



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

Office of the Vice-Chancellor and Rector
Kantoor van die Visekanselier en Rektor

Dear Parents

As the 2015 academic year comes to an end, it is important to share with you my assessment of the year that has passed, as well as a sense of what can be expected in 2016.

This has been a difficult year for all public universities in South Africa. We were faced with unprecedented levels of student protests and demands since the dawn of democracy. The concerns raised by the protestors were legitimate, namely, that the increasing costs of higher education exclude far too many promising students. We have a duty as university leaders to listen to our students during these difficult times. I have to salute our student leaders on all three campuses for exceptional leadership during those turbulent weeks and months. The Student Representative Council (SRC) and the Student Associations were exemplary in their commitment to non-violence and peaceful demonstration. These leadership commitments enabled the University of the Free State (UFS) to systematically work through the demands of the students with respect to poverty alleviation and social inclusion.

We should acknowledge that government has made major investments in higher education through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and through new campus infrastructures. The problem, however, is *adequacy*. This means that while the amount of money available for student funding has in fact increased, it has not kept up with the growing demand for post-school education and training. Most students in South Africa cannot find the money to cover fees for application, registration, tuition, accommodation, books, and other costs. Even with increased government funding, many students therefore struggle to access, remain in, and graduate from university.

Alert to these problems, the UFS has not been unresponsive to student needs. We were the first university to offer free application to all first-year students. We also offer free registration for Honours students and free studies for full-time Master's and PhD students. These concessions have cost the UFS millions of rands, but it was the right thing to do, on the one hand, and it was an investment that will eventually increase the revenue streams of the university as more good students enter and graduate from the university, on the other hand.

205 Nelson Mandela Drive / Rylaan
Park West / Parkwes
Bloemfontein 9301
South Africa / Suid-Afrika

P.O. Box / Posbus 339
Bloemfontein 9300
South Africa / Suid-Afrika
T: +27(0)51 401 7000
F: +27(0)51 401 3669
www.ufs.ac.za



We do much more. This is the only university with a No Student Hungry programme that feeds the almost 60% of students who are food insecure. We raised more than R65 million last year from private sector and family trust funding to support students. We budget R123 602 420 from normal university funding to provide additional finances for students, including merit, sports, cultural and leadership bursaries. We started a Personnel Fund in which ordinary staff members give from their often modest salaries to support more students. And now our own student leaders started a Right2Learn Campaign to raise funds for 2016 Registration in order to support needy students.

I need to tell you that the UFS runs a tight ship financially. We have one of the best debt management returns of any university. Every cent is spent responsibly and every year, without fail, we receive unqualified audits. Our small reserves were carefully built up to enable the university to deal with inevitable crises – from drought affecting the Bloemfontein Campus to a power station that breaks down in Phuthaditjhaba near the Qwaqwa Campus.

It is clear that 2016 will probably start with more protests for free education across the country. I have full confidence in the student and staff leadership that we will be able to once again navigate these choppy waters with two goals in mind.

One – to listen and be responsive to the students as far as possible. In this respect, we have launched a Student Bursary Fundraising Campaign with the target of raising R100 million for scholarships by the end of 2016.

Two – to be responsible with the university's finances. The UFS is not a wealthy university and, as I have said to both staff and students, we dare not steer the university into bankruptcy.

We will, therefore, not make decisions concerning either personnel remuneration or student demands that places the university's operations at risk or that threatens the long-term job security of staff. That cannot and will not happen.

And so, as we look forward to welcoming new and continuing students in January 2016, I urge everyone to be responsible in their activism and co-operative in seeking solutions to pressing problems of student funding. Most of all, we must be joined in our commitment to making sure that every student has the opportunity to study without constraint or interference on all three campuses of the University of the Free State in 2016.



Finally, there is much to celebrate, but let me mention at least one important achievement among many. Our student pass rates have improved from 68% in 2006 to 79% in 2014. This is a massive achievement that results from the increase in admission standards and the quality of student support through the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and our extensive tutorial programme in the seven faculties. Not only do we attract better prepared students, we also have a high-quality access programme on the South Campus for talented students who need an additional year or two before entering mainstream degree programmes. In other words, talent and opportunity combine to raise the general standard of education at the UFS.

With that good news, I sign off and thank you for your support during 2015 and I look forward to your continued partnership in 2016 as well.

Happy holidays!

Best regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Jansen", is written over the typed name. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Prof Jonathan Jansen
Vice-Chancellor and Rector
University of the Free State