



CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP - EXPANDING SOUTH AFRICA'S KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

Dr. Saleem Badat, Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University

"In the light of our dark legacy and our constitutional imperatives, South Africans have to develop our economy, enhance social equity, extend and deepen economic, social and political rights, and consolidate democracy by-and-large simultaneously rather than sequentially. This is a tremendous and largely unprecedented challenge. The only way we can do this is to talk about it in an informed, open and honest way. To do this will require both the candor and responsibility that our constitution has given the country's universities - it is for them to show how engaged and critical scholarship can be the handmaiden of our common future."

The South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARCI) programme is a national knowledge and human development intervention, led by the Department of Science and Technology and managed by the National Research Foundation. The programme was established in 2006 to strengthen scientific research leadership and capacity in South African universities. It aims to create a critical mass of world-class scholars who will train future generations of scholars and graduates to support a South African knowledge-based economy. Several centers of research excellence make Rhodes a university of choice for postgraduate studies - Dr Badat will speak about how these pockets of excellence are not only seeing Rhodes contributing to the knowledge economy of South Africa but also how responsible and engaged scholarship can move this process forward.

"Rhodes is a very special and distinctive university, one that deservedly commands an enviable academic reputation. We take pride in our striving to ensure that we are an environment in which knowledge, understanding and the intellect can flower; in being a leading postgraduate and research university that takes undergraduate studies seriously; in enjoying among the best pass and graduation rates in South Africa; in our increasing engagement with local communities; in the pursuit of equity and excellence, and in being a cosmopolitan institution with students from some 56 countries. This year we also celebrate a new University record of 55 PhDs - not bad for the smallest university in the country!

Dr Badat heads South Africa's smallest university (7,500 students) but its commitment to knowledge generation and the development of outstanding intellectual capital and thus the skills base of the country is out of proportion to its size. It has only 0.8% of South Africa's university students and 1.9% of all full-time academic staff. The award of 15 SARCI chairs is a testimony to Rhodes' commitment to knowledge and its outstanding track record in research."

The five most recently awarded chairs at Rhodes are in 'Intellectualization of African Languages, Multilingualism and Education;' 'Insects in Sustainable Agricultural Ecosystems;' 'Interdisciplinary Science in Land and Natural Resource Use for Sustainable Livelihoods;' 'Critical Studies in Sexualities and Reproduction: Human and Social Dynamics,' and 'Marine Natural Products Research.'

Once appointed these will join current chairs in Medicinal Chemistry and Nanotechnology (Prof Tebello Nyokong); Marine Ecosystems (Prof Christopher McQuaid); Mathematics Education (Prof Marc Schafer); Numeracy (Prof Mellony Graven) and the Chair in Radio Astronomy Techniques & Technologies or SKA (Square Kilometer Array) (Prof Oleg Smirnov).