



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

ACADEMIC CLOSING ASSEMBLY

ZK MATHEWS HALL

6 DECEMBER 2012

Unisa 2012: restoring the light

- Programme Director, Dr Marie Ferreira
- Pro Vice Chancellor, Prof N Baijnath and members of Unisa's executive and extended management
- Professor M Phakeng, Vice Principal: Research and Innovation
- Professor M Maré, Vice-Principal: Academic, Teaching and Learning
- Members of Unisa's Executive and Extended Management
- Unisa staff and students
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning to you all

Back in 1974, Unisa received a very unique gift (in the form of a permanent loan) from Dr Anton Rupert, Chairman of the then Rembrandt Tobacco Corporation. The gift was an unusual sculpture by English artist Keith Grant, which he named *Idomeneo* after the mythical Cretan King, Idomenius, who led the Cretan armies to the Trojan war.

For those who don't yet know, *Idomeneo* is the blue coloured structure that is located on the corner of the ridge above the bus parking on this campus. *Idomeneo* is a kinetic abstract sculpture, consisting of a pedestal on which a hydraulically activated hemisphere of coloured mosaic-like perspex panels both rotates horizontally and tilts vertically. The revolving disks throw out coloured lights as the bowl moves. Illuminated, it is a beautiful sight to behold.

Speaking at the installation, then Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Theo van Wijk described *Idomeneo* as “a symbol of the university, a radiance that is at once both spotlight and beacon, searching for and enticing all those who would gain by studying through distance education at the university.”

Sadly, over the years, the sculpture fell into disrepair – its light extinguished - until a chance remark by our Archive Service

Manager Ms Marie Coetzee to Garden and Grounds Manager Ms Christine Hartdegen, set off a chain of events that culminated in the restoration of the sculpture to its former glory.

The former VC's description of the university is as evocative now as it was more than 40 years ago. Unisa remains a beacon of hope and promise. But I would like to add another dimension to that evocation – one that it linked to its mosaic-like appearance, which finds resonance in the mosaic theme on which I based my presentation to this university prior to my appointment. It is a theme that I have repeated often, and which I have enlarged upon as our institution has grown and developed these past two years, and which I am confident, will remain valid for years to come.

I posed the question: *Why (Unisa as) a mosaic?* I provided the following reasons:

- mosaic is formed of small pieces, each maintaining its own integrity, form and shape, so that the many small components create a picture.
- The pieces in a mosaic can be moved around to form a different pattern.

- The pieces in a mosaic are contiguous (next to each other) without being submerged or blurred: each maintains a unique identity.

At the beginning of this year I spoke of the need for Unisa to be agile in the current higher education environment. By changing and shifting its shape and form (the changing mosaic pictures and patterns) in line with emerging higher education needs and priorities, but nevertheless retaining the integrity and individual capacities of every single staff member (each piece of the mosaic), Unisa will be able to shine its multi hued light into the future for many years to come – *still* a beacon of hope and possibility. I would suggest that *Idomeneo* has become much more than a sculpture. It is also a symbol of all that Unisa stands for and of the potential and promise that it embodies. And each time we drive or walk past the sculpture, or marvel at its beams in the evening sky, we will be reminded of our importance, as individual pieces of the Unisa mosaic, in realising that potential and promise.

So, as we conclude our academic year, let us consider how well we have fared in 2012.

Our first extended management lekgotla took place from 4 – 6 March this year, at Kievits Kroon Estates. The main aim of the

lekgotla was to embed risk-based planning into our operations in line with the governance and compliance practices contained in the King III. The lekgotla also provided an opportunity for me to take stock, evaluate our status, identify key challenges and suggest actions to drive our institution forward. And so I located my presentation within the very sobering context of South African higher education, and highlighted the tension that exists for Unisa to increase access on the one hand – let us call it the “social imperative” – but to do so with limited income, failing infrastructure, overburdened and insufficiently capacitated staff, and an inadequately prepared student corps on the other.

I asserted our intention to re-establish Unisa nationally and internationally as a high-quality academic institution and highlighted many of the initiatives that the institution has implemented to provide a more conducive and affirming environment for staff. I also spoke at length about the organisation architecture and the process that is unfolding institution-wide to ensure its efficient and effective implementation. That process included adjustment to our structure to ensure a dedicated focus on and management of the project.

Of course, along with that is the need for staff to adjust to new ways of working and doing, to ensure that the technology is used

to its best effect. That too is a process that has been unfolding incrementally, and it is pleasing to see how enthusiastically growing numbers of our staff are embracing the challenges, and I want to affirm Unisa's staff for having the courage and loyalty to change. Change is never easy, but many Unisa staff now realise that change can be very empowering once it has been tackled with an open mind.

At the lekgotla, four key areas of concern were identified for immediate attention, namely: SERVICE; ICT; LEARNER SUPPORT; and PEOPLE (especially in the area of staff development). We undertook to address these through the thorough embedding of the reworked strategic goals and our strategic activities for the next three years. The five (5) reworked strategic goals reflect the changed focus of the University, and the Unisa *2013 – 2015: towards a high performance university* (with aligned institutional risks), was approved by Council at our last Council meeting. The goals comprise *Academic, Corporate Governance and Sustainability, Service, People, and Co-operate Governance and Stakeholder Relations*. The aligned IOP for this final phase of our 2015 Revisited strategic plan has also been approved, allowing us to start 2013 with clearly defined and approved focus areas.

When it comes to our regions, much work remains to be done, and this too is work in progress that is already bearing fruit. I am

excited by the calibre of our regional directors and the enthusiasm that they have displayed in ensuring that our regions become centres of excellence, especially around service delivery. Regional facilities are not where we would like them to be, neither are we happy with the way in which some staff continues to treat our students, but interventions have been identified to deal with this and I look forward to seeing a lot of good things emanating from regions in 2013.

As an institution committed to quality higher education, and with the support of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Unisa has prioritised the deliberate enhancement of teaching and learning, research and innovation and community engagement. The success of this depends on having facilities that can accommodate the planned activities. To this end we have for example, done renovations, upgrades and/or additions to the existing facilities at our campuses in Polokwane, Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria (Sunnyside) to make provision for additional tutor facilities, learning space and computer laboratories. We have also purchased and equipped mobile units to provide mobile tutorial and library facilities to our students in very remote areas such as the Northern Cape.

The University is also investing in the redevelopment of the libraries at the two main campuses as well as the regional centres.

The project will improve the delivery, scope and availability of library services and resources at the Regional Centres.

Partnerships and collaborations are growing in importance as we maximise all available resources to achieve our goals. For example, Unisa has had strong historical relationships with three FET Colleges in the Western Cape; namely Boland College, College of Cape Town and Northlink College. The University recently signed new collaborative agreements with these Colleges following discussions with the Department of Higher Education and Training. On 12 December, as we celebrate the official opening of the renovated Unisa Cape Town Campus in Parow, we will also conduct a ceremonial signing of these agreements.

Next year, my institutional and regional visits will be focused on hearing your voices and views on Unisa after 2015. Where do you see Unisa after 2015 and what suggestions can you offer as a way forward? I am embarking on this process in line with the undertaking that I made to you, to ensure that we hear the institutional “voice” on matters of importance to us all, for inclusion in our strategy and planning deliberations at a future stage.

It was also my pleasure to announce our new SRC members at our first Senate held in March this year. My office launched the

project of training of student leaders this year and I want to extend my gratitude to a cross-section of our staff members who volunteered to participate in training our student leaders. In addition to our own staff members, the training team included Ethics SA; Prof Brian Figaji (retired VC of the Cape University of Technology); and Dr Mathews Phosa (Chairperson of Council). It is my sincere hope that the training that we have provided to our SRC will translate into a professional and dynamic cohort of students who will not only service Unisa and its students with pride and efficiency, but who will take their newly acquired skills and knowledge into their future careers to the benefit of our country and its people. We certainly look forward to that.

During the course of the year I have repeatedly challenged staff at our institutional assemblies and at our Senate meetings to introspect on our progress in achieving a transformed institution and the desired institutional ethos. At a staff assembly address in June this year entitled “From Apathy to Action: *Collaborating towards high performance*,” I reminded staff that Unisa’s Charter on Transformation defines each of the 11 C’s plus 1 on which our nascent institutional ethos is premised. We agree that at Unisa we are striving for a truly African ethos of warmth, caring and inclusivity. Pleasingly, there are clear indications that this is beginning to bear fruit and I would like to acknowledge all of

those staff who are “walking-the-talk”. You are making a difference. Our efforts must be sustained and increased in 2013. Genuine transformation requires a concerted, ongoing effort.

Our actions colleagues, determine the way people perceive us, how they respond to us, and the levels of respect and appreciation they will accord us. And so as staff we need to do a *reality check* from time-to-time, to assess and identify areas in which we are lacking. If we want to be valued, respected, appreciated and included, then we need to work and behave in ways that enable others to value us, respect us, appreciate us and include us. It is a process of mutual reinforcement that can only happen through collaboration - through teamwork.

I have also addressed the institution on poor attendance of staff assemblies at which critical institutional issues are raised and I have emphasised the need for all staff to attend these meetings. This remains a challenge that will continue to be addressed very firmly next year. Equally, on occasion, I have had the unpleasant task of speaking very plainly to staff about those who have shirked their duties and their responsibilities, particularly around our response to, and treatment of our students, as well as other important aspects such as absenteeism, which impacts on our productivity and efficiency, and which is receiving ongoing

attention. And while that is never a pleasant thing to do, it is necessary in the best interests of service and sustainability.

But colleagues, if I have emphasised one thing above all else this year - in fact, it is what I deem to be Unisa's greatest challenge and its greatest risk, and that is *service delivery* - a concern that is shared by Council and even DoHET. We are all aware of the amount of work and expenditure that is going into the implementation of the organisation architecture and so we are assured that this is a work in progress, that is proceeding according to plan. However, there is concern around key systems such as the semester system and the student system, among others, which I am pleased to inform you, is currently receiving focussed attention and action. The resolution of these thorny issues in the near future, will undoubtedly improve our efficiency and service delivery.

This year also saw the deeper embedding and inculcation of the Servant Leadership ethos, during which time we emphasised that servant leadership is antithetical to autocratic leadership and other unsavoury behaviours such as bullying, as well as silo mentalities which militate against effective teamwork. As an institution we are gradually changing the way that we approach our interactions and our projects, understanding that what we are doing should be in the best interest of Unisa and our students. I

am confident that there is in the institution, a growing understanding of the debilitating effect that a lack of collaboration and teamwork has on the successful implementation of critical institutional projects, and I look forward to seeing improved efficiencies as we begin with the implementation of the *2013 – 2015 : towards a high performance institution*.

This year we have also had to deal with the changed demands being made on higher education institutions when it comes to institutional reporting. From this year, in our annual reporting, where we claim progress on the implementation of our various IOP actions, these claims must be supported with *auditable* proof. The Auditor General has made it clear that HEIs will be audited on their performance (amongst others) in future. The draft reporting regulations for higher education institutions appear to marry the recommendations of KING III with our more traditional regulatory reporting requirements, but the changes that this has brought about are very significant – not only in regard to the way we report, but the way in which we plan. This means that as an institution we will have to adjust as the process unfolds. I feel confident that we are well placed to do that.

This year marked a strong emphasis on ethics, risk and sustainability at Unisa. Once again the issue of service came to

the fore, when, in compiling our institutional risk register at the beginning of the year, it became crystal clear that *service* posed a significant risk to the institution - and not merely from the perspective of ICTs. There is also a significant measure of risk around the issue of *People*.

Colleagues, it is always important to acknowledge and celebrate our progress and success as an institution, and I believe that we have done that. There are many colleagues whose contributions are simply superb and who are clearly dedicated to this institution and our students and I would like to publicly acknowledge them for their efforts. The results of their dedication will be seen later in our programme this morning, as we acknowledge our graduation excellence and tuition excellence awardees.

Over and above general staff who fit into that category, I can also mention our research function earlier this year, at which we celebrated excellent improvements and accomplishments in research at Unisa. It is really rewarding to see the accelerated interest in this core area of our institutional mandate.

I can also tell you that Unisa has filed its first patent – a very bold step into the future! On 14 November, Research and Innovation filed Unisa's first patent focusing on an invention relating to

apparatus and method for treating a fluid. The invention was filed in collaboration with Wits University and the inventors are:

- Prof Wei Hua Ho (CSET, UNISA)
- Prof Vijaya Srinivasu Vallabhapurapu (CSET, UNISA)
- Prof Ivan William Hofsjer (University of the Witwatersrand)

A number of our top management have also distinguished themselves, including Prof Narend Baijnath (Pro Vice Chancellor) appointed to the Board of the Commonwealth of Learning, Prof Divya Singh (Vice Principal: Advisory and Assurance Services) appointed to the Audit and Risk Management Committee, as well as the Legal Services Committee of Higher Education South Africa, Dr Molapo Qhobela (Vice-Principal: Institutional Development) appointed to the Board of the Council on Higher Education, and Prof Rita Maré, Vice Principal: Academic, Teaching and learning, appointed to the Teaching and Learning Committee of Higher Education South Africa. This list is by no means exhaustive – there are other colleagues in the institution who have also received similar accolades too numerous to mention, some of which will be acknowledged and celebrated at other institutional functions.

The fact these colleagues have been appointed to serve on these Boards and committees is not only a testament to their own professional abilities and expertise, but also to the calibre of management and staff that we have at our institution, and the

esteem in which they are held in the broader education environment – and we are justifiably proud of that fact. I can also mention other important institutional milestones such as the launch of our College of Education at the beginning of the year, as well as a number of institutes, which have poised the institution for some exciting and innovative projects in line with our vision to be *the* African Institution in the service of humanity.

At our last Senate meeting I spoke of the need to open up spaces for reflection and deeper engagement, to the extent that we begin to “rewire” our thinking patterns and our engagement with our colleagues across the institution. I asserted that we need to “claim our space.” We have already begun that process. For example, this year my office held a number of dedicated institution-wide roundtables and discussion fora with the aim of opening up more and varied spaces for engagement on important initiatives and issues. (I know that various other colleagues held similar initiatives.) This will be accelerated next year. We have also held a number of public lectures including our Annual Founder’s lecture which this year, was delivered by Dr Mamphela Ramphele, the founder of the Citizens’ Movement on the topic: Educating and Training the 21st Century South African Citizen. By all accounts this was a most enjoyable and successful evening.

There can be no doubt that we have had a really busy year. I am pleased with our progress in Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation and Community Engagement. Over the period 2007 to 2011 the number of academic qualifications offered has increased by an average of 7,2% year-on-year. While the majority of courses currently offered at Unisa are year courses, this number continues to decrease (down from 4 822 in 2007 to 1 934 in 2011). In contrast, the number of semester courses has increased from 731 in 2007 to 1 212 in 2011. However, the year-on-year percentage change is declining for both newly introduced year and semester courses. This suggests a stabilization of the curriculum as the implementation of the semester system for undergraduate qualifications comes to completion.

Provisional registration statistics reveal a moderate growth of 2,7% from 2011 to 2012. This in comparison to a growth of 12,6% recorded for 2010 to 2011. Given the growth in provisional registrations, HEMIS HC enrolments for 2012 are projected at 338 577 (compared to a 2011 figure of 328 864).

Drawing from the 2011 HEMIS submission, Unisa's student profile continues to increase its proportion of:

- Part-time students (up from 82,3% in 2007 to 88,7% in 2011).
Average year-on-year from 2007 was 12,0%.

- Female students (up from 57,1% in 2007 to 61,4% in 2011.
Average year-on-year from 2007 was 11,9%).
- African students (up from 61,0% in 2007 to 69,4% in 2011).
Average year-on-year from 2007 was 14,0%.

The number of graduates increased marginally by 2,8% from 26 073 in 2010 to 26 808 in 2011.

In 2007 to 2008, UG degrees have been the main contributor of graduates. The contribution of UG certificates and diplomas, however, surpassed UG degrees in 2009 and 2010. In 2011 the contribution of these two types was nearly equal.

In absolute terms, The College of Education was the main contributor with 10 767 graduates in 2011, followed by the College of Economic and Management Sciences, with 9 525 graduates.

Graduates in UG Degrees and post graduate degrees below Masters have continued to increase steadily over the period. Currently, the rate for UG level is 67,3%, and for PG below Masters 58,9%. Small increases in Masters and Doctoral graduates are evident. The Degree Credit Success Rate has shown an upward trend since 2008 on both UG and PG below Masters level.

In conclusion colleagues, government and the people of South Africa and this continent have very high expectations of Unisa as the key player in the upliftment of our people, our country and our continent. I sincerely believe that we can deliver *whatever* is required of us if we are committed to do so and prepared to make the effort and yes, even sacrifices sometimes, to see it through. Like most countries in the world we are going through a very tough time. Unisa cannot fail this country and our children in their hour of need. We will continue to face our service delivery challenges with honesty, courage and determination and in a spirit of collaboration. I have every confidence that we will succeed.

It remains for me to thank each and every one of you most sincerely for your commitment to this university and its students. I look forward to an exciting 2013. On behalf of management and Council I would like to wish you and your loved ones a blessed, relaxing and joyous holiday season. Travel safely and return to us next year, well rested and raring to go!

I thank you.