

Good afternoon and welcome to all UCT parents.

Goeie middag en welkom aan alle UCT ouers.

Molweni kubo bonke abazali base UCT. Namkelekile.

Being here in this hall today means that you, your son or daughter – our new UCT student – are now and forever more, a part of the UCT community.

Well done. It's a spectacular achievement. It's an achievement that is the reward for years of work, with many sacrifices by both you and your sons and daughters. We realise the sacrifices made by yourselves to motivate your children and to realise their aspirations to come not just to university, but to the University of Cape Town. We thank you for not only having brought them to this point in their lives, but having brought them to this place in their lives and for encouraging them and supporting them in their choice to come to UCT.

I know that there are many reasons for coming here. Your sons and daughters no doubt made their choice for their own reasons. I suspect one of their reasons – especially for this group of (out-of-town) parents – was that they wanted to get away from home and that's a jolly good reason!

Another reason I suspect were the beautiful beaches and mountains. That's not a bad reason either! But from your point of view and from their point of view, what are the reasons? What does UCT offer? What will we offer your sons and daughters that is a little different and that make us a unique place in the world, and unique among South African universities?

I want to assure you that UCT is a phenomenal place and I want to give you five reasons. I'm going to talk about five reasons that should reassure you that you have made the right decision in sending your sons and daughters here.

So the first is related to UCT's achievements and our academic track record.

The second concerns the traditions of UCT, but also the renewal and the constant change to which we strive.

The third is our institutional values and the way these values are infused into the education system – and which we hope will ultimately inform or validate your own sons' and daughters' value systems.

The fourth is the experience of diversity and the intercultural competencies that your sons and daughters will acquire through being at UCT.

And the fifth is the kind of attributes that we call 'graduate attributes', which we hope your sons and daughters will embody when they leave UCT. In a few years' time when we meet again in this very hall when you're here to see your sons and daughters capped: what will they have in addition to an excellent degree, as they walk across the stage at their graduation ceremonies?

So to start with the achievements and excellence, UCT is associated with five Nobel Prize winners in our history. We are the highest ranked university on a variety of different measures, not just in the

country, but on the continent. We are a globally ranked university in the top one half to one percent of all universities worldwide.

Our Graduate School of Business and our faculties are ranked well. The UCT Graduate School of Business is the only South African business school in the top 100 in the Financial Times Index ranked at 52 – up from 59 last year. Our health sciences faculty is ranked 50th in the world. Our humanities faculty is ranked in the top 100.

More lecturers at UCT have PhDs than at any other university, probably on the continent, but certainly in South Africa.

We have the highest proportion of what we call A-rated scientists in the country. That is scientists who are regarded as international leaders in their fields.

We collaborate with the leading universities all over the world and those collaborations give us an international profile. They assure us of the quality of the programmes we offer.

We receive some 1 000 semester abroad students, mostly from North America and Europe every year. These are students whose course here is accredited at their own universities so that they do not have to take extra time to complete their degrees. In other words we have hundreds of universities around the world that have accredited our courses and that is a measure by which we can assess the international standing of our qualifications. As an aside, semester abroad students often complain that they've had to work harder at UCT and that they're more stretched than they were at their own universities.

This is coupled with our facilities – our quality IT systems, our world-class libraries (I urge you to take the library tour later today) and our physical infrastructure. We also have a very favourable student-staff ratio which allows for more personal attention, more tutorial work, and more time for academics to do research.

These are all the achievements and markers of excellence at UCT. And these achievements now belong to you and to your sons and daughters, the direct beneficiaries of this, and who we hope own this association with great pride. We want you to go out and say, "Je suis UCT".

On to the second factor: our traditions and renewal.

This institution is the oldest in the sub-Saharan continent. Our achievements are the result of nearly 200 years of history and of course part of our reputation is built on that. Our reputation is what attracts the best staff and students here. After all, a university is only as good as its students and its staff. So our history, tradition and the integrity of the UCT brand is critical to our future success.

But it is also about renewal. If any institution remains static, if it rests on its laurels because of its history, then it will quickly find that it has become a dinosaur and will become extinct.

We are not of the view: '...that if it ain't broke, don't fix it'. We take the opposite view that if it 'ain't broke', it may soon be and we need to stay ahead of the game and keep changing. So while we are respectful of what we've inherited and we acknowledge some of that brilliance, we also acknowledge the shortfalls. We acknowledge that while we have a history of resistance to injustice and to apartheid, we also have a history of collusion and complacency.

In building on tradition we need to renew our institution. It's constantly in flux and that renewal happens in part through bringing in new students, new parents and new associates. And this history and tradition is now yours, but it is the engagement with your sons and daughters that will change us and we look forward to that.

Achievements, tradition and renewal are not the full story. The third arrow in this quiver of what makes us special is our values. The values are the essence of the UCT experience. They inform our decisions and they govern our behaviour and they infuse our educational programme. What are these values? Well, if you go onto our website, you'll find a list of about seven. There isn't time to elaborate on them all. I'm going to pick two: academic freedom and social justice.

Academic freedom entails the pursuit of truth and integrity, challenging received wisdoms, contesting ideas and guaranteeing a safe space for debate – no matter how controversial the views. It also involves respect for the dignity of others; tolerance of different views; and demands an openness to consider alternative ways of thinking. This allows staff and students to try out new things, and to experiment, and to potentially make mistakes. That is what research is about, both in the laboratory, as well as in the social sciences and the world of ideas.

This commitment to being a space of argumentation may help you understand a little bit about the character of UCT because it is a character that is never really as it seems. We are not this or that. We belong to no one, and particularly not to power. We ask, we challenge, we argue because that is our character. It is in this 'unsettledness' of not meekly accepting and of always wrestling with complex issues of the day, that new frontiers are found; that scientific breakthroughs are made; and where progress, renewal and true transformation materialises. It is a noisy marketplace of ideas where one gets jostled and where occasionally voices are raised. This character is our inheritance. It is our distinctiveness, and it is our nature.

I want to elaborate briefly by way of two examples on why I'm emphasising this to you, to the parents at this orientation. I fully expect, for example, in a week's time when Sax Appeal, the RAG magazine of the students goes on sale in the streets, that there will be howls of protest from some internal student groups and many more from members of the public. In fact, I will be disappointed if there are not such howls, because that's what the students should be doing. They should be otherwise. They should be controversial. We will not censor the magazine before it goes out and we will not ban it afterwards. You may see this magazine and you may say: "How can the university allow this to be coming from its portals?" We will not censor it, but we will, both before and afterwards, help develop students' abilities to think through the issues of free speech and its consequences and what limits should be placed on the way we express ourselves in order not to hurt or insult people's dignity. We will have discussions with them, both before and after publication, on how to trade off the value of a joke at someone else's expense, against the divisiveness of such speech within the diverse community that cohabits on this campus. We will weigh up the value of a cartoon that makes a sharp satirical point, against the consequent conflict that this may generate.

There are no absolutes and that will be the message to our students. Our goal as UCT is not to take a position on one side or the other; or on a particular cartoon or article. However we will nurture students' ability to understand context, to defend the position rationally and to always recognise that there are other views. In doing so we will also ensure that we do not limit ourselves in upholding justice and in speaking out against the abuse of power. This is at the heart of UCT's ethos

and represents a way of being in the world – one that we hope your sons and daughters will take away with them when they graduate.

Let me use another example. In a few months we will experience the annual Israel Apartheid week on campus. There will probably be a considerable rise in tension between pro-Palestinian and pro-Zionist groups. Our job is not to take sides there. It is to ensure that all views are heard, that the campus provides a safe space for controversial views to be rationally debated and heard, and that there should be no intimidation – physical, or verbal or implicit. It is to point out that accusing someone of being a racist or an anti-Semite creates a chilling effect which closes down debate instead of protecting the space for robust engagement. The job of protecting academic freedom is not primarily the task of the university administration, it is the task of every student who participates in the discussion. What our students learn from this is not just related to the content of the different sides' views, but also about the process of nurturing a tolerance and respect for others. They will need to be open to hearing different views from what they have been brought up to believe. That is the purpose of a good university. That is the purpose of UCT.

The second core UCT value I want to highlight is a commitment to social justice. Very briefly, this has been core to UCT's political positioning and academic programmes for many decades during the struggle against apartheid, and in the post-apartheid era. We have been and are, an activist university. We encourage individual staff, students to speak out against social evils and abuse of power and the university as an institution does this too. We want to inculcate these values of active citizenship in our students. We provide numerous activities at UCT for students to be exposed to, and to understand, inequality in society and to make some contribution to addressing it. We also aim to help students understand that with privilege comes the responsibility to give back to the community in which we are embedded. So they will be offered such opportunities through SHAWCO, through the Township Debating League, through environmental organisations such as the Green Campus Initiative, through legal and health clinics, and through offering after-school teaching in the townships; also through sports clubs many of which have outreach development programmes – students are invited to use their skills even at this early stage to change the world. And as a university we want to signal to students that these activities are an important part of their education here – hence we will acknowledge such activities in their student records and references.

We've talked about achievement and excellence, tradition and renewal and about values. The fourth distinguishing feature of a UCT education, and a key reason for sending young adults here, is the development of positive attitudes to, and competence in dealing with, cultural diversity.

Most of our students come from fairly homogenous communities, where there might have been some diversity, but generally, a common culture. This most certainly is the legacy of South Africa's history – many of us still work and live in very homogenous communities. Our children go to schools where most people speak not only the same language but speak with the same accent. Their friends like the same music and go to the same parties and clubs; or they all don't go clubbing because they come from a different cultural and economic background. If they go on holidays, most of their friends go to the same sorts of places. They are comfortable around adults who are like their parents, and not familiar with others who are not.

At UCT that changes. Here they are thrown together, often for the first time, with students of different races, different language groups, different religions, different cultures different socioeconomic class, different nationalities. This diversity, that in South Africa is part of what we call transformation, will challenge them all. It is far more comfortable to stick with those whom you

know and understand than to have the courage to break out of the familiar and learn how others see the world and how they see you. The differences of background and beliefs will create confrontation and conflict too – hence again the importance of protecting the space at university for widely different perspectives to be aired. Students will have opportunities through their residences, through the cafeterias, through their classrooms and study groups, through involvement in clubs and societies, to mix and meet and develop relationships and to value diversity.

If they leave here in four years' time without a very different circle of friends from the circle they came in with, then both we as a university, and they as individuals will have failed. They will have failed in pursuing the mission of the university. They will have failed to take advantage of the opportunities. They will have an ordinary education instead of an unusual and brilliant education.

As a post-script to this point, let me add that a component of the diversity is the twenty percent of our students – one in five – who come from outside South Africa - from other African countries and from further afield. This diversity presents a huge opportunity for your sons and daughters. They will learn about other countries and other lifestyles. They will form friends and networks that will serve them throughout their lives. One day when they are employed in a company that has subsidiaries in China or India or in Kenya, they will not only be familiar with the cultures to some extent, they will have friends there who they can immediately link up with, and if not personal friends, then UCT alumni whom they can find through the alumni office. Such networks are invaluable for the future global citizens.

And now the fifth and final reason, which incorporates many of the others, is what I refer to as the graduate attributes. A UCT graduate is distinguished and distinctive because of a whole range of attributes that go well beyond the quality of their degree. Some I have mentioned already:

- a commitment to understanding in terms of academic freedom that all ideas are contested and the need for a tolerance and for a respect for those differences of ideas; a commitment to social justice;
- an understanding of the issues of inequality and the need to make a difference in the world;
- an appreciation of the richness of diversity and competence in dealing with the challenges presented by multicultural environments.

But there are others too:

- teamwork – which is often nurtured not only in the classroom, but through the clubs and sports and societies;
- leadership skills – where we provide many development opportunities such as becoming a member of the executive of a society, being elected to a faculty council, engaging with management over university policies; chairing meetings; managing budgets; public speaking. There are just hundreds of opportunities for students, formally and informally, to develop their leadership skills.
- an understanding of the big challenges that face the world – no graduate should leave UCT without some familiarity with the issues of sustainability and climate change. No graduate should leave without some inkling of what our digital future means to us and how we need to be able to adapt to that. No graduate should leave without an understanding of the issues of HIV/AIDS and the public health pandemics that we face because they are going to, in their

personal lives and their work lives, have to grapple with those. So these are the kinds of things that all of our graduates should have in addition to their curriculum which will mark them as distinctive.

Let me wrap up by saying that we want you to adopt UCT as your own. It is now your UCT. If you are an alumnus of UCT, please consider becoming more involved and renewing that connection. If you are a new parent at UCT, take advantage of the connection through the websites, the newsletters, vicariously through the experience of your sons and daughters he, and engage with us – tell us what you think, write to us. Come to our public lectures, or if you cannot attend in person, almost all of them can be watched on UCT's YouTube channel, including all graduations ceremonies and speeches. We are a place that welcomes debate and we want you to be part of that discourse.

We have all travelled many different routes to get to where we are now. And I hope that between us, we make this a better institution and that this institution will get under your skin and into your bones – as I know it will your sons' and daughters'.

Thank you. We do not take for granted that you have chosen to send your children to UCT. I hope I have conveyed to you why we believe you have made the right choice. We undertake on our part to help them succeed and to make sure that they have a wonderful experience; that they are safe; that they have a lot of fun; that their minds are broadened; that they make new life-long friends; that their commitment to justice is emboldened and given substance; and that they become graduates that both you and UCT will be proud of in the future.

Welcome to UCT!