



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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UCT encourages responsible student activism over Rhodes statue

**Please cite Ms Gerda Kruger
Executive Director: Communications & Marketing Department at UCT**

The University of Cape Town welcomes the initiative taken by students today to demonstrate in a peaceful and lawful manner. We encourage debate and constructive dialogue on all matters affecting our society, including symbolism, race and transformation. We aspire to graduate students who are engaged in issues in society, who take a view on matters and participate in changing society for the better.

The institution views protest as a basic right, and rigorous debate lies at the core of a university's character. We strongly uphold the right of UCT students and staff to disagree with each other and university management on any issue. UCT has a proud tradition of public discourse and expects members of our community to lead and participate in such activity – and in particular to speak out against injustice. UCT has well-established protocols in place in terms of protecting the rights of protesters as well as the rights of the institution. Individuals who, after appropriate investigation, are found guilty of violating the university's rules or the law of the country will face disciplinary action.

In terms of the particular matter of the Rhodes statue, we note the views of those participating in the protest action. We recognise that there are divergent views in our community about the statue and its place on campus. We appreciate the controversy about Cecil John Rhodes and the role he played in the founding of UCT. It is important that these matters are debated.

We had, prior to the protest action on Monday, initiated a series of discussions in partnership with the Student Representative Council. At the heart of these discussions is how to transform the campus so that it truly reflects the diversity of our community. On 16 March 2015 we will be debating the matter of heritage, signage and symbolism. We hope to lay the groundwork for resolving how to balance the historical origins of UCT with the values and aspirations of today's campus community. This is part of the work of the university.

In terms of last Monday's protest, in which excrement was poured on the Rhodes statue, our position is that this behaviour is reprehensible and regrettable. We are investigating the matter, including an allegation that a campus security officer was assaulted by a student protester. We have also investigated the allegation that a journalist was manhandled by a

security officer. We have already engaged with the journalist and his editor and assured them that UCT upholds and fully respects the right of the media professionals to do their work unhindered. We have also engaged with the security company that employs the officer on this matter, and made our position clear.

In terms of transformation at UCT, our view is that the debate around transformation and the calls for further transformation are legitimate, very important and valuable. We encourage all students and staff to engage in this debate, not just in articles in the media, but also around the table on campus with colleagues, where issues related to transformation often arise and where collective wisdom is invaluable in shaping a UCT in which everyone recognises themselves.

The debate and issues are not easy, but this pivotal debate will not only determine the kind of university we will be in future, but in itself offers transformative qualities for all involved.

END

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

Patricia Lucas

Manager: Communications & Media Liaison
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town

Tel: (021) 650 5428 Fax (021) 650 5628
Cell: 076 292 8047

E-mail: Pat.Lucas@uct.ac.za
Website: www.uct.ac.za