

23 September 2014

Statement by the Institutional Forum of the University of the Free State

The Institutional Forum (IF), as the only cross-stakeholder body with a statutory mandate of overseeing the processes related to transformation at the UFS, hereby releases the following statement in line with our role of “fostering an institutional culture which promotes tolerance and respect for human dignity and fundamental human rights, and a positive environment for teaching, research and learning” (Republic of South Africa, 1997:26).

We noted with concern the steady flow of reporting and commentary, for example, in the Afrikaans press, indicating that there is a crisis at the UFS, which apparently is confirmed by a range of incidents in 2014. To the contrary, all the major indicators of university progress point in the **right** direction from the first term of the current Rector, continuing into the second term. See the factual picture further on.

Thus, the IF supports the vision and the mission statements of the university, as we believe that this puts the UFS on an improvement curve that will eventually position it among the top universities in the country.

Our trust in the trajectory is borne out by facts. The South African Survey of Student Engagement of 2009 reported the students at the UFS as having the lowest level of academic engagement, which, compared to seven other institutions, included the least time spent on preparing for class and lowest participation in deep learning activities (UFS, 2014^a:30). However, from 2010 onwards, there is a steady increase in the levels of academic engagement by UFS students. Granted, there is still room for more improvement, but the increase is noted and the work put in by the Centre for Teaching and Learning in this regard is acknowledged. The success rate of UFS students showed an increase from 2008 to 2012, i.e. the numbers of students achieving pass percentages in their modules increased from 72% in 2008 to 74.8% in 2012 (UFS, 2014^a:22).

Again, measured against the national success rate of 80%, our students still do not perform yet among the best in SA universities (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014:15). Still, we note the progress and are confident that the efforts at broadening and deepening the teaching and learning skills of lecturers will bear fruit in the long run, as these early indicators clearly point towards.

The productivity of academic staff increased regarding their research outputs. In 2008, the article equivalent output was 0.9 per research-active academic; in 2012, it increased

to 1.1 (UFS, 2014^a:28). This means that every research-active academic publishes and works on research outputs at a higher rate now than before. Such an increase in productivity brings growth in income, better academic standing and improved chances for promotion; all good indices of a university serious about its contribution to knowledge production. This increase in productivity is not just a race for quantity; quality also rose. From 49.5% of articles published in internationally indexed journals in 2008, an increase is noted in the 66% of articles thus published in 2012 (UFS, 2014^a:28). This is the mark of a university on the right course, as we are aware of the explicit targets set for faculties regarding the increase in postgraduate students at master's and doctorate level, together with the explicit targets set for outputs per research-active academic. These new targets for faculties are still very reasonable and will further entrench the university's growth path on the higher education landscape.

On matters financial, it is apparent that the UFS has a healthy state of affairs, as evidenced by the ability to deposit 2% of its income into the general reserve and consistently attain unqualified audit opinions (UFS, 2012:14; UFS, 2013:33). The growth in income, assets, funds and reserves, together with the phenomenal increase in DHET allocations for infrastructure projects from R65 million in 2011 to R333.6 million in 2013, attest to frugality and wise spending. In fact, the Integrated Report (UFS, 2013:36,67) from which these figures are drawn, is in itself an accomplishment based on the King III recommendations for healthy corporate governance. Coupling these strong financial indicators with the increase in funded research chairs, like the recently announced R30 million SANRAL chair in Science, Mathematics and Technology Education, we cannot but commend the financial managers and fundraisers of the UFS. In sum, no one's job is at risk as the university remains in a healthy financial position.

There are numerous indicators in the 2012 and 2013 Integrated Reports which record an upward movement in the realisation of the Human Project vision. Compared to the recently released national crime statistics, the 56% decrease in reported crime on our campuses from 2010 to 2013 (UFS, 2013:68) makes our university environment a very conducive place within which different conceptualisations of the Human Project can take effect. The 2014 Stakeholder Perception Audit, an internationally acclaimed audit of this kind, reports high perception scores for all indicators, from Leadership to Trust/Ethics (UFS, 2014^b:1). Empirically, therefore, the Human Project is on track. The UFS is building vibrant and transformative intellectual cultures across our campuses; our SRC elections do not follow racialised patterns anymore; we value the significance of student voice and student-lived realities; we understand the importance of diversifying our knowledge base and its producers; we know that excellence and diversity are twins; and we acknowledge the centrality of academics in the pedagogical transformation.

With this battery of changes, it is expected that there will be unease and unhappiness in some quarters. Still, it comes as a surprise that the university can be regarded as so reckless as to disregard due process as far as certain human resource management procedures are concerned. Fortunately, the UFS' project cannot be held back by a minority of actors who do not want to allow the university to fulfil its larger social responsibility as a national asset; there is too big a majority of staff and students who want to play their part in this project.

Given all these facts, the Institutional Forum expresses its confidence in the transformation trajectory of the University of the Free State. However, the need to spread distorted information about our institution confirms that anti-transformation voices in- and outside the UFS miss the point of what it means to be at and to work for a **university**. Deep reflection is required on their part. We implore staff to support one another and the university in general by systematically contributing to the university's project in your own work specialisation and beyond.

By its own account, the UFS has areas which it is still not totally satisfied with, rightly so. The IF also observes indicators where growth is slow, like the Employment Equity targets for an increase in black females in academic leadership positions (Department of Labour, 2013). We need to continue to generate momentum in the transformation project. It is in our own, our students', and our communities' interests.

In conclusion, any institution of this size will have its incidents and dynamics, but the UFS is certainly not in a crisis.

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23 September 2014

Verklaring deur die Institusionele Forum van die Universiteit van die Vrystaat

Die Institusionele Forum (IF), as die enigste kruis-belanghebbende liggaam met 'n statutêre mandaat van toesighouding oor prosesse wat verband hou met transformasie by die UV, stel hiermee die volgende verklaring vry in ooreenstemming met ons rol in “die bevordering van ‘n institusionele kultuur van verdraagsaamheid en respek vir menslike waardigheid en fundamentele menseregte, asook ‘n positiewe omgewing vir onderrig, navorsing en leer” (Republiek van Suid-Afrika, 1997:26).

Ons het met kommer kennis geneem van die voortdurende stroom van beriggewing en kommentaar in byvoorbeeld die Afrikaanse pers, wat daarop dui dat daar ‘n krisis by die UV is, en wat klaarblyklik bevestig word deur ‘n reeks insidente in 2014. In teenstelling hiermee, dui al die belangrike aanwysers van universiteitsvordering in die **regte** rigting sedert die eerste termyn van die huidige rektor, wat in die tweede termyn voortgesit word. Sien die feitelike beeld verder aan.

Dus ondersteun die IF die visie- en missieverklaring van die universiteit, aangesien ons glo dat dit die universiteit op ‘n kurwe van verbetering plaas wat uiteindelik daartoe sal lei dat dit onder die topuniversiteite in die land geïmplementeer sal word.

Ons vertrou in die trajektorie word deur die feite bevestig. Volgens die Suid-Afrikaanse Opname van Studentebetrokkenheid van 2009, het studente aan die UV die laagste vlak van studentebetrokkenheid gehad, en het in vergelyking met sewe ander instellings, die minste tyd spandeer aan voorbereiding vir klasse, en het ook die laagste deelname aan grondige leeraktiwiteite gehad (UV, 2014^a:30). Sedert 2010 is daar egter ‘n geleidelike toename in die vlakke van akademiese betrokkenheid by UV-studente. Toegegee, daar is steeds ruimte vir meer verbetering, maar daar word kennis geneem van die toename en erkenning word gegee aan die werk wat deur die Sentrum vir Onderrig en Leer in hierdie verband gedoen word. Die slaagsyfer van UV-studente het van 2008 tot 2012 ‘n toename getoon, d.w.s. die aantal studente wat slaagsyfers in hulle modules behaal het, het van 72% in 2008 toegeneem tot 74.8% in 2012 (UV, 2014^a:22).

Weereens, gemeet teen die nasionale slaagsyfer van 80%, is ons studente se prestasie nog steeds nie onder die bestes in SA universiteite nie (Departement van Hoër Onderwys en Opleiding, 2014:15). Nogtans neem ons kennis van die vordering en is vol vertrou dat die pogings om die onderrig- en leervaardighede van dosente te verruim en te verdiep, op die lang duur resultate sal oplewer, soos duidelik blyk uit hierdie vroeë aanwysers.

Daar was 'n toename in die produktiwiteit van akademiese personeel ten opsigte van hulle navorsingsuitsette. In 2008 was die artikel-gelykwaardige lewering 0.9 per navorsingsaktiewe akademikus; in 2012 het dit verhoog na 1.1 (UV, 2014^a:28). Dit beteken dat elke navorsingsaktiewe akademikus nou aan navorsingsuitsette werk en op 'n hoër koers publiseer as voorheen. So 'n verhoging in produktiwiteit bring groei in inkomste, beter akademiese status en groter kans op bevordering mee; alles goeie aanduidings van 'n universiteit wat ernstig is oor sy bydrae tot kennisproduksie. Hierdie toename in produktiwiteit is nie net 'n wedloop om kwantiteit nie; daar was ook 'n styging in kwaliteit. Van die 49.5% artikels wat in 2008 in internasionaal-geïndekseerde vaktydskrifte gepubliseer is, word 'n toename dus opgemerk in die 66% van artikels wat in 2012 gepubliseer is (UV, 2014^a:28). Dit is die merkteken van 'n universiteit op die regte spoor, aangesien ons bewus is van die duidelike teikens wat vir fakulteite gestel is wat betref die toename in nagraadse studente op meesters- en doktorale vlak, tesame met die duidelike teikens wat gestel is vir uitsette per navorsingsaktiewe akademikus. Hierdie nuwe teikens vir fakulteite is steeds baie redelik en sal die universiteit se ontwikkelingspad in die hoëronderwyslandskap verder versterk.

Wat finansiële sake betref, is dit duidelik dat die UV oor 'n gesonde toedrag van sake beskik, soos bewys deur die vermoë om 2% van sy inkomste in algemene surpluskapitaal te deponer en konsekwent onvoorwaardelike ouditmenings te behaal (UV, 2012:14; UV, 2013:33). Die groei in inkomste, bates, fondse en reserwes, tesame met die merkwaardige toename in DHOO-toekennings vir infrastruktuurprojekte van R65 miljoen in 2011 tot R333.6 miljoen in 2013, getuig van spaarsaamheid en wyse besteding. Trouens, die Geïntegreerde Verslag (UV, 2013:36,67) waaruit hierdie syfers kom, is op sigself 'n prestasie gebaseer op die King III-aanbevelings vir gesonde korporatiewe bestuur. As hierdie sterk finansiële aanwysers gekoppel word aan die toename in gefinansierde navorsingsleerstoele, soos die R30-miljoen SANRAL-leerstool in Wetenskap-, Wiskunde- en Tegnologie-onderwys wat onlangs bekendgestel is, kan ons nie anders as om die finansiële bestuurders en fondsinsamelaars van die UV te loof nie. Kortom, niemand se werk is in gevaar nie, aangesien die universiteit steeds in 'n gesonde finansiële toestand verkeer.

Daar is talle aanwysers in die 2012 en 2013 Geïntegreerde Verslae wat op 'n opwaartse beweging in die verwesenliking van die visie aangaande die Menslike Projek dui. In vergelyking met die nasionale misdaadstatistiek wat onlangs vrygestel is, maak die 56% afname in aangemelde misdaad op ons kampusse vanaf 2010 tot 2013 (UV, 2013:68) van ons universiteitsomgewing 'n baie bevorderlike plek waarbinne die verskillende konseptualiserings van die Menslike Projek kan plaasvind. Die 2014 Belanghebbende-persepsieoudit, 'n internasionaal-erkende oudit van hierdie aard, meld hoë persepsietellings vir alle aanduiders, van Leierskap tot Vertroue/Etik (UV, 2014^b:1). Empiries is die Menslike Projek dus op koers. Die UV bou lewendige en transformerende intellektuele kulture regoor ons kampusse; ons SR-verkiesings volg nie meer rasgebaseerde patrone nie; ons heg waarde aan die belangrikheid van studente se stem en studentervervaarde realiteite; ons begryp die belangrikheid van verskeidenheid in ons kennisbasis en die vervaardigers daarvan; ons weet dat uitnemendheid en

diversiteit hand aan hand gaan; en ons erken die sentraliteit van akademië in die opvoedkundige transformasie.

Met hierdie reeks veranderinge, kan ongemak en ongelukkigheid uit sekere oorde verwag word. Tog kom dit as 'n verrassing dat die universiteit as so onverskillig beskou kan word om regsvoorskrifte te verontagsaam wat die prosedures van menslikehulpbronbestuur aanbetref. Gelukkig kan die UV se projek nie teruggehou word deur 'n minderheid rolspelers wat nie die universiteit wil toelaat om sy groter maatskaplike verantwoordelikheid as 'n nasionale bate na te kom nie; die meerderheid van personeel en studente wat hulle deel in hierdie projek wil doen, is te groot.

Gegewe al hierdie feite, spreek die Institusionele Forum sy vertroue uit in die transformasiekoers van die Universiteit van die Vrystaat. Die behoefte om verdraaide inligting oor ons instelling te versprei, bevestig egter dat antitransformasie-stemme binne en buite die UV nie snap wat dit beteken om op en vir 'n **universiteit** te wees en te werk nie. Hulle het nodig om diep na te dink. Ons vra dat personeel mekaar en die universiteit oor die algemeen sal ondersteun deur stelselmatig tot die universiteit se projek by te dra in u eie spesialiteitsveld en daarbuite.

Die universiteit erken tereg dat daar areas is waarmee hy steeds nog nie heeltemal tevrede is nie. IF merk ook op dat daar aanwysers is waar groei stadig is, soos die Diensbillikheidsdoelwitte vir 'n toename in swart vroue in akademiese leierskapposte (Departement van Arbeid, 2013). Ons moet voortgaan om momentum te skep in die transformasieprojek. Dit is in ons eie, ons studente en ons samelewing se belang.

Ten slotte, enige instelling van hierdie grootte sal sy voorvalle en dinamika hê, maar die UV verkeer beslis nie in 'n krisis nie.

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