

## **VICE-CHANCELLOR'S ADDRESS AT THE MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY THIRD CONGREGATION ON - THURSDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2004**

The time has come again for us to experience the pleasure of receiving you at the Midlands State University. This is yet another joyous occasion for us as we witness the conferment of degrees of the University to a second cohort of graduands this year. It is the uniqueness of the Midlands State University that as a fully semesterised University we have two student intakes in the year; one in March and the other in August. From the beginning of this year we have a group of students completing their degree studies at the end of each semester, hence two graduation ceremonies in the year.

We are proud as a university that we were able to embrace the semester system that allows our students faster progression through their studies since they can retake or repeat failed modules in the very next semester.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, the Midlands State University recognizes that university education is the great engine of economic and social change and that this education confers considerable benefits to the individual, not least in terms of future earnings. It is our belief that these benefits which higher education brings to the individual must become available to the majority of our people.

For this reason, Your Excellency, this university has introduced innovative ways of expanding access to higher education. We introduced new programmes including the Visiting School that is largely available in the Faculty of Commerce and the Block Release programme in the Faculty of Education. These programmes allow our stakeholders to obtain undergraduate university education without necessarily leaving employment. The University realized that it is part of the global village and as such, it would be prudent to assist the working population to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills required to cope with the increasingly dynamic workplace. The University also increased its student intake by introducing evening undergraduate studies – we call parallel programme for full-fee paying students. Your Excellency and Chancellor, that is how the Midlands State University has widened access to higher education and hence also produced so many graduates over such a short space of time since 2000 when it had its first student intake. Statistics clearly illustrate this fact:

On 28 May 2004 the University presented to you, Your Excellency and Chancellor, three hundred and seventy (370) graduands whom you capped here. Today, nine hundred and seven (907) highly trained men and women will be stepping up here to receive their awards. In addition to these you will also notice in the Programme Booklet that there is a group of twenty-five students who have completed their Postgraduate Diploma in Education studies, but will not, as is our tradition, go through formal academic ceremony. Over and above these figures it may be of interest to you, to know that our current student enrolment stands at seven thousand one hundred and twenty (7 120). Of these, two thousand five hundred and forty (2 540) are women and four thousand five hundred and eighty (4 580) are men. As you can see we have gone past the 36% female enrolment mark and our aim is to achieve a fifty-fifty enrolment mark in a short time.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen this is how Midlands State University has contributed to the broadening of access to higher education in the country to date.

As we congratulate these graduands for their attainments we are also glad, Your Excellency, to announce that quite a number of them are already in employment. Let me also add that a good number of our Level Four students, who are currently writing their final examinations also managed to secure employment at the end of their Level Three Work Related Learning. This is a very pleasing sign of the acceptance of our degree programmes and training methodologies by the corporate community. The Midlands State University student receives special training that is buttressed by our unique Work Related Learning Methodology. Throughout the student's study programme lecturers integrate the concept of Work Related Learning with lecture-room theory by way of relating their lectures as much as possible to what goes on in the work place.

Indeed, we can claim that our curriculum is in conformity with the observations of the former President of Ireland, Mrs Mary Robinson, who once said that

“education must reflect the needs of a people and endeavour to fulfill their aspirations”.

We continue to strive for a more relevant curriculum and effective teaching and training strategies that will equip our graduates with the necessary skills and competencies required by commerce and industry.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, beginning in August 2004, the University has added to the curriculum, new programmes that are in line with recent calls for increased awareness of our cultural and historical heritage. Zimbabwe is the only country in the world named after a unique archaeological culture. Until recently, we have not been paying much attention to our historical heritage, though we have a rich cultural past. Just as the Americans find inspiration in the Statue of Liberty, and the Egyptians in their pyramids, so must we also be similarly inspired by monuments such as Great Zimbabwe, Khami, Nalatale and others. They represent past achievements which have withstood the tests of time. We have therefore introduced within Faculty of Arts, the Department of Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies.

The Midlands State University also realizes the need to develop local Governance awareness at grassroot levels. To this end, the University recently introduced a Department of Local Governance Studies to spearhead general sensitization on local governance matters.

We are also as a University keen on keeping up with socio-economic needs of Zimbabwe. To this end, and very shortly, the University will be establishing a department of Modern and African Languages that will teach major languages spoken in the region and in the far eastern nations. We have in mind such languages as Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Portuguese, Afrikaans, Swahili, Chinyanja, Spanish, French and Chinese. Definitely, a working knowledge of these languages by Zimbabweans will facilitate increased interaction including trade, between the concerned countries and ourselves.

The Midlands State University considers gender issues to be central to our social relationships and development efforts. This is why we believe that the students who pass through our university should be gender empowered. Recently Midlands State University has been working very closely with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) on the project to introduce Gender Studies for all our students in the University. Our objective is to establish a Gender Studies Centre that will co-ordinate the teaching of Gender Studies. Our plans for the short term are that, beginning in March 2005 all Midlands State University

Level Two students will be required to take modules in Gender Studies. In addition to this, Gender Studies will be introduced as a specialist teacher education option, to be made available at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. We hope to eventually offer first and postgraduate degrees in Gender Studies. The University has already offered the necessary training to the lecturers who will teach the modules.

Our female students need to be gender empowered so that they 're-invent' themselves and not remain constrained by rigid societal expectations, notions and prejudices. They should claim their legitimate place in the current male dominated world. In that way they will make meaningful contributions to the socio-economic development of the country and at the same time realize their due rewards for their contributions. Male students will also be gender empowered so that they become fully conscientised and socialized colleagues of liberated women in the workplace and, indeed, in the home.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, as has become our tradition, on an occasion such as this one, the Vice-Chancellor's address is usually a high point of the day, providing information on the current state of the University today and looking forward to tomorrow. Also as part of his address, the Vice-Chancellor takes advantage of the occasion to elaborate on a theme that he considers to be of interest to the times and to his audience. This is why this time around I wish to briefly address the issue of Information Communication Technology and Higher Education. Indeed taking my cue from Professor Robert Aylett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the London Metropolitan University's inspiring statement that:

"Our Universities do not just play a role in education, but can be a catalyst for change and development across many fronts."

Indeed, higher education institutions are in the knowledge business. They are key to the cultural and social development of their communities. They create knowledge; access international excellence; transfer knowledge and development in students of all ages and backgrounds the desire for and higher levels of lifelong learning that underpin sustained economic performance of any nation. Their links and networks at the regional and local levels help develop clusters of innovation and help small companies develop their capabilities. They engage in knowledge transfer in a variety of ways, including via technology; business support and consultancy; and the continuous upgrading of workforce

skills. It will, however, be appreciated that our higher education sector in Zimbabwe and, indeed, elsewhere in the SADC region and most other parts of the world, experiences to fulfill these roles. One of these problems is the general lack of resources. The other is the ongoing battle to retain high caliber staff in a context of scarce human resource and growing competition from better resourced countries and multinationals.

In my view, the solution lies in us taking advantage of globalization and the information technology revolution. Information Communication Technology forms the backbone for science and technology innovation, research and communication. At present the major problem that restricts access of Zimbabwean Institutions to the global village is limited bandwidth. During my recent trip to the United States of America, I had the opportunity to visit information technology service providers based in that country. I was made to understand that being a land locked country, Zimbabwe is currently connected to the international backbone and thereon to the international communication satellites through South Africa by means of an eight megabyte bandwidth. The capacity of this bandwidth is not sufficient for our requirements as evidenced by the slow downloads we experience each time we access the internet. I also found out that it is possible to connect directly to the internet using the satellite communication technology provided by some Internet Service Providers (ISP). I also discovered that there is no limit to the bandwidth using this route. However, of note is that fact that this is a generally expensive undertaking which individual Universities cannot afford given their meager resources.

We are aware that there are a number of initiatives within Africa to address information communication technology issues. Access to affordable bandwidth and the skills to use it are the subject of a wide range of international initiatives in Africa. Very recently heads of information communication technology from all the twelve universities in the country held a workshop at Midlands State University to map out our information communication technology initiatives for institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. Our Information Communication Technology heads came up with a number of proposals which would be realized if funding became available. Similar developments are taking place in the SADC region.

Apart from these national initiatives there are many groups and organizations that have recognized the importance of bandwidth to African Universities and to Africa in general and

are engaged in some way with increasing this access. Efforts are also underway in the SADC grouping of Universities – the Higher Education Association for Southern Africa which we are going to be formal landing in February 2005 – to develop a conceptual and implementation Information Communication Technology framework for its members and possibly partner many of these initiatives.

When national and/or regional universities participate as a consortium or “buying club” to purchase bandwidth, the benefits will be incalculable. The consortium will be in a position to negotiate the best price for bandwidth equipment and services.

Our institutions of higher education will benefit from assistance in utilizing the bandwidth more effectively. The participating institutions will also be able to explore how the resulting network could be leveraged to increase the effectiveness of research and educational initiatives – especially enabling the dissemination of relevant information to end users in each country.

The most obvious benefit will be that university staff and students will again access to reliable high-speed internet connections. Universities will also gain easy access to useful literature on a variety of subjects. The lecturer will also feel liberated from the labour intensive teaching methods thus affording him/her the opportunity to undertake research and pursue other professional activities as his/her duties dictate. The university student will all of a sudden find that he/she gains access to lectures delivered by experts in all subjects. Above all the Universities will now become of tremendous benefit to the wider community by availing to the all types of technology as well as churning out well-trained professionals and practitioners. The Universities will, indeed, become the catalysts to social and economic development. Your Excellency and Chancellor, as we attempt to gain unlimited access to the information super highway as well as to acquire faster downloads of information from various websites we will always be wary as to what and whose knowledge we will be searching for, since all this apparent privilege will bring along in its baggage western dominance with all its unwelcome cultural biases. We shall have to consciously try to use the international network as a conduit to disseminate our own African and Zimbabwean perspectives to achieve a balanced global knowledge environment. But more importantly the new network will facilitate speedy information flow and exchange of educational materials and programmes within the SADC. This way our higher education institutions will actively

and effectively compliment our political leaders' efforts to achieve regional integration and high rate of regional economic development.

Finally, your Excellency and Chancellor, allow me to once again congratulate these graduands who will be conferred degrees of the Midlands State University today.

Congratulations, Makorokoto, Amhlope!

**I THANK YOU.**

