central to learning through the provision of formal staff development programmes leading to qualifications such as the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE);*
- *Continue to offer support to staff in the development of curricula, the construction of personal teaching portfolios and the optimal identification of valid and reliable assessment strategies in order to ensure that language development is facilitated and that the assessment of language use is valid and appropriately weighted;*
- *Regularly up-date language-learning materials, both written, and audio-visual, to facilitate the acquisition of English as an additional language, and make these available to all members of the University community;*
- *Encourage the use of web-based resources and technology to support the learning of English.*

Academic Departments will:

- *Continue to evaluate the extent to which course design and teaching methods are appropriate to those for whom English is an additional language as well as the extent to which they facilitate the students' ability to use English as the language of learning and teaching;*
- *Ensure that all their prospective international students, who are not English first language speakers, comply with the IELTS / TOEFL¹ criteria before they are*

¹ TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language; IELTS: International English Language Testing System

permitted to register.

The Registrar's Division will:

- *Carry out an annual survey during registration to ascertain the linguistic demography and the linguistic practices of students, and to monitor students' views on the medium of teaching and learning at Rhodes University.*

B. Support for South African Languages:

Rhodes University aims to maintain and strengthen the full academic courses which it currently offers in English, isiXhosa for non-mother-tongue speakers and in Afrikaans. In particular, given the unfortunate legacy of apartheid, it aims to promote the offering of courses in isiXhosa. The Department of English Language and Linguistics will continue to teach a module in South African Sign Language. The University also aims to strengthen the current status of isiXhosa by promoting its usefulness as a medium of communication for all academic and support staff. Accordingly,

The School of Languages will:

- *Devise strategies to recruit students into courses in isiXhosa and Afrikaans;*
- *Where appropriate, encourage departments to make isiXhosa definitions of technical terms in a wide range of disciplines available to staff and students in order to facilitate learning;*
- *Facilitate the use of isiXhosa and Afrikaans in informal non-academic communication where possible;*
- *Explore the feasibility of providing the region with a centre for postgraduate programmes in Afrikaans and isiXhosa, collaborating with colleagues from neighbouring universities where appropriate;*
- *Explore the feasibility of reintroducing a programme in isiXhosa at post-graduate level for mother-tongue speakers by offering incentives such as scholarships to such students.*

The Communications & Development Division will:

- *Where feasible, annotate key documents (e.g. application forms, bursary forms etc.) by providing addenda with explanatory notes in isiXhosa and/or Afrikaans;*
- *Make budgetary provisions to enable them to provide additional signposting in isiXhosa and Afrikaans for the main buildings on campus, and to enable them to translate key University documents.*

The Human Resources Division will:

- *Devise strategies to encourage members of the University who do not speak isiXhosa to enrol for the short communicative course in isiXhosa;*
- *Ensure that advertisements for vacant positions indicate that competence in more than one official language will be a recommendation.*

C. The Promotion of Multilingualism and of Sensitivity in Language Usage

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

Rhodes University undertakes to foster and encourage an awareness of, and sensitivity towards the multilingual nature of the University community in order to promote intercultural understanding and, at all levels, to make communication more effective. Accordingly,

The Registrar's Division will:

- *Ensure that, where feasible, official university correspondence with prospective and current students, staff and the public is available on request in at least two of the major provincial languages, taking into account the multilingual nature of the University community.*

The Communications & Development Division will:

- *Obtain updated statistics annually on the linguistic competence of all University staff, and ascertain their self-assessed literacy levels;*
- *Where necessary, use interpreters to make verbal presentations regarding certain policies or issues in the University;*
- *Ensure that isiXhosa and Afrikaans are used on the Rhodes web page;*
- *Critically examine all existing university documentation to ensure non-discriminatory linguistic usage;*
- *Explore the potential of using Rhodos and Rhodes Music Radio to communicate in languages other than English.*

Academic Departments will:

- *Be sensitive to linguistic demographics when allocating first-years to tutorials and aim for bilingual tutor support wherever possible and appropriate;*
- *Make multiple copies of appropriate dictionaries accessible in the library;*
- *Where appropriate, provide access to a wider range of dictionaries in examinations;*
- *Encourage constructive debate about bilingualism, multilingualism and the role of language in learning.*

The Academic Development Centre will:

- *Through workshops and formal programmes, sensitise staff and students to the need to counteract possible implicit sexist or racist bias in the language of materials for teaching, assessment and everyday usage;*
- *Foster mentoring programmes which promote opportunities for interlingual contact where appropriate;*
- *Devise strategies (in addition to the Alternative Admissions Research Project) to attract students from all linguistic groups with sufficient English proficiency and academic potential to succeed;*
- *Establish appropriate courses to ensure that new lecturers receive training in methods and techniques for teaching students who speak a range of different languages and that existing staff are also encouraged to undertake training.*

The Human Resources Division will:

- *Pursue staff employment policies and strategies which ensure that, for those positions where multilingualism will enhance effective communication and*

understanding, successful applicants have the required linguistic skills.

Student Support Services will:

- *Pursue staff employment policies and strategies to ensure that students from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds are provided for in terms of counselling and support.*

D. The Study of Foreign Languages

Recognising the cultural and religious significance of various foreign languages in South Africa, Rhodes University aims to continue to work towards ensuring the ongoing viability and development of its foreign-language courses in French (the major European language of Africa), German, Classical Studies and Netherlandic Studies by consolidating present foreign language offerings over the next three years and promoting the study of foreign languages, including Dutch, French, German, Latin and Greek through adequate staffing, regular review of programmes and publicity for the School of Languages as a major centre for language studies at university level within South Africa. Accordingly,

The School of Languages will:

- *Ascertain the effect of foreign language policy at secondary school level and devise strategies which respond to the needs of school leavers in terms of future curriculum planning;*
- *Pursue the installation of a multi-media laboratory to facilitate foreign language acquisition;*
- *Continue introducing students in Classical Civilization to Latin and Greek;*
- *Continue recruiting French mother tongue exchange students from France to assist with the teaching of French;*
- *Continue using exchange students from Germany to assist with German language classes;*
- *Consolidate established links which financially support the teaching of Dutch at Rhodes University;*
- *Distribute School of Languages information booklets to schools.*

E. Academic Literacy

In embracing the concept of Academic Literacy and the need to master the forms and conventions of the languages used in academic contexts, Rhodes University aims to support both undergraduate and postgraduate students in providing access to knowledge and knowledge production within the University. The University acknowledges that the ability to use English as the language of learning and teaching at tertiary level goes beyond the mastery of the formal structures of the language and encompasses the way language users relate to both spoken and written texts in academic contexts, which is itself underpinned by values about what constitutes knowledge and learning. The University undertakes to provide all students with the means to improve their competence in the use of language for academic purposes. Accordingly,

The Academic Development Centre will:

- *Continue to support the acquisition of academic literacy through the development of*

extended programmes;

- *Strive to ensure that posts dedicated to literacy development are equitably distributed across the University;*
- *Through the Office of the Dean of Research, investigate the viability of making writing respondents available to postgraduate students;*
- *Continue to support students in the acquisition of academic literacy through their engagement with mainstream programmes. This support will take the form of tutorials and the provision of interactive learning materials;*
- *Continue to promote awareness of the existence of a range of literacies through the provision of formal staff development programmes leading to qualifications such as the PGDHE;*
- *Continue to support mentoring programmes which will assist students in understanding and acquiring the ‘rules and conventions’ which underpin the way knowledge is constructed and accessed.*

3.2 REVIEW PROCEDURE:

The Quality Assurance Committee should set up a sub-committee (Language Policy Review Committee) to reconsider the effectiveness of the Rhodes Language Policy at the beginning of 2008. This committee should include the following people, or their nominees:

- Head: Department English Language and Linguistics (Convenor)
- Head: Academic Development Centre
- Head: Communications & Development Division
- Head: School of Languages
- Head: Department of English
- Dean: International Office
- Registrar
- Director of Finance
- Human Resources Division
- Director, Academic Planning and Quality Assurance
- President: SRC

The Committee will receive reports every three years from all Divisions and Departments with specific responsibilities (see section 1). Its recommendations will then be submitted (via the Quality Assurance Committee Minutes) to Senate and Council for consideration. If revisions are recommended and approved, a copy of the revised policy must be widely distributed by the Committee Secretariat, and the web version must be replaced by the new policy.