

Response to the Teaching & Learning Sub-Committee's submission to the Transformation Summit

Chrissie Boughey

This response to the submission made by the sub-committee working on issues related to Teaching and Learning to the Transformation Summit is based on discussion in the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee to a draft of the submission and also on written comments made by Senate Committee members on draft of the actual document.

The response is framed within the spirit of critical enquiry about teaching and learning which has long been part of the South African Academic Development movement. This line of critical enquiry often cites Gramsci's construct of 'hegemony' and the idea that common sense, derived from our experiences of being educated and using language, can hold us captive. As a result, a vein of work within the Academic Development movement has long sought to 'make education (and language) strange' and, in doing so, has drawn on theoretical work as well as empirical and other studies. This work has problematised much of what is done in the context of teaching and learning in South African universities.

The submission by the Teaching and Learning Group is organized around a series of recommendations which appear below in blue. This response to the submission will therefore follow this form of organization and speak to each of the recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Problem. Students come from a range of backgrounds and lecturers are often left to guess as to what the issue might be with a student - is it language, or unfamiliarity with the fundamental concepts, or unfamiliarity with the problem domain, or unfamiliarity with the subject, or an age-related issue, or something else? By the time that an issue is firmly pinpointed, it may be too late to help a particular student; the rest of the class could be weeks ahead.

Theme(s). Students.

Recommendation(s). Provide all lecturers with socio-demographics of their classes (this is already available on the PROTEA system). For each class, provide at least the following items for class members: home language groups, age, matric subject profiles, matric mark, residential situation (residence name or off-campus).

Response

Analysis of data from higher education systems across the world (see, for example, Arum, Gamoran & Shavit, 2012) show that, regardless of numerous variables such as the quality of the

quality of schooling systems and the proportion of GDP spent on education, those who enjoy most access and success in universities are the children of middle class, educated parents. In the context of findings such as this, higher education, and education more generally, can be seen to be implicated in maintaining the status quo at a global level.

Ethnographic studies, often conducted in the field which has become known as 'New Literacy Studies' (see, for example, Heath, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981), provide insights into why this is the case by illustrating the way some parents are able not only prepare their children for the literacy and learning practices that dominate schooling but also to extend and challenge what their children learn when they are in school. This same work argues that the literacy and learning practices of the university are not 'neutral' or 'natural' but are simply a set of practices which have been privileged over time and which serve some at the expense of others because of the way they have been groomed into using those practices through their previous experiences long before they ever arrive at a university.

Historically, higher education systems have served an elite. In the last fifty or so years, and in the context of globalization and claims made for the 'knowledge economy', most countries have sought to expand participation in higher education. As this has happened, so universities have diversified and the learning and literacy practices, which served an elite so well, have been shown to be alien to many students now entering higher education across the globe.

The need for demographic data is important. But data is simply data and needs to be interpreted. Knowing that a percentage of a class were educated at low quintile (and therefore generally poorly performing) schools and that another percentage use English as an additional, and not a home, language can only enhance teaching and learning so that it serves all students equally provided appropriate theoretical lens are applied to the data and solutions to perceived 'problems' are then informed by appropriate theory. Historically, the fact that the majority of students in South African universities use English as an additional language has led, and continues to lead, to the introduction of initiatives which actually can be argued to cause more harm than good. This is because the 'theory' informing the initiatives is often not rigorously interrogated to explore the way it supports privilege or, more usually, because the initiatives are based on commonsense about what is involved in mastering a language.

In 2016, a proposal for a campus wide curriculum review served before Faculty Boards and Senate and was approved. The proposal incorporated a methodology for the review which aims to work from what is observable (for example in the form of data about students and their performance) and experienced (in the form of feedback from students) to explore the reasons for these observations and experiences. The use of demographic and other data as a means of enhancing teaching and learning is therefore already in place – at least in those faculties which have embraced the curriculum review process. CHERTL has allocated staff members to faculties to support the interrogation of this data.

Rather than recommending that all lecturers should be provided with socio-demographic data, the transformation process would arguably be better served by a recommendation that more

departments and more faculties engage with a curriculum review that is already in process and which, as some at the Summit may attest, is already providing extremely useful insights and is leading to change.

Recommendation 2

Problem. In practice, lecturers face no consequences if they fail to take student feedback seriously. In small or close-knit departments, maintaining collegiality may be prized above remediating poor teaching (where poor teaching is potentially the reason for high failure rate).

Theme(s). Students; Curriculum; Governance; Staff.

Recommendation(s).

1. Ensure that aggregated course feedback is seen at the level of the Dean, outside of the department, and implement monitoring to verify that changes are being made. Courses with high failure rates must be examined in terms of curriculum re- design and additional support required. Departments are required to report on course changes, their impact, and the relevant student data for two years after the last problematic throughput rate. Departments, and failing that, Faculties, should be empowered to send in observers to better understand the reasons behind a high failure rate, and reports and recommendations of observers should be carefully considered and, unless there is good reason to not do so, implemented.
2. Where an intervention (as in (1)) has been made, a further recommendation is that written discussion documents and evaluations are to be submitted to the relevant Dean every three years after the monitoring period ends, where lecturers/departments comment on failure rates, as well as the support that is needed and provided.
3. Staff are to account, departmentally, on results of feedback, and a process must be instituted by CHERTL that alerts academics to the need to demonstrate responsiveness to student feedback. Within a limited time frame (for example 3 years), responsiveness to student feedback will become a more important part of the assessment criteria for Teaching Portfolios submitted for promotion.

The faculties are the ‘guardians’ of the academic project and it is appropriate that they should take responsibility for the performance and experiences of students in a process of mutual accountability. CHERTL does not, and cannot, carry responsibility for performance. Rather, the Centre can only offer support for faculty and departmental processes.

That said, it is important to note that Deans *do* interrogate performance and *do* identify courses where this is problematic. Currently, the Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching & Course Design places responsibility for interrogating feedback on course design in the hands of course co-ordinators who are expected to provide leadership in this area. It is also important to note that leadership in teaching and learning (demonstrated by holding co-ordinator positions) is acknowledged and rewarded in the personal promotion process.

Feedback from students simply provides a snapshot of a course from one particular perspective. In order to evaluate a course, student feedback needs to be triangulated with that from other perspectives if an evaluation is not to run the risk of bias. CHERTL offers support in designing evaluations which are rigorous and unbiased. However, many departments have

chosen to institute their own feedback systems. Often the systems themselves are ill informed and the assumptions that inform them may not always be appropriate to explore activities such as teaching and learning.

It is also important to note that a top-down recommendation, such as that made by the sub-committee in this instance, is not conducive to giving new, young academic teachers (who are often black) a chance to learn to teach in safe spaces in spite of the fact that the recommendation is aimed at the course rather than an individual's teaching. In practice, it is very difficult to separate out an individual's teaching from course design. Sending in faculty observers could be extremely threatening to relatively inexperienced staff regardless of the fact that the observers had been mandated to look at course design and not teaching.

The University has a very well conceptualized suite of policies on teaching and learning that, if implemented, would contribute to transformation. Leadership from HoDs and course co-ordinators in respect of the implementation of these policies has enormous potential to contribute to transformation.

Recommendation 3

Problem. Students are increasingly unfamiliar with the use of books and reading material as their primary way of obtaining information. While it is agreed that students must *become* familiar with this mode of learning, it is unrealistic to expect the transition to occur immediately upon entering university. Furthermore, many students enter the university with a poorer grasp on English than students in decades past and, while they will improve, they may not improve quickly enough to pass their first year.

Theme(s). Students; Curriculum.

Recommendation(s).

1. The IT department is to take an annual survey of technology (including devices and software) being used for teaching purposes. This information is to be uploaded to the Rhodes website and made available to lecturers, especially at the first-year level, who can then use the suggested technologies to broaden participation. Broadening participation may include, for example, multiple languages in their courses using new technologies like videos and podcasts. IT is to report to the Academic Technologies Roundtable on whether this has been done, and to report to the university community via official channels when the information is updated.
2. Look into the possibility of translation services in relevant departments for the first year; see, for example, the translation services available at North-West University.
3. All lecturers to be reminded by HoDs of the kinds of language they use, and that are found in readings that are set in first year. Efforts must be made to use as inclusive/accessible language as possible, especially in first year, but not excluding other years.
4. Provide tri-lingual dictionaries (English, isiXhosa, Afrikaans – Eastern Province languages) in exam venues.

Response

Reading, writing and language are probably the areas that have received most attention from researchers in the South African Academic Development because of their centrality to teaching and learning in higher education. Reading, writing and language are also the areas which are probably most open to common sense assumptions that can often be problematised using theory and research.

The starting point for any thinking about language related activities has to be the role of language itself in meaning making. Language itself does not 'carry' meaning. Rather it is a system of signs which provide clues for meaning making. Meaning making occurs as a result of the interaction between the conceptual and linguistic knowledge that language users bring to both spoken and written texts and the signs and symbols of the texts themselves. Background knowledge is critical to reading and coming to a text 'cold' means that meaning making is more difficult than it might otherwise be. There are numerous ways to support and scaffold students' engagement with texts regardless of whether they are screen or paper based.

The recommendations made by the Sub-Committee in respect of this problem area are indicative of an understanding of language as a vehicle for conveying meaning – i.e. on a view which sees meaning as existing 'in' the text and reading and understanding as processes of decoding. Such views of language are simplistic and need to be considered in the light of others. A body of theory in linguistics known as 'systemics' argues that language is always used in context and that meanings are made in those contexts. Simple translation from one language to another without adequate understanding of the context is unlikely to assist comprehension in any meaningful way.

This is not to say that the use of multiple languages in the classroom is not beneficial (not least because of the value accorded to those languages through their use in academic contexts and the resultant affirmation of students' linguistic identities) but rather that simple translating is not likely to provide the remedy envisaged. Universities using translation (UNW and SUN) are already discovering that more is needed than translation and that translations themselves can be problematic as those employed to translate are not always masters of the disciplines in which they are called upon to work. These same universities are also discovering that wearing headsets in class for purposes of translation 'marks' students and that many students who are not home language speakers of the languages of instruction are not availing themselves of the translation service because of this. The recommendation of translating therefore needs to be interrogated theoretically and pragmatically within the context of the need for multilingualism in classrooms.

A plethora of programmes claimed to address 'problems' related to language, reading and writing exist. Many of these programmes are based on dubious theoretical assumptions about language, reading and writing. Before any programme is recommended or purchased, these assumptions need to be interrogated from a theoretical perspective and in the light of extant research. There is also a danger that the purchase of programmes (and, indeed the provision

of translation devices and other teaching aids) will allow the pedagogy in the mainstream curriculum to continue without critique.

Academic teachers can do an enormous amount to support the development of language related activities. Such initiatives require intellectual work on the part of academic teachers themselves and the use of strategies such as providing feedback to written work at the level of meaning and not 'form' (i.e. by engaging with students' ideas and not correcting language errors which should only be dealt with at the last stage of a writing process).

CHERTL is currently advertising a short course open to all RU staff members which explores the options available to support and develop language related activities in the light of current theory. In addition, for four years now, a 'Writing Intensive Project' funded by the Teaching Development Grant has been running. This project aims to infuse support for writing (alongside reading and language use more generally) into mainstream courses. Funding is available to provide additional assistance but key is the need for lecturers to engage with the project co-ordinator to identify a small intervention which can make an enormous difference to students' experiences and learning. The aim of the project is to build 'ladders' of courses/modules that support language related activities *in the context of mainstream teaching and learning*. Since 2013, more than 7000 interventions have been counted where an 'intervention' is understood as a single student experiencing some sort of support in a course or module. If ladders of courses supporting language related activities are built, a single student could expect to encounter multiple interventions on a journey through the degree curriculum. More funding for this work will be sought from the new University Capacity Development Grant and the project itself forms part of a move towards a flexible curriculum structure (see below for an explanation) which aims to provide more tailor-made support for individuals.

This project, along with other work by CHERTL, promotes the use of the African languages in teaching and learning. The impact of providing multilingual spaces cannot be underestimated and a recommendation around providing support for language and language related activities (including the use of multilingualism) in the mainstream curriculum might better serve our students than those made above.

Recommendation 4

Problem. The financial sustainability of the University and its teaching programme depends, in part, on the research subsidy that the University receives. To sustain that teaching programme, it is important for it to contribute to the research of the University.

Theme(s). Sustainability.

Recommendation(s).

1. Make lecturers aware of the opportunities of publishing in the field of T&L as a way of sharing best practice and contributing to financial sustainability through research. Each department to table all papers

written annually, including written reasons from members of the department who have not written a paper.

2. All staff (and not just new staff) encouraged to complete PGDHE, and/or establishment of faculty T&L Committees (Science and Commerce already have them), which would encourage a more critical analysis of T&L.

3. Recognising that some of the recommendations have financial implications, we call for an open, detailed budget workshop by February 2018, where budget decisions can be defended, and where new contributions can be considered. We call for ongoing engagement and negotiations based on this for a more sustainable budget.

4. Re-evaluate the policy of slow undergraduate growth rates at RU: we are good at undergrad and have spare capacity in some courses. Smaller undergrad classes are, in some subjects, resulting in smaller postgraduate numbers. Annually, each department to table the financial implications of undergrad/postgrad numbers, to serve before Faculty. Currently, despite the focus on research, including M and PhD research, 75% of the University's income comes from teaching.

Response

Thanks to funding from the Teaching Development Grant, for some years now CHERTL has been running writing retreats aimed at supporting staff members who want to write in relation to teaching and learning. Participants in retreats work on producing evidence that they meet teaching criteria for probation or personal promotion or on articles related to their work as academic teachers. In addition to these opportunities, efforts are being made in the Faculty of Science to start a 'Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Group' which will aim to introduce participants to educational research design and methods and support publication.

All research outputs are collated and reported in the annual Research Report. The recommendation that individuals should be called to produce reasons for not producing a paper each year constitutes a move towards performance management and needs to be discussed more widely in this context. In addition, it is important to remember that the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is an academic field like any other and requires induction into research design and methods appropriate to it. The ability to produce research in one academic area does not mean that an individual will be able to do the same in another given that very different assumptions about what can count as knowledge and how knowledge can be known can apply. Academics need to be supported to develop research capacity in relation to teaching and learning and the confidence to conduct research in this area. Pushing academics into publishing for financial reasons may drive research output but this may only be achieved at the risk of quality.

The claim, in the recommendation, that 75% of the block grant is due to undergraduate teaching is incorrect. In reality, teaching and research are intertwined in complex ways in calculations regarding subsidy, particularly at the postgraduate level. For example, the 65% of the block grant that is based on enrolments is heavily dependent on postgraduate numbers

which are weighted more heavily, and the 8% that comes from the institutional factor is also not as directly attributable to undergraduate numbers as the recommendation suggests.

Nonetheless, undergraduate growth rates and areas for increased enrolments have been evaluated by Deans and form part of the Viability Plan. Deans have also looked at capacity to increase enrolments at postgraduate level. It is also important to note that the Size and Shape of the University is not entirely within our control since much is dependent on the capacity of the town to support increases in student numbers.

A teaching and learning structure/plan has been developed as part of the Viability Plan. This structure is based on the construct of the 'flexible curriculum' where the use of several course types, already in use in Extended Programmes, provides multiple routes through the curriculum for students who need support. These course types are: i) Extended Courses where the time taken to complete a course is doubled in order to allow for more tuition (eg by spreading a semester long course over an entire year) ii) Augmenting Courses where additional tuition is provided in addition to that provided by disciplinary specialists (this tuition typically supports gaps in knowledge or in literacy and learning practices and is a DP requirement) and iii) Fully Foundational Courses which aim to provide missing building blocks necessary for students to engage with the mainstream curriculum before they encounter it. The availability of a range of such courses would allow Deans and other academic advisors to tailor make support for students as they progress through degree curricula.

The University has already used the Teaching Development Grant to provide augment courses in Science in with high failure rates. This initiative has been shown to have impacted on student performance. The new University Capacity Development Grant (to be introduced in 2018) will allow us to introduce more courses of the types noted above in all faculties. Importantly, these courses do not constitute *ad hoc* academic support but are part of the curriculum. We would argue that a move towards a flexible curriculum such as that described above is the best means of improving performance and that this should be recommended by the Summit.

Recommendation 5

Problem. Incoming and outgoing students and staff don't necessarily appreciate the historical context of the University, which is necessary for understanding the University as it is presently constructed. They may, consequently, jump to extreme conclusions.

Theme(s). Visual culture & rituals; Institutional identity.

Recommendation(s).

1. Problematise visual culture with colonial roots not by removing it, but by providing information on background and meaning. This can be done by using well-placed signs to explain the historical context of buildings, artworks, etc. Students should be encouraged to form their own opinions, based on the facts, about the culture, traditions, and visual representations of Rhodes University.
2. Reform O-week activities to include the history of RU as a way of sensitizing students to the colonial past of the institution and the meaning and significance of the campus, and their place in it.

3. Rethink graduation. Allow different graduation regalia, consistent with the decorum of the occasion and the Eastern Province context. For example, a student may choose to add African cultural symbols to the graduation regalia. Students have been encouraged to graduate wearing traditional cultural dress, and this should be continued.

Response

A revised Student Orientation Programme encompassing an entire semester's worth of activities is being developed. The Academic Orientation Programme aimed at new members of staff explicitly raises issues of institutional culture.

Recommendation 6

Problem. Staff, especially new staff, sometimes face many obstacles to change in their departments. Many staff (and students) have reported that their experiences are dismissed as “anecdotal”. This creates an unnecessary barrier to radical change and reinforces an unsustainable status quo. The barrier is not necessary because existing staff and structures should be able to argue against a proposed change based on solid reasoning around the benefits and disadvantages of the proposed change itself, and not have to rely on the argument that the current system is “good enough”.

Theme(s). Staff.

Recommendation(s).

1. N-gap or accelerated development staff progress reports should be acknowledged and, if needed, problems (such as the reporting of racist or sexist incidents) should be investigated and discussed. This must be the responsibility of the Research Office or VC's Office.
2. A wider representation on Senate, including N-gap lecturers, should be considered. Pleasing progress has been shown in this regard.

Response

Reports on the experiences of members of the academic staff appointed as a result of funding opportunities provided by, for example, the DHET (nGAP), Mellon and Kresge have always been acknowledged. They are reviewed by the Dean, DVC and VC, all of whom provide comments. Individuals appointed thanks to such funding initiatives are always involved in the report writing process in so far as they comment on reports as they are written and see further comments as they are added through the review process. The nGAP funding initiative is managed by Dr Amanda Hlengwa who benefitted from an earlier initiative. Dr Hlengwa intervenes in any instances where staff members may experience problems and negativity and has the full backing of Deans, DVCs and VC when she does so.

As an aside, the Summit might like to consider the use of the term ‘nGAP lecturers’. Individuals appointed as a result of funding initiatives are fully fledged members of the academic staff and need to be acknowledged as such and should not be subject to special labelling.

Recommendation 7

Problem. Despite changes that Rhodes has made, the underlying system at the University is perceived as preferring a “white” or “colonial” cultural heritage over more local Eastern Cape and African cultures. This has led to the charge of Rhodes being unresponsive in the context of a changing South Africa. The culture of the University greatly influences the culture and values of the students that it produces, and it is therefore important for Rhodes to accent, re- think, and/or replace existing cultural norms as necessary.

Theme(s). Institutional identity.

Recommendation(s).

1. In university ceremonies, like graduation, translate traditional songs and other text into isiXhosa and other EC languages. This has already been done to some extent.
2. The “home for all” slogan, among others, is inappropriate and unrealistic. It is clear that everyone at Rhodes does not feel at home, and it is not clear that any students *should* feel at home: an academic environment that prizes constructive engagement with difficult ideas is quite different from most homes. The current slogan enforces a group identity and causes students to feel that they are not “real” Rhodes students if they do not feel at home. This has also been independently picked up by the Sexual Violence Task Team (see Recommendation 68 of *“We Will Not Be Silenced”*: *A three- pronged justice approach to sexual offences and rape culture at Rhodes University/UCKAR*), albeit in a different context.
3. Those who feel at home in the dominant institutional culture could be made to feel uncomfortable with some of their assumptions and attitudes. One way to achieve this would be to make cultural sensitivity training mandatory for RU staff, based on consultations between the Equity and Institutional Culture office, and all faculties.
4. Give alumni more of an opportunity to comment on what was useful for them in T&L experiences – especially those who belong to industry related groups such as the Black Lawyers Association/ Black Business Forum etc. The Alumni department is to assist with this, and reports can be tabled at faculty or departmental level as appropriate.
5. As a condition for graduation, every final-year undergraduate must submit 1 page of feedback on their learning experiences in each of their majors. The feedback should highlight what worked and what did not work in their learning experience at Rhodes. The data should be seen at the departmental and faculty level, and departments should be required to utilize such feedback for curriculum design going forward; there is an opportunity for integrating such feedback with the process described in Recommendation 2, points 1 through 3.

Comment. These recommendations attempt to be concrete, and therefore necessarily address symptoms instead of causes. It would therefore be easy to make the necessary “window-dressing” changes that are not accompanied by any sustainable or worthwhile underlying change. An example is such window-dressing is the change of “bosberaad” into “strategy session” into “imbizo”, with little practical difference to be seen. We caution against this approach. Instead, it is important to reevaluate existing practices and norms — both cultural and academic — in the light of South African and, more specifically, Eastern Cape cultural practices and norms. As an example, traditional South African cultures tend to value group work and group dynamics above competition and conflict; yet much of the assessment at Rhodes creates competitive divisions in a class and encourages students to keep their knowledge to themselves. Is a reevaluation in order?

Response

It is little short of astonishing that most of what has been written about the need for transformation of the curriculum focuses on content and not pedagogy. There is nothing

'natural' or 'neutral' about pedagogy or the literacy practices with which it is associated. All can be seen to have their roots in Enlightenment thinking and a wide literature exists exploring the impact of this.

Our recommendation is that work on curriculum reform must encompass pedagogy and the literacy practices (often associated with assessment) that accompanies it. Currently, a significant blind spot appears to exist in this area although attempts have been made to address this through, for example, the production of a booklets of case studies on Curriculum and Assessment by CHERTL. Some staff members have worked hard to transform their pedagogy and assessment and this needs to be acknowledged. Those who have been willing to share their work through the production of case studies need to be commended. More work in this area is necessary, nonetheless.

Recommendation 8

Problem. Students report a divide between what is taught in the classroom versus lived experiences. As a consequence, they feel that what is taught is sometimes irrelevant to them, and they have greater difficulty learning it. Part of curriculum transformation needs to attempt to close this gap by using more content from the global south, but also through encouraging application of theory to real-world examples that speak to the context of student's lived experiences.

Theme(s). Curriculum.

Recommendation(s).

1. In designing/redesigning curricula, encourage and provide support for a more democratic model, where the ideas and life experiences of students can be included. Ways to do this include:

a. how to include student created content (for example, 3rd year students to provide input to 1st year courses). This approach is particularly applicable in the humanities.

Including students in discussion groups around course redesign where possible, or

b. Revise or impose a theme on practical work to reflect the context of the Eastern Cape and/or South Africa and/or Africa. This approach is particularly applicable in the sciences.

2. Service learning provides an opportunity for both curriculum transformation and the use of a transformative pedagogy, which is important for both personal and university transformation. It was recommended that service learning should be highlighted as an important way into transformation. A challenge is how to make it available at undergrad level in a cost-effective way. Each department should nominate a service learning representative who would be tasked with researching and implementing service learning in at least one course per department.

3. Modules which are relevant in a specifically South African context, in addition to stating learning outcomes, should state how the course is useful in a South African or decolonised context (Why take this course? or Why is this course important?).

4. Encourage departments to consider a wider variety of assessment types, while still making sure that they are valid and reliable. This has already begun in some departments where, for example, student assessment includes podcasts, blogs, journals etc., with less emphasis on one final exam. CHERTL should support this process through workshops, individual advice (which is already offered) and further encouragement for those already making assessment innovations to share best practice.

Response

The use of African examples and the application of theory to African contexts is imperative in a university which seeks to be responsive to its context. Particular consideration should be given to recommending text books produced in Africa and which use examples from the African continent.

Many departments draw on methods to evaluate course design which encompass discussion with students. CHERTL is often involved in facilitating these discussions, in analyzing data from them and in supporting departments as they make changes to curricula as a result of them.

In addition to offering formal programmes leading to the PGDip, CHERTL offers the CATALyst course which is intended as an introduction to pedagogy and assessment. Over the years, ad hoc workshops were offered extensively and evaluation has shown that more formal courses are likely to have more impact and, in addition, to attract more, and more meaningful, participation.

In considering the infusion of service learning in the curriculum, it is important to acknowledge that different disciplines have different 'knowledge structures' and this may make them more or less open to its inclusion. These different knowledge structures will also make disciplines more or less open to what can be included as content. In the Humanities and Social Sciences, the way knowledge is structured opens the way for considerable flexibility with regard to what is included. This is not the case in the Natural Sciences where the 'hierarchical' knowledge structure requires the careful construction of basic concepts and methods if students are to understand and master complex theory and constructs which will allow them to produce new knowledge. This is not to deny the need for critical engagement around questions regarding which and whose knowledge is legitimated but rather to caution that the way knowledge is constructed in different disciplinary areas needs to be considered.

It is also important to take into account that the University is located in a fairly small town and the extent to which local communities can become 'saturated' with service learning also needs to be acknowledged. Any service learning project must be developed in coordination with the Division for Community Engagement.

Finally, the fact that students also engage with learning opportunities involving local communities that are independent of service learning must also be considered. The Division of Community Engagement runs a large volunteer programme which encompasses the One in Nine initiative. Learning from and taking learning to local communities therefore needs to be understood as extending beyond formal service learning opportunities.

Recommendation 9

Problem. Students at Rhodes have reported going hungry due to a lack of resources. This, in turn, has a negative effect on their studies.

Theme(s). Students; Sustainability.

Recommendation(s). The University must provide a lunch time meal at a dining hall for these students. Students may be required to undergo a means test to qualify for this. “Budgetary constraints” are not a sufficient reason to not implement this recommendation, unless *every other non-essential activity* at the University has already been removed from the budget.

Response

From 2017, students on NSFAS have been encouraged to remain in residence where they are offered a full range of meals to meet their dietary requirements. A policy is being developed to manage occupancy of the residence system so that those who need to remain there are able to do so and also that all incoming, first-year students have a place in residence.

Recommendation 10

Problem. Rhodes often laments that it cannot find the necessary staff to fill certain academic posts. Staff comments indicate that part of the issue is that, without the social and financial infrastructure that supports historically advantaged applicants, new black staff members struggle to make ends meet and cannot justify applying to Rhodes.

Theme(s). Sustainability; Staff.

Recommendation(s).

1. Rental accommodation should be provided for staff, suitable for a single staff member or a staff member with a partner. This should not be “transit” housing, where staff are encouraged to “move on” and find their own accommodation after a few months; in addition, it should be located on or close to the University campus. The accommodation should be furnished with similar basic items that a self-catering chalet room (or off-campus student accommodation) of a similar size might have - small refrigerator, kettle, bed, stove, chair, desk, etc. As an example, an apartment in an apartment building would be acceptable as accommodation.
2. Staff should be assigned to a dining hall and be able to book meals at that dining hall, including breakfast, lunch, and supper. Rhodes should consider carefully the possibility of covering at least the mid-day meal.

Comment. The goal of these recommendations is to remove *most* of the day-to-day worries that a new staff member might have: specifically, *where do I sleep?* and *where do I eat?*. It should be recognized that a historically advantaged person would typically have the necessary social and financial capital to remove these worries, whereas a historically disadvantaged person would not.

Response

In recent years, the University has invested heavily in the provision of student accommodation, a process which has included drawing on and, indeed, depleting, reserves. Building accommodation for staff would require the University to draw on commercial loans and to face the financial implications of doing this.

It should be noted that all staff are offered the opportunity of booking a midday meal in the Oppidan Dining Room at a very reasonable cost.

Recommendation 11

Problem. It is clear from the research report that the University, though it produces a great deal of research *per capita*, is reliant on the presence of “superstar” researchers to achieve this: most staff do not produce any subsidy-earning research in a given year. Staff have reported wanting to spend more time teaching instead of doing research, claiming that it is a more satisfying path for them. This focus may be what has resulted in some of the best throughput rates in the South African higher education system.

Theme(s). Staff.

Recommendation(s). Provide a viable career path for three kinds of academics: teacher, teacher/researcher, and researcher. At present, only the teacher/researcher has a viable career path towards the professoriate at Rhodes, and the researcher tends to be valued more than the teacher. A viable career path would make it possible for a teacher to carry a much greater teaching load and achieve a professorship in comparable time to a teacher/researcher. Researchers, by contrast, would be responsible for generating much more subsidy-earning research. A teacher/researcher would follow the “traditional” career path.

Comment. It is traditional to view the academic as being teacher, researcher, and administrator. However, many academics simply do not wish to pursue all three goals, and it is unrealistic — and likely unsustainable — for Rhodes to insist on a particular conception of “academic”, simply because that is the traditional construction of an academic. Indeed, the research reports over a number of years have tacitly acknowledged that some staff simply do not do research, and the Research Division at the University has spent considerable time attempting to “fix” such staff members by means of incentives, education, and so forth. However, do otherwise-productive staff members really need to be “fixed”? By acknowledging, respecting, and encouraging the strengths and desires of each staff member, Rhodes stands to gain a great deal from the specialization of its staff.

Response

The Policy on Personal Promotions allows individuals to reach the rank of full professor by scoring ‘good’ for research and ‘outstanding’ for teaching and learning. Part of the question being posed here appears to be whether it is necessary to have any score whatsoever for research. In response, it is necessary to point out that, unlike school teachers who ‘receive’ a curriculum from the Ministry, academic teachers are responsible for the development of curricula in their disciplinary areas. It is important for curricula to be up to date and relevant within the context of these disciplines. If an academic does not engage in any research (which can constitute postgraduate supervision) and the reading associated with it how can s/he keep ‘up to date’ in the discipline?

Moreover, teaching in a discipline is shaped by that discipline. Good academic teaching is rooted in the disciplines and is only 'generic' with regard to a few relatively basic principles. It is important for academics to be able to follow a 'teaching track' in their academic careers but this cannot be at the expense of research and of the exploration of the discipline that comes with it since this is integral to academic teaching.

References

Arum, R., Gamoran, A. & Shavit, Y. 2012. 'Expanded opportunities for all in global higher education systems. In L. Weiss and N. Dolby, (eds), *Social class and education*. New York: Routledge.

Heath, S. B. 1983. *Ways with words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scollon, R. & Scollon, S.B.K. 1981. *Narrative, literacy & face in interethnic communication*. New Jersey: Ablex.