

VICE-CHANCELLOR’S WELCOME ADDRESS

2018 GRADUATION CEREMONIES

# Lead for good!

* The Chancellor, the Honourable Justice Lex Mpati,
* The Chairperson of the Rhodes University Council, Mr Vuyo Kahla, and other members of our Council,
* The Chairperson of the Rhodes University Convocation, Professor Emeritus Peter Mtuze,
* Our honorary graduands,
* The University Public Orator, Distinguished Prof Paul Maylam,
* Deputy Vice-Chancellors,
* Deans,
* Registrar,
* Heads of Academic Department and Directors of Administrative Divisions,
* Academic and support staff colleagues,
* President and other members of the Student Representative Council,
* Proud parents, guardians, siblings and friends of our graduands,
* Honoured guests,
* Ladies and gentlemen,
* And most of all, our graduands.

It is a signal honour and a great privilege for me to welcome you all to the first of six graduation ceremonies of 2018 at Rhodes University.

Let me extend a very special welcome to the Grade 11 and 12 learners, their parents and teachers of our local high schools, Nombulelo and Ntsika Secondary Schools, Nathaniel Nyaluza, Kutliso Daniels, TEM Mrwetyana and Mary Waters High Schools, who are joining these proceedings via a live streaming link at sites in Joza and Vergenoeg. As a university, Rhodes exists for the public good, and to this end wished to celebrate this momentous occasion with the community of which we are a part and to which we are inextricably bound.

Walking across the stage today, we will be inspired by many first generation graduates from our Grahamstown community. We know the journey of each graduate has been a communal effort hence the communal celebration. We hope that these young Rhodes University graduates will make us all proud, by not only inspiring others with their success but also supporting local learners to reach greater heights. We are grateful to the Government Communication Information System (GCIS), the Department of Education and our Divisions of Communication and Advancement as well as Community Engagement for making this technological connection possible.

We are very proud of being part of the greater Grahamstown community and are committed to making a positive change in this community, not as an act of charity or benevolence, but as a recognition of our common humanity and an acknowledgement of our shared destiny. Our vision is to make Grahamstown a centre of educational opportunity for all young people of Grahamstown – from early childhood development to tertiary education.

Graduation ceremonies are a major highlight in our university calendar of events. They afford us a special opportunity to recognise, honour and celebrate the academic success and achievements our new graduates.

Graduation is a significant milestone which marks one of the most memorable experiences in the life of a young person. It is a culmination of many years of hard work and personal sacrifice; a moment of joy and pride for parents and other family members; a time of celebration; a time to reflect on the road travelled and to look forward to a future filled with great promise.

On behalf of our Council and the entire Rhodes University community, we offer our warm congratulations to each one of you, our graduands, on your wonderful achievement. Completing a Rhodes University qualification is a particularly demanding undertaking. You and your family are justifiably proud of your remarkable personal accomplishment.

Let me extend our deep and heartfelt congratulations to those graduands who are the first in their family to earn a university degree. Having been one myself, I know too well just what a proud and special moment this is for you. This day will remain deeply etched on your memory and will be a source of inspiration for you for the rest of your life.

Each one of you, our graduands, has your own unique story to tell about your journey to the glorious achievement we are celebrating this morning. For some of you, the journey to this day has been a long and a difficult one. It has been marked by twists and turns, failures and disappointments that threatened to derail your dreams, hopes and aspirations. Others have had to confront and negotiate struggles of financial hardships that left them uncertain at the beginning of each year as to whether or not they would be able to continue with their studies. The fact that you are here this morning is testament to your incredible resilience, perseverance, and resolve to rise above all hurdles that lay on your way. You’ve pulled through! Well done and hearty congratulations!

Graduands, you will be the first acknowledge that you would not have made it this far were it not for the unfailing support, loving sacrifices and constant encouragement of your parents, guardians, siblings, friends and loved ones. They have walked this journey with you; they have shared your setbacks, disappointments and anxieties; they have been there to provide advice and to cheer you up and cheer you on at times when you had lost all hope. Their hearts are full of joy and excitement this morning. We can only imagine the deep sense of relief they must be feeling now that they don’t have to worry about your university fees and other costs incidental to being a university student!

*[Can we please give a warm round of applause to all the families and those who supported our students]*

On behalf you, our graduands, we wish to offer profound gratitude and sincere appreciation to your lecturers, tutors, laboratory technicians, computer assistants, support and administrative staff for their guidance, mentoring, support and encouragement during the demanding times of your studies. We also acknowledge with great gratitude the important role played by our cleaners, cooks, gardeners, janitorial staff, wardening staff and student leaders in creating a rich and supportive intellectual, social and physical environment for our students to develop, grow and succeed in their academic endeavours. The success of our students is their just reward!

In our 2018 graduation ceremonies, we will also recognise, honour and celebrate distinguished individuals whose profound and exceptional contributions to our nation and humankind are worthy of our recognition. Their personal journeys and selfless service and sacrifices serve as an inspiration and an example worthy of emulation by all of us. These are women and men whose significant achievements in public life and distinction in some field or selfless leadership set them apart from others, and are consonant with our own institutional mission, purposes and values. Our University will be greatly honoured to confer honorary degrees to these remarkable people. They are: Professor Peter Mtuze, Justice Dikgang Moseneke, Ms Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Prof Vishnu Padayachee, Mr Andrew Mlangeni and Dr Sindiwe Magona.

We are deeply grateful that four of the six will grace us with their presence at our graduation ceremonies. We have arranged a special ceremony for the other two, Justice Dikgang Moseneke and Ms Yvonne Chaka Chaka, later in the year.

*Graduation statistics…..*

In the 6 graduation ceremonies of 2018, a total of 2494 students will receive their degrees and diplomas. Of these, 1457 (or 58%) are undergraduate Bachelor’s degrees and 1037 (or 42%) are postgraduate degrees and diplomas. Of the 1037 postgraduate students, 229 will be receiving their Master’s degrees.

Of the 2494 graduates, 63% are women (*Malibongwe*!), and 16% are international students.

This year we have produced 88 PhD graduates. The Faculty of Science has produced 44 PhD degrees – up from 38 of 2017; the Faculty Humanities has 22 PhD of graduates; the Faculty of Commerce 6, the Faculty of Education 13, Faculty of Law 1; and the Faculty of Pharmacy 2. All Faculties have done exceedingly well. Our warm congratulations to all our Faculty Deans, Heads of Department and the academic and support staff of our academic Departments.

These fabulous statistics bear testimony to the standing of our university as a preeminent centre of academic excellence.

* We enjoy the best undergraduate pass and graduation rates of any South African university;
* We have outstanding postgraduate success rates;
* We share the first position with another university in research output per academic staff member;
* Among the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), we are ranked as the most efficient research university;
* Thanks to the excellent efforts of our Community Engagement office, we are a leading South African university in community engagement and in engaged research.

It is our conviction that these metrics serve as the bedrock foundation for the success we witness today amongst our graduates and our firmly held belief that our graduates are well-poised to lead in South Africa and beyond.

*Lead with honour, integrity and humility…*

Let me, for a moment, address myself to our graduands.

You have received outstanding higher education from one of the finest universities in our country. With your Rhodes University qualification, you have a great many opportunities ahead of you. Your education has equipped you with knowledge and developed the values to imagine a different and a better future for our society and humankind. Equally important, your education has given you the skills and abilities to be able to contribute to the realisation of a better tomorrow; one that is more just, more humane, more equitable, fairer, more compassionate, more inclusive and more respectful of every citizen.

Your graduation this morning fills us with great hope, optimism and confidence that you will place at the service of humankind the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes you have gained at Rhodes University and thereby help us advance our shared objective of creating the society and the world of our dreams. As you cross the stage on this auspicious occasion, your challenge is to hold fast to the belief that you can and will contribute to the remaking of our society and our world. You are more than equal to the challenges that face our society and humankind.

With your graduation this morning, you join a small, powerful and privileged segment of our society, a knowledge elite. In the globalised world, membership of this knowledge elite has the potential to bring enormous financial and social rewards. However, it also carries with it special duties, obligations and responsibilities you cannot and dare not shirk. Always remember “to whom much is given, much is expected.”

We expect you to use your privileged position as truly educated men and women to advance social justice, substantive equality, and human dignity for all.

We expect you to stand up for what is right, just, and fair.

Wherever you find yourself, we expect you to exercise leadership - the kind of leadership which, according to uTat’ uRobert Mangaliso Sobukwe “demands complete subjugation of self, absolute honesty, integrity and uprightness of character, courage and fearlessness, and above all, a consuming love for one's people."

We are sending you out into the world as liberated, educated, compassionate and caring people so that your presence can liberate others.

We are sending you out as a force for good.

We are sending you out as a voice for the voiceless; as a voice of reason, truth, justice and hope in a society and world fraught with frightening levels of anger, intolerance, poverty and inequality.

We are sending you out to serve our society and humanity with honour, integrity, compassion, empathy and humility.

We may have not taught you everything you need to know to navigate the challenges and pitfalls of life. Reason and experience tell us we could not have done this even if we tried. However, what your education at this great and distinctive university has given you is the ability to learn, and how to think, and how to solve problems.

As you move on with the next phase of your lives, never cease to appreciate the value of learning, the significance of knowledge, the strength of ideas, the merit of asking questions, the usefulness of theory, the need for reason and evidence, the power of logic, the benefits that come from clear thinking and thoughtful argument. Above all, never forget that one of the most important things we have tried to teach you here is the value of keeping a mind open to views and perspectives that are different to those you may hold initially.

Now that you have a qualification from this great university, you are able to make life choices and define what success, happiness and fulfilment mean for you. The choices you make will shape and define the person that you will become and the legacy that you will bequeath humankind.

Whatever choices you make in life, never elevate personal ambition or single-minded pursuit of material or financial gain above everything else. In particular, never allow the temptation of instant gratification to cloud your good judgement.

Whatever the future holds for you, always strive to be the best that you can possibly be. Always strive to live a life of virtue, a life of consequence.

Never allow the fear of failure to drive you into the safety and placidity of inaction. President Nelson Mandela taught us that courage is not the absence of fear, but triumph over it. From every failure draw inspiration and courage to try harder.

Never sacrifice your values of personal integrity, fairness and honesty.

Never discount any experience in life, no matter how insignificant it might seem. It shapes you into a person you learn to become.

How ever you choose to define success fulfilment or happiness, never forget who you are or where you come from. Never forget those who have supported you and stood by you through all your ups and downs.

How ever you choose to define success, fulfilment or happiness, never fail to treat others with respect, kindness and decency.

How ever you choose to define success, fulfilment or happiness, never fail to pause once in a while to assess what it is that really matters in life and take time to appreciate little things in life.

As a graduate of this great university, you join a special community of our alumni – extraordinary women and men who are making remarkable contributions and leading change in many and diverse fields of human endeavour. They are found in our classrooms as educators; in our hospital dispensaries as pharmacists; in our courts as lawyers, magistrates and judges; in our financial services institutions as accountants and CEOs; in our laboratories as scientists; in our news rooms as journalists; they are entrepreneurs and thought-leaders. They are all playing their part to create a better society and a better world. Animated by our motto ‘*Vis, Virtus, Veritas*’, inspired by our slogan “*Where leaders learn*” and guided by our values of integrity, respect, social justice, human dignity, human rights, personal excellence and rational inquiry, they are committed to bequeathing future generations a better society and a better world than the one they inherited from the generation before theirs. We will expect no less from you! We welcome you to this special and ever-growing community and we invite you to visit the alumni table in the foyer to receive your special graduation gift as a *memento* of this special occasion.

In the years to come, we will follow your growth, development and success as a professional with keen interest and we will applaud you for the honour and credit you bring to your *alma mater*.

Today is your special day to cherish and remember. You have earned it! May you look back on this glorious day with great pride and warm memories and may it serve as an inspiration and a springboard towards better and exciting things in life for you.

May the friendships formed at Rhodes and rooted in shared experiences and memories sustain you and last you a lifetime.

We wish you much strength, courage, happiness, fulfilment and we wish you discernment.

To all of you, our graduands, Mazel tov!

*Appreciation….*

Let me conclude by conveying our heartfelt appreciation to the wonderful women and men who have worked tirelessly to make our graduation ceremonies possible. They normally work behind the scenes to ensure that our graduation ceremonies run without a hitch. These are the people who have worked extra hard to ensure that the names of our graduands appeared on the graduation programme, in the right place, in the right order and for the right qualification.

They wanted to be sure that the moment of glory of each one of our graduands was a truly memorable experience.

When you see these exceptional people around, please give them a bear hug, a smile and say a quiet ‘thank you’. They are truly special!

Asante sana. Enkosi. Ke a leboga. Ngiyabonga. Ke a leboha. Ndo livhuwa. Ngiyathokoza. Obrigado. Inkomu. Shukraan. Merci beaucoup. Baie dankie. Thank you very much.

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