GIVING FOR IMPACT

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

TAKING CONTROL AND UNDERSTANDING THE NOTION OF CONSENT

PRIMOR set to become a leader in scientific research

MERCEDES BENZ SA EMPOWERS

RHODES UNIVERSITY GOES GREEN

UNLOCKING THE CODE
Common Cancer linked to HIV/Aids

RAISING VOICES in Africa for Africa

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isivivane fund 2016-2026
THE CHALLENGE
It is becoming increasingly difficult for the University to meet the financial demands of a growing institution in a tumultuous climate of diminishing state support in the higher education sector. Our University relies heavily on student fees to maintain smooth operations, provide extensive support structures, and a residential environment that is conducive to good scholarship and collegiality.

OUR SOLUTION
ISIVIVANE FUND is an integrated fundraising campaign which seeks to not only raise funds but to also maintain and build lifelong relationships with key University stakeholders. The name is inspired by the Zulu proverb “ukuhlonhisa ithe esivivaneni” meaning “to throw one’s stone on the pile or monument” to make a personal contribution to a great common cause.

KEY OBJECTIVES
• Increase funding for undergraduate students
• Increase funding for postgraduate intake
• Maintain residences and dining halls
• Grow university endowment to ensure sustainability

Just as Rhodes University will never stop attracting the best students, we must also constantly reaffirm our commitment to making Rhodes University education accessible to everyone. It is our hope that you will see value in supporting this campaign.

For more information on the campaign please visit www.ru.ac.za/isivivane or email development@ru.ac.za

MESSAGE FROM THE FUNDRAISING OFFICE
In order for Rhodes University to thrive, we rely heavily on financial support from donors. Our research, community engagement and teaching and learning efforts are made possible by the provision of external funding.

Many inspirational stories of student funding fill these pages, such as Mercedes Benz’s scholarships for previously-disadvantaged female commerce students, the Thuthuka Bursary, which was set up by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SA-ICA) to assist academically strong black students excelling in mathematics, and Aspen Pharmacare’s assistance of financially-needy pharmacy students.

The University’s Institutional Development Plan (IDP) complements global and national goals, such as the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals and the South Africa National Development Plan chapters, which is highlighted by some of the stories in this publication. Consider the algae-based wastewater treatment system of Environmental Biotechnology Rhodes University (EBRU) and the tremendous work that is being done towards sustainable water methods at the Unilever Centre for Environmental Water Quality (UCEWQ).

Sustainability is a core focus of Rhodes University, identified through our IDP as one of the four development pillars, and it runs through almost everything we do. In this magazine, you can read about PRIMOR’s research on the sustainable use of iron and manganese, the CBC’s use of biological agents to control invasive plant species and the environmental Biotechnology Rhodes University (EBRU) and the tremendous work that is being done towards sustainable water methods at the Unilever Centre for Environmental Water Quality (UCEWQ).

Through your support of our research projects and bright young students, you can rest assured that you are contributing to the positive development of the country and the world.

As one of the foremost academic institutions in Africa, Rhodes University is a research-led university, and one of the pre-eminent research institutions on the continent. Some of our research centres of excellence range from computer science, journalism, physics and electronics to biotechnology, water research, biological control and environmental science.

Community engagement and engaged research, as you will see in this publication, forms a very important part of this research excellence. Our University is inextricably bound to the city it is located in, Makhanda (Grahamstown), and through several Vice-Chancellor inspired projects, Rhodes University is dedicated to uplift education within the community, the province and the country. You can read more about Dr Sizwe Mabizela’s vision on page 6.

Beyond uplifting the quality of life and educational standards of Makhanda, we are actively creating access between potential funders and our most deserving students through our Isivivane Fund. Isivivane’s main goal is to secure sufficient funding from donors and funders to ensure no academically capable but financially-needy student is refused entry to our University.

As one of the four development pillars, Sustainability is a core focus of Rhodes University, identified through our IDP as one of the four development pillars, and it runs through almost everything we do. In this magazine, you can read about PRIMOR’s research on the sustainable use of iron and manganese, the CBC’s use of biological agents to control invasive plant species and our Environmental Learning Research Centre.

An isiXhosa word, Ilima describes the notion of reciprocity and teamwork in the act of giving or helping someone in need. The concept suggests that your assistance is an act for the greater good and by helping, you will be assisted when the need arises.

So to all our existing donors: thank you, and to all new donors: thank you, everyone, and to all new donors: thank you, everyone, and to all new donors: thank you, everyone.
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“As an institution of higher learning we cannot sit and watch when young people amongst us are condemned to a life without hope; a life of despair because of the failure to provide them with the education they need and deserve. We must brighten the corner where we are!” – Dr Sizwe Mabizela, Vice-Chancellor, Rhodes University

Quality Education for All

The starkly unequal access to quality education in Makhanda (Grahamstown) is the inspiration behind Rhodes University’s VC Education Initiative. Statistics show that middle-class black learners at fee-paying schools have a three out of four chance of exiting the system with a good quality matric and thereafter entering a top university. By contrast, learners at “nonfee” schools have a less than a one in ten chance of reaching this level.

The Eastern Cape is one of the worst performing provinces when it comes to public education. Since 2007, except for two years in 2009 and 2010, the Eastern Cape has come last of all provinces in matric pass rates. Every single year its matric pass rate has been way below the national pass rate. In Makhanda, we have a collection of some of the best schools in the country interspersed with some of the most dysfunctional schools imaginable serving the majority of our young people,” said Rhodes University Vice-Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela.

The underlying problem is dysfunctional schooling, which has a range of consequences that condemn the learners to lives with few opportunities and prospects. The problem of youth unemployment is one of the most serious socio-economic issues facing contemporary South Africa, and it has its roots in the generally dysfunctional public schooling system. Rhodes University is the most significant institution in Makhanda; it is the biggest local employer and it serves as the educational hub around which the city functions.

When Dr Mabizela was inaugurated as the University’s 6th Vice-Chancellor in early 2015, he signalled that he would lead a University that would address the challenges of local young people and build a more inclusive City.

“As an institution of higher learning we cannot sit and watch when young people amongst us are condemned to a life without hope; a life of despair because of the failure to provide them with the education they need and deserve. We must brighten the corner where we are!” he proclaimed.

Having outlined the problem, Mabizela then suggested that Rhodes University should take some responsibility for addressing it.

Several projects fall under this initiative, including:

- Connecting pathways to learning in early childhood development and education
- Homework clubs: Rhodes University Education Faculty work at core primary schools
- Addressing ‘barriers to learning’
- Nine-Tenths
- High Impact Supplementary School (HISS)
- Virtual Learning Initiative
- Mobile Science Lab
- Supporting Rhodes University support staff to support their children
- Short course on leadership for public school deputy principals and heads of departments

Motivation Behind the Projects:

1. The future and sustainability of Rhodes University is intimately bound up in the future and sustainability of Makhanda. The University has both a responsibility and a degree of potential influence in the matter of schooling that sets it apart and imposes a special duty of leadership.

2. The more accessible Rhodes University is to the young people of Makhanda, the greater the influence it will have and the stronger the bonds of association with the entire community, eroding the dominant schooling culture of exclusion and despair.

3. The process of reviving schooling in Makhanda, if set up and developed with students at its heart, will lead – inexorably – to fundamental change. Student energy will be fundamental to the solution, powering a range of effective interventions and partnerships.

4. Schools are complex social organisms. Effective change can only take place in schools ready and willing to embrace it. The approach to reviving Makhanda’s schools cannot be a blanket, one-size-fits-all approach. It must be multi-pronged, multi-stage and multi-partner. This insists that resources be directed to where they can make the most difference - into the community at large to create a supportive environment and into those schools that display readiness organisationally and educationally. Such readiness is determined by the willingness of school leadership and a critical mass of parents and teachers to support and own it.

5. None of this change will happen overnight, but supporting the emergence of centres of excellence, school by school, will be the quickest and most sustainable route.
Mercedes-Benz South Africa is known for the manufacturing of luxury vehicles, coaches, buses and trucks. It is now emerging as one of the key players in supporting initiatives in higher education. The Eastern Cape arm of the German car manufacturer awarded over 50 scholarships and bursaries to students at Rhodes University to the value of R3 million. According to the University’s Dean of Commerce, Professor Dave Sewry, the enterprise gave very stringent criteria for the funding. He said the funding was destined mainly for previously-disadvantaged female South African students.

“The company insisted that the funds be used only to assist black female students with an average pass of not less than 65% in their course work. Qualifying candidates must come from Commerce, Education and the Social Sciences. In addition, these students should show proof that they need financial assistance. The University was advised to use the money only for tuition and books and not for accommodation and other social endeavours,” Sewry said.

Sewry led a faculty team to search through the records in an attempt to identify all qualifying students. After completing the shortlisting process, they invited students who made the cut for a brief interview to determine their financial standing. After the nail-biting process and careful consideration, deserving students were awarded in a ceremony held in East London. Recipients were amazed by the flawless process that unfolded as they were used to a long waiting process.

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Sewry expressed his delight for the bursary: “What makes me even happier is this is an Eastern Cape-based organisation, providing funds for students in an Eastern Cape based university.”

He said this initiative provides the much-needed relief on the already pressured government fiscus, as the demand for higher education increases.

Depending on the degree programme, some students have received up to R50 000. While most of the students secured tuition funding, others had extra money for books and stationary.

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Economies in Africa must grapple with dynamic local and global challenges, and economic journalists need to keep up. Guided by the notion that a healthy economy is central to democracy, the South African Reserve Bank Centre for Economic Journalism educates journalists to encourage responsible economic development on the continent.

In making a case for how business and the economy should be covered, the Director of the Centre for Economics Journalism (CEJ), Ryan Hancocks stated: “Financial and Economics journalism is critical for a healthy economy and it is the voice of the non-financial capital has historically come from the key Foreign Direct Investment it needs to drive growth and infrastructure projects on the continent, and while the capital has historically come from the east, we now see a new form of strategic investment coming from the east.”

The Centre is also engaged in research regarding the coverage of economics, business, and finance in Africa, looking at a wide range of topics including economic transformation and development. The continent is short of the research and teaching components also benefit from the Centre’s far-reaching networks with economic journalists, the business industry, government, and society. These partnerships make innovative resources available for journalists to improve their reporting. “The Centre is involved in tertiary, corporate, and government training. This allows for a strong connection of ideas and content between all sectors of society.” Hancocks noted adding that, “through this, we can offer content that is always at pace with global innovation in financial markets, such as data and specialist expertise. Our alumni network will continue to grow and become a space for idea generation, helping to establish an ethos of economic quality and empowerment on the continent.”

The Centre has partnered up with Bloomberg Media Initiative Africa (BMIA), and Hancocks said exciting new collaborative projects are in store for the future. Together with the Gordon Institute of Business and BMIA, the Economic Journalism Centre successfully hosted an innovative and world-class training programme over three years for top journalists and professionals to learn more about business journalism as it pertains to African economies and realities. “It is scare expert knowledge and training of this nature that the CEJ and Rhodes University School of Journalism will continue to offer with the support of Bloomberg and the SARB,” concluded Hancocks.

The Centre’s flagship programme is the Postgraduate Diploma in Economic Journalism (PgDip EJ), a two-year part-time course which is aimed at training journalism professionals or other professionals who would like to switch to or gain knowledge about economic journalism. This training can improve their career prospects in the industry. “In today’s market, with continued financial innovation and many interconnected global economic forces and monetary flows, a journalist needs to have as much and more knowledge than the bankers, regulators and governments in order to hold them accountable. The combination of this data-centric focus on following the trail of financial information and world class data access allows us to provide critical skills for journalists looking to be able to decipher the audit trail,” Hancocks explained. Previous experience in the media industry is required because the course builds on existing journalistic skills, but no background knowledge in economics is needed.

SARB has made available the prestigious SARB Scholarships in Economics Journalism. These are full scholarships awarded to students who are interested in economic journalism and who are embarking on any number of degrees within the School of Journalism and Media Studies, including the PgDip EJ. The funding is meant for development purposes in the Eastern Cape. As such, preference is given to female candidates originating from the Eastern Cape who have been previously disadvantaged, and who intend to contribute to community and economic journalism in the province.

The Centre has now seen the need to expand this offer to students who are embarking on any number of degrees within the School of Journalism and Media Studies, including the PgDip EJ. The funding is meant for development purposes in the Eastern Cape. As such, preference is given to female candidates originating from the Eastern Cape who have been previously disadvantaged, and who intend to contribute to community and economic journalism in the province.

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The Centre is able to draw on the intellectual and academic resources at Rhodes University, as well its own resources and networks. “Through its application via the press, this research helps to update and improve society’s interaction with the economic space,” added Hancocks.

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STRENGTHENING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH JOURNALISM

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The Centre, which is funded by the South African Reserve Bank (SARB), aims to improve media coverage of economics, business and development in Africa, starting with South Africa. It equips journalists with in-depth knowledge and skills which they can use to produce quality economic analysis and reporting. Indusivive, reflective, and critical journalism is key to holding business and government sectors to account when they do not act in the public interest. “Without this reporting, the population is left at the mercy of institutions both public and private,” said Hancocks.

Tackling a variety of topics including the role of financial markets, companies reporting, development, equality, and economic theory and policy, economic journalism can contribute to sustainable economic and social development on the continent. The modern financial journalist, Hancocks noted, “has crafted a space where all views, opinions, and interests of economic analysis and reporting. Inclusion of institutions both public and private,” said Hancocks.

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The Department of Accounting at Rhodes University secured an annual grant of R10 million from the Thuthuka Bursary Fund and the Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training (FASSET) Bursaries to fund two separate bursaries.

The Thuthuka bursary fund was set up by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) with the ambition of developing future Chartered Accountants to service the sector. The objective of the bursary is to train and introduce new players in the industry in order to level the playing field for previously disadvantaged students.

The fund is intended to support academically strong black students excelling in mathematics who wish to pursue a career in Chartered Accountancy in South Africa. It provides full bursaries of about R140,000 per student on an annual basis. This all-inclusive fund covers tuition fees, accommodation, meals, prescribed textbooks and stipends for the students.

The advantage of this funding is that it is guaranteed up to the end of the first year of postgraduate studies. This means that every student on a Thuthuka bursary is assured to graduate with at least an Honours Degree from the University. It is compulsory for the beneficiaries to pass their courses, because failure at any level of study disqualifies them from the continued financial support. The Thuthuka initiative is a national programme which has been running for over 15 years.

According to the Head of the Accounting Department, Professor Jackie Arendse, the department successfully graduated more than 30 students through this programme. She said the staff and the University were dedicated to keeping the programme running. In exchange, the University is committed to providing mentorship, support skills training and academic support to the students on the Thuthuka bursary.

One of the recipients of FASSET funding, Yolande Moyo explains how the funding assisted her: “FASSET assisted us with all the necessities needed for school. I never had to stress about books, stationary or food and I am really grateful for that.”

Another recipient, Lethabo Semetsi said that had he not received the FASSET bursary, he would have been roaming the streets of Makhanda. “Before I was on the FASSET bursary, my fees were being paid by my father, who could only afford to get me through my first year of studies. It was a struggle to get the textbooks I needed because they were costly and in addition to the residence and tuition fees. At the beginning of the year, I did not know where I was going to get the money to pay for my initial fee payment, as my father said that he could not afford to and my mother did not qualify for a sufficient loan in order to pay for my fees. To keep my dreams of a university education alive, she managed to pay just enough to secure me a place at the University at the beginning of the year.”

Jessica Ngwenya said her FASSET funding made her forget her difficult circumstances. She comes from a family of six and the household is dependent on her single mother. She acknowledged that the financial muscle from the funding gave her the required momentum to focus on her studies and her assigned life coach has been an additional blessing.

The bursary is performance-based and the University is required to refund the Seta for tuition costs if the throughput rate is less than 70%.

**BURSARIES TO TRANSFORM THE ACCOUNTING SECTOR**

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The Rhodes University Mathematics Education Project’s (RUMEP) recent 25-year anniversary celebration was sadly overshadowed by the initiative’s urgent need for funding. Speaking at the anniversary event Vice-Chancellor Dr Sizwe Mabizela said: “As an NGO attached to Rhodes University, RUMEP has remained at the forefront of mathematics education in the province. However, with rural schools in the Eastern Cape being the poorest in the country, we face huge challenges for teaching and learning, especially within the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines.”

RUMEP’s mission is to promote in-service teachers’ content knowledge, teaching and reasoning skills in mathematics that will enable them to be confident and competent in teaching the subject. It also seeks to support the continuous professional development of mathematics teachers through a variety of programmes in order to address the crises in mathematics teaching and learning. This will, in turn, help to produce graduates from rural and semi-rural backgrounds who are confident, resourceful and sufficiently skilled to guide and support other teachers of mathematics in a cluster of neighbouring schools.

A large part of RUMEP’s role is to continually raise funds to support and empower teachers of previously disadvantaged communities to attend and participate in a university-based specialized course. This is to address the crisis of under-qualified mathematics teachers in rural schools in the Eastern Cape Province. South Africa as a whole, but the Eastern Cape in particular, has long grappled with a lack of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving necessary mathematics pass rates. This in turn, continues to have a negative impact on the development of the country.

Although RUMEP has provided a solid service for a quarter of a century, recent classroom support visits showed learners still lack fundamental computational skills, content knowledge and language proficiency. RUMEP Director Tom Penlington said: “Further hindrances include student dependency on their knowledge of both mathematics as a language and the language used to teach mathematics.”

Inadequate resources such as poor infrastructure, lack of furniture and a lack of space, contribute to teachers being unable to teach mathematics effectively. Teachers either do not have the expertise or are unqualified to teach mathematics and, as such, often lack the confidence to teach it adequately. “RUMEP has worked with the remotest of schools because it is them that are forgotten,” said Penlington. Despite RUMEP’s efforts to improve teaching and learning, very little assistance has come from some of the Department of Education districts. Fortunately, however, departmental officials do assist and are very loyal to the programme. “We are grateful to all of our funders, but even so, this is not enough. Funding remains the biggest challenge at RUMEP,” Penlington concluded.

Our natural environment is a priceless part of our heritage: plants and soils help to purify water, forests act as natural carbon sinks, and all animals have a role to play in the food-chain. A healthy natural environment is vitally important for all eco-systems and it is our responsibility to protect it. This is what the Rhodes University’s Environmental Committee seeks to achieve.

“The aim of the Environmental Committee is working actively towards promoting the operations at Rhodes University to become more sustainable in the areas of energy, water, waste and travel,” explained Head of Economics at Rhodes University, Professor Hugo Nel, who is also the Chairperson of the Environmental Committee. The Committee operates in such a way that the projects are organised through working groups within the Committee. For the Committee to achieve certain goals within a given timeframe, they identify particular working groups which report to the committee on a regular basis and then implement each project.

“The working groups are the policy implementation working group which liaises within divisions of the University to promote sustainability. The second is the Green Fund Working Group which serves as a vehicle for fundraising to generate funding and resources to implement certain sustainability projects with a keen interest in energy,” said Nel.

Aligned to the global environmental goals which aim to conserve the natural environment, the Rhodes University Green Fund (RUGF) serves to encourage the Rhodes University and the greater Makhandana (Grahamstown) community to become a model of sustainability for the rest of South Africa. The objectives of the RUGF are to support learning and practice in respect of water, energy, waste, carbon footprint, biodiversity, green buildings, responsible purchasing, sustainable travel and sustainability education.

“An example of this would be the implementation of a grey water project,” said Professor Nel. “Another project we have implemented is a clean-up of the University’s rainwater tanks – a pilot project we implemented recently,” he added.

“Part of water sustainability at the University is to harvest more water and store more water to become a little bit more self-sufficient when there are water cuts,” Nel stated. “It is a pilot project, a very small way to work towards the practices that could improve the sustainability of water.”

Another important area to look at is energy, as the crux of the sustainability policy is to reduce the carbon footprint of the University. “We aim to reduce the extent to which we are reliant on electricity,” said Nel. Currently, the University is highly interested in investing in solar energy as an alternative energy form.

Much of the already implemented green initiatives on campus are centred on the residence system. “We no longer install boilers in the residences, we install heat pumps which are far more energy efficient. In fact, heat pumps result in a 60% reduction in electricity usage,” explained Executive Director of Infrastructure and Operations Division, Dr Iain L’Ange. “In the common areas, we have installed motion sensors so that the lights get turned off when there is no movement. They are also rolling out the replacement of incandescent and fluorescent bulbs with LEDs,” he said.

“We are in the process of investigating a scheme to move the whole campus onto solar power. Another area we have been exploring with Makana Municipality is the production of electricity using biomass,” said L’Ange.

The new environmental policy along with the energy policy aim to re-imagine the University’s practices and operations into more sustainable solutions.
What began as a pathfinder project for the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) telescope, the MeerKAT telescope is now one of the world’s leading projects for radio astronomy, and one of the most powerful radio telescopes in the world, and the most powerful telescope that can observe the Southern sky, picking up astrophysical signals that could not be detected before now. The MeerKAT project was conceived as part of South Africa’s bid for the SKA site, but quickly evolved to its current status as a solo project. When the SKA is eventually constructed, MeerKAT will be merged into it, giving it the power and capacity necessary to improve global understanding of space.

At Rhodes University, Professor Justin Jonas, who also holds the post of Chief Technologist at the South African Radio Astronomy Observatory (SARAO), is the main architect of the MeerKAT. The Chief Technologist, as well as the SARChI Chair Professor Oleg Smirnov said they are working on generating a continuous stream of discoveries about the cosmos in the coming decades. These discoveries will also improve human understanding of fundamental physics using the high spatial and frequency resolution of these telescopes. As a physicist himself, Jonas is excited to reengage with Einstein’s theory of gravitation along with the history and evolution of the universe. “The MeerKAT and SKA have provided Rhodes with direct access to the most powerful radio telescope in the world, and to most of the leading researchers and institutions in the world,” Jonas confirmed.

As academics, both professors collaborate with other scientists from around the world. Through a consortium of nations to bring human, technological, and financial resources together for the project. The SKA Organisation is made up representatives from Australia, Canada, China, France, India, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

However, although each of these nations contribute to the project, the main operations are South African led; meaning the people who provide most of the building materials, support, knowledge, and finances are from this country. Within South Africa, University of Cape Town, University of the Western Cape, University of KwaZulu Natal, University of the Witwatersrand, University of Pretoria, and North-West University and the University of the Free State all work in partnership with Rhodes University. So, to be able to say this is a homegrown project, worth global attention, is something Rhodes University and South Africa can be proud of. For students who choose to pursue their postgraduate studies at Rhodes University, there are incredible opportunities to grow as both academics and scientists. “We recently had 26 graduate students registered under RATT (the Centre for Radio Astronomy, Techniques & Technologies), which our group is known as, within the Department of Physics & Electronics), up from more typical numbers of 1-2 per year, which was the norm before the project started. We’ve also attracted a number of postdoctoral fellows, as well as four visiting professors. RATT has also established two new Research Fellow positions. So for a small university like ours, this has a huge impact on the teaching and research aspects,” Smirnov said.

As a University, Rhodes University endorses an interdisciplinary approach to community engagement. Projects such as this one can serve a dual purpose of discovering and educating. Smirnov shares that their biggest impact has been to educate the next generation of scientists, physicists, mathematicians, and data analysts. “Our students and staff have been active in public lecturing, contributing to teaching at disadvantaged schools, and teaching at events such as the SKA Science Camp in Carnarvon,” he said. “I think this is where having a project like MeerKAT makes a huge difference. It’s one thing for an astronomer to go to a school and deliver a lecture about stuff out there in the Universe, but it’s quite another to be able to say look, here’s MeerKAT, it’s a completely South African project you can all be proud of. It’s right there in the Karoo, and you can get involved too.” Moreover, the project has successfully integrated the local communities of the Karoo through the creation of employment opportunities and developing skills and understanding of science.

The MeerKAT, now a complete 64-antenna radio telescope since 2018, is preceded by great expectations. As the project progresses, many more antennae are expected to be built as a part of an increasingly more powerful system. While Smirnov shares his expectation that South Africa will “cement its position as a global hub for radio astronomy”, according to Jonas, “I have been able to fulfil a lifelong ambition to build radio telescopes. To have been the architect of the MeerKAT, one of the most powerful radio telescopes in the world and one of the largest scientific infrastructures across all disciplines, has been a fantastic experience, for which I am very grateful.”
ONE of the largest drug companies in Africa, Aspen Pharmacare, is in a bid to address challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment through education. The pharmaceutical company injected financial assistance to the Rhodes University students and one of such students is Koketso Moropa.

Moropa is a determined young man who grew up in a poor background, in a crime-ridden Daveyton community where drugs are prevalent among the young.

Despite these circumstances and being an orphan, Moropa had the courage to make a difference in the community by being a positive role model to the youth and teach them that poverty can only be defeated through education.

He wrote a heartwarming letter to Aspen Pharmacare thanking the institution for the support during his time at Rhodes University. He said: “I would not have obtained my tertiary education if it was not for Aspen Pharmacare. I would like to express my deep regard to them for intervening and offering a hand holistically and become a parent throughout my university life. Although I am not able to repay their kindness and assistance, I can offer my loyalty to the Aspen family by joining them in the near future. I couldn’t have got where I am without them.”

Aspen Pharmacare’s Senior Executive of Strategic Trade, Stavros Nicolaou said: “Aspen is a great believer that the best way of addressing our challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment is through education. Education leads to a more globally-competitive nation, where all its citizens can flourish. Koketso has proven to be an ideal role model and his ability to beat the odds so heavily stacked against him, have personally inspired many others like him, who like Koketso have got where I am without them.”

Preventing tomorrow's scientists today

Cell biology has been at the forefront of innovative research and scientific breakthroughs around the world, and South Africa is no different. Rhodes University’s cell biology expert and South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI), Associate Professor Adrienne Edkins, is leading research in cell biology, intersecting with biochemistry and molecular biology.

Edkins has inspired many students in pursuing a career as scientists. Scientists stand at the forefront of human discovery, and her research of the eukaryotic cells’ stress response presents no less than a multipotential breakthrough. “All organisms, from plants, bacteria to humans will have similar systems, but there are differences that make them able to be selective drug targets,” she said.

The SARChI-funded research projects are founded on both a fundamental and applied aspects. On the fundamental level, the research attempts to understand how healthy and diseased cells function under stress, and how the stress coping mechanism is modified between these two states. The applied aspect of the research looks at how to isolate and use the understanding of the mechanisms to promote future therapies in the field of breast cancer, and infectious diseases like tuberculosis (TB), malaria, and trypanozoon.

This aspect of the research compares the stress system between the human host and the infectious organism. In a country that faces a substantial burden of infectious diseases like TB, studying cells’ response to stress to create therapies is an important undertaking.

The postgraduate students led by Edkins engage, collaborate and innovate as a team and one of the main goals is that research conducted at the University feeds back into the wider community, both locally and nationally. “With research, it’s quite pressured. There are lots of deadlines, a lot of expectation, and although we are really trying to do work that has global impact, we obviously want to focus on issues faced in South Africa,” said Edkins.

The Department aims to develop a well-rounded scientist in each student – someone with not only specialised technical skills, but can also communicate science to people outside the field. The work done by students impact the department’s literature, patents, and reach in terms of improving student resources for the future. However, the catch lies in that the funded research conducted at the Department is governed by what the donor expects within a given timeframe. In science, projects take time to provide relevant, and well-validated results. The more progress Edkins makes as a Chair and Professor, the more options for funding the Department will have in the future, giving students the chance to take their research to the rest of the country, and to the world. “We believe that South Africa can have a position in the world as a global player and that obviously raises the bar in the expectation of what you have to try and produce,” she said.

In terms of community engagement, Edkins and her team of students work with school pupils from around the city, and at the annual SciFest exhibition, as contributors to building a better understanding of modern science and its importance. As the 2018 SAWSGA winner of the Distinguished Young Scientist in the Natural and Engineering Sciences, and through her interaction with Victoria Girls High School students, Edkins sees the rise of inspiration for women in science. She said that although this was not the sole intention of her award, the rise of young women and girls in science is heartening. Despite being eager to contribute actively to the community’s knowledge of science and her research, she admits that it is often difficult to transfer technical knowledge due to the niche area of research. This is where interactions between young learners and people outside the field help in the transfer process and acceptance of science as a way to combat social issues we face in the country.
RHODES UNIVERSITY TREATS WASTE-WATER USING ALGAE

The natural environment has an astounding ability to cope with small amounts of wastewater and pollution, but it would be overwhelmed if the billions of kiloliters of wastewater and sewage produced every day were not treated before releasing it back to the environment.

It is this sustainability and rehabilitation goal that Professor Keith Cowan and his team at Environmental Bio-technology, Rhodes University (EBRU) work towards.

Over the years, EBRU has developed the Integrated Algal Ponding System (IAPS), a wastewater treatment system, which uses the biological processes and micro-organisms found naturally in all sewage treatment processes to produce a high quality effluent.

The by-products of the system are energy from biomass, biomass to be used as fertiliser and effluent which are required for disinfection as the algae eliminates most of the E. coli.

Instead of water sludge, the IAPS produces a green fertiliser with high commercial value. Its big advantage is that it has other properties, it’s not just water that we are getting. You can use it as fertiliser, you can use it as a feed-stock, or you can use it as a biomass," explained Cowan.

Cowan advocates for remedial bio-technologies which establish ways to recover natural resources from it. And it is done through engaged research – from a catchment perspective," said Odume.

"We’ve realised that implementing IWRM in South Africa is quite difficult, and we have been investing a lot of effort, time and resources in to coming up with what is necessary to implement IWRM in South Africa," said Odume. In 2017, the IWR completed a project which showcased several ideas for implementing IWRM in South Africa.

"I think that our impact has been tremendous," said Odume. The IWR has been around for over 20 years now, and we are at the frontier of water research in sub-Saharan Africa."

On a national level, the IWR is active in contributing to policies and legislation, such as the National Water Act. "What is revolutionary about that Act is that for the first time in history, we have rights assigned to the natural environment that say the natural environment has a right to water. And the pioneering of that idea actually came from this Institute," explained Odume.

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The IWR has contributed to building and strengthening Africa's internal capacity to deal with her water challenges, instead of relying on external parties. "We can build capacity from within, through collaboration, and retain and use that capacity to address the challenges that confront us as a people," Odume explained.

Within the wider Makana area, the Institute has also facilitated the establishment of the very first Water and Sanitation Forum in South Africa. "This is the first forum where water resources and sanitation services blend together to form one forum. And it is done through engaged research with the municipality," Odume said.

Studies show that although 71% of the earth’s surface is covered in water, only 2.5% is fit for human consumption.

The Unilever Center for Environmental Water Quality (UCEWQ) within the Institute for Water Research (IWR) at Rhodes University works to ensure that water is being used sustainably.

According to Dr Nelson Odume, Senior Researcher and Director of UCEWQ, “The main focus of the IWR is sustainable water resource management, strengthening capacity in terms of training Masters and PhD students through research that impacts those living in sub-Saharan Africa, and more recently, globally. UCEWQ’s primary research focus is water quality issues as they relate to ecosystems, sustainability and society.”

Unilever SA has been a key funding partner of the UCEWQ, explained Odume. The Centre and Unilever SA have partnered on a number of projects, including the Water For Dignity initiative and a project which aims to understand the effects of detergent on water resources.

The Water For Dignity project was anchored on the realisation that human dignity is linked to access to good quality water. Through the project, which was partly-funded by Unilever SA, 25 litre containers were distributed to people so that they could have potable water during outages in Makanya (Grahams town).

More recently, the Center began research into Adaptive Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM). "Globally, IWRM recognises that in order to manage water resources sustainably, water has to be considered holistically - from a catchment perspective," said Odume.

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Iron and manganese ore form an integral part of South Africa’s mineral resource base. Studying these deposits holistically in order to ensure their sustainable use is an important task. The purpose of the Postgraduate Research in Iron and Manganese Ore Resources (PRIMOR) unit at Rhodes University was founded to do that and much more.

With core funding from ASSMANG Ltd, one of South Africa’s leading mining companies, PRIMOR was founded in 2014. PRIMOR operates within Rhodes University’s Geology Department with the primary goal of providing a hub for world-class research and training of geoscience graduates at all levels of post-graduate study (Honours to PhD), with chosen focus on the economic geology of iron and manganese.

According to Professor Harilaos Tsikos, the founder of PRIMOR, rocks that contain a high amount of iron and manganese seem to have developed at a very special time in the history of the planet. “We are getting to the point where we can argue that the South African deposits hold the answer to when and how the Earth started to become oxic (i.e. contain free oxygen). These rocks are telling a story of how the Earth evolved to what it is today.”

Approximately 2.4 billion years ago, the first major event of atmospheric oxygenation is thought to have taken place. This is widely known as the Great Oxidation Event (GOE). Xolane Mhlanga, a PhD student at PRI MOR, has been able to precisely constrain the partitioning of iron and manganese among individual mineral species in rocks that record the GOE. His research plays a pivotal role in the detailed reconstruction of the physical and chemical parameters that controlled the primary deposition of iron and manganese in the Earth’s early oceans. It therefore provides crucial new constraints for the evolution of oxygen in the ancient atmosphere-ocean system through time. PRIMOR aims to conduct this and many other high-impact research projects that help shape how people see the world they live in.

PRIMOR is currently conducting research in the Northern Cape, where mining makes up about 23.4% of the economy and contributes nearly 7% of South Africa’s total mining value.

The Northern Cape has two major ore belts, from Postmasburg to Hotazel. The Kalahari Field, west of Kuruman, contains around 80% of the world’s high-grade manganese ore reserves. The Kathu/Postmasburg Field produces more than 85% of South Africa’s iron ore. But iron and manganese ore are not only good for mining. Stephen Dorbor, one of the students working under PRIMOR, focuses his research on the iron and manganese-rich Hotazel Formation in the Kalahari Field. “We sampled these rocks in an effort to query some of the theories regarding their complex origin, and refine them where necessary,” he said.

Dorbor’s love for geology was inspired by his father who also studied geology at Rhodes University. “When I do research, I always think about how I can take it back home. I want to help as many students as I can. I want to help as many students as I can. Liberia has a lot of mineral deposits and research into them could potentially create jobs and help improve the lives of many people,” he added.

Dorbor also plans to work in the field of mine rehabilitation. Mine rehabilitation is the process of returning land back to some degree of its former state after mining has been concluded. Poorly rehabilitated mines leave a host of problems for communities living nearby. Properly rehabilitating mines contributes to the sustainable development of not only the community, but the entire nation.

Tsikos is grateful to ASSMANG Ltd for the funding that keeps PRIMOR functioning successfully. “It has, in a fundamental sense, provided students with the means to engage in research,” said Tsikos. “Through PRIMOR, we have established a brand and we have been able to market the research unit and the university. Our students are exposed to international opportunities and collaborations. This allows them to exchange knowledge on a global level and to bring back skills and knowledge to South Africa and the rest of the continent.”

PRIMOR’s existence is a testament to the possibilities that await not only academics, but also school children who have a love for the sciences. The tools that PRIMOR provides to scholars allows them to play an important role in the economic and social development of the country. PRIMOR aims to reach new frontiers in science research, an important aspect of sustainable development in the context of scientific innovation.
The organisation has also estimated that although almost 800 million people are currently hungry, by 2050 global food production would need to increase by 50% to feed the more than 9 billion people projected who live on our planet.

The 2006 United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimates that 300 million out of the 800 million who live on the African continent live in a water-scarce environment. Specifically in the very north of Africa, as well the very south of Africa, the rising global temperatures accompanying climate change have intensified the hydrological cycle that leads to drier dry seasons, thus increasing the risk of more extreme and frequent droughts. This significantly impacts the availability, quality and quantity of water.

Rhodes University’s Centre for Biological Control (CBC) has risen to these challenges by working to reclaim water security threatened by invasive plant species. An increase in water availability would mean more food, better health and ecosystems that are more balanced.

Led by Distinguished Professor Martin Hill, the CBC is involved in the development of biological control agents in their Department of Agriculture approved quarantine facility. They also manage the mass-rearing and implementation of the insects once they have been cleared for release. The two mass-rearing facilities, one in Grahamstown/Makhanda and the other in Uitenhage, contribute substantially to the control of invasive species in South Africa and beyond its borders.

The CBC’s work on invasive species is part of a Rhodes University-led national consortium of universities, included in the consortium are the including University of Cape Town, University of KwaZulu-Natal, University of the Free State, University of Mpumalanga, Wits University, as well as the Agricultural Research Council.

Funded by the Department of Environment Affairs to the value of R78m, the three-year project is one of the largest partnerships the University has ever secured. In addition to the financial support from the government, the Centre also receives support from the agriculture industry, a direct beneficiary of the research conducted by the CBC.

In a demonstration of engaged research, the CBC works with approximately 40 postgraduate students each year with some of the academics in the centre also involved in undergraduate programmes. The Centre’s mass-rearing facilities employ members of the communities in line with Rhodes University’s community engagement focus – with particular focus on the recruitment of people living with disabilities. In addition, the CBC works closely with local schools in a bid to create and grow awareness about biological control of alien invasive species, and actively engages with the subject on the subject of invasive species and biological control.

“Invasive plant species present a much bigger problem than people realise. With this project, we hope to spread not only our biological control agents, but awareness to all South Africans about the devastating effects the propagation of these non-indigenous plants have on the ecosystem and biodiversity of natural habitats,” said Hill.

SOLVING THE INVASIVE PLANT PROBLEM

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SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH EDUCATION

What to do about the reality of water scarcity, the threat of famine, growing disease burdens and other effects of climate change? How to protect our wildlife and beautiful landscapes, while giving all citizens access to decent and sustainable livelihoods? These are questions academics at Rhodes University have grappled with for decades, back to when Africa’s first Chair in Environment and Sustainability Education was established in the Education Faculty in 1992.

Professor Eureta Rosenberg, the current incumbent to the Chair explained, “The solutions to these environmental issues are complex and we all have to play our part. Our contribution here at the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) is to focus on the social learning needed to work out the solutions - on an ongoing basis. We conduct research and prepare teachers and other educators, who, in turn lead environmental learning in society.”

According to Rosenberg, working with such a range of educators and education planners is a powerful way to have a profound impact with limited resources.

“While it is difficult to quantify the long-term impact of educational change, we do know that the ELRC has been influential at a local, national and regional level. In Makhanda (Grahamstown) and the Eastern Cape, for example, we’ve encouraged teachers to set up Eco-Schools projects, and we’ve resourced the national programme for decades.”

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Educating university students about sustainability issues is one of the best strategies for shaping a better future, since these are tomorrow’s leaders in government, industry and communities.

Distinguished Professor Heila Lotz-Sisitka, holder of the SARChI Chair in Social Learning and Global Change at the ELRC, regards the Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in African Universities (MESA) project as one of the most influential projects that the ELRC has led in recent years. Supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Education, Culture and Science Organisation (UNESCO), this project’s vision was to “mainstream environmental education and sustainability into African universities, across curricula, disciplines, university activity and higher education policy”.

In the first ten years of its existence as a flagship programme of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2004-2014) in Africa, 106 universities participated in the programme from 23 countries in Africa. A further 50+ universities from 12 countries in Asia joined the programme in its latter years when the MESA programme expanded to a global initiative of UNEP.

Each participating university has implemented at least one ‘Change Project’ to expand their environment and sustainability offerings in the higher education system.

More recently, this project has expanded to focus on teacher education, and new partnerships with the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) and UNESCO’s Regional Office for Southern Africa catalysed a Sustainability Starts with Teachers project with 60 Teacher Education Institutions in 2017 developing curriculum innovations. This initiative is now expanding via extended funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) into a R43 million project which supports educators in southern Africa to introduce sustainability topics across school subjects.

Over the years, the project has reached, and continues to reach, thousands of students across the African continent.

Rhodes University’s Professor Lotz-Sisitka has played a leading role, providing ongoing research and curriculum design support, convening and teaching courses, designing materials and conducting and supporting innovative evaluations.

A toolkit developed out of the programme offers one of the few tools for reviewing sustainability practices in Higher Education in Africa. Lotz-Sisitka said, “I have worked with so many inspiring and leading academics in Africa and Asia on the project over the years.” The project has been a major contributor to the scholarship and focus of the ELRC.

“It has also been rewarding to see many young people benefitting from the curriculum innovations designed through this large scale participatory programme which is now almost in its 15th year,” she said.

At the start of the programme, very few higher education institutions in Africa were giving attention to environmental and sustainability issues. Today, the story is different.

“Environment and sustainability is being taught in disciplines as diverse as science, sociology, psychology, education, law, journalism and more, across the continent,” said Lotz-Sisitka.

The work of the ELRC has helped showcase how academic staff development and organisational learning are important for creating sustainable universities and societies. As a result, UNESCO has made this a strong focus of the follow up work after the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development. Not least because of this work, Education for Sustainable Development has now also been included as a target in the global sustainable development goals.

MESA HOTSPOTS

The MESA partnership has provided a broader context for our work and has opened opportunities for collaboration more widely in Africa”. MESA Professor, 2007

This diagram shows the policy and practice outcomes of the MESA ITP programme in Africa and Asia over a 5-year period only (2008 - 2014)

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UNLOCKING THE CODE
COMMON CANCER LINKED TO HIV/AIDS

The awarding of a R2 million cancer research grant to Rhodes University’s Professor Adrienne Edkins may have brought us a step closer to unravelling the complex HIV/AIDS-related cancer that has not been properly studied in South Africa until now.

Kaposi sarcoma (KS) is most common among people infected with HIV/AIDS and is an area where Professor Edkins, has focused her research - leading to her being awarded the Newton Advanced Fellowship from the Royal Academy of Sciences in the UK.

Edkins is the Director of the Biomedical Biotechnology Research Unit and is also a South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair for Molecular and Cellular Biology of the Eukaryotic Stress Response.

We were able to get some grants to establish collaboration with a leading group at Leeds University in the UK and this is to look at a type of cancer that is associated with HIV. This cancer is called Kaposi Sarcoma and it is considered an AIDS defining cancer and it’s linked with another virus called human herpesvirus 8 (Kaposi’s sarcoma-associated herpesvirus or KSHV). It’s a specific type of cancer which is linked to HIV and it occurs on your skin or on your mucous membranes.

“It is made from the type of cells that make blood vessels in your body. So these tend to be very dark-coloured tumours. It causes skin and blood cancers. This virus can infect certain cell types in your body and in some of them it can cause cancer,” said Edkins.

Edkins says their research on the virus is quite unique. “My group is interested in studying how cells cope with stress. If you think about humans, we are multi-cellular organisms, so we have millions and billions of cells in our bodies. They all have to integrate and talk to each other and they have to function in unison. So every cell has its particular function and it has to do that properly,” she said.

Cancer, said Edkins, is driven by mutations. “Genetic mutations destabilise many proteins. So you’ve got this kind of cocktail of destabilisation in environmental stress that means that a system that would normally function to help you becomes hijacked by the cancer cells in order to allow them to survive.

“In terms of the context of cell stress, viruses have their own proteins which are essential because viruses are the simplest form of life. A virus needs a host cell and it needs to hijack all the machinery from the host cell that it doesn’t have in order to propagate itself.

“KSHV is a very big virus so it’s got quite a lot of proteins... We had some preliminary data which is the subject of these grants to say that one of the proteins we’ve done a lot of research in over the years trying to understand it in other systems and understand it in just normal cell biology, it looks like this protein is required for virus production. We are asking how does it do that?” she said.

Edkins then unpacked the project. “So there are two arms of this project. One is to look at trying to understand the biological pathways of the virus, and two, to look at whether we can develop inhibitors to this protein that will take out the virus but not the normal cells. Majority of virus infected cells require the virus for growth so if you take out the virus you cure the cancer.

“In Sub-Saharan Africa we have a very high level of people with KSHV infection so we get it probably in childhood. We’re dealing specifically with viruses that cause the cancer, either to treat it or to improve current treatment. We also need to understand it because not everybody who gets HIV gets KSHV. We don’t know why some people get it and some people don’t. For some people antiretrovirals (ARVs) are very good in controlling KS as well but for others with KS, when they start with ARVs their immune response can be fatal,” she said.

Much of the research that has been done has been on the most prevalent types of cancers - breast, colon, lung and cervical cancers.

In October 2019, Edkins and two Masters students jetted off to the UK to link up with Professor Adrian Whitehouse, an expert on the virus, based at Leeds University. They will return with cell-lines, as work is underway to set up a facility to grow the cells at Rhodes University.

Growing the cells at Rhodes University bodes well for the country’s research capacity. “Having the cells here means that we can start to dissect the biology of the virus and use these as easily accessible tools for our drug discovery. So we can for example compare how effective this compound is against a normal cell and a cell with a virus in it. You don’t want to kill off all your normal cells, you want something that specifically targets this and not that.

“We still don’t understand much about this cancer. It was prevalent in America and a lot of researchers in this area are in the States and two in the UK.

There’s very few of us in Africa and a lot of the work has been done by those scientists using model systems in their countries, using our patient samples. It’s important that African scientists get involved in this because we’re the ones that are going to benefit.”
The Rhodes University Community Engagement Office (RUCE) serves as one of the core pillars of higher education along with teaching, learning and research. Universities exist for the public good and this national mandate challenges Higher Education Institutions to reimagine themselves, become responsive to society and play a critical role in the shaping of a new, more equitable and prosperous society.

It is this purpose that drives Community Engagement Director, Diana Hornby, and her division to form strategic partnerships between Rhodes University and the wider community.

RUCE recognises the importance of joint solutions and therefore adopts a participatory model where community groups become part of the knowledge-making process. The academic endeavours of a University play a key role in tackling intractable problems faced nationally and on the African continent. “When we talk of participatory ways, we talk of working alongside the community and researching with them, rather than for them. This is a shift from the traditional and sometimes extractive ways of undertaking research to recognising the capabilities of others and building on what they already have towards joint solutions. This win-win approach strengthens the academic project as well as the community groups who realise their own leadership and potential to drive development from the inside out, rather than waiting on someone outside to advise and lead,” Hornby explained.

To encourage strategic engagement Rhodes University has established three centres of focused learning: The Assumption Development Centre (ADC), Joza Youth hub located in Joza and the Digital Storytelling Lab. ADC was established on the premises of what was previously the Assumption Clinic. After researching how best to use the space to benefit the community it was decided to create a hub of focused learning around economic development with an ambitious goal of re-inventing the township economy of Joza.

“ADC is an international project involving six South African universities and six international universities to create a social innovation platform so that people can share their social innovation solutions and inspire others. Coupled with that is the EU Erasmus+, Common Good Project, who have funded an IT lab. This community hub on campus makes the University even more accessible. The lab allows free internet access for community partners and advanced equipment for the teaching of digital storytelling and other IT courses.”

It is this mutually-beneficial relationship because we provide a space that allows some of the students and lecturers to learn from us as a Centre. But mainly to close this gap between community and township. We learn from each other and useful knowledge is produced from this relationship.”

Vice-Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, described these initiatives as critical elements of a University experience as they contribute to the development of knowledgeable, socially conscious and empathetic human beings who go on to play key roles as significant citizens in a democratic society.
MENTORS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Trojan Academic Initiative (TAI) programme has played a vital role over the last few years in the transformation agenda at Rhodes University. This programme, which started in 2003, forms part of the Extended Studies Unit (ESU) at the University. It offers socio-economic support through student-peer mentoring to first-year students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The TAI was developed out of a need to meet the post-1994 objectives of higher education: to promote inclusive education and consider the questions of gender, race, class, and inequality.

“At Rhodes University, one of the transformation objectives is to ensure that the University is accessible to everyone, not only those from elite schools, irrespective of race, class or gender,” TAI programme coordinator, Masixole Booi said.

First-year students from disadvantaged backgrounds get overwhelmed academically, socially and culturally when they get to the universities. The TAI programme provides a mentor for each Extended Studies student and is intended to make the mentees feel a sense of belonging. “The mentors assist mentees to curb alienation or exclusionness. This is because some people are not familiar with the University culture and it can be quite a culture shock, which often leads to high levels of dropouts each year,” said Booi.

Close to 80% of the students who are part of the mentee programme become mentors after completing the programme. They offer their support based on their own experiences and all faculties are catered for. The programme is structured as a conversation between the mentee and the mentor and aims to benefit both individuals. It provides the mentees with guidance through the transition from school to university, while ensuring that the students have access to equal opportunities. “Examples of the assistance that participants Extended Studies Programme get assistance with include Computer Studies and English skills,” added Booi.

Another objective of the programme is to assist students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds to get into University. Booi believes that there is still much to be done in addressing inequality among students at the University. “Some students have never seen a computer in their lives and they grapple with the language. The TAI programme offers guidance to such students.”

The TAI is funded primarily by Investec, the Orpen family and The Department of Higher Education and Training. However, Booi thinks it is important for every business to invest in a programme such as the TAI, as no business can exist without a functioning, stable education system. “The more you invest in education, the more you create a situation whereby people from disadvantaged backgrounds can attend university. Businesses need to invest in diversity, and this programme enables that,” concluded Booi.

FUTURE LAWYERS IN THE MAKING

The Rhodes University Law Faculty prides itself in excellence and producing quality graduates each year. The faculty recognises exceptional graduands through the Law Graduation Prizes in various categories, which are donated by loyal patrons such as Baker McKenzie, Cliff Dekker Hofmeyer, Bowman Gilfillan, and Spoor and Fisher.

The initiative was started by Pierce Rood, a Rhodes University alumnus and founding partner of the Baker McKenzie partnership, by continuously donating a prize in his personal capacity. Baker McKenzie eventually took over the donation of the prize, and has been the Law Graduation Prize’s longest standing donor. The Baker McKenzie prize is rewarded to Law students for academic excellence. It awards R10 000 to the top students in legal theory for first, second and third year, and the best LLB student in their penultimate year.

The Law Graduation Prizes comprise of over 20 prizes with both bursary and scholarship opportunities, donated by firms and old alumni. One of these is the Bowman Gilfillan Prize, which awards R5 000 to the best student in Corporate Law. Another gracious donor is the Spoor & Fisher Prize, which awards R2 500 to the best student in Intellectual Property Law. The Mtshali and Sukha Prize is also one of significant value. “We were the first University to start offering legal ethics and professional responsibility as a compulsory course a couple of years ago,” said Dean of Law, Professor Rosaan Kruger. “In an attempt to provide an incentive to students, two of our alumni agreed to sponsor this prize, in the interests of enhancing ethics within the legal profession.” The 2017 prize was awarded to Babyn Clarkson.

The vast amount of prizes and generous lump sums attached to these awards, provides law students with great incentive and set as a basis for them to develop a tenacious work ethic and mindset. In some instances, the cash assists the students to resolve some financial issues as they pay their way through university. However, the partnership between the donors and the University benefits both students and law firms. According to the Dean, “It’s useful to the firms because they invest in quality law graduates.”

Kruger noted that “some of these partnerships have existed for many years and we truly value them. For them the benefit is an investment in quality legal education and academic excellence for the greater part, and for contribution to the greater good in society.”

The initiative to produce quality lawyers and other legal personnel is another priceless contribution into the legal space and for the country’s growing democracy. For example, we have seen the judges and the courts intervened in calling out other arms of government to sit up as in the case of local grants payments, calling political parties to book and even asking cabinet members to account for executive maladministration.
A SEAT AT THE WORLD TRADE TABLE

“I needed something that would help with my career prospects and to help develop my career. I didn’t really know what area of law I wanted to do, and this opportunity helped me decide,”

Trade policies affect all South Africans, making the WTO an important part of the national development agenda. According to the World Integrated Trade Solution, South Africa currently exports 74 billion US Dollars’ worth of goods, making exports 30% of the country’s GDP.

Nkosazana Dweka, a candidate attorney and an LLB graduate from Rhodes University participated in the competition in 2016. She won a scholarship to pursue an LLM at the University of Barcelona. “I got the opportunity to sit with people at the forefront of international trade at the WTO,” she said.

With gratitude to the funders of the competition, Dweka added that the competition provides the ideal opportunity for African law students to get involved in international trade. “Anyone you speak to will tell you that there aren’t enough Africans representing our interests on the international stage. We need competitions like this one to continue and grow.”
I t’s 5:30 am, and in the silence of the pre-dawn hours, a group of rowers begin their steady march towards the water with a boat over their heads. Today is more relaxed with a mix of the more experienced rowers and some novices. They gracefully flip a 13-metre racing shell from overhead into proper alignment along the water. Locking in their boats, gingerly settling into seats, and strapping in shoes, they push slowly off into the dim early morning light of the Kowie River.

The Rhodes University Rowing Club (RURC) cultivates skilled rowers, community, and grit.

According to the rowing club president, Kristen Walker, rowing is a competitive sport and requires intense training. “But it is also fun, and a beautiful sport because you can be taught and learn how to row quickly. You don’t necessarily need natural ability and you don’t have to row pretty to be fast,” said Walker.

The club, which has been buzzing with activity since 1934, opens its doors to rowers of all levels, from novices to the more experienced, providing training, equipment, and support. “Many students who did not resonate with other sports tried out rowing and absolutely loved it. The majority of the rowers in the club did not play the sport at school. It has taught them invaluable skills such as time-management, commitment, teamwork, community, and perseverance,” added Walker.

Walker said passion for rowing and the Rhodes University rowing community lasts long after members leave the University. She expressed her profound gratitude to the club’s alumni community, who play an integral part in the club through funding and support, and are involved in some of the club’s social events throughout the year. “The RURC is a like a living, breathing thing with a past and a future, and having the opportunity to be a part of its journey is really quite a privilege,” reminisced alumus member Sam Vosper, who has been integral in organising alumni funding for the club.

Assistant Manager of Sports Administration at Rhodes University, Emlyn Gallant, said: “You get more out of the sport than rowing, it’s not just sweating and training hard. You make long-lasting bonds. These relationships are nurtured through rowing across oceans. Through competitions, you make connections all over the world.”

This zeal for physical fortitude, commitment, and community are values which the club tries to share with others through their outreach work. The club is involved in the rowing component of the Nelson Mandela Township (Nemato) Youth Empowerment and Sports Project in Port Alfred. “Rowing and sport are something the children really enjoy. It can keep them out of trouble, because they have something to focus on, and they can see that someone is investing in them,” said Walker. The club contributes by teaching children how to row, and every year when the rowing team goes to the National Rowing Championships in Johannesburg, they take a few of the Nemato rowers with them and sponsor their trip.

The club also takes part in the Rhodes University Community Engagement’s initiatives by teaching sports skills to young boys and girls from the Eluxolweni Child & Youth Centre in Grahamstown. Former club members Thomas Lungu, Micheen Thornycroft and Malike Diekmann also took part in RowZambezi, a 900-kilometre rowing exploration on the waters of Zambia’s Kafue River. This project aims to raise funds for clean water research and conservation.

Thornycroft also won the prestigious international Filip-pi Spirit Award in 2017 for her rowing excellence and outreach and is committed to promoting women’s rowing. Through the award, she has donated a boat to the club intended for a women’s eight team. The club also aspires to promote women’s rowing, often facing national sporting requirements for gender quotas.

The club’s dedication to the sport is reflected in its numerous successes. Despite being a part of a relatively small university, rowing members continue to flourish at national and international competitions. Diekmann learnt how to row through the club and has since represented her home country, Namibia, in various rowing competitions including the World Championships and the African Championships.

Port Alfred-born Rowing Club member Bradley Betts has represented South Africa on numerous occasions, recently winning a bronze medal in the heavyweight men’s doubles rowing race at the Fisu World University Championships in China. In 2016, he came fourth in the World Rowing Under 23 Championships in the Netherlands. Betts and Murray Bales-Smith of the Rowing Club have also competed as a men’s double team at the Head of The Charles Regatta in Boston, USA, where they won the Collegiate Medal for the fastest undergraduate double.

The club has also had successes locally, competing against other universities throughout the country. The Rhodes University’s Men’s four and eight teams had recent victories at the University Sports South Africa Sprints Regatta, and the Men’s eight team did well in the A-final over 6km at a recent Boat Race in Port Alfred.

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His research interest focuses on the appreciation, preservation, and promotion of the African culture through the visual arts. Ijisakin’s research specifically looks at printmaking and how prints become a social matrix, as they often reflect cultural images and symbols.

Another of Simbao’s team members, Dr. Stephen Folaranmi, is an artist and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts at Obafemi Awolowo University Ilé-Ife, Nigeria. His research interests include Yoruba Art Studies, African mural Art, African Architecture and Public Art. “He comes from a royal family within Nigeria,” explained Simbao. “He has a really strong focus on architecture and he has been looking at certain carved posts in this royal palace. He has a particular interest in language as well, and he analyses particular objects in relation to language and proverbs.”

Simbao explained that ultimately, her research aim is to building relationships through art. “To me, it’s all about building relationships on the ground and how we sustain these relationships.”

Arts of Africa and Global Souths comprises the SARChI research programme (Geopolitics and the Arts of Africa), supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF) in South Africa, and the Publishing and Research of the South: Positioning Africa (PROSPA) research programme funded by the Andrew W Mellon Foundation.

As the SARChI Chair in Geopolitics and the Arts of Africa, Professor Ruth Simbao’s research interests include contemporary art with a particular focus on Africa, the geopolitics of art and society, geopolitics in relation to biennialisation, ‘strategic southernness’ and the Global South.

“Having trained in the United States for my PhD, I have seen how Africa has been and continues to be seen externally and written about from outside of Africa. I think that this underpins a recent move to interrogate geopolitical ideas regarding what knowledge is produced, by whom, where it is situated and where the frameworks and lenses we are looking through are,” said Simbao.

Simbao explained that by doing this, the visibility of scholars based on the African continent increases. “This way, voices on the continent are not subsumed, controlled and steered by the north.”

According to the Professor, the idea behind ‘veering south’ is not just that the north is ‘waking up’ to what is happening, but it is an acknowledgment that people within Global South are at the cutting edge of knowledge creation.

By focusing on Africa and the Global South, Simbao and her team have made phenomenal inroads to lifting up the voices of scholars on the African continent.

Professor Simbao fondly speaks of Dr Rachel Baasch, who began her journey at Rhodes University, and who now holds a PhD and teaches a course in the Fine Arts Department. Baasch spent 10 months in Ramallah in the Occupied Palestinian West Bank, where she conducted research for her PhD thesis Visual Narratives of Division: South African and Palestinian Intersections. Her study discusses the way in which artists talk back to, and potentially subvert, defensive aesthetics and dominant narratives of division. “Some of her research connected to South African issues of spatial constructions of division with the legacy of apartheid,” explained Simbao.

Dr Eyitayo Toluolope Ijisakin, who has also worked as part of Professor Simbao’s team, received his PhD in African Art Studies in 2016 from the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University Ilé-Ife, Nigeria, where he also lectures.

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His research at Masters level, sought to develop novel biotechnical ways that would lead to new technology that could clean water. He describes the process he had to follow while doing the study “as a lot of trial and error… until we discovered that ‘oh wait, this actually works’.”

The invention is now at a point where they have patented it. Mfuku said he is proud of what he and his team have achieved so far. The invention is at 80% ready to go to the market but obviously we still need to do further tests to ensure that everything is still on point. We are working with engineers from Jo’burg. It’s a lot of teamwork,” said Mfuku.

His has been a long journey, which started with Mfuku thinking that he would study to become a pharmacist. But he ended up taking the biotechnology route upon his arrival at Rhodes University six years ago. Born as a middle child in a family of five, Mfuku said he had always been independent as “no one takes note of me just because I am a middle child. The focus is always on the first and the last born”.

To get the attention from the adults, he would ask inquisitive questions from a very young age. “All I can say is that I have always been curious. So I have always been that child who needs extra information. Even when I order my pizza, I always ask for extra cheese,” he quips, with a laugh.

“I think that is how I got interested in things because I always wanted to know the fundamental information. That is how I gravitated towards science in my high school years,” he said.

Mfuku said he is proud of what he and his team have achieved so far. The invention is in line with the university’s focus on engaged research which involves finding solutions to problems facing communities around Makhanda.

“When I did Biotechnology I was just very excited about this project,” he said. He quipped that his academic progress has also helped him get the attention he so wanted growing up as a middle child. “When my parents took me to varsity, it was just a case of ‘oh yes, he is at varsity now, let’s focus on others’. The support was there but was not enough. But now that they (parents) can see that I’m doing something for our people, they are interested in everything I do. That’s the attention I never received as a child. So I am very excited about this project,” he said.
TAKING CONTROL AND UNDERSTANDING THE NOTION OF CONSENT

She said the scholarship is based on open debate and discussion about social issues. “I told myself that this is a perfect space for me to be in as well as to travel,” she said.

Ndaba said during the interview for programme, the panel included Rhodes University Vice-Chancellor Dr Sizwe Mabizela and participants were asked about current affairs issues and how they think they would come up with solutions. “Basically they were testing our awareness of social issues and ability to respond to them,” she said.

Ndaba promised to continue teaching young people about consent and issues around gender-based violence.

She said she felt it was important to teach young people about what consent was, from a young age, “because if we do not start these conversations now, then people carry these thoughts and mentalities to universities and we have universities where rape culture is so prevalent and people have normalised it so much that when you say no that is not consent they look at you as if you are saying something wrong,” she said.

She said the programme was community service, leadership and entrepreneur based. “We were taught how to write proposals, how to start up NGOs and getting involved in community services,” she said.

The 22-year-old honours student in dramatic arts said, her idea was inspired by the high rate of rape statistics in the country as well as gender-based violence at institutions of higher learning. “I then decided to work on a project that will educate high school pupils that being in a relationship with someone does not mean you own them. We will always emphasise that no means no, whether it’s loud or soft,” she said.

After returning from an exchange programme in the United States, Siphesihle Ndaba started working on a theatre production to sensitise pupils about the importance of consent before they reach the university level.

Titled Consent the production features pupils from a Makhanda high school.

She said the programme was community service, leadership and entrepreneur based. “We were taught how to write proposals, how to start up NGOs and getting involved in community services,” she said.

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When he was in high school, Luyolo Mapekula was forced to study science without a laboratory or a library. This spurred Luyolo to get involved with the Masiphumelele Family Support Centre in Makhanda where he assists learners from grade 7 to 12 with critical subjects such as Maths, Science and Technology.

Having attended Nafutu High school, a rural high school with neither a science laboratory nor a library, Mapekula, who is employed as a Lab Technical Officer in the Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology at Rhodes University, understands the hardships learners in under-resourced schools face. Despite the limited resources at his school, Mapekula passed all his matric subjects and went on to study at Walter Sisulu University, where he completed his post-graduate studies in BSc Honours in Chemistry.

The Lusikisiki-born Mapekula knows all about the hardships of learners in under-resourced schools - having attended Nafutu High school, a rural high school with neither a science laboratory nor a library.

But despite his struggles at high school, Mapekula managed to pass his subjects then went through university and all the way to post-graduate level. His efforts to improve the experience of learning in poor schools do not end with him teaching Maths and Science.

His passion for improving the learning experience of learners in poor schools saw Mapekula joining forces with the Biotech Innovation Centre (RUBIC) Head of Department, Dr. Carl Prinsloo, to secure the donation of a 3D printer to DD Siwisa Primary School in Joza Township. This donation is part of the General Electric (GE) Additive Education Programme where 600 printers were distributed to schools across the world.

“We teach pupils how to use computers so they may know how to assemble them. This is in line with coding,” Mapekula said.

Other schools that have benefited from Mapekula’s efforts include Inyasa High School and Kutloso Daniels High School. “Kutloso Daniels High School now has laptops. We have organised so that we also train teachers and students during weekends on how to use the 3D scanners,” added Mapekula.

Mapekula, 35, obtained his BSc Honours in Chemistry from Walter Sisulu University in 2011 and joined Rhodes University a year later.

For his efforts, 35 year-old- Mapekula’s was honoured as one of the 12 finalists for the Daily Dispatch and Johnson & Johnson Local Heroes Awards in 2018 for writing his own isiXhosa Maths study guide - Isiseko sezibalo ngolwimi lwenkobe.

“A lot of high school pupils are doing Maths and Science but don’t understand the basics of the subjects. So it is my mission to help the students to understand the subjects the best way I know how. I started this work in the Mthatha area when I was at university. When I joined Rhodes University I requested the University to allow us to roll out a similar project in Makhanda, Masiphumelele is part of that initiative,” says Mapekula.

The collapse of the Eastern Province Kings Academy in 2017 spelt doom for scores of young sports star who still dreamt of making it big in the world of rugby.

But for Sandile Athenkosi Mantantana, the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel came in the form of a call from Rhodes University offering him a scholarship - provided that he would join their rugby team.

The22 year old was among the group of young athletes that Rhodes University recruited in 2018 to help turn around the fortunes of different sporting codes. The Mthatha-born Mantantana is now the number one flank for the university’s rugby team.

At the time that he received the phone call, inviting him to Rhodes, Mantantana was studying towards a Bachelor of Science degree in Construction Management at Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth.

He was on the verge of dropping out of university as he was not coping financially.

“I was faced with this dilemma when I received a call in late 2018, which informed me that Rhodes University wanted to offer me a bursary on condition that I take part in the Varsity Cup,” said Mantantana, who matriculated at Cambridge High School in East London.

With the help of the Sports Management team, he applied to Rhodes and was accepted. The rest, as it is often said, is history. The head of Sports Administration Frans Mamabolo sang the praises of Mantantana - saying he brought with him the much needed boost to the Rhodes’ rugby team.

“Not only is he a good flanker, Sandile has also helped the team win a game this year. I am very positive that his contribution will help us reach the target of making it into the top eight next year,” says Mamabolo.

The decision to leave the friendly City for the City of Saints at the beginning of 2019, also resulted in Mantantana changing his career. He is now pursuing a BA in Psychology, a path which he believes will eventually lead him to a career in sports management, at a later stage.

“I don’t regret anything about changing my career choice because I view this as a life changing decision,” he said.

The change in Mantantana’s life also came at a time when he was facing serious challenges at home - with his younger sister hooked on drugs. This led to his mother suffering from depression.

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Sandile Athenkosi Mantantana of Rhodes University’s rugby team.

FLANKER COMES IN FROM COLD ADDS HEAT TO RUGBY TEAM

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Helping Pupils Get up to Speed with Maths and Science

We teach pupils how to use computers so they may know how to assemble them in the future. We want them to understand that they can do design on a computer and they too can do engineering. This is in line with coding,” Mapekula said.

For his efforts, 35 year-old- Mapekula’s was honoured as one of the 12 finalists for the Daily Dispatch and Johnson & Johnson Local Heroes Awards in 2018 for writing his own isiXhosa Maths study guide - Isiseko sezibalo ngolwimi lwenkobe.

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PUPILS HELPING PUPILS

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Sandile Athenkosi Mantantana of Rhodes University’s rugby team.
When Dr Sizwe Mabizela took over as Rhodes University’s Vice Chancellor he made an important pronouncement in his maiden speech - no academically deserving students will be turned away from Rhodes University simply because they cannot afford to pay fees.

Records show that since the launch of the Nine Tenthsof2019. 52 matriculants who were mentored by Rhodes University students had since received bachelor passes.

T

he water crisis in the town has been a threat not only to business in Makhanda but also to the education sector, which is the mainstay of the town’s economy. Rhodes University alone contributes over 65% towards the town’s GDP.

19

That is what prompted the university’s community to partner with the private sector to intervene to ease the pressure on not just the university but also schools around Makhanda.

Ntsika, Nombulelo and Mary Waters have their top-half learners given one-on-one attention by Rhodes University students through “nine guided structured contact sessions”.

The programme is overseen by the Community Engagement Division, and has about 150 learners at any given time.

Another similar initiative is the GADRA Matric School which is a partnership with the university to give a second chance to learners who pass matric with university passes, but do not have enough points to be admitted to the courses of their choice. Among the Makhanda learners who took advantage of the opportunity was Sibabalwe Zwkala, 23, who was one of the first students to join GADRA during its first intake in 2017.

Not only did he pass Psychology 1, the course he did as part of the bridging programme, with a distinction, he is now a tutor of the current batch of second chance students. Zwkala was doing his third year towards a BA at the university in 2019.

He has one piece of advice to current "second chance" students and future ones - "keep your heads down and focus more on your studies. I say so because a lot of people think that as they are at Rhodes University they can do as they please. But they should actually push and pass very well," he said.

Rhodes University alone contributes over 65% towards the town’s GDP.

The idea was then shared with Pam Sandi, the Chairperson of the Makhanda Early Childhood Development Forum and Di Hornby, the Director of Community Engagement also came on board and wrote to various banks - with GBS being the only one that responded positively.

"Those tanks are now installed in 20 schools, and each school has two tanks, totalling 40 tanks in all. We're working with Makana Municipality to source water to these tanks,” said Nkwinti.

The water shortage is also something that bothers the university’s Deputy Vice-Chancellor Dr Mabokang MonnupalaMapesela a great deal. She said that while the university was ably led by Vicer-Chancellor Dr Sizwe Mabizela and was stable, the water issue could turn away potential students.

"The only thing that worries me about being at Rhodes and being in Makhanda is not having basic services like water. For me that is something that I really don’t want to get used to or accept. That my students have to go sometimes for two weeks without water in some residences or without laundries open for them to wash their clothes, for me I don’t know, it is really something we need to sort out,” she said.
VC SET ON TURNING THINGS AROUND MOVING FORWARD

As the first black woman to occupy that powerful position in US politics, Rice was more than qualified to make such an observation. At Rhodes University, the same can be said for the women who occupy various positions of influence ranging from the 23-year-old SRC president Kago Mphahlele, the Registrar Dr Adele Moodly to the deputy vice-chancellor Dr Molokwane-Maposela.

The institution has taken great strides in transforming its management, making significant and also important appointments in key positions. The university has previously been criticised for having an untransformed leadership structure. This transformation project has seen the university attract talent from other institutions while also developing capacity from within.

When she was appointed, Moodly became the first black registrar of the 115-year-old institution. She refers to her appointment as having taken place at an “exciting time” of transformation – something that she is the proverbial marathon as opposed to a sprint. But Monnapula-Maposela feels that being “first” should not be overstated, as the constant reference to it tends to overshadow the competencies of the pioneering individuals.

She is the first black female Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Rhodes. But the issue is a source of great debate in society and at the home of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, it is no different.

“I have two sons, one is more the outspoken one who said: ‘Yes mom, you deserve it, it’s black excellence. Let people just be happy because indeed this is a historic moment’”. So he told me ‘there’s nothing you can do, you can’t run away from it. It’s just a fact,” said Monnapula-Maposela, who was appointed in July 2019.

Vice-Chancellor Dr Siwe Mabizela has placed transformation at the top of his priority list. He has also made Monnapula-Maposela’s job to make sure that Rhodes is truly transformed. “The VC told me when I got here that my most important function is to make sure that there is transformation in all aspects that affect the university.

“Demographically the picture is still gloomy. We are still struggling with that. We have a lot of programmes that try to include black academics but I think it will take time,” said Monnapula-Maposela. But she said Mabizela had done well in transforming the university. And as Condoleezza Rice aptly put it, the 23-year-old Mphahlele from Limpopo did not always set out to be an SRC president. She had always wanted to do and what we promised to do… to prove that women can take up issues and work together in that space,” said the Master of Pharmacy student. Another first for the university was the appointment, in June 2019, of Nomawethu Danster, as the new Director of Library and Information Services.

Rhodes University adopted its transformation plan in 2018 and four of the five recent senior management positions have been filled by women. These include Moodly, Monnapula-Maposela, Danster and Noma Mwetyana as the Director of Student Affairs.

Some of the appointments in other areas were equally crucial, although they did not attract as much attention as the firsts. 10 out of 12 support staff members for the directors were women, according to the Acting Head of Human Resources Susan Robertson. “This is a much improved picture if one reviews the past five years. The picture has also improved drastically in terms of academic leadership as two out of the six deans at Rhodes are women. Prior to this all deans were men,” said Robertson. “The attraction of staff to enhance the profile of the institution has required a review of strategy and investment in new advertising methods. In terms of transformation of staff and demographic profile, especially women, progress is evident,” said Robertson.

At Rhodes University, we celebrate all women who defy the odds and break the metaphorical glass ceiling by assuming powerful and influential positions… positions that were previously and predominantly occupied by men.

“The success of these women serves as an inspiration to young girls and the youth to be ambitious and to pursue their dreams to the fullest,” said Mabizela.
Toni Parsons and James Rycroft made headlines in October for their kind gesture when they asked guests to their wedding to consider donating money to settle students’ fees at their alma mater, Rhodes University, instead of the usual gift registries.

The couple did not expect the reaction they received from fellow South Africans and were pleasantly surprised. “When we told our family and friends, they thought it was just a nice gesture. It was not discussed much. It really was not a big deal.”

“We didn’t expect the reaction. We were very surprised because all we wanted was to help students who could not pay their debts.”

The couple hoped that everyone who saw their story would feel inspired and compelled to do something similar to help the less fortunate.

Parsons (37) and 36-year-old Rycroft met at the university while they were students in the early 2000s. They exchanged wedding vows in Port Shepstone, KwaZulu-Natal.

Their “gesture of goodwill” as Rhodes University Vice Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, described it, was inspired by another Old Rhodian and mutual friend, Natasha Jospeh, who, since 2017, runs an annual call for contributions to clear students’ fee accounts. Earning a degree is often a key life moment for a young person and we felt strongly about directing our community resources to helping a few young people at the university to graduate,” said Rycroft.

Parsons added: “We believe that earning a degree should not be inhibited by your [in]ability to pay. A degree from a quality institution like Rhodes University can lead to serious opportunities when you enter the world of work. The contributions made by our community are intended in that spirit - to help those students who are unable to graduate.”

Dr Mabizela, in a letter to the couple, welcomed the “profound gesture.” “This has impacted me deeply. It proves, once again, the calibre and well-roundedness of our graduates. At a time when young couples would normally and naturally only think of their own comfort and improving their lives, they have both actioned a social purpose and are living proof of our alumni.”

Parsons and Rycroft met in 2001 while both were reading for a Bachelor of Arts degree with English as a major. Parsons would go on to complete her BA (Hons) in Philosophy.

Director for Communication and Advancement, Luzuko Jacobs, said: “Rhodes University has a unique aura about it: exclusive yet accessible and pursuing transformation through excellence. We have change agents for our engaged alumni. “Our data shows healthy growth in giving by the 29 - 39 years cohort. It gives a great feeling just how young professionals are getting increasingly involved in positive social advancement of our communities through Rhodes University as their vehicle of choice.”

Rycroft is a third-generation Old Rhodian. His grandfather was in Milner House, and his father and brother also studied at Rhodes University.
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