

**OPENING OF THE STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY LEARNING COMMONS**

**Professor H Russel Botman,
Rector and Vice-Chancellor,
Stellenbosch University (SU)
JS Gericke Library Auditorium,
SU, 16 February 2011**

**INWYDING VAN DIE UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH LEERSENTRUM**

**Prof H Russel Botman,
rektor en visekanselier,
Universiteit Stellenbosch (US)
Ouditorium, JS Gericke-biblioteek,
US, 16 Februarie 2011**

Dankie, Mohamed [Shaik, Senior Direkteur: Kommunikasie].

Goeiemiddag, almal. Molweni. Wamkelikile. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We are here to celebrate the opening of our library's new Learning Commons, but you might still have had to face the afternoon traffic, so thanks for coming. In particular, welcome to our distinguished guests:

- Alderman Cyril Jooste, the Mayor of Stellenbosch;
- Mr Graft Mugaragumbo, Programme Officer of the Belgian Embassy in South Africa;
- *Dr Paul Cluver, voorsitter van die US-Raad, en sy mede-raadslede, dr George du Toit en dr Adelbert Scholtz;*
- *Lede van ons Bestuurspan, Dekane van ons fakulteite, en lede van die studenteraad;*
- Ms Niki Crowser of the Cape Higher Education Consortium and our colleagues from other universities;
- *Lede van die argiteksfirma en boukontrakteurs wat by hierdie projek betrokke was*

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to take you back a few years to the "BC" era. In this instance, "BC" stands for "Before Computers". Mind you, I am not talking ancient history here. It is incredible to think that the World Wide Web was only invented in 1989, yet a mere 22 years later we can hardly conceive of a world without the Web.

Now, like some of you here, I too was a student in the "BC" era. And in many respects it was not all that different to being a student today. *Ons het ook hard geleer én hard gespeel.* And come exam time, or when you had to do an assignment, the race was on to claim the best spot in the library and to lay your hands on the right books.

This is still the case today, except for two things. Academic knowledge – and lots of it – is also to be had elsewhere, not only in libraries. And there is so much information available today – most of it almost instantaneously – that it can be quite overwhelming to anyone.

There is a qualitative difference between the knowledge world of the 20th century and the knowledge economy of the 21st century. This is where our new Learning Commons comes in. It is a truly 21st century facility filled with high-tech equipment and innovative learning spaces. But it also follows the old-school approach of having suitably qualified and well-trained staff on hand to help students navigate the high seas of higher learning.

Finding information is not difficult these days. Anyone can enter a term in a search engine and get millions of hits. The trick is to find the right kind of information – reliable and relevant knowledge.

Last weekend, at our first Institutional Planning Forum for the year, we had a very interesting presentation by Professor Johann Kinghorn, the Director of our Centre for Knowledge Dynamics and Decision-making. We had asked him to give us a glimpse of things to come by the year 2020.

He pointed out that in the Industrial Age of the past, the key to productivity was labour. Success depended on efficient workplace systems, labour saving machines, and so on. Now that we find ourselves in the Information Age, we have built machines to do some of our thinking for us. We call these machines computers, and we use them to store and process information.

In this age, the key to productivity is creativity – knowing how to get the best out of our thinking machines. This has serious implications for universities, which have traditionally shaped their students for professional life. Clearly, information literacy has become a crucial skill to transfer, and the Learning Commons and its staff will help us get there.

Die Leersentrum wat vandag amptelik ingewy word, is 'n tree onderweg daarna om ons studente optimale toegang tot die jongste tegnologie te gee, en om hulle toe te rus met die nodige kennis en ingesteldheid om dit ten beste te benut. Dit is 'n belegging in uitnemendheid, wat nog altyd 'n hoeksteen van die Universiteit Stellenbosch was.

Studentesukses is 'n hoofdoelwit van die HOOP Projek, die US se ambisieuse ontwikkelingsveldtog wat in 2010 openbaar bekendgestel is. Dit is dus heel gepas dat die Leersentrum minder as 'n jaar later een van die eerste tasbare uitkomst van die HOOP Projek is.

Die Leersentrum behels 'n aansienlike uitgawe juis omdat ons dink om in die sukses van ons studente te belê, is 'n goeie idee. The Learning Commons was constructed at a cost of R18,7 million, and we consider it money well spent. Of this amount, R10 million was allocated from initial HOPE Project seed funding provided by the Council of the University. The logic of the HOPE Project funding model is that we use our own funds to leverage contributions by other parties, including the government and donors.

An additional R8 million came from regular institutional funds, which leaves a shortfall of roughly R700,000. Did you bring your cheque books? Don't worry, I'm only joking! But you are welcome to speak to us about how you can help us make a difference.

We are serious in our desire to be a relevant university, an institution that makes a difference to the lives of our students, and through them and through our science, to society. And we do aim to deliver graduates with the requisite intellectual agility to flourish in a future society, and the necessary moral fibre to contribute to the sustainable development of our country, our continent, our world and all its people.

To achieve this, we do need partners who share our vision, which is a country and continent free from poverty, where the human dignity of all people is protected, where our social and ecological systems are healthy, and where peace, security and democracy are safeguarded.

Hoekom bemoei ons as universiteit ons hoegenaamd daarmee om van die wêreld 'n beter plek te help maak? Beteken dit ons het nou 'n welsynsorganisasie geword? Allermens. Dit gaan oor hoe ons die aard, plek en rol van die Universiteit in die samelewing sien. Die US se "bestaansdoel" is "om in verbondenheid aan die universitêre ideaal van uitmuntende wetenskapbeoefening 'n omgewing te skep en vol te hou waarbinne kennis ontdek kan word, gedeel kan word, en tot voordeel van die gemeenskap aangewend kan word".

Met dié missiestelling word beklemtoon dat die Universiteit tegelyk op kennis ingestel is én 'n verantwoordelikheid tot diensbaarheid het. Dié twee aspekte – akademiese uitnemendheid en relevansie – loop soos 'n goue draad deur die US se geskiedenis, en die HOOP Projek is gewoon 'n omvattende, planmatige vergestaltung daarvan.

Ons wil hoop skep deur middel van uitnemende wetenskapsbeoefening in die hoër onderwys. The HOPE Project allows us to use our knowledge base and our cutting-edge scientific research to address some of the most pressing needs around us in South Africa and on the rest of the African continent. In this way we aim to generate hope in and from Africa, our continent.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me tell you about another initiative driven by Ellen Tise, Senior Director of our Library and Information Service, and her team. In the spirit of the HOPE Project, Stellenbosch in October last year became the first African university to sign the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities. The goal of this international convention is to make research freely and widely available to both civil society and the research community worldwide.

We have created an open access repository, SUNScholar, which can be accessed by anyone with an internet connection. It is an electronic archive for digital theses, dissertations, research articles, and so on. In this way we are sharing our intellectual output with the rest of the world.

Die Leersentrum is ewe grensverskuiwend. Ellen, ek wil jou en jou span en almal wat daarby betrokke was, gelukwens. Welgedaan! Our Library and Information Service has shown us the way forward, and judged by their enthusiastic response to the Learning Commons so far, Maties can clearly not wait to get to the future.

Ellen, jy besef natuurlik jy gaan nou die res van hierdie gebou en al ons ander biblioteke ook moet transformeer? Ons kan nie wag nie.