



RHODES UNIVERSITY 2024 – MID-YEAR UPDATE

From the Vice Chancellor Prof. Sizwe Mabizela

Extracts from Report to the Board of Governors, May 16, 2024



MESSAGE TO ALUMNI WORLDWIDE:

“We remain true and faithful to our new vision, mission and our transformative purpose as a research intensive university in a country and world with many challenges. Our commitment to fostering a better society and a better world is unwavering. We are positive, confident and optimistic that Rhodes University will remain strong, intellectually vibrant, resilient and sustainable. We thank you for your commitment, support and encouragement as we endeavor further to consolidate our position.”

VISION

Our vision is to be foremost in the generation and advancement of locally responsive and globally engaged knowledge that seeks to create a just and sustainable society.

MISSION

Our mission is to provide transformative education, rigorous scholarship and research that:

- Seeks to produce knowledge to advance the frontiers of science, human understanding and wisdom
- Cultivates knowledgeable and skilled graduates; innovative and critical problem-solvers; caring and engaged citizens; responsible, courageous and ethical leaders
- Enables and drives environmental sustainability, equitable and inclusive social and economic development based on respectful and mutually beneficial partnerships with diverse communities.

AUTUMN 2024 GRADUATION CEREMONIES...

- The 2024 Autumn graduation ceremonies were held from **3 April to 5 April 2024**. In the six graduation ceremonies, a total of **2035 students** received their degrees, diplomas and certificates.
- Of these, **1361 (or 65%)** received their undergraduate bachelor’s degrees and **719 (or 35%)** received their postgraduate degrees, postgraduate diplomas and postgraduate certificates.
- Of the **719** postgraduate students, **66** received their master’s and **34** doctoral degrees. (We have another graduation ceremony in October which is exclusively for Masters and Doctoral graduates.) **Sixty-five percent (65%)** of the graduating students were female students and **10%** were international students



- At the graduation ceremonies, our University honored five outstanding people with the conferral of the University's highest honor, the honorary doctorate degree, in recognition and celebration of their outstanding and praiseworthy contribution to our nation and humanity.
- The recipients of the University's honorary degrees were Ambassador Barbara Masekela; Professor Sylvia Tamale; Archbishop Thabo Makgoba; Mr Thandabantu August and Professor Irvy Gladhill.

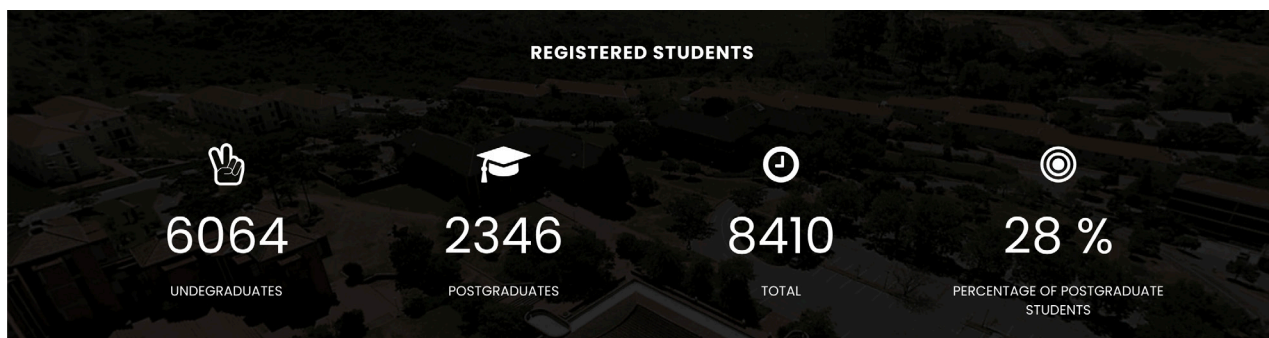


THE UNIVERSITY'S FINANCIAL POSITION...

- The University's financial position remains healthy and strong. We are able to meet all our financial obligations without any challenge.
- Once again, the university obtained a clean audit outcome for the year that ended on **31 December 2024**.
- Our struggle to meet our enrolment targets remains a significant risk to the stability of the University's fiscal position.

MEETING OUR STUDENT ENROLMENT TARGETS...

- One of the most serious risks facing our University arises from its inability to meet its enrollment targets. If not arrested, this will have a significant impact on the University's output subsidy and its long-term sustainability.
- We generally meet (and exceed) our First-Time Entrants (**FTEN**) figures but struggle to meet the postgraduate student enrolment targets.
- We also experience non-return of students in good academic standing.
- Postgraduate student enrolment requires our focused attention. The two Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Registrar and the Deans are attending to the issues of student enrolment.
- A student recruitment, progression and retention plan/strategy has been developed, while continuous discussions regarding student recruitment, support, retention and success are being had.
- A survey is also underway to establish the reasons why some students who are in good standing do not return to Rhodes University.



NATIONAL STUDENT FINANCIAL AID SCHEME (NSFAS) NEVER-ENDING PROBLEMS...

- The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), once again this year, created havoc at the start of the 2024 academic year as the CFO explained earlier.
- The dysfunctionality of NSFAS recently culminated in the dissolution of its Board by the Minister of Higher Education, Science & Innovation, Dr. Blade Nzimande.
- Allegations of corruption in the disbursement of student allowances through the fintech companies continue to bedevil the Scheme. As reported last year, without doing any due diligence, NSFAS decided to implement a cap of **R45 000** on student fee accommodation.
- As a result, the accommodation fees for NSFAS-funded students who were in our residence system last year are in arrears. This has caused anxiety and concern leading to some NSFAS-funded students leaving the residence system to look for cheaper accommodation in unsuitable backrooms around town. This will severely impact their prospects of academic success.
- Given the problems experienced by NSFAS, universities have been asked to assist with the disbursement of student allowances and NSFAS has advanced funds to us to disburse allowances to students until **July 2024**. On our part, we have ensured that our students are cared for as best as possible.
- The Institution is also reimagining the residential model to ensure that it is affordable and sustainable while retaining the RU residence value proposition.



INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT

- In **2021-2022**, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) conducted an institutional audit of Rhodes University to assess the effectiveness of its internal quality assurance management systems in supporting its core academic functions.
- The audit process included a self-evaluation report by the University, external peer review, and a site visit by an audit panel of experts.
- The final report commends Rhodes University for its clearly stated vision, mission, and strategic goals, which align with national priorities and its quality management system.
- It highlights the strategic alignment between the university's quality management system and governance processes.
- The panel found the university to be mature/functional on fifteen out of the sixteen quality standards. It further recommended that Rhodes University improve its systems for tracking its graduates.

DEVELOPMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH THEMES AND FACULTY PROGRAMMATIC RESEARCH AREAS

- **Rhodes University's Institutional Development Plan (IDP 2023 - 2028)** aims to enhance the institution's status as a research-intensive university.
- Over the next **12 to 18** months, the university plans to develop Institutional Research Themes (IRTs) in collaboration with faculties and other stakeholders.
- These IRTs aim to enhance global positioning, accelerate research excellence, and promote collaboration across disciplines.
- Additionally, programmatic research areas within faculties will be identified to facilitate inter-departmental collaboration, guide research funding, and support postgraduate student recruitment.



120TH ANNIVERSARY OF RHODES UNIVERSITY IN 2024...

- Rhodes University's 120th anniversary project, **#RU120**, is well and truly underway. It aims to deepen unity among the University's diverse alumni, connect scholarly exploits, and reimagine the institution in a fast-changing global context.
- The year-long celebratory activities and events include reunions, high-level societal debates, unveilings, exhibitions, and cultural activities. Highlights of the **#RU120** program include dialogues between Vice-Chancellors, high-level current affairs reflections, a Journalism Summit, and the grand opening of the **R90 million** Institute for Nanotechnology Innovation building.
- Over the weekend of **27 - 28 January 2024**, Rhodes University hosted a successful Makhanda Education Summit as part of the University's 120th anniversary activities.
- The purpose of the Summit was to celebrate the tremendous strides that have been made over the past decade in improving the quality of teaching and learning in the local public schools and to position Makhanda as the leading education city - from early childhood education and development to tertiary education - in South Africa and the African continent.
- Makhanda has some of the best schools in the African continent and Rhodes University is one of the leading universities in the African continent. Education is, without a doubt, a unique value proposition for Makhanda.
- On **01 March 2024**, Emeritus Prof Paul Maylam presented an exciting lecture on the intellectual traditions of Rhodes University.
- On **04 - 06 April 2024**, the School of Journalism & Media Studies organized and hosted a Journalism Summit under the theme "Seeds of Change: Cultivating the future of Journalism in Africa." The Summit served as a platform to "deliberate on the future of journalism in South Africa and on the African continent."

LOCAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT REMAINS VERY STRONG AND VIBRANT...

- We hosted a three-day (**14-16 May 2024**) community engagement conference which drew presenters from more than **17** South African Universities including a private university, and presenters from all over the world. The theme of the conference was Community Engagement and the Trajectory of Community-University-Society Relationship: Past, Present and Future possibilities.
- Still related to community engagement, on **23 November 2023**, we established and launched the very first journal of community engagement called, African Journal of Higher Education Community Engagement,
- Recently the Council on Higher Education (**CHE**) accredited the first Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education Community Engagement which will be implemented in **January 2025**.
- Our success rate has also improved from **80% in 2022**, to **84% in 2023** exceeding the set target of **82%**. It is worth noting that for the past **5 years** the average student success rate has been above **80%**.

RE-IMAGINING OUR STUDENT RESIDENTIAL OPERATIONS...

- Acknowledging that NSFAS was unlikely to increase student fee accommodation going forward, the Vice-Chancellor established a Task Team, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs, to analyze the cost drivers in our student residence system and recommend a sustainable operational model that will bring the student residence fees as close to the NSFAS fees as possible.
- Even as we endeavor to re-imagine our residential operations, we will not lose sight of the fact that our residence system is a significant success factor for our students.



MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS UPDATE...

- The University campus remains a major construction site. The governors will be pleased to know that the new building housing the Tebello Nyokong Institute of Nanotechnology Innovation was completed in **January 2024** and the equipment, some of which is the most expensive in the Southern Hemisphere was successfully relocated and Prof Nyokong took occupation of her new office on **22 March 2024**. This was a DHET project costing approximately **R80 million**.
- The **R226 million** ChemPharm Building Refurbishment and Renovation project is progressing well, with Phase 1 completed. Academic activity in that part of the building has commenced. Phase 2 of the project is going according to plan and should be ready for the **2025** academic year.
- On the residence side, we are busy with the Canterbury House refurbishment and Hobson Hall Refurbishment, these projects have been delayed and will be completed in **August 2024**. The oppidan student bus shelter, Oppidan common room, student entrepreneurial hub and the roof of Steve Biko Building are in the final stages of completion.
- Various lighting projects which entailed **13, 20m** mast lights, **254** lights in Prince Alfred Street and the “Blue Route” were upgraded. These lights are connected to generators and therefore the university is lit up during power outages and loadshedding.

- We are in the process of our final consultations for the refurbishment of the Sir Herbert Baker Main Admin Building. The project is estimated to cost over a **R100 million** and is funded by DHET. In Phase 1, the external works were completed in **2020**, and phase 2 was postponed, in order to concentrate on the Science buildings as these were prioritized for construction. We are optimistic that the construction will commence in **August/September 2024**.
- We shall be commencing with our sustainable energy plan in the 2nd semester with solar installations in certain parts of the campus. We received **R18 m** from DHET to support this project.

DR ALISTAIR MOKOENA EDUCATION FUND...

- Google South Africa Country Director Dr Alistair Mokoena has launched the Alistair Mokoena Education Fund at his alma mater, Rhodes University. The fund aims to reduce the debt owed by Honours students, many of whom would otherwise enter the working world on the backfoot.
- Dr Mokoena has contributed the first **R100,000** to the fund, which has awarded two bursaries valued at **R50,000** each to two deserving students studying towards their Honours degrees at Rhodes University.
- He urges students to be problem solvers, highlighting the critical role of education in providing hope and shaping the future.



15. THE IHLUMO SCHOLARSHIP

- The iHlumo Scholarship, established in **2023** by four members of the **2017** Student Representative Council. The scholarship, derived from the word 'Hlumelo' meaning 'growth', aims to support students in need by contributing to their individual and community growth.
- The first recipient was selected early this year and handed over in March. The scholarship is open to students in all faculties and does more than just pay fees; it feeds into the future of students, rescuing them from despair and hopelessness.
- The founders aim to inspire recipients to learn from them and contribute positively to their communities. They encourage other alumni to make financial contributions to their alma mater to assist the next generation of Old Rhodians.
- We appreciate both these generous gestures and hope that all alumni could contribute in one way or the other.





FINTECH CHALLENGES...

- On **28 January 2022**, the new Oracle financial management system, FinCore, went live, replacing the **25-year-old** Protea system. Despite the best of efforts, challenges in the post implementation of FinCore persist. Chief among these relate to: Report writing for funders, and the inability to access (accurate) balances in real time.
- Extraction of accurate financial reports for funders has been a particularly a challenge which places the university at a reputational risk. At its meeting earlier this year, the Finance & General Purposes and the Audit & Risk Committees of Council deliberated at great lengths on this matter.
- The Committees resolved to engage the services of our internal auditors, Ernst & Young, to drill deep into this matter and ensure that a solution is found within a month. The investigation is currently underway.

The University's investment in the local Grahamstown community manifests in strategic initiatives that are conceptualised and implemented in collaborative partnerships. Pathways is a project to enhance the capacity of the historically disadvantaged schools in the city. Grahamstown's oldest community organisation and reputed education NGO GADRA and the newly formed multi-stakeholder Makhanda Circle of Unity (MCoU) are two civic bodies that are at the forefront of the strategy to facilitate shared growth and development in our town. Their strategies cover two broad areas

- 1. Providing second chances to underprivileged senior grades learners in the townships. The project leverages the capacity of our formidable Community Engagement programme through mentorships.**
- 2. Strengthening a wide civil society cooperation for open, transparent and accountable governance of the city.**