

VC newsletter

Dear colleagues and students,

We have reached the halfway mark for 2007, and building on the “good news items” of the May newsletter, e.g. the Absa-Beeld Economist of the Year competition and the Descartes prize for science, I would like to share the following with you:

- The first Huberte Rupert Award for Service to Classical Music was awarded to Prof. Werner Nel of the School of Music.
- Prof. Esté Vorster, Director of the Research Unit AUTHeR (Africa Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Research) was awarded the prestigious Havenga Prize of the Academy for Science and Art for her medical research.

We had a very constructive Council meeting on the 22nd of June. The Council newsletter can be read elsewhere, but I would like to point out the following:

The terms of the Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campus Rectors

Following a process of interviews by the Executive Committee of Council and receiving the advice of Senate and the Institutional Forum, Council upon the recommendation of the Executive Committee of Council resolved to extend the contracts of the Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campus Rectors as follows:

- Prof Annette Combrink: with 2 years and 4 months, until retirement on 31 December 2009; and
- Prof Piet Prinsloo: with 2 years, until 31 August 2009.

The extension of these contracts will ensure prolonged stability and effective leadership in the top management of the two campuses; it will provide sustained leadership during the critical academic alignment process and in the ongoing transformation of the campuses; and will provide the much-needed continuity in our preparations for the Institutional Audit.

Vaal Triangle Campus structures

Council also approved the restructuring of the Vaal Triangle Campus structures to provide for two faculties, with two deans, by establishing a Faculty of Humanities (consisting of the Schools of Behavioural Sciences, Languages, Basic Sciences and Educational Sciences) and the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Information Technology (consisting of the Schools of Accounting Sciences, Economic Sciences and Information Technology). Following on the establishment of schools at the Mafikeng Campus, this restructuring seems to be the last major intervention that will ensure that we are all operating in the same management model.

The 2006 results (Annual report)

Council approved the 2006 Annual Report and from the report it is clear that the NWU's core business is stable and growing and good progress has been made towards the overall transformation of the institution. The Report will be available on the web by the middle of July. The following summary from the Annual Report gives a clear indication that the NWU is indeed performing very well with regard to all the core indicators:- Having established itself in the marketplace as a vibrant, innovative and entrepreneurial university, the NWU attracted high quality students and to avoid overtaxing its existing capacity, had to set limits for first-year intakes. The total student headcount for the year came to 38 736, slightly more than the 2005 figure.

- Healthy increases were recorded in research output, while student throughput rates remained stable (and high). The NWU has also increased its ability to generate ‘third-stream income’, meaning income from sources other than subsidy funding and student fees. More than a quarter of the University's R1,1 billion budget for 2006 came from other sources, including patents and inventions developed by the NWU.

- The Institutional Plan was prepared after extensive consultation with university stakeholders, submitted to the Department of Education in May 2006 and accepted by the Minister in August 2006. It contains clear strategic objectives and action plans, complete with targets, for achieving the NWU's chosen strategy. Essentially, this strategy aims to move the University from being tuition-based with focused research towards becoming an effective, transformed and balanced tuition and research university.

- While taking the first steps in this strategic direction in 2006, the NWU reached another important milestone: the implementation of the NWU Statute. Meeting the deadline set by the Minister of Education for complying with the Statute, 8 August 2006, the NWU successfully established a new Senate, Convocation Roll and Board of Donors, as well as these structures' designees on the NWU Council.

- As the year progressed, the NWU accelerated efforts to achieve integration on all levels. This included implementing a single, centralised system for student administration, as well as integrated systems for financial management and human resources. Policies, rules and procedures were aligned across the University.

- In the last quarter of the year, the entire university community was given the opportunity to contribute to the development of a new branding strategy for the NWU. This consultation process took the form of a brand and perception audit, which was conducted to assess the symbolic value of the NWU logo and corporate identity. The findings of this audit will inform the new branding strategy that will make the NWU an instantly recognisable brand as a vibrant, well managed and entrepreneurial institution.

- The NWU has, during 2006, come to the conclusion that it will have to benchmark its performance to be able to improve continuously. This process was started in 2006 and will be concluded in 2007. The table below gives a selective summary of the NWU during its short history. Most (if not all) of these performance areas could also be benchmarked nationally and internationally.

Benchmarking performance	2004	2005	2006
Total student enrolment	40145	38596	38736
Undergraduate pass rate (contact and distance)	75.2%	78.8%	78.5%
Total degrees and diplomas awarded	9657	7746	9821
Master degrees awarded	626	700	765
PhDs awarded	87	82	110
Article equivalents published (total)	275	326	373
NFR-rated researchers	73	85	85
Income from own intellectual property	R1.52m	R2.23m	R4.26m
Financial surplus/shortfall	R14.7m	R64.3m	R71.2m

Challenges for the second semester

Apart from all the commitments with regard to the core business that need to be achieved by all of us, as an institution we will have to work hard on the following matters in the second semester:

The rate of academic programme alignment was slow in the first half of 2007. We do recognize, that there are indeed outstanding critical agreements, e.g. the implementation of the critical cross-field outcomes (CCFOs). It is important that the Institutional Senate finalise the decision on the CCFO implementation in August 2007. About 79% of the undergraduate programmes will be involved in alignment in 2008 and 94% of the postgraduate programmes will start with their alignment in 2008. The outstanding stumbling blocks must be resolved to ensure that the rate of alignment will intensify in 2008.

The Institutional Management (including the campus rectors) will now commit to individual targets (numbers) to achieve our employment equity targets as outlined in the Institutional Plan.

The stabilisation and optimisation of the Oracle eBusiness Suite is still one of our urgent support projects. Problems that we experience range from functional aspects to the general responsiveness of the system. We have requested Oracle South Africa to do a technical evaluation of the system, and to help us to determine the causes of the sluggish response. They have assigned the project to a team based in India, and we have received a detailed report of potential problems areas. Our IT support specialists are urgently attending to the matter, and have already rectified a number of issues, resulting in some improvement. However, some recommendations require extensive and complicated system changes that will take more time. In general, the system is functioning well and is providing us with the required functionality.

With regard to the Institutional Audit, we have to keep up the good momentum that was achieved in the first semester. The IM recently accepted the proposal by the HEQC that the Audit be re-scheduled to take place during March 2009. It is, however, important to note that we have decided to maintain the initial role-out plan in order to ensure that we do not lose any momentum.

The roll-out of the branding strategy remains a high priority and in the 2nd semester we will experience a visible improvement to ensure that the NWU is also portrayed in the market as a vibrant and entrepreneurial university.

On a personal note, my own election as chairperson of HESA will be challenging, but not necessarily take up more of my time than was the case as deputy chair. I believe that this is an unique opportunity for the NWU to be "up-front" in helping to address the many challenges facing higher education in South-Africa.

I would like to thank staff and students for all the hard work and commitment up to the halfway mark of 2007. I hope that you will all have a well-earned recess...

The rest of the year remains full of challenges.

Kind regards,

Theuns Eloff
Vice-Chancellor