

[DRAFT: embargoed until delivery; subject to change; compare against delivery] 10 MIN

## **SU Leads 2017**

**Kruiskerk, Mon 4 September 2017, 13:30–13:40**

**Session Theme: “Building a community for all”**

**Address by SU Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof Wim de Villiers**

Thank you, Gareth – for the introduction, and also to everyone in Student Affairs for organising this event. Afternoon folks. Goeie middag. Molweni. Wow! What a gathering. It’s my third time at SU Leads, and it’s always impressive to see our student leaders get together like this, empowering yourselves for the journey you have embarked upon.

Leadership is a profound journey ... on different levels: your own journey as a person; the journey of those you serve and whose interests you represent; and the journey of your organisation – in this case, Stellenbosch University, and the particular structure or environment that you form part of. From my side, I welcome you as fellow travellers, and I look forward to walking with you on the path of leadership here at this University.

In terms of my own journey, I’ve come full circle in many ways. Having studied here and having been a student leader here, it is exciting for me to now lead the University at a crucial time in its history. And I am glad to have you as partners on that journey.

I’m also glad to see that the theme this morning was “Inclusivity”, and that this afternoon’s theme is “Building a community for all”. That is the journey we are on as a University. And like all journeys it started somewhere, it had a beginning; we have our current location, where we are at the moment; and we are headed somewhere, a destination we want to get to.

Past, present, future – let me briefly touch on those three aspects, starting at the very BEGINNING.

Next year, it will be 100 years since Stellenbosch University was formally born out of Victoria College in terms of an act of parliament. Like the 100th sprouting of a leaf on a tree, Stellenbosch University’s Centenary signifies a new beginning, while commemorating the growth and hard work over the past century – and also the important lessons learnt.

Having been founded in a certain context at a particular time, this old university has come a long way. And ours has certainly not been an uneventful journey. There have been many twists and turns, ups and downs ... major milestones, but also potholes and dead ends.

We will celebrate our achievements, but there have also been serious challenges and mistakes. It is important that we acknowledge these – as we have done, and will continue doing – so that we can get on with our journey, here and now.

That is the second aspect I want to touch on – the PRESENT, where we find ourselves currently. There are many more students here at SU Leads – this gathering of our student leaders – than the whole University started with in 1918, which was 213. Today we have more than 31 000 students, on five campuses.

Our students are here to get an excellent qualification, but the University also offers much more, and you folks have seized that opportunity ... which is the chance we have as leaders to learn more about

what is going on in the world around us, but also to influence things, to shape society, to make it a better place for all.

In our context, that includes such issues as broadening access to higher education, in the process looking at financial issues. It also includes our institutional culture as a University, ensuring that it is inclusive and welcoming to all. It includes the languages we use as mediums of instruction. It includes the curriculum we follow, what subject matter is on offer here, paying attention to what knowledge we include, making sure our context here in Africa is acknowledged.

We should have these debates, engage in an open conversation, but always do so in a value-driven way. And our two touchstones in that regard are:

Firstly, our own values as an institution – which currently include shared accountability, empathy and leadership in the service of others. Our second touchstone is the Constitution of South Africa, which says our values as a country include: Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms; as well as non-racialism and non-sexism

What I have always found very compelling in the Constitution is the Preamble, which says “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity”. That’s how I see our institution. Stellenbosch University belongs to all who work and study here, united in our diversity

We need to go forward **together**, which brings me to my THIRD AND FINAL POINT – THE FUTURE.

We have started a process of developing a new vision and strategy for the University – Vision 2040, and an institutional strategy for the six-year period 2019 to 2024. This is an exciting journey, and we want to take all our stakeholders along – including students.

We intend launching our new Vision and Strategy towards the end of next year, but we need your input. Students are a key stakeholder, and your role as student leader is vital ... to give students a voice in this process

We are consulting in various ways: Through formal structures, e.g. SRC, Prim Committee, Academic Affairs Council, etc. But there will also be opportunity for broad input from the student body, for instance in discussion forums, and through mechanisms such as a questionnaire or survey.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am proud of you. For nearly 100 years, we have been learning, growing and moving forward together.

May we as leaders at this university proceed in that spirit. Thank you,