



RHODES UNIVERSITY

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Vice-Chancellor's Circular

27 September 2016

Letter from the Vice-Chancellor

Dear Rhodes University students and staff

Since the start of disruptions of the academic activities of our University on Tuesday, 22 September 2016, I have received numerous e-mail messages from students, academic and support staff and parents who are anxious and concerned about events on campus. Many students are rightly worried that the disturbances on campus might seriously jeopardise their future as they cannot afford to have an academic year wasted. Many have overcome significant hurdles to reach this stage of their academic and personal development. The following letter which I received recently from one of our students reflects the position of many that I have received:

Dear University Management

As a student coming from an abusive family, my childhood had never been a walk in the park. Despite being born to poverty and suffering I still managed to try and better my life. At the age of eight I was already working in a local tavern just to have money for food and school. The only option that I had in life was to study and create a future or success for myself and my siblings. When I received an acceptance letter from Rhodes, I was happy and for once in my life I learned how to smile, as there was hope for me despite my background. I came to Rhodes university in my first year with only R50 as a pocket money to sustain me for the month. You see, even if I had little money I did not let that come in my way as I was given a once in a lifetime opportunity to change my life. So I focused on my academics and studied up until I reached my final year and today I already received a job offer for next year. The way I was so happy, it was like I had won a lotto. I'm going to be the first graduate in my entire family and I had plans to also send my other siblings to university and also change my life. When the protest started, when I was kicked out of my class and told that academic activities are suspended, I just felt empty, I could see all my plans disappearing in thin air, this degree was the only chance of changing my life. Why me God? Have I not suffered enough in my past? Why am I being denied my right and freedom to study and be something in life? I felt my heart being torn into pieces this morning, when I received an email that the university may shut down and we might be sent home. Dr Mabizela and the entire management, please note that I am not writing this email to point fingers or something. I'm begging you from the deepest of my heart to please think of people like me when you make that decision to close the university, depending of what will happen on next week. If the university closes, that bright door that is also opening in my future will also close. I'm the only hope of my family, please don't close the university.

Regards
Lerato

The majority of our students and staff support the cause of achieving quality free education for the poor and adequate funding for our higher education system. They however disagree with the approach taken by the protesting students.

We cannot make 'Lerato' and many other silent 'Leratos' in our University become nothing more than 'collateral damage'. We cannot make their hopes, dreams and aspirations inconsequential or disposable. We cannot fail them; we dare not fail them.

I appeal to your good sense that we do all we can to ensure a successful completion of the 2016 academic year. In this regard, I urge all students and staff to re-engage the academic activities tomorrow morning, Wednesday, 28 September 2016 at 10h30.

In the meeting held with various university constituencies earlier today, all participants, including the representatives of the protesting students, made a commitment to non-violence on our campus.

While the academic programme continues, the Leadership of our University remains deeply committed to engagements with all University constituencies who are committed to making the academic project a success.

Let me reiterate our unambiguous collective position on the issue of funding of our public higher education and access to quality higher education:

First, we stand united with our students in urging our Government and the private sector to provide funding so that every academically deserving student is afforded a fair opportunity to access quality higher education. In particular, we support the call for the immediate implementation of free quality higher education for the poor.

Second, we call on our Government and private sector to support our public higher education system adequately to maintain quality in our public higher education and with a view to lessening the burden of tuition fees from struggling parents.

Yours sincerely

Dr Sizwe Mabizela, Vice-Chancellor, Rhodes University