**Alumni Transformation E-mail Submissions:**

Below is a brief summary based on 188 Alumni who between 2015 - 2017 have sent emails wishing to express their views and stance around the current debate at Rhodes University. The emails largely were about the issue around the name change. The emails have been coming in since 2015 and continued into 2016, whilst a Task Team was to be put into place and then picked up pace again in 2017 with the formation of the Transformation Summit. A petition was conducted in 2015 with approximately the same amount of people signing to keep the name, as per the results of the current online survey, conducted in 2017

**Survey Link**

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/437/643/264/tell-the-vc-of-rhodes-keep-rhodes-name/>

The respondents were against Rhodes University changing its name, with reasons varying across a short and narrow spectrum. Although an overwhelming 92% strongly disagreed with the name change, some of the Alumni respondents suggested “that instead of changing the name from one historical figure to the next, we should look at the geographical naming of spaces”.

A few of the respondents in their own right also suggested that “Rhodes University adopt a double barrel name”

Hi, I am going to Cape Town for a conference so won’t be able to attend. I still like the idea of Steve Biko University which you can pass on.

The point of view of the alumni (all 188) relates to question 4, 5 and 6 found in the Questionnaires that were done during the consultation process. Question 4 asked directly if the name of Rhodes University should be changed, while question 5 asked what the benefits would be of renaming Rhodes University and finally question 6 asked what issues might be associated with changing the name. These 188 respondents while expressing their views around the name change, showed that they strongly disagreed with the name change and if it should happen, then it would result in the continued “disenchantment of alumni and supporters”, “less affinity and attachment from graduates” with a very consistent theme continuing with “reduced interest of private sector partners and contributors”.

Most of the respondents saw the name of “Rhodes University” as being a means to beginning the process of “building reconciliation and education in a country that is still deeply wounded by the legacy of apartheid” The general view was that changing the name implied an authoritative approach to re-writing history.

“Please convey to the authorities my objection to any discussion about name change.

I hope that if Mr Rhodes is taken out of the name, then the Rhodes Scholarships funding will also be unavailable to students who support this name change. I wonder if this has been considered. The University authorities should make is very clear to objecting students that were there no Mr Rhodes to fund and start this university, they, the students, would not be able to study. I feel very strongly about name changing for political reasons, and students, and the current authorities should be appreciative of what has gone before and all aspects of the full history of the university and the country.”

“ My father, mother, brother and I arrived in South Africa from India in January 1942 so that my father could take up his post as Junior Lecturer in Geography at Rhodes University College. When Rhodes became a university in its own right he became senior lecturer, and retired as Professor of Geography at the end of 1970. So, from my earliest years I have known the institution as Rhodes, and so do my brother and sister who attended the university after I did from 1956 -59. I shall be very sorry to hear of any name change. The University was only founded as a result of a gift of £50,000 of De Beers Preference shares from the trustees of the Rhodes trust in 1904. Any change of name would deny that fact. I am suspicious of people who wish to rewrite the past. What else will they wish to rewrite ? We cannot change the past, however uncomfortable it may seem now. We are shaped by the past, and build on its achievments. Progress is only possible by building on the past, and to deny one's heritage is to diminish one's dependence on our predecessors, and to pretend that the present has sprung out of the present – which nobody will believe. Over a century the name of Rhodes has become synonymous with high academic reputation, nurtured by staff who are dedicated to the highest standards. If the name is ditched, so will the institution's standing in the wider world. Students graduating from a renamed university will no longer have that standing to back up their degree, and will find it more difficult to establish their credentials when seeking employment. I do understand that a new generation of South Africans wish to establish a new identity, and I wish them well in their search for academic success and fruitful employment to the benefit of South Africa, but they will not

achieve those aims by denying the past.”

However a more consistent line of thought from the Alumni, was that of funding and continued financial support. Some respondents took the time in their emails to personally address the Vice Chancellor saying “I repeat what I said earlier.  I will consider a donation when I hear you have finally decided not to change the name of the university”

This continued through the hundreds of emails,

“I am an alumnus of Rhodes University (PhD 1989). I don't know if you are the person to contact, but I am writing to say that, should Rhodes University decide to change its name, I will no longer feel able to donate to the University or provide for it in my will. I know of a significant number of Rhodes graduates here in the United Kingdom who were intending to provide for RU in their wills but now feel equally strongly about this issue. A University's reputation can take decades, a century even, to be built up, but it only takes the stroke of a pen to undermine it severely. Over the past year, I have witnessed not only the vandalising of the Rhodes statue at UCT, but, much more seriously, of the Memorial to the Dead UCT Alumni of the two world wars. Now, portraits in that University have also been destroyed. If, against this wider background, Rhodes University decides to abolish its name, I will be clear about deciding about my will. I understand that you cannot take a view of this matter, but trust you may understand my reasons for making my feelings clear at this stage”

“It is with deep regret that I learn that the University is bowing down to political pressure. Should this go forward , my Lawyer and the Executor of my estate have been instructed to ensure that the monies which have been allocated to you will be cancelled . I was a student at Rhodes when they were in dire financial straits and my parents donated funds ,as did many other families,in order to ensure that the college remained in a viable position. We should have let it "go to the wall"”

“You will know that I severed all ties with UCT and rescinded a bequest I had made to the university. I have subsequently chatted to the Bequests Officer there and he told me that UCT had haemorrhaged money from donors and benefactors in the aftermath of the Rhodes Statue debacle. This will definitely be the fate of RU if there is a name change... A referendum of ALL stakeholders will prevent this, I think. When the votes are counted, I am in no doubt that Rhodes will still be Rhodes.”

“Just a small note. Should the Rhodes name change, I shall probably stop donating in my very modest way as my own personal protest. It would take too long to go into my reasons.”

Another respondent followed the theme of the cost of a name change:

“What I know about, and what I am picking up on, the situation in South Africa does not fill me with hope. Some years ago I decided not to make contributions to any SA organisation. With the corruption and political problems in SA, combined with student and union activism on the

campus, I think the last thing Rhodes should be doing is wasting financial and management resources on even considering a name change. But it seems a name change will be made and to another political person, no matter how well hidden that political agenda appears to be..

The university seems too involved in politics and is beginning to lack the wider vision of where a university should be internationally. The re-writing of history would seem more appropriate than the constant use of the word transformation. I would have preferred reading of improvements at the university and of a more outward looking international vision. My parents were too poor to pay for my time at Rhodes. After school I worked six years, before I enrolled at Rhodes. I used my hard earned savings to support my three years B.Com achievement. Money does not fall off trees. It would seem that is not being understood by many of today's students. Nothing in live is free! I spite of the comments above, I do wish RHODES a bright future.

Others against the name change highlighted other issues the University should be focused on.

 “I believe you would be better served trying to improve your global reputation”

 “This change of name would deny the existing prestige and advantage referred to above to all future graduates, who will effectively be graduating from an unknown institution”

Overall across the spectrum, the Alumni felt that the name change would result in severe cuts of funding, and a loss of prestige that the name carries.

‘My biggest fear regarding transformation, is that I don’t know what the new “transformed” university will look like.  I love the current vision/mission statement .  I think that transformation is a journey, but would like to know if there is a model somewhere in Africa or the world that is thought to be the best for Rhodes (bearing in mind that it is probably a moving target)  I am involved in a post graduate scholarship programme for “overseas” study and in more than 10 years no student has applied for funding to attend a university anywhere on the African continent.  Yet I know how proud we all are that so many of our current students come from outside of SA.  Surely this must indicate that we are already transformed.

I think that this “new transformed Rhodes” is where the most uncertainty lies.  I fear that current donors will adopt a wait and see attitude.  This means that they will stop making donations until such time as they are satisfied that the new university is one that they still wish to regard with pride as their alma mater.  We are fortunate that we have wise men and woman who will be making decisions about what to change and what to acknowledge as part of our history and leave as it is.  Over time leaders have done what they thought best and, like leaders all over the world, not all their decisions have, with the benefit of hindsight , been the best,  but that is how we learn.’

“I had a fantastic time at Rhodes, as did my three brothers who also spent time studying there. It has been sad to see the university slowly dwindling away and slipping down the rankings; this latest lunacy will only serve to accelerate that fall and diminish the perceived worth of the degrees I obtained there. I believe you would be better served trying to improve your global reputation, looking outwards rather than this fear-induced navel-gazing. Those seeking to drag Rhodes down to the status of a tiny rural college in a Third World country have no interest in research, reputation or international ratings (much the same as the South African Government, sadly) but I hope that you, the custodians, can rise above this kind of inward myopia. If and when you want to attract international students, partner with global institutions and design

attractive courses then I'd love to help but particating in an act of self-mutilation is not my thing.”

“Some of my thoughts about Rhodes University Rhodes has definitely played the greatest part in my academic development and preparation for teaching im both Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and South africa. I have watched Rhodes'developing and establishing a proud record of academic excellence during the past few years and one available to all races and cultures. I am sure that any name change will lend to dismay and strong opposition. Please advise the sub committee on the transformation issue that I can guarantee that a large majority of alumni do not want the name Rhodes University changed. If the sub committee does not believe me they should undertake a poll and the result will be an overwhelming no vote against any change of name.”

“Why does Rhodes University need any transformation from its good standing in the academic world? I just cannot understand the stupidity of this process, the result of which appears preordained in order to meet political ideals.”

“I would be grateful if you could either tell me how to, or if you yourself could add my

name to what is (I’m fairly sure) a long and growing list of alumni who do **not** want the university’s name changed. I shall not rehearse my reasons for this decision, unless it is incumbent upon all petitioners to motivate their choices. Suffice it, for now, to say that I believe the thrust for a name

change comes from a very small and specific group of people, whose agendas have very little to do with the welfare of an institution much loved by all who have had the privilege of studying there. I hope all of this does not beg the question. Will the terms of reference cover the issue of whether any transformation of any kind is actually needed. The rather than the how. It also implies that the university authorities have accepted, in principle, that the name of the University is up for grabs. And another question is, who runs the university? Those are primary questions. One could say that if any students or future students or even teachers do not like institutional tradition, are they not free to move elsewhere?”

“This is a fine and long-overdue effort. We much appreciate being keep posted and would wish to make what humble contribution we might in the spirit of the need for transformation in our country, especially the change in paradigm our universities should be at the leading edge of.”