



# RHODES UNIVERSITY

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## Citation for the 2013 Vice Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award

Undine Susanne Weber

Mr Chancellor,

The Vice Chancellor's Senior Distinguished Teaching Medal is presented annually to an academic with 15 or more years of experience who is able to demonstrate to a Committee of peers from this University that her or his teaching is truly exceptional.

In 2013, Undine Susanne Weber of the School of Languages more than demonstrated that she is worthy of the honour of this Award. Ms Undine Weber was born in Ulm, Germany of a father, born and raised in Spain, and a Hungarian mother. Her multi-lingual and multi-cultural background was then augmented by a three year sojourn in Brazil in the 1970s just as she started primary school. Given this, it is hardly surprising that Ms Weber turned to the teaching of languages even before she had graduated from the University of Bonn. She then went on to teach German at high schools in Britain before returning to Germany to complete the equivalent of Master's degree.

At Rhodes University, where she took up a position in 1996, Ms Weber teaches German Studies – an area which encompasses a study of the literature, the history, the customs and the history of ideas of the German-speaking countries as well as the study of the German language. As she points out in the documentation submitted to the Committee judging the Award she is about to receive, the teaching of a language can easily be reduced to

utilitarian purposes – to the need to communicate for the purposes of trade, for example. It can also simply function as a form of personal enrichment for those who are already privileged by virtue of the circumstances of their birth. Ms Weber's work as an academic teacher goes beyond this, however, as she sees her work as contributing to the criticality necessary for the transformation of South African higher education. Drawing on the work of Noyes, she points out that 'South African universities, like society in general, are so deeply marked – some would say scarred – by European configurations of power and knowledge, that a meaningful transformation will only be possible through a critical encounter with these configurations'. Ms Weber's teaching therefore seeks to bring her students into a 'critical encounter' with one ex-colonial foreign language, its literature and ideas.

That her students value this work is indisputable. As one noted on a student feedback survey

“Undine is a wonderful and enthusiastic lecturer and I have greatly enjoyed being taught by her. She commands great respect from her students and yet is very approachable. It has been a privilege to have her as a lecturer.”

Another student says of her:

“A wonderful personality and genuine concern for the students' understanding and well-being – even out of the classroom.”

Yet others noted Ms Weber's sense of humour – a quality familiar to her colleagues as well as her students. The following comment is typical in this respect:

“It has been a hell of a time. I wish more lecturers were so much fun!”

Mr Chancellor, I could continue to cite Ms Weber's students' words in order to sing her praises but time does not allow me to do this. I will therefore end by

saying that it is an honour for me to ask you to award the 2013 Senior Distinguished Teaching Medal to Ms Undine Weber.