

Welcoming new students and their parents to Stellenbosch University

Coetzenburg, 18:00, 25 January 2018

By Prof Wim de Villiers, Rector and Vice-Chancellor

Thank you, [Ms] Tonia [Overmeyer, Director: Centre for Student Leadership and Structures, and MC of the event.] Good evening everyone! *Molweni. Goeienaand, en baie welkom*. It's great to see all of you here! Welcome to all the parents and guardians in the audience. I also welcome members of the University Council, as well as student leadership structures.

The real VIPs tonight are our newcomer first-year students! And I must say, you folks look splendid in your Matie T-shirts ... a sea of maroon! Welcome, Maties!

There's great symbolic meaning in that T-shirt of yours. Just as we all have the same maroon coloured blood flowing in our veins as human beings, so we are all maroon as Maties. Whether we are black or white, English, Afrikaans or isiXhosa, urban or rural, rich or poor, a South African or an international student or staff member ... we are all part of the Matie family, united in our diversity.

Here we strive to be **INCLUSIVE**. We respect each other – regardless of our differences. In fact, we celebrate our diversity because it makes us stronger. We treat everybody with dignity, irrespective of skin colour or language or gender or sexual orientation or religious beliefs or political views.

Now, you are joining Stellenbosch University at a very special time in its history – our **CENTENARY** year. That's right, Maties turns 100 this year ... which makes your 2018 Matie T-shirt a collector's item ... so hang on to it!

This is one of the **topics** I want to touch on in my address – our **Centenary**. Another major topic will be the **water crisis** that we are facing because of the drought in the Western Cape. Both of these aspects are reflected in the signage that you see on and around the field.

So, first to our Centenary. Stellenbosch University started in 1918 with just 503 students and 40 lecturers in four faculties. Today, we have more than 31 000 students and 3 000 staff members in 10 faculties on five campuses in the region.

You folks are a very special group, our Centenary intake. Stellenbosch received approximately 33 000 applications for this year, but we only have 5 000 places available for new first-year students. So you are a very select group.

Year after year, Stellenbosch attracts top candidates from across the country and beyond because it is a top university. We are known for our academic **EXCELLENCE**, which is reflected in a number of indicators. For instance:

- Our student success rate is consistently around 85%, which is among the highest in the country.
- We regularly award record numbers of degrees and other qualifications.
- And we have the highest research output per full-time academic staff member of all South African universities.

Little wonder, then, that a substantial number of last year's 24 top matriculants nationally are now here at Stellenbosch. If we look at one subject in particular – Mathematics – two thirds of the matriculants in South Africa who achieved more than 90% in Maths applied to Maties.

I am proud to report that four out of every 10 newcomer first-year students admitted to Stellenbosch achieved a matric pass rate of more than 80%. And if we use 70% as criterion, it covers eight out of every 10 of you. Well done, folks!

Now, I must warn you that there is a big gap from school to university. *Eerstejaar is nie Graad 13 nie! Julle gaan baie hard moet werk, van dag een af!*

The good news is that help is at hand. You are entering an ecosystem of support. It is an integrated arrangement, with everyone working together. Like we see here today, our academics, management and students are aligned and share the responsibility for a successful academic and social

environment. If you find the going tough, ask for help, reach out for support. Because at the heart of the excellence that Stellenbosch has become known for the past 100 years is a spirit of mutual support, friendship and togetherness.

In commemorating our Centenary, we acknowledge our inextricable connection with generations past, present and future. We will be celebrating our many successes and achievements the past century, but at the same time, the University acknowledges its contribution towards the injustices of the past.

For this we have deep regret. We apologise unreservedly to the communities and individuals who were excluded from the historical privileges that Stellenbosch University enjoyed. We also honour the critical Matie voices of that time who would not be silenced despite being ostracised. And in responsibility towards the present and future generations, Stellenbosch University commits itself unconditionally to the ideal of an inclusive, world-class university in and for Africa.

That is our dream, because we share the conviction held by former President Nelson Mandela that "Education is the most powerful weapon ... you can use to change the world." We are honoured to be commemorating our Centenary in the same year as Madiba, who was also born in 1918.

He, of course, played a leading role in South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994. And two years later, in 1996, he received an honorary doctorate from Stellenbosch University. Taking a look at the commendation on that occasion, we see that Madiba was honoured by Maties for being "a symbol of empowerment through learning"; "an icon of peace and reconciliation through negotiation"; and "an embodiment of justice and humanity". This is a legacy that we continue to honour at Stellenbosch University, and one that will serve us well as we enter the second century of our existence.

Let me now turn to the other main topic of my address: the **WATER CRISIS** in this region. This precious resource, on which all life depends, is under threat like never before. We are in the grip of an unprecedented drought in the Western Cape, which has led to ever dropping dam and reservoir levels. It is so serious that we are actually facing the very real prospect of taps running completely dry. "Day Zero" is looming large ... unless we all work together to avert disaster.

There are two aspects to dealing with this crisis – supply and consumption. On the supply side, the authorities and the University are pulling out all the stops to secure additional water, for instance through boreholes.

But it won't be enough. We must also drastically reduce our water consumption. Now, a lot has been done already by the University to reduce the water footprint of our five campuses – Stellenbosch, Tygerberg, Bellville Park, Saldanha and Worcester. This includes the fitment of efficient showerheads in residences, restrictor aerators on taps, and fittings in toilets. Electronic water meters are also being fitted to measure water usage in buildings and to detect leaks.

But, again, this won't be enough if each and every one of us don't start using less water. A lot less. The City of Cape Town has set a target of 50 litres per person per day, and Stellenbosch Municipality could follow suit. Fifty litres a day. That's the combined figure for your total water consumption, everywhere you go – whether at home, in res, on campus or in town.

And the only way of doing this is to change our behaviour. Don't draw a bath but rather take a brief shower – lasting no more than 90 seconds – and use a bucket to collect the water. Use that water in the toilet, and even then, only flush when you have to. Also find other sources of greywater, for instance from washing machines.

There are many other things that can be done. Let's talk to each other about it. Let's find creative and innovative solutions. Like the three Maties chemistry students who last year came up with a way of reducing their specific laboratory's water consumption by at least 3 000 litres per week. And the three postgraduate students in Earth Sciences who are crowdfunding their nationwide study of South Africa's groundwater resources. That's the Matie spirit! That's how we will get through this crisis – with creativity and innovation, mutual support, friendship and togetherness.

The same principles apply to your **HEALTH and SAFETY**. Please take care of yourself and each other, and look after your possessions. Campus Security is there to help. And always behave in a way that protects yourself. As a university sector, we too are vulnerable to HIV /Aids, TB, sexually transmitted infections, and to gender-based violence. Avoid factors that compromise safe behaviour. This University is committed to the values of caring and support for all.

Later tonight, you will get the opportunity to write down your dreams for the future. To come to university is a dream for many, but not everyone gets the opportunity to pursue that dream. That is why we welcome the announcement of additional funding by the state. This has implications for households in two income categories: up to R350 000 and up to R600 000 per year – but remember, you must apply for this funding. Our Centre for Bursaries and Loans will be glad to assist.

In **CONCLUSION**, ladies and gentlemen, you have a wonderful opportunity starting here tonight. It is up to you to make the most of it. Let us go forward together, *saam vorentoe, masiye phambili*. Thank you.

Let me now introduce members of the **RECTORATE** to you:

Prof Arnold Schoonwinkel, Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching / Viserektor: Leer en Onderrig

- Prof Eugene Cloete, Viserektor: Navorsing, Innovasie & Nagraadse Studies
- Prof Nico Koopman, Vice-Rector: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel
- Prof Hester Klopper, Vice-Rector (or DVC) for Strategy and Internationalisation;
- En prof Stan du Plessis, Bedryfshoof
- Ons Registrateur, Dr Ronel Retief, is vandag met siekverlof

We also have the DEANS of our FACULTIES present:

- Prof Jimmy Volmink, Dean of Medicine & Health Sciences
- Prof Samuel Tshehla, Dean of Military Science
- Prof Nicola Smit, Dean of Law
- Prof Louise Warnich, Dekaan Natuurwetenskappe
- Prof Danie Brink, Dean AgriSciences
- Prof Reggie Nel, Dean of Theology
- Prof Anthony Leysens, Dekaan Lettere & Sosiale Wetenskappe
- Prof Johan Malan, Acting Dean of Economic & Management Sciences
- Apologies from our Dean of Engineering, Prof Wikus van Niekerk, and our Acting Dean of Education, Prof Yusuf Waghid, who could not be here tonight