

**Theme: Repositioning Education central in the SA transformation agenda to deal with socio-economic challenges facing the country in the 21st century**

Your excellency, the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, members of the convocation, Heads of departments, distinguished Guests, friends of Walter Sisulu university, staff, Alumni of the university, students, media representatives, ladies and gentlemen good morning. It is indeed such a great honor for me to be standing before you to address such an important occasion-the conferment of degrees and diplomas. I am truly humbled.

When I received this request I had to stop and reflect on how institutions of learning operated 20 years ago and how they operate now and my answer was very little has changed in terms of how the traditional institutions operated and the way they do today. Considering where our country is in terms of policy and being a global player, I then decided to talk about “Repositioning Education central in the South African transformation agenda to deal with socio-economic challenges facing the country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

In the SA green paper of December 2006 on Higher Education Transformation Professor Bengu—the former Minister of Education states that: Higher education is one of the most important activities organized in modern societies. It creates a demanding but rewarding environment in which individuals may realize their creative and

intellectual potential. Through high-level training across the disciplines, it equips people with the necessary knowledge, skills and values to play a wide range of social roles and to become effective citizens. Through research and the production of knowledge, higher education provides a society with the capacity to innovate, adapt and advance

Therefore , It is about time that SA face up to the "triple challenge" of unemployment, poverty and inequality with education playing its vital if not the' main role towards winning this battle. Education is not an end in itself, it serves broader objectives. We cannot continue to view education in isolation to its own environment (community, business, government). Millions that the government invests towards education (Early childhood development, basic education -no fee schools; free supply of books; and various bursaries and financial aid schemes from government and the private sector are clear indication of level of importance that government puts on education; question is - are institutions of high learning up to the challenge?

The dual challenge that higher education institutions face is firstly to contribute to economic growth of the country and secondly to improve the quality of life of its citizens

Due to Globalisation, the government funding formulae and the scarcity of resources are forcing higher education institutions to use business improvement methodologies and quality models to survive in the increasingly global market. It has become imperative that universities must adopt business models such as business process reengineering

(BPR), lean techniques in order to improve the quality that is rendered to students and industry.

A new breed of leadership and academics are required to take the country forward ; in essence this means that we need to reinvent ourselves as leadership and academics to be able to present a new and fresh vision that will reposition education as a pillar of hope to address the Triple challenges facing our country.

In his January 8th statement of 2012 President Zuma emphasized that the country's education and training system should be the cornerstone of all efforts to radically transform South Africa and build a truly non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, united and prosperous society.:

<http://www.southafrica.info/news/zuma-090112.htm>)

It is mainly Africans, women and youth who continue to carry a disproportionate burden of the triple challenges. It's even worse in the rural areas

With substantial pressure escalate on state funding, increasing campus energy and operational costs, and a national economic readjustment of unprecedented proportions, higher education must re-examine and reposition itself to meet new and emerging challenges. Quality education goes beyond individual learning achievements and can lay the foundations for more equitable, just and tolerant societies

" Severe economic pressures have created a defining moment for

colleges and universities, which must fundamentally reinvent themselves to survive.”- E. Gordon Gee, Ohio State University

Higher education is at a pivotal time, especially in South Africa. As with many nonprofit organizations and corporations, survival will depend upon achieving the elusive balance between flat or declining revenues and increasing expenses. As economic and demographic shifts continue to challenge higher education, and as financial constraints reset consumer preferences, institutions will have to redefine and reposition themselves as part of an increasingly competitive landscape. How can higher education institutions increase revenue without sacrificing or damaging the quality of programming or brand? In other words how do they ensure financial viability whilst remaining relevant.

### Use of Technology

Students have become savvy consumers who seek high quality programming across all marketed educational delivery methods including on-campus (face-to-face), blended, and online. Recognizing that competing educational programs are now just one click away, quality is critical to student attraction and retention and program sustainability ( this is even more crucial for our institutions in rural communities) . Quality programme by expert academics or lecturers guarantees programme sustainability and through increased demand.

Economic development, for example, emerged in the second half of the

twentieth century as the most desired goal sought by Third World nation. But despite the many national development plans and World Bank programs and foreign aid, no Third World nation, with only few exceptions, has managed to achieve the desired economic goals. This failure clearly indicates that Third World societies in general lack the knowledge and the tools and the institutions to design and implement feasible economic plans. Even with the hundreds of billion of dollars spent by the World Bank to build dams, roads, schools and educational and technical training centers, economic development has remained an elusive goal for most nations.

Hesitance to initiate the kind of social, cultural, political and economic changes needed to facilitate the transformation of the existing social and economic structures, has made economic development a difficult, if not a largely unattainable goal. Societies that lack the right knowledge and attitudes and societal systems to live the age and recognize its limitations and opportunities are unable to develop and climb the civilizational ladder in an orderly and timely manner.

Development, to be feasible, needs much more than traditional education, or the abundance of natural resources, or the availability of cheap labor, or a fairly developed infrastructure, or even a good supply of capital. It needs a society whose values are conducive to change, whose human resources are skilled and disciplined, and whose institutions are capable of designing and carrying quality programmes beyond the solid walls of a classroom.

Traditional, on-campus face-to-face programs will always play a critical role in higher education. However, even on-campus students will continue demanding greater access to worldwide knowledge and faster-paced, technology-supported delivery. Entirely online programs and those that blend both in-person and online features provide new opportunities to expand education beyond the limitation of the physical campus and its geographic location.

Online and blended programs provide opportunities to reach new student markets across all generations by expanding the accessibility of educational programs to increase an institution's future alumni base. Additionally, online and blended programs provide opportunities to re-engage and reconnect alumni through expanded programming. Therefore, colleges and universities must consider quality and scale in terms of program development, sustainability, and meeting the needs of online students. Think about it- you would not talk about limited space, shortage of lecturers, could attract the best lecturers who could address millions of students all at once, this would make education more accessible to many.

### Employment Expectations

"The labor market demands greater skills than ever before as a precondition for higher earnings," according to Hozler [69]. In fact, increasing numbers of professions are requiring some level of post-matric qualification. The Career Voyage website developed by the US Departments of Labor and Education reveals that the top fifty in-

demand occupations require a college certification. With increasing unemployment rates over the past year, competition for jobs has also increased putting more demand on the need for a more practical approach to qualifications

With advances in technology and telecommunications, the labor market will continue to need employees with skills and knowledge to lead innovation. Therefore, it is imperative that government, corporate, institutions of high learning, and civic leaders work collaboratively to identify strategies to provide higher education opportunities through cost-effective and quality programming that will enable the nation to again lead on a global front and provide increased professional and personal benefits to workers .I must say many corporate organizations are trying -through provisioning of computer laboratories and the like but I am not sure if the institutions do leverage optimally on this very important resource , from the point of providing quality education. If we may pause to say how many students can afford the textbooks that are being prescribed year on year, wouldn't it be cost effective and more savvy to have license agreements which the publisher of a specific book to access the book for the institution and a more reduced rate , same way we do with ICT software like Microsoft or is there an open resource option that can be created with targeted authors to provide insight into their literature on the specific topics that are within the scope of the syllabus .

Resources that a nation may have are useful only if people know how to evaluate them, how to use them, and how to employ them where

they are most needed, or where the benefits are most rewarding. Though people can and often do learn and borrow from others, their previous training of how to learn, how to apply what is learned, and what kind of knowledge matters most, is most important to determining the usefulness of their knowledge.

In their research paper on RE-EXAMINING & REPOSITIONING HIGHER EDUCATION: Drs .Kristen Betts, Kenneth Hartman, Carl Oxholm III, JD, conclude that Higher education will continue to provide hope and new opportunities for those seeking careers, and re- entry into the employment market. Today, online and blended education are an integral part of higher education. Through balancing academic quality and accountability with flexible scheduling, online and blended education provide long-term sustainable programming opportunities for colleges and universities. Online and blended programs also enable institutions to expand student markets nationally and internationally, moving beyond traditional local, regional and state markets. These expanded student markets provide opportunities for new institutional revenue and the expanding of an institution's alumni base.

People engaged in the development of knowledge in particular, are faced with a difficult challenge. They need to make themselves understood by those who have little knowledge, and make knowledge and the technologies they develop accessible to those with little money to buy it. They need also to make knowledge itself capable of addressing the particular needs of those who need it most but can afford it and use it least. While institutions are the tools to produce

knowledge and the right education is the means to deliver knowledge to people and make it relevant, the right attitudes are the qualities that make people of knowledge able to help themselves and others, and improve the quality of life for all members of society.

Is your choice of study relevant

As young graduates, you operate in a global space irrespective where you come from but you need to position yourself to leverage on what is readily available at your door step . Globally, the top ten most important fields of study are:

1. Business: The most popular majors today are that of Business. Students looking at a business major may develop general administrative and managerial skills or focus on a specialized area of business like Banking and Finance, Management Information Systems, Accounting, International Business, Entrepreneurship, Human Resource Management, Marketing, Business Administration and Management

2. Engineering:

Computer Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Biomedical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Materials & Metallurgical Engineering, Aerospace Engineering

3. Liberal Arts: Today's world demands people who think clearly, communicate effectively, seek information, and adapt to change.

These, and such attributes as historical perspective and analytical abilities, are hallmarks of the liberal arts graduate. This includes Fashion Designing, Fashion Merchandising, Interior Designing, Jewelry Designing, Film Studies, Fine Arts, Ceramic Art & Design, Commercial Arts, Theatre and Drama, Graphic Arts, Painting/Sketching, Photography, Textile Arts, Music and Dance

4. Law: Students looking at legal careers may pursue a career in Law.

5. Humanities & Arts

6. Social Sciences

7. Medicine

8. Education

9. Natural Sciences : Agriculture, Biological Sciences

10. Hospitality Management

Now, if we were to apply this information in the South African context, Eastern Cape in particular, you would find that all these field of study are versatile in that one can either be an employee or pursue a business venture as an entrepreneur. Both the National Development Plan and the EC Antipoverty (which WSU is an action participant in) require these skills. The manifesto of the ruling party is focused on the implementation National Development plan; a plan which has 3 critical policy instruments namely; the National Growth path that deals with economic development, the National Infrastructure plan which guides the roll-out of infrastructure and the Industrial policy Action Plan which supports the re-industrialisation of economy. The priorities of this term of government are: job creation and sustainable livelihoods, rural development, land reform and food security, education, health and

crime prevention. It therefore means that both the students and the institutions have to position themselves well to contribute towards the realization of these plans and ensure their future security and sustainability.

International institutions some of which have little academic credibility are occupying our space and attracting many potential students away from our institutions because they speak the language students want to hear. Tom Kelly, partner in IDEO expresses this as empathy. He explains empathy in terms of creativity and innovation as the ability to see an experience through another person's eyes to recognize why people do or act as they do. He argues that organizations can use this kind of anthropological research of empathy to gather inspiration, review and update concepts generated through the design process. And this is so relevant in the context of education, where you have to design and review curriculum and its delivery approach. He concludes by saying "empathy is a gateway to the better and sometimes surprising insights that can help distinguish your idea or approach". So , involvement of both internal (students and staff) and external stakeholders and taking advantage of technological advancements are very crucial towards re-engineering institutions of high learning towards long-term sustainability.

I thank you!

