

Openingstoespraak gelewer deur prof. Teuns Verschoor, Waarnemende Rektor op 30 Januarie 2009

Verlede jaar in November, net voordat die Uitvoerende Dagbestuur na 'n bosberaad sou vertrek, het mnr. Roelf Meyer 'n ontbytgesprek met die UBD-lede gevoer. Hy het vertel van die Kodesa-samesprekings in die vroeë 90's en hoe die Nasionale Party-regering se fokus aanvanklik was om in 'n nuwe bedeling soveel mag as moontlik vir die wit bevolking te probeer behou. Maar toe vind die Boipatong-skietvoorval plaas – en hulle ontvang 'n oproep van mnr. Mandela om te sê die ANC onttrek aan dié samesprekings. Dit was 'n waterskeidingsoomblik, want sonder die medewerking van die ANC sou 'n vreedsame ooreenkoms nie moontlik wees nie. En in dié waterskeidingsoomblik het daar ander denke by die NP-leiers ontstaan. Die futiliteit daarvan om te probeer vasklou – op openlike en/of bedenkbare wyses – aan soveel moontlik van die politieke mag van die verlede het tot hulle deurgedring.

Hulle het besef dat, in stede daarvan om te kyk hoeveel van die ou mag hulle kan behou, daar eerder gekonsentreer moes word op hoe hulle 'n toekomstige Suid-Afrika wou sien – nie uit die oogpunt van slegs eie belang nie, maar gesamentlike volksbelang. Deur dié kopskuif kon die Kodesa-gesprekke weer terug op die spoor geplaas word – en kon daar by 'n vreedsame oplossing en 'n model-grondwet en regstaat uitgekome word.

There are views among our staff members and students that many of us are still in the initial Kodesa frame of mind – trying to retain or claim as much power as possible out of self-interest, rather than to embrace the enriching aspects of diversity and to have a vision of a joint future for this country, province and University – or, in the words of the S.A. Human Rights Commission, “a vision to a constitutional democracy and to align our practices with the constitutional values and practices in the interest of building a caring society based on respect, social justice, equality and enjoyment of human rights.”

The year 2008 was for this University, as Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II would have phrased it, an “annus horribilis”.

On this occasion, last year, we optimistically spelt out the strategic priorities that we would have liked to drive, only to be confronted one month later with a triad of tragedies, to wit: the vandalism committed by protesting students, the disclosure and world-wide broadcasting of the Reitz video, and class disruptions in close pursuit.

Maklik 80% van die jaar se bestuurstyd is bestee aan die hantering van dié krisis, en om die negatiewe impak wat dit op die kerntake van die Universiteit sou kon hê, so min as moontlik te maak.

Daar was onophoudelike besonderhoude – nasionaal en internasionaal – protesoptogte deur menige vakbonde en ander protesgroepe, hofaansoeke om interdikte ten einde te voorkom dat die protesoptredes die akademiese bedryf van die

universiteit benadeel en honderde telefoonoproepe van ontstelde ouers, alumni en die publiek.

En daar was genoeg dreigende negatiewe impak:

“Everyone pushes a falling fence” – sê die Chinese.

- Die UV het wêreldwyd bekend geword, maar om die verkeerde redes. 'n Beeld is geskep van die UV as 'n rassistiese plek, “back-in-the-sticks”, met Reitz-kamerwonings as die simbool van rassisme.
- Internasionale navorsingsteun van miljoene rande was in die weegskaal.
- Die Bill Gates-stigting het navraag gedoen oor die verwoesting op kampus.
- Die Department for International Development (DFiD) in die Verenigde Koninkryk het laat weet dat die negatiewe gebeure nie op 'n slegter tyd kon plaasgevind het nie, want hulle was juis op daardie tydstip besig om te besluit oor navorsingstoekennings aan die UV – en die Raadslede vra vrae wat hulle nie kan antwoord nie.
- Die kansellering van buitelandse akkreditasie van ons grade is op die agendas van internasionale beroepskongresse geplaas.
- Die protesoptogte op die kampus wat die akademiese program kon benadeel, en die negatiewe beeld onder voornemende studente en donateurs wat dit meebring het.
- Dit was 'n terugslag vir die koshuisplasingsbeleid.
- Die klasontwrigtingsepisode – alhoewel van korte duur, was dit 'n traumatiese ervaring vir dosente en studente wat daardeur geraak is.
- Vir ons personeel was dit 'n verleentheid om internasionale kongresse by te woon en honende kommentaar ongevraagd te moet aanhoor en te probeer regstel.
- Die onvermydelike sluiting van Reitz-kamerwonings, met die verhoogde aantal emosionele briewe en die verlies van steun van sommige alumni wat daarmee gepaard gegaan het.
- Die verhoogde polarisasie onder studente en personeel.
- Die uitrede van die Rektor, met die onsekerheid wat dit meebring in die oploop, hoogloop en afloop van die verkiesingsprosedure vir die aanstelling van 'n nuwe Visekanselier.

- Die Parlementêre Komitee se besoek en ondervraging.
- Die Ministeriële Komitee van Ondersoek se ondervraging, en
- Die vertroue wat die UV verloor het – in die Vrystaat, Suid-Afrika en oorsee.

But, as they say, adversity is a greater teacher than prosperity (William Hazlitt 1839), it is the first part to truth (Byron 1825), and every calamity is a spur and valuable hint (Emerson 1860).

As a university, we put our shoulders to the wheel and we succeeded to a large extent in limiting the damages. It was Churchill who said: “Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts.”

- Through the interdicts, the protest actions were strictly regulated and we suffered only one afternoon of cancelled lectures.
- We honestly and straightforwardly acknowledged our mistakes and failures, in the belief that we thereby indicate that today we are wiser than yesterday (Alexander Pope).
- We appointed agencies to assist us in investigating the stumbling blocks in our residence placement policy, to help us identify the so-called wicked issues inherent in our operations, and to improve our image.
- As a University with academic integrity and diligence, we have an urge to analyse our weaknesses, to ask questions as to why things happened the way they did, and how we could have prevented the occurrence of such failures. This led to the decision to establish an Institute for Diversity (working title) on our campus that presents itself as a living laboratory wherein the phenomena of a polarised society can be researched.

And from there on, many blessings started coming our way:

- Major support was received from the Fulbright Commission in SA for the placement at the UFS of internationally-renowned scholars from the US to assist in the establishment of the Institute for Diversity. In this regard the UFS also hosted the US Ambassador to SA, Eric Bost, as a guest speaker during the first-year welcome this year, to focus on a “new generation” of students joining the UFS, and a commitment to an open and inclusive dialogue involving students.

As Edgar W. Howe (1901) put it: “When a man gets up in the world, people want to down him; when he gets down in the world, people want to help him”.

- Where we expected a decline in the number of first-year students for 2009 due to all the negative publicity, an increase of 3,8% was evident by yesterday on a day-to-day comparison with last year's registration schedule. An even bigger increase in the number of post-graduate students is also indicated.
- Een van die inisiatiewe wat moontlik tot die groei in eerstejaargetalle meegewerk het, is die UV/Volksblad Lenteskool wat gedurende die Septembervakansie aangebied is.

Deeglike en gestruktureerde hersiening is gedoen in kernmatriekvakke soos Wiskunde, Natuur- en Skeikunde en Rekeningkunde. Nagenoeg 730 leerders van oor die Vrystaat en Noord-Kaap het die skool bygewoon. Die UV het 150 leerders uit minderbevoorregte skole geborg om die Lenteskool mee te maak. Daar is berig dat 'n groot aantal van die suksesvolle matrikulante besig is om as nuwelingeerstejaars aan die UV te registreer.

- The Career Preparation Programme also experienced a large growth in student numbers. In the past, participants in this programme never topped 400, but for 2009 the number more than doubled to more than 800 students. With the CPP initiative, the UFS provides a bridging opportunity for students who would otherwise not be able to prepare themselves for the University entry requirements.
- The Master's Degree in Sustainable Agriculture presented by the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development at the University of the Free State is bursting at its seams this year, and has the most students (70) in the 16 years the programme has been presented.
- Concerning the Qwaqwa campus of the University, major strides were made last year towards improving the offering of academic programmes.

Given the reality of where the campus is geographically situated, the socio-economic backgrounds of potential students, educational needs of the broader catchment area as well as the natural resources of the region, the challenge is to offer programmes, research, academic interventions and community service learning opportunities that will be socially and educationally responsive to the region. The UFS therefore aspires to position the Qwaqwa campus by creating and maintaining its own niche, and to continue to be a Community Engagement Campus in the true sense of the word. This thinking is also endorsed by the UFS's community engagement policy (2006), in the preamble of which it is stated that the UFS aspires to be a robust and responsive university that uses its teaching, research and community service capacities to make a significant contribution to the development of its province and also to its wider region, South Africa and Africa.

Individual staff members also excelled and showed the world that, despite the bad publicity about the Reitz incident, teaching and research at the UFS were still of an exceptionally high standard.

- Prof. Maryke Labuschagne last year received the National Science and Technology Forum Award in the category of research capacity development in the last 5 - 10 years, with a R100 000 prize. The award was given for the research capacity building that resulted from the training, under her supervision, of a large number of especially black post-graduate students from South Africa and Africa over the last 10 years.
- Sy is ook in November 2008 in Stellenbosch deur die Landbouskrywersvereniging van Suid-Afrika aangewys as Nasionale Landboukundige van die Jaar uit nege finaliste, een uit elk van die deelnemende provinsies. Sy het die toekenning gekry vir haar navorsing op glutienproteïene in koring. Die navorsing is in samewerking met wetenskaplikes van Swede en Hongarye gedoen.
- Sy het ook die “Cereal Science and Technology Association of South Africa” se 2008-prys vir navorsing en ontwikkeling ontvang.
- Top researchers at the UFS continue to attract national and international recognition and win the most prestigious grants available from funding agencies.

For example, in December 2008, Prof Hendrik Swart of Physics and Prof Jannie Swarts (not related) from Chemistry received R10 million from the National Equipment Program of the NRF (National Research Foundation), as well as R3 million from the South African oil giant Sasol, to purchase a nano Scanning Auger Microprobe and an X-ray photoelectron spectroscope to analyse and characterize very small particles. The uniqueness of the system lies in its high resolution capability, which makes it ideal for nanotechnology research. The UFS is one of the leaders in nanotechnology research, and the achievements of Physics in particular have made national and international headlines. The total cost of this equipment package exceeds R22 million and the UFS will be the only institution in Africa, and one of only a few institutions world-wide, that has access to this instrumental array.

- The School of Nursing at the University of the Free State (UFS) received a financial injection of R16 million over four years from The Atlantic Philanthropies, an international philanthropic foundation with a strong focus on community well-being and health care. The money is part of R70 million donated to the UFS, the Tshwane University of Technology, the University of Fort Hare and the University of the Western Cape. It is said to be the biggest single commitment of funds from a private donor to establish a Virtual Health Teaching and Learning Facility with state-of-the-art equipment and facilities, and to establish a unit for continuing professional development and research capacity development to serve both practicing nurses and members of staff of the School of Nursing.
- Furthermore, the University’s academic staff are playing a pivotal role in establishing and strengthening international ties. Recently, the UFS, in collaboration with US-based agencies, was appointed as the lead grantee to spearhead a 10-year

- The Centre for Accounting at the UFS will receive about R12 million over the next four years from the Thuthuka Bursary Fund to train black students as chartered accountants. The bursary fund is managed by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA), and is aimed at increasing the number of black students who obtain the Bachelor's degree in Accounting.
- DiMTeC concluded 2 international cooperation agreements in risk management with the United Nations University (UNU) and the University of Novi Sad.
- The UFS also received visits from the University of Minnesota and the Duke State University of North Carolina, arising from which memoranda of cooperation will be finalised.
- The strategic role that the UFS plays in terms of human capital development in Africa was also highlighted by the fact that almost 200 international students from 14 countries obtained their qualifications at the UFS in 2008. An increase in international student numbers from 1800 to 2200 during the past two years, with a marked increase in postgraduate students, positions the UFS as a destination of choice for academic excellence. More than 40 international academics are appointed at the UFS.
- The assessor of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) 2008 Internationalisation Benchmarking Review has commended the UFS on its excellent progress towards supporting internationalisation at the institution.
- The Student Development and Success Division (SDS) has received funding from the Council on Higher Education (CHE) to the amount of R1 million for a national pilot study to identify the drivers of student success in higher education.
- Wat individuele studente of alumni-presteerders betref, is een van die Bestuurskool se oud-MBA-studente verlede week as 'n wenner in die Enblis FNB Launchpad Sakeplan-kompetisie aangewys – en dit is 'n enorme prestasie.
- Mr JB van den Berg from Bothaville was honoured as the Free State's Young Farmer of the Year last year; he was also recently named the National Young Farmer of the Year. He is an alumnus of the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development.

- Me Desme Human, 'n UV-honneursstudent, se artikel is deur die "International Cost Engineering Council" (ICEC) aangewys as die beste artikel in bourekenkunde deur 'n jong persoon vir die tydperk 2006 - 2008. Sy het die toekenning in Junie 2008 in Toronto (Kanada) ontvang.
- Die Departement Bourekenkunde en Konstruksiebestuur het so pas verneem dat hy onvoorwaardelike akkreditasie vir Konstruksiebestuur ontvang het by die Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), en dat die Departement voldoen aan die vereistes vir 'n geakkrediteerde sentrum, wat die Universiteit ook op hierdie terrein op die wêreldkaart plaas. Prof. Basie Verster, hoof van dié Departement, is ook verkies tot Visepresident (Onderwys) van die CIOB (Afrika).
- Die CIOB het ook die UV se Honneursprogram in Konstruksiebestuur onvoorwaardelik geakkrediteer.
- Daarbenewens het die Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), met sy hoofkantoor in Londen, die UV se internasionale akkreditasie weer bekragtig. Die akkreditasie word gebaseer op studentegehalte, aanstelbaarheid van studente, navorsingsuitsette, infrastruktuur en personeel. Die UV was slegs een van drie SA universiteite wat tot die RICS se gesogte internasionale vennootskap toegelaat is.
- Drie programme in die Fakulteit Opvoedkunde is ook deur die Komitee vir Hoër Onderwys geakkrediteer.
- The Centre for Education Development within the Faculty of Education received a grant of \$100 000 from Hewlett Packard based on their proposal for the innovative and effective application of mobile technologies. For the 2008 programme, HP received 80 university nominations from 28 countries within the European/Middle East/Africa region, from which only 15 universities were selected.

A key criterion was that there had to be solid proof in the proposed projects regarding how teaching would be enhanced through the deployment of technology.

- Ons het ook in hierdie week verneem dat die UV R73,3 miljoen ontvang het uit die spesiale fondse wat deur die Minister van Nasionale Opvoeding toegeken is. Hiervan is o.a. R30 miljoen geormerk vir onderwysopleiding, R6 miljoen vir navorsingsapparaat en R17,1 miljoen vir Gesondheidswetenskappe.

Op sportgebied is daar ook goed presteer:

- The inclusion of eight Free State cricket players in the amateur team, the hockey team winning the University Sport South Africa (USSA) B section, the inclusion of three soccer players in the USSA team, rugby winning the USSA competition for the second time, netball winning gold at the USSA tournament for the fourth consecutive

- Vier van die SA 0/21-netbalspan van 15 lede is Kovsies. Hulle gaan in Augustus vanjaar vir die Wêreldbeker op die Cook-eilande speel.
- Shimlapark se ligte word op 9 Februarie in gebruik geneem tydens die Varsity Cup wedstryd tussen die UV en ons jare lange opponente op die rugbyveld, die Pukke.
- Die Varsity Cup wedstryde van 9 Februarie, asook 2 Maart 2009, word gebeeldsaai op Supersport .
- Op hokkieterrein was die UV ook suksesvol om 'n Drienasies-toernooi te kry. Die manshokkiespanne van Duitsland, Rusland en Suid-Afrika sal tussen die 6de en 16de Maart sake uitspook op ons astrovelde. Dit behoort te sorg vir aanskoulike hokkie omdat Duitsland tans die houers van die Olimpiese goue medalje is, asook die Wêreldbekershouers, en dus die beste span ter wêreld.
- Die wedstryde gaan ook gepaard met die ingebruikneming van ons nuwe hokkiefasiliteite. Die feit dat ons daarin geslaag het om die toernooi na die UV te trek in stede van hulle gebruiklike oefenkamp te Potchefstroom, behoort vir die UV groot blootstelling met enorme bemarkingswaarde te bied.
- Op kultuurgebied is die Bochabelo String Orchestra genooi om in Februarie in België op te tree. Die samelewingsdiensleermodule wat deur derdejaar-musiekstudente gevolg word, is deels betrokke by die afrigting van hierdie jong vioolspelers.

Hierdie is maar 'n paar van die uitstekende prestasies van UV-personeel en -studente. Ek is oortuig daar is veel meer – en ek wil die presteerders gelukwens en vir hulle dankie sê vir hulle bydrae om die UV se beeld weer in ere te herstel.

- Die beste nuus vir personeel was natuurlik die aankondiging van 'n salarisverhoging van 16,13%, asook die feit dat mediese voordele ten volle ingefaseer is vir diene wat nie die volle subsidie ontvang het nie. Dit wil sê, elke personeellid ontvang nou die volle mediese subsidie wat hom/haar toekom.

Hierdie vergoedingsmylpale is moontlik gemaak deur die toepassing van die ooreengekome meerjarige inkomstegebaseerde vergoedingsmodel en die feit dat die bestuur verbind is om binne die grense van bekostigbaarheid die maksimum voordeel aan personeel te bied.

Ons is dankbaar dat ons hierdie goeie salarisaanpassings aan die UV-personeellede kan deurgee. Dit maak ons vergoedingspakkette meer kompetender met dié van ander universiteite, wat ons dan in staat stel om goeie personeel makliker te behou. Ons het 'n buitengewoon uitdagende en moeilike 2008 beleef. Daarom is ons dankbaar om personeellede op 'n besonderse wyse, deur hierdie baie goeie salarisaanpassings, te kan vergoed vir hulle harde werk en lojale ondersteuning.

Ons wil ook vir UVPERSU en Nehawu van harte bedank vir die wyse waarop hulle in dié verband met die bestuur saamwerk om die beste moontlike bedinging vir die personeel te bewerkstellig.

Despite all these blessings coming our way, our job is not done and there is much to do to fully restore the trust that our clients, stakeholders and society had in our institution. We have therefore a responsibility to keep on performing accordingly.

The UFS must also operate within a set of challenges common to all universities and must forge its own unique path through them, taking advantage of our own particular goals and institutional strengths. These common environmental challenges and opportunities include:

- the increased demand for public trust and accountability;
- the increased globalisation of higher education;
- the rising costs of education and changing patterns in funding;
- the greater competition for staff, students, and financial resources;
- the changing methods of teaching and learning;
- the rapidly changing means of information access;
- the political uncertainties (at national, provincial and institutional levels), and the
- declining global economy.

The University itself also has its own set of challenges, many of which were foremost in our minds during 2008. However, with its diverse range of academic programmes, good and growing links with industry and the community and an impressive research record, the University is well positioned to make a lasting impact on our society.

Die verhouding tussen universiteite en hulle belanghebbendes ontwikkel voortdurend. Ons identiteit – hoe ons gesien word en hoe ons ander sien – is lewensbelangrik vir ons sukses.

Ons moet enige geleentheid aangryp om ons identiteit te versterk, en ons toewyding aan uitnemendheid moet sterker as ooit word.

Ons moet nog meer relevant word vir die verligting van die probleem van die breë samelewing. Despite all the good news that we are able to report today, there is still a loss of trust in the UFS on the part of society. We need to regain that trust, and to improve our relationship with our stakeholders and the Provincial and National Government.

To borrow from the wisdom of Robert K. Greenleaf: The only sound basis for regaining the trust of the society is for people to have the solid experience of being served by this University in a way that builds a society that is more just and more loving, and with greater creative opportunities for all of its people. And it is worth the cost of some chaos and disruption if enough people will read the signs and start building a University that generates a high level of trust through quality of service that is exceptional by all

previous standards.