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**Inhuldigingsrede deur
prof Wim de Villiers as
Rektor en Visekanselier van
die Universiteit Stellenbosch (US)**

**Inaugural Address by
Prof Wim de Villiers as
Rector and Vice-Chancellor
of Stellenbosch University (SU)**

29 April 2015

[As delivered. Translations in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa are available at www.sun.ac.za/rector]

Baie dankie. Molweni. Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, you have all been welcomed by the Chairman of Council, and from my side, I would also like to extend a warm welcome to everyone. I am honoured to have you all present for this very special occasion, and it is a great privilege for me to stand here today.

Education is the bedrock of society, and higher education is the keystone locking everything in place. This institution, in particular, is a jewel in the crown of higher education in South Africa. I want to thank our Council for entrusting me with this responsibility. I will not let you down – and by that I mean the entire University community, inclusively defined.

I also want to thank everyone for welcoming me and my family with open arms. My wife and children have always been pillars of strength to me – thank you, Catherine, Katusha, Braam, Kelly and Gera for your enduring support ... not to forget our darling grand-daughters, Eloise and Beatrice.

Dames en here – ek voel soos ’n verlore seun wat tuis gekom het na vele omswerwinge. Ek is ’n Stellenbosser gebore en getoë. My pa, AB de Villiers, was Dekaan van Regsgeleerdheid. As klein seuntjie het ek dikwels ingeloer by sy kantoor in hierdie mooi gebou. En net om die hoek, in Huis De Villiers, het ek ’n oorlas van myself gemaak by die “groot kinders” – die studente van destyds.

Later het ek aan Paul Roos Gimnasium gematrikuleer, en aan hierdie Universiteit het ek my in Geneeskunde gekwalifiseer, en ook hier gespesialiseer in Interne Geneeskunde, voordat ek in 1992 verder gaan studeer het in Engeland, en toe lank in Amerika gewerk het.

So, ek kom van ver af, maar ek is ook hiervandaan. My grondslag is hier op Stellenbosch gelê, waarvoor ek baie dankbaar is. Dit is een van die hoofredes hoekom ek hier is – om terug te ploeg by my alma mater.

I am a proud alumnus of Stellenbosch University. But I know all too well that the Stellenbosch of today is not the Stellenbosch of yesterday, and nor will it – or should it be – the Stellenbosch of tomorrow. Life is dynamic; nothing stays the same, which means that we have the exciting opportunity of constantly changing, constantly transforming ourselves. That’s what we need to focus on – moving forward.

Baie van die harde werk wat ons tot hier gebring het, is verrig deur my voorganger, wyle prof Russel Botman. Ek bring graag hulde aan hom. Ek het nooit die voorreg gehad om hom te ontmoet nie, maar ek het die grootste respek vir wat hy vermag het. Hy het Stellenbosch op ’n pad van verandering gelei, ’n reis van hoop. En vandag pluk ons die vrugte daarvan.



Om die Stellenbosch van more te bou, is 'n groot taak. Laat ek u egter verseker, my moue is opgerol – selfs al lyk dit nie so in hierdie akademiese toga en snaakse hoed nie! Ek is reg om hierdie gerespekteerde Universiteit saam met u na die volgende vlak te neem, en na die tweede eeu van sy bestaan.

So, waarheen is ons op pad? Ek het nie al die antwoorde nie. Dis nie waaroor leierskap gaan nie. Elke belanghebbende het 'n stuk van die legkaart. Ons moet almal saam daaraan bou.

Soos ek van die begin af gesê het, praat ek met soveel mense moontlik om eers te verstaan wat ons situasie is, en wat dit van ons vereis. Dit is hoe ek opgelei is as dokter. Jy neem eers 'n volledige mediese geskiedenis. Dan ondersoek jy die pasiënt. En eers dan maak jy 'n diagnose en implementeer 'n behandelingsplan.

So, with this in mind, I have essentially been asking two questions: What makes you proud to be a Matie? And what can we do to make Stellenbosch University better? Here's some of what I've heard thus far.

On the first question, a student said, "It's wonderful to share my life with so many different people from around the country and world. The quality of instruction is outstanding." And a staff member said, "The academic atmosphere here is on par with the very best universities in the world."

Dit klop met wat ons reeds weet. Stellenbosch is een van die beste universiteite in die land. En op die gesaghebbende Times Higher Education-ranglys tel ons onder die top 300 universiteite ter wêreld, en onder die top 20 in BRICS-lande.

Actually, I have some breaking news. A few minutes ago, the global embargo on the latest edition of the *QS World University Rankings by Subject* was lifted, and I am proud to announce that Stellenbosch – and I quote – “now features among the world's elite institutions in 10 subjects”, including Biological Sciences, Chemistry and Mathematics. Particularly in Agriculture and Forestry we are No. 1 in the country. All credit to our staff and students for this achievement!

Hierdie suksesse spruit uit ons volgehoue prestasie ten opsigte van ons eerstejaarsretensiekoers en ons algehele studentesuksesvlak, wat konstant bo 85% is. Dit is ook die gevolg van ons volgehoue prestasie in navorsing. Ons navorsingsuitsette is van die hoogste in die land, en ons navorsingsinkomste het ook beduidend gestyg. Wat ook 'n belangrike rol speel, is ons betrokkenheid by die gemeenskap om oplossings te help vind vir ontwikkelingsuitdagings en probleme in die samelewing.

Dit is hoekom u my dalk al hoor sê het dat in my professionele opinie as mediese dokter die US “fiks en gesond” is.

Now, Stellenbosch University may be fundamentally fit and healthy. But that does not mean there's no room for improvement. That much is clear from some of the constructive feedback on my second question, “What should be done to make Stellenbosch University a better place?” A good number of the responses focused on the scarcity of parking on campus; surprisingly few on salaries, I'm glad to say.

More seriously, though, there have been concerns raised around transformation, inclusivity and diversity, as well as our institutional culture and symbols on campus. There have also been comments around our language policy, which may be experienced as exclusionary by some.

Dui hierdie kommentaar bloot op die normale kwale en skete van 'n universiteit in sy laat negentigerjare? Of dui dit op 'n onderliggende toestand wat ons welstand as instelling bedreig? Kom ons ondersoek dit verder.

The need for transformation has been part of the South African landscape for some time now – also in higher education. It seems to me that transformation can be thought of in two ways. On the one hand, it relates to the need for change in response to South Africa's history of racial discrimination and exclusion. On the other hand, transformation in education and research is an imperative to build the future we want – for ourselves, for our University, for our country and for our continent.

Let me now deal first with putting right what was wrong in the past. In this regard, Stellenbosch University took an important step in the year 2000 when it formally acknowledged – and I quote – “its contribution to the injustices of the past”. This was captured in a policy document called *A Strategic Framework for the Turn of the Century and Beyond*, which took shape in Prof Andreas Van Wyk’s time as Rector. Broad and deep discussion led the University to take responsibility for its role. Make no mistake – this was an apology for apartheid, which I would like to reiterate.

But the University did not stop there. It also committed itself to “redress and development” – specifically in terms of broadening access to the University for those who had previously been excluded solely on the colour of their skin. Today, inclusivity is one of the cornerstones of our new policy framework, our *Institutional Intent and Strategy*, adopted by Council in 2013, under Prof Russel Botman.

In 1990, the year Nelson Mandela was released, Stellenbosch had 762 black, coloured and Indian students in total. Today, we have more than 11 200, or nearly 38% of our student body. And we will advance this further the next few years. I believe we can do it.

Looking at our staff diversity, 43% of our personnel are black, coloured or Indian – although that figure drops to 20% in terms of academic staff. So, yes, there is much room for improvement. This is also true for the representation of women, especially at senior academic and management levels. But on both fronts – race and gender – we are working towards greater equality, and I believe we can do it.

Ons moet sorg dat die US ’n plek is waar almal welkom voel. Veral namate ons meer inklusief en divers raak, is dit belangrik dat elke Matie voel hierdie plek is ook sy of haar plek, ’n kwessie wat prof Chris Brink reeds in 2004 as Rektor geopper het. Ons kan dit doen – daaraan twyfel ek nie vir ’n oomblik nie.

Now, there is an argument that we don’t sufficiently meet the needs of those students who don’t speak Afrikaans. And there are viewpoints to the contrary.

Wat ons moet doen, is om eerstens te beseft onderrigtaal is ’n komplekse kwessie wat versigtige oorweging en deeglike bespreking vereis. Kom ons neem dan as ons uitgangspunt die US se nuwe Taalbeleid, wat in November verlede jaar deur die Raad aanvaar is – ’n beleid wat meertaligheid voorstaan. Hiervolgens is die US verbind tot Afrikaans as akademiese taal, maar gebruik ons ook Engels om alle Suid-Afrikaners toegang te gee, en bevorder ons Xhosa waar doenlik.

Stellenbosch is not an Afrikaans university; Stellenbosch is not an English University; Stellenbosch is not a Xhosa university; Stellenbosch is a world-class multilingual South African university – one of the few in this category, which is sorely needed in a country with 11 official languages. This is how we are trying to ensure that language is not a barrier to access, but a tool for success – especially in diverse educational settings.

Dames en here, die kwessie van Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite se institusionele kultuur en die pas van transformasie geniet tans baie aandag, en Stellenbosch is noodwendig deel van hierdie debat. Nóú is die tyd om die denkleierskap wat ons nastreef, te beoefen. Ons kan van die huidige debat ’n positiewe groeigeleentheid maak. Hoe so? Deur indringend te kyk na ons vordering – in sowel hierdie jong demokrasie van ons wat eergister mondig geword het, as hier by Stellenbosch, waar ons oor drie jaar eeufes vier.

Ons moet praat oor waar ons staan en waarheen ons op pad is. Daarvoor het ons ’n konstruktiewe gesindheid nodig. Dit moet ’n “gesprek sonder grense” wees, soos Johan Degenaar, dit noem. Of ’n “oop gesprek”, wat deur NP van Wyk Louw gedefinieer is as “gesprekke waarin jy oor alles kan praat; waar geen standpunt te ‘gewaagd’ is nie, en wat nooit in belediging, twis of woede ontaard nie”.

Die “oop gesprek” is eensydig “die vrye uitspraak van eie mening” en andersydig “die aandagtige luister na die mening van ander, sodat ’n wisselwerking ontstaan.” As jy hierdie wisselwerking tussen “sê” en “luister” het, kry jy ’n sterk “sirkulasie van gedagtes”. En dit, sê Van Wyk Louw, is “so noodsaaklik soos bloedsomloop vir die liggaam”.

Dames en here, as medikus kan ek bevestig bloedsomloop is absoluut onontbeerlik! As ons nie vrylik kan sê wat ons op die hart het nie, en as ons nie regtig na mekaar luister nie, is die prognose nie goed nie. As

daar egter 'n sterk "sirkulasie van gedagtes" is, kom die bloeddruk weer reg en die kleur terug in die gelaat, want daar ontstaan "wederkerige begrip" en "gemeenskaplike oortuiging".

Ladies and gentlemen, that is what is needed in the transformation debate – "discussion without borders", an "open debate" in which ideas can circulate freely, leading to "mutual understanding". I know we can do it.

This brings me to the second way to think of transformation – as an imperative for creating the future we want. And this is especially true for universities – where we learn and teach, conduct research, and engage with society.

In the foyer of our Education Building, there's an often used but enduring quote by Madiba: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Interestingly, the same quote appears in the hallway of the inner-city high school in Los Angeles where our son, Braam, is Principal. This speaks to its universal truth and inspirational appeal.

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan once described education as "a human right with immense power to transform." Let's unpack that for a moment. Transformation through education. That means there can be no transformation without education – because "on its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development."

To learn – and to teach – is truly transformative. It changes lives. I have experienced the power of education myself. And I have seen time and again how a passion for knowledge and excellence sweeps us along.

The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said the "task of a university is the creation of the future". Now there's a potent thought: "The task of a university is the creation of the future." How is that achieved? It works, he says, because "the gift the university has to offer is the one of imagination ... the lighted torch which passes from hand to hand." That's transformation in action – passing the torch from person to person.

Let me share with you a story that illustrates this well. It's about one of our students, Claudia Ntsapi. She is currently enrolled for a PhD in Physiology, after obtaining her MSc degree here in March this year. She grew up in Eldorado Park, Johannesburg, and after matriculating from Kliptown Secondary School, she wanted to study Chemical Engineering, but needed to improve her marks. Many learners in our country experience this problem. They might have the talent and motivation, but face obstacles due to educational backlogs in the system.

Then Claudia heard about a bridging programme called SciMathUS, which stands for Science and Mathematics at the University of Stellenbosch. So, she enrolled, did extremely well, and soon realised that she actually wanted to study BSc, not Engineering.

She says, "SciMathUS opened doors for me, gave me a second chance, and time to discover my true passion."

Since 2002, more than 1 100 students have completed our bridging programme, with many of them going on to obtain university degrees in medicine, engineering, science and business. That's 1 100 young South Africans who experienced the transformative power of education, with ripples extending outwards from them throughout society.

Claudia, baie geluk met jou inspireerende reis tot dusver! En sterkte met jou verdere studies. Jy wys die wêreld wat gedoen kan word. In die hoër onderwys kan ons transformasie bewerkstellig deur menslike potensiaal raak te sien en te ontwikkel, en deur voortdurend op uitnemendheid te fokus.

This brings me to a very important point I never tire of making. In the foyer of the Mayo Clinic, in Rochester, Minnesota, is a quote from a speech that its founder, Dr Will Mayo, gave to a graduating class of doctors in 1910. He said, "The best interest of the patient is the only interest." We at Stellenbosch University could just as well adapt this to, "The best interest – and success – of the student is the only interest."

Dames en here, wat in die student se beste belang is, is al wat van belang is – en dít sluit studentesukses in. Dit is vir my 'n prioriteit. Ek wil hê die Universiteit moet studente 'n ervaring bied wat aangenaam, verwelkomend, veilig en gasvry is – in 'n inklusiewe omgewing. Ons kan dit doen.

Ons voor- en nagraadse studente moet 'n uitstekende opvoeding ontvang wat hulle 'n mededingende voordeel in 'n snelveranderende wêreld sal gee. En die jongste tegnologie moet hiervoor ingespan word, want virtuele leer en onderrig raak al hoe belangriker. Studente het deesdae heeltyd toegang tot kennis, van enige plek af. Hulle dra hele biblioteke op hul slimfone rond, kry lesings op die internet, en kommunikeer blitsvinnig via sosiale media.

Die US beproef ook hierdie nuwe waters. Die Raad het aansienlike bronne beskikbaar gestel vir 21ste-eeuse tegnologie in leer en onderrig. Ons plaas die klem op die vermengde model. Hiervolgens vervang tegnologie nie kontakssessies nie, maar word dit gebruik om leer en onderrig te verryk.

Now, universities are places of learning and teaching, but also places of research. And it, too, is a transformative activity; it has the power to change how the world works and how people think. Society is increasingly looking at universities for solutions to both local problems and global crises in such areas as the environment, conflict management, health, water, food security, sustainable energy and social cohesion.

American journalist and cultural critic HL Mencken said, “For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear and simple ... and wrong”! That’s because the world is faced with what John Kao calls “wicked problems” – highly complex challenges comprised of interwoven issues whose potential solutions require creative, interdisciplinary thinking.

This is how Stellenbosch University as a research-intensive institution can help. Ons uitdaging is om plaaslik relevant te wees, en terselfdertyd globaal mededingend. Ons moet fokus op unieke areas waarin ons bepaalde kundigheid het, en ons moet samewerkings- en navorsingsnetwerke in Suid-Afrika, die res van ons vasteland en wêreldwyd bou. Ek is vas oortuig ons kan dit doen.

Ladies and gentlemen, in his book *Good to Great* Jim Collins coined the phrase “Big Hairy Audacious Goals”. He was referring to those visionary ambitions that spur us on to greater heights – NASA’s goal of getting to the moon, the World Health Organisation’s goal of eradicating polio, Google’s goal of organising the whole world’s information and making it universally accessible and useful.

I believe the aims of this University qualify as “Big Hairy Audacious Goals”. Our Vision 2030 shares with South Africa’s National Development Plan (NDP) the desire to create a country work for all its people. We want to create a University that works for all of us – a national asset, in fact a continental and global asset, to help make the world a better place by seeking solutions to such “wicked problems” as poverty, inequality and unemployment in our society.

And it is exactly because of this, that the recent manifestation of xenophobia in our country is so reprehensible. South Africa is known internationally for its progressive Constitution, but this is of little value if we as citizens have no regard for the human dignity and rights of others. Stellenbosch University is proud of the fact that we have more than 4 100 international students, making up 14% of our student body. They come from 117 countries around the world, and 56% of them are from other African countries. They enrich us, and that is why we say “No!” to xenophobia!

Dames en here, dit is vir ons baie belangrik om impak op die samelewing te maak. Ek het reeds met Burgermeester Sidego gepraat, en saam gaan ons toesien dat die Stellenbosch Rektors-Burgermeestersforum aktief en gereeld aandag aan sake van gemeenskaplike belang skenk. Die US streef nog altyd na diensbaarheid en gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid. Aanvanklik was “gemeenskap” eng gedefinieer, maar mettertyd het daar 'n evolusie gekom – van die US as “volksuniversiteit”, na “nasionale bate” wat nie net sommige mense van diens is nie, maar die hele gemeenskap.

Ons het foute gemaak in die verlede, en dit is belangrik om verskoning te vra, en bande te probeer herstel. Dit het ons begin doen in 2000 met die erkenning van die Universiteit se “bydrae tot die ongeregtighede van die verlede”.

Meer onlangs, in 2012, het Dagbreek Manskoshuis apologie aangeteken vir die Slag van Andringastraat in 1940, toe studente met swart en bruin inwoners van Die Vlakte – ’n gebied van Stellenbosch net hier langs ons – slaags geraak het.

Prof Botman het gesorg dat daar ’n permanente, omvangryke uitstalling in die Universiteitsargief in die Wilcocksgebou ingerig is om ons te herinner aan die gedwonge verskuiwings uit Die Vlakte in die 1960’s. Hierdie verskuiwings het skeiding gebring omdat die Universiteit as ’n instansie nie destyds teen die uitsettings geprotesteer het nie, en ook omdat die Lettere en Sosiale Wetenskappe-gebou later op onteiene grond opgerig is.

Ek kondig nou met nederigheid aan dat die Universiteit – in die belang van regstelling en in die gees van wat prof Nico Koopman, Dekaan van die Fakulteit Teologie, “helende versoening” noem – ’n beursfonds stig vir die kinders van Die Vlakte, die nakomelinge van hulle wat ontwortel is.

Last year, Stellenbosch University awarded R588 million in bursaries and loans to the 37% of our students in need of financial assistance. Of this amount, 55% went to black, coloured and Indian students based on merit and financial need. And because greater diversity is a priority for us, we want to award even more recruitment bursaries. It is a golden opportunity for empowerment.

Let me reach out to members of our community everywhere. Let us all move forward together. That will be the main thrust of my time as Rector and Vice-Chancellor: Forward, vorentoe, siyaya Stellenbosch!

If there are obstacles in our way, let’s remove them. Like the HF Verwoerd plaque in our Accounting and Statistics Building. This will be removed and placed in the University Museum, there to be properly contextualised.

Ons sal dit doen in konsultasie met alle belanghebbers, waaronder studente, personeel, alumni en die breë gemeenskap.

This is an ideal opportunity to engage in open discussion about visual elements and symbols on campus, as a place of learning and critical thinking should. It will help us move forward.

Dames en here, die US het diep wortels in hierdie land, en daar is twee aspekte wat nog altyd soos ’n goue draad deur ons geskiedenis loop: uitnemendheid en diensbaarheid. Deur hierop te fokus – op inklusiewe wyse – sal ons vorentoe beweeg en floreer.

We are moving forward into our next century, striving for perfect health, deeply committed to our community and our country, and the values of our Constitution.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Ek dank u. Enkosi kakhulu.