

Welcome Day 2010

Vice-Chancellor and Principal' Speech

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure, as Vice-Chancellor and Principal to welcome you – our new first year students and your parents and families – to the University of Pretoria.

Dames and Here, Al ons nuwe eerstejaar studente en julle ouers en familie lede, baie hartlik welkom.

A special welcome to all our international students. We take pride in the growing number of countries and cultures represented on our campus.

I wish to congratulate our new first year students – Veels Geluk! The fact that you are here today is due to your excellent results in the National Senior Certificate.

The University of Pretoria, fondly known as Tuks, is one of the leading universities in South Africa and we enjoy wide international recognition. In choosing to study with us, you have made an excellent decision. U keuse om by ons te kom studeer was 'n uitstekende besluit.

This year we have had a record number of applicants for admission to our programmes. The competition for places has been exceptionally tight. We regret that we have not had sufficient places to accommodate all the deserving students who applied to our University.

From small beginnings in 1908, the University of Pretoria has become the largest residential university in South Africa. The University of Pretoria has a proud history of just over a century-old. In terms of international status, the University of Pretoria is one of a few African and South African universities that is included in various international rankings.

Quality is of utmost importance to us – providing modern, well-maintained facilities- is at the foundation of the high quality education that you will experience at the University of Pretoria. We strive to provide an unequalled environment for achieving outstanding results.

Most of you will have noticed the large construction project in progress behind the Aula. This is one of several construction projects the University has undertaken over the past few years, and in fact the largest ever by the University. It will comprise 4 levels of parking - providing parking for 1000 cars for students, staff and visitors - and another 3 levels on top of that providing major new facilities for the School of Engineering in the form of lecture halls, laboratories and office space. Within the next two months construction on a new Plant Sciences Building will begin.

All this is part of the University's strategy of responsible growth to meet the needs of the country. In this regard we are appreciative of the financial contribution of the Department of Higher Education and Training.

In our rapidly changing global context, we recognise that it is imperative that as the University of Pretoria we give continuous attention to increasing our quality, competitiveness and stature.

As one of the oldest and largest universities in South Africa, we believe it is our national duty to all our citizens to make sure that we use our resources to provide the very highest quality in the full spectrum of our core responsibilities – teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

In addition to investing in our buildings and infrastructure, high on our agenda is the need for us as a university to support and invest in our people – staff and students. We wish to ensure that we create an environment of support, a culture of openness and inquiry – a place where all our people will feel valued and able to grow and develop intellectually.

Diversity is essential to this vision. The social and economic challenges of the twenty-first century are complex, requiring new ways of thinking to produce solutions. Through interacting and engaging with people from different communities, we expose ourselves to different ways of seeing the world. Our taken-for-granted

assumptions and ideas are likely to be challenged, requiring that we reflect on our perspectives and subject our ideas to scrutiny and debate. This is the transformation that we seek for the University of Pretoria – a transformation that is in keeping with our academic mission to be a centre of intellectual creativity and innovation.

It is a people-centred vision that is at the same time anchored in understanding our collective responsibility as a public university in a developing democracy.

We see our main role is to produce high level skills, educate the next generation of leadership, create new knowledge and use our knowledge and intellectual capacity find solutions to local problems and issues. Solving our high priority issues – food security, poverty eradication, climate change, crime reduction, education and health and well-being - is dependent on the intellectual capital attracted by top universities.

UP's aim is to produce graduates who are sought after by potential employers and who can make a meaningful contribution to society. Therefore, we are investing substantially in ensuring that our teaching and learning is cutting-edge and relevant.

But the quality of student life is more than what happens in the classroom. There is also sport, cultural activities and fun. After all, university is also about making friendships and forming relationships that last well after we have graduated. Many of you, in addition to gaining an education, may meet your future partner at Tukkies.

A UP graduate should leave the University not only with a valuable qualification but also with good, happy memories of the student experience - residence life, orientation, sport and cultural activities all contribute to later success and life satisfaction.

After all being at a university is about education for life not simply about the acquisition of skills. Over and above the technical skills, it's about engendering respect for the views of others, tolerance, ethics and human dignity.

We are committed to protecting our values-based organisational culture whereby we can assure that each (new) student can feel at home regardless of social background – academically, physically, culturally, religiously as well as socially. Like all old education institutions, Tukkies too has certain unique traditional ways of doing

things which bond its students and alumni. While we honour our traditions, it is non-negotiable that our value framework of respect for diversity, person, privacy and property, human dignity, and tolerance for difference is respected. While we continue to honour many of our traditions, we have prohibited initiation and any other degrading practice, of first year students (be they day – or residence students) at UP. In the unlikely event that this should occur, we will take action immediately.

We understand that coming to University for the first time, especially a large one such as this, can be a daunting experience. Therefore, at Tukkies we focus on creating a caring community through providing a holistic educational experience. Orientation is taken very seriously and our senior students play an important part in orientation.

You will find that at our university there is top quality teaching by academics who will give you insights into ground-breaking research as well as ensure that you have a strong academic grounding and skills that will enable you to succeed in meeting your career aspirations. Community engagement is a core aspect of our educational experience too. So you will have opportunities to undertake community service and at the same time develop your professional and leadership talents. Outside of the lectures, you will also have opportunities to develop your creative, social and sporting talents. I encourage you to participate in the wide range of arts, music, cultural and sporting clubs and societies that all make for a unique and outstanding student experience.

Since it is 2010, a special and exceptional year for South Africa in that we host the FIFA Soccer World Cup, it is appropriate that I make special mention of TuksSport. The University of Pretoria has world-class sports facilities. Through TuksSport our students have the opportunity of participating in almost every code of sport and we have an outstanding record of success at national and international level.

The University of Pretoria will be playing an important role in the historic hosting of the World Soccer Cup. Our university will be hosting one of the world's top teams, many fans will be accommodated in our campus facilities and of course many exciting matches will be played at Loftusversfeld which is within our broader precinct.

Ladies and Gentlemen, amidst all the excitement and opportunities for socializing, it is imperative that there is hard work, discipline and focus. To our first year students, I am sure that your families have made sacrifices for you to be here. Therefore, it is important that you use your time responsibly and purposefully.

The world of the twenty-first century is highly competitive and the economic climate is tough. For those with education, however, there are ample opportunities. As you are aware there is a shortage of high level skills in our society. There is no doubt that the sacrifices you and your parents make in order for you to graduate will pay off. Employment is moving more strongly in the direction of more highly educated individuals. The entry-level qualification for many jobs has increased and most jobs now require some form of tertiary education. The demand for people with university education has increased strongly whereas the demand for people with high school level education or less has declined sharply.

Focus, discipline and hard work will enable you to realise your dreams and reap rewards. To assist you in bridging the gap from school to university, we offer a range of educational support services including mentoring. I encourage you to use the available opportunities. Your success is important to us!

I welcome you whole heartedly to the University of Pretoria. I hope you all will quickly settle down and become “Tukkies” in the true sense of the word.

Ek will u graag baie hartlik verwelkom by die Universiteit van Pretoria. Ek hoop u sal almal baie gou aanpas en “Tukkies” in die ware sin van die woord word.

One of our special Tukkies traditions is that each year we plant a tree to mark the entry of our new first years. We will water and feed the tree in the ways that we will nurture you so that you will grow as the tree most surely will. We take pride in your growth and success as your success is our success.

Prof Cheryl de la Rey