



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

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PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES (CGS)
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Programme Director, I feel honoured to have been invited to this august occasion of the Official Opening the College of Graduate Studies. This is indeed significant as the College will also be welcoming the new Executive Dean, Prof Lindiwe Zungu. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate her on her appointment and wish her and the College a productive 2019.

As I indicated at the Official Opening of the University on Friday 15 February 2019, I expect a lot from the College this year. I expect you to

account for the effectiveness of supervision of Masters and Doctoral work across the University.

According to CGS's website, you define your role as to:

- provide a central hub for master's and doctoral support within Unisa, South Africa and Africa;
- nurture a research community whose primary purpose is to sustain master's and doctoral researchers within a supportive academic environment;
- promote and facilitate interdisciplinarity and open, distance and e-learning research;
- inculcate an African perspective in research;
- create a vibrant intellectual space for research innovation, debate and creative thinking;
- produce research and help Master's and Doctoral candidates publish.

Colleagues these are huge responsibilities and I have no doubt that you are capable, as a collective to deliver on this mandate. However, in order to do so you will need a new paradigm shift. This new paradigm shift has been occasioned by the appointment of Prof Zungu who will

be bringing in new vision for the College and new ways of working. I implore you to support her and take this College to new heights.

We all agree that we live in a world that is forever changing. The challenges you face as a College are vividly described by Tade Akin Aina (2010: 36)¹ who argues that:

“Universities are a part of these changes, sites where the changes are documented, studied, and disseminated, and in some cases they are the arenas of struggle for and against the changes, their catalysts and facilitators. From the perspective of knowledge production, some of these changes are affecting the modes of scholarly inquiry, the constitution of disciplines and their boundaries, and the relationships among institutions, knowledge systems, and other parts of society.”

The author goes further and asks a pertinent question which I contend is appropriate for the College. He asks “How are African universities dealing with these challenges, and how do the challenges constitute a basis for the transformation of the universities?” Colleagues, what I am

¹ Tade Akin Aina, 2010. Beyond reforms: the politics of higher education transformation in Africa, *African Studies Review* 53 (1): 21 - 40

hearing from this quotation is what happens to the knowledge that is produced in this College? Does it inform policy or does it lead to innovation and commercialisation? What is the relevance of the research we produce as a University and as a College to the University itself? I think these are questions that we must engage as scholars and researchers.

In an informative book called *The Next Generation of Scientists in Africa*, edited by Catherine Beaudry, Johan Mouton and Heidi Prozesky (2018)² they provide an important lesson on how to support and mentor young scientists that we desperately need in South Africa and in the continent. They state that:

“At the earlier stages of their research careers, young scientists voiced a need for more clarity on the requirements involved in pursuing a successful research career. These include an understanding of the relevant university cultures, preparation for undertaking lecturing duties, and navigating the intricacies involved in publication of research results in academic journals. At the later career stages, introduction to research networks and

² Catherine Beaudry, Johan Mouton & Heidi Prozesky (editors). 2018. *The next generation of scientists in Africa*, African Minds, Cape Town

mentoring on fundraising are contributions more established scientists could offer. However, there seems to be an absence of experienced staff who are able to act as mentors and role-models, or a disinclination of available (often overburdened) senior staff to do so in an encouraging manner.” (2018: 102).

It is important to take into account what they regard as barriers in producing the Next Generation of Scientists in Africa. Among the many challenges that are experienced by young scientists in ‘breaking into’ the scientific publication system are:

- barriers to publication
- dangers of predatory publishing
- lack of a conducive and supportive research environment
- heavy teaching workloads,
- a lack of mentoring and training support, and
- a lack of mobility opportunities” (2018: 146)³.

I trust as a College you have a plan of dealing with some of these challenges.

³ id

Programme Director, I would like to conclude by referring to the words of Savo Heleta (2018)⁴ who captured resistance to transformation in succinct manner when he argues that:

“The opposition to *genuine transformation and decolonization is deeply entrenched within the university structures* and will do all it takes to hold on to power and influence. Currently, there is very little interest or willingness to decolonize the curriculum and dismantle the “pedagogy of big lies” due to the presence of *established hegemonic structures, power relations and institutional cultures* that stem from the apartheid days and hinder any serious possibilities of disruption and dismantling of the status quo. Many at universities do not want to change anything; some still do not understand what all the debates are about; others are only interested in superficial change that would allow business as usual to continue; and those in the academia and administration who want to change are the minority. Despite all the challenges, student activists and progressive academics and administrators will have to maintain a

⁴ Savo Heleta. 2018. Decolonising knowledge in South Africa: dismantling the ‘pedagogy of lies’, *Ufahamu: a journal of African Studies*, 40 (92): 47 - 65

nonviolent and intellectual struggle until the curriculum and knowledge at universities are decolonized. This struggle will be a long and arduous one. But however difficult the road ahead, there are no alternatives if the South African higher education sector is to be relevant” (2018: 60).

Based on the above, I want to urge the College to forge ahead and lead the project of transforming knowledge at UNISA for the ‘public good’. I am convinced Colleges are looking at this College for inspiration and guidance on how to ‘do’ knowledge transformation. I am certain that the research institutes and SARCHI Chairs that are located in the College, though not enough, have the potential to change the status quo and lead the process of disruption. I am looking forward to see how these units will be repositioned and repurposed to deliver on this important mandate.

I wish the College all the best in 2019.

Thank you very much.