

Welcoming new students and their parents to Stellenbosch University

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By Prof Wim de Villiers, Rector and Vice-Chancellor

[Translation of speech delivered in English and Afrikaans; all versions at www.sun.ac.za/rector
Vertaling van toespraak gelewer in Afrikaans en Engels. Alle weergawes by www.sun.ac.za/rektor]

Good evening. Welcome to Stellenbosch University, each and every one of you. We have quite a few VIPs in the audience, but the most important guests – the VVIP's – are our new first-year students. Welcome to Maties!

You are here today – from all corners of our country, and abroad – because you want to be here, and let me assure you, you've made the right choice. This is your dream destination.

This event is billed as a “dream launch”, so let's talk about that ... your dreams as a student; your dreams as a young person starting out in life as an adult. Your dreams as parents and guardians and friends and family; your dreams for our students who you would like to achieve success so that they can get ahead in life.

And let's talk about our dreams as University – a place where we share a commitment to knowledge and to common values; a place where we care about knowledge *and* about people. And our dreams as a country, a continent, a planet ... the dreams of a nation, the dreams of humanity. Here dreams are cherished, new dreams are born, and you have the opportunity to make your dreams come true.

Now, we are well prepared for your arrival – not only with the Welcoming Programme over the next 10 days, but also with an integrated teaching and learning process, and a comprehensive ecosystem of student support. But you have to be an active partner and take charge of your life here at university. You have to take responsibility, to show accountability – like it says on the back of your T-shirt, listing the University's values.

This also applies to your health and safety. Please take care of yourself and each other, and look after your possessions. Campus Security is there to help, but first and foremost you have to look after yourself.

We know that you are a distinguished group – top students from all nine provinces and even beyond the borders of our country. You are talented and you have worked hard to get to where you are today. Congratulations!

Every year, Stellenbosch University attracts top achievers. Look around you – most of you have a matric aggregate of above 75%. Our surveys show that the No. 1 reason students give for coming to Stellenbosch is our academic reputation – and correctly so: The best students apply and the best are accepted. No wonder we are ranked in the top 1% of universities worldwide.

We go to a lot of trouble to offer support, to create an environment where students can flourish. For instance, each of you will have access to a mentor. This is but one of the support mechanisms which collectively bear much fruit.

According to the Department of Higher Education and Training, Stellenbosch University is the top performer in the country in terms of undergraduate student success. Maar, dit beteken nie alles gaan maklik wees nie – huis nie. Jy gaan hard moet werk, van Dag 1 af. En as jy sukses, vra vir hulp, reik uit. This is the most important part – you must reach out and make use of the range of support services on offer. Because it is not going to be plain sailing at all.

You will be challenged, like never before – academically speaking, but also in other ways. You are going to be confronted with new ways of thinking and doing, a diversity of people and ideas. And that's how it's supposed to be. “An unexamined life is not worth living,” Socrates said aeons ago already. And university is the best place to examine life and come to new insights ... together with others.

Stellenbosch is an inclusive university. It belongs to all of us. And we want everyone to feel at home here. All voices should be heard clearly.

We would like you to think hard and work hard; not to repeat information parrot-like, but to analyse, evaluate, create new knowledge, reach for excellence ... that is why you came to university. But this has to happen within the framework of respect for others – this is one of the University's values that appear on the back of your T-shirts ... alongside compassion and equity.

We stand for excellence, compassion, accountability, respect and equity. These are our values; and they are *lived* at Maties – each day, even when you don't like someone or what they have to say. It is exactly then, when the going gets tough, that you have to be respectful and compassionate.

You are now part of a new community – the Matie community. Within this overarching community, you are in residence or a PSO group, and through these in a cluster. This is a purposeful design to ensure each one of you will be in a social network to enable you to learn collaboratively, live in diverse groups and be exposed to a range of voices.

One of the things that distinguishes us from other universities, is our level of internationalisation. You will benefit from our many international partnerships, and even get the opportunity to study abroad. And because we have many international students coming to Stellenbosch, you will be studying with them. Enjoy this diverse setting!

We are a community; we may come from different backgrounds, but we are all Maties ... and we are building a community together. In our vision statement we say clearly that we "advance knowledge in service of society". We want to make a positive difference to people's lives – and our students share that commitment.

At the Social Impact morning, which will be held this coming Thursday (2019/01/31) you will be able to participate in several projects to contribute to the broader community, because we are part of our town, our province, our country, our continent and the rest of the world.

Another example of how Maties make a difference, is the great success we have had so far with our [Move4Food campaign](#). This is a student-led initiative to combat student hunger on our campuses. Please support it.

There are also other ways to make a difference. Saving water is still a priority, despite the good rains we had during winter. Water restrictions are still in place. So please save water. The University is also on a big recycling drive. And we are trying to save as much electricity as possible. Please help us in our efforts.

You are a unique group of new incoming students – the first intake in Maties' second century as a university. We were officially established in 1918 and over the years many students have stood where you stand today – embarking on your life's journey, on your way to make your dreams come true. Now it's your turn. We received 40 000 applications this year, but only had 5 300 places available. We chose *you* folks. Make the most of this opportunity to realise your dreams ... like those who came before you; people like:

- Ntsiki Biyela, who herded cattle as a young girl and became South Africa's first black female winemaker ... a Maties alumna;
- Elana Meyer, Olympic Games silver medallist ... and Maties alumna;
- Gerald Maarman, a lad from Eerste River who went on to obtain his PhD in cardiovascular physiology ... a Matie alumnus; and
- Japie van Zyl, a space engineer at NASA ... and Matie alumnus.

Class of 2019, welcome to Stellenbosch University. Your time has come! Welcome to the global Matie community!