



Central University of
Technology, Free State



**CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE TO GRADUATES AND DIPLOMATES
AND
VOTE OF THANKS**

AUTUMN GRADUATION CEREMONIES

**Thandwa Mthembu
Vice-Chancellor and Principal**

2 September 2016

- ✚ Chancellor, Judge President of the Free State High Court, Mahube Molemela;
- ✚ Chairperson of Council, Mr Mike Mohohlo, and members of Council present;
- ✚ Chairperson of the Alumni Association, Dr Garth van Gensen;
- ✚ Members of Senate and academic staff present;
- ✚ Members of CUT's Executive Team
- ✚ Senior management and the rest of our support staff;
- ✚ President and Vice-President of the Institutional SRC, Mr Solomon Khiba and Mr Lucky Maseko, respectively;
- ✚ Members of the SRC, student leaders and the student body at large;
- ✚ CUT strategic partners and donors;
- ✚ Most importantly this afternoon: graduates, parents, guardians and family members;
- ✚ Distinguished guests;
- ✚ Ladies and gentlemen.

At a university, Senate is the body that the Higher Education Act gives authority over the design, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of our academic, research and engagement programmes. I have had the privilege to chair this important body over the last 10 years or so. On behalf of Senate, therefore, I stand here to congratulate all our graduates for what they have allowed us to achieve with them. Congratulations!

I must hasten to congratulate each and every member of our black and red brigade behind me here: the lecturers, the professors. You worked so diligently with these graduates, often in the face of enormous challenges. You ensured that they are more than ready to take their rightful places in the world. You provided the knowledge and the skills that empower them to play their part in creating a better future, not only for themselves and

their families, but for our communities, our cities, our regions, our country, and the world at large. Congratulations to you all!

Congratulations are due to the parents/guardians, family members, spouses who sacrificed so much to give these graduates one of life's greatest game-changers: university education. Congratulations for putting your all in them!

✚ Ladies and gentlemen; and dear graduates

There are those of you dear graduates, who registered 3, 5 or may be 7 years ago! Some of them decided to concentrate on other social qualifications they had not registered for, like boozing, bashing, you name them. Most of those are not graduating today. But, here you are graduating today. Congratulations for holding on steadfast on your dreams!

You are a very special group of young people. You are very intelligent, focused, driven, dedicated and tenacious. And, as our transformation agenda document implores us, you should be caring, compassionate, competent, innovative and productive graduates. Without all this set of virtues, you could not have graduated and this grand occasion would not have taken place. Congratulations, again, for throwing us a party!

✚ Ladies and gentlemen; dear graduates

This is a very special graduation ceremony for at least three reasons:

Firstly, our Chancellor, Judge President Mahube Molemela, has just officiated for the very first time this afternoon since her inauguration on 10 June 2016. Congratulations to her! The prospects of her tenure as CUT's Chancellor are very bright and exciting.

For those who may not be aware, a chancellor at a university is a titular head. It is on behalf of the Chancellor that a Vice-Chancellor then toils and manages the university on a day to day basis. This is a position that historically had been reserved for kings and queens. For many reasons, she is our modern queen. As Vice-Chancellor, I am her modern slave.

Secondly, since March 2007, I have had the unique privilege of being involved in graduating and/or shaking the hands of 25 440 graduates and diplomates. This graduation ceremony is my last as CUT's Vice-Chancellor. But, compared to what this day means to each one of you as graduates, diplomats, parents and family, that this is my last graduation ceremony here is a small matter of working life in this post-modern world.

Lastly, and more important, this is your graduation; most of you your very first graduation!

By the end of the 2016 graduations, CUT will have graduated a total of 3 457 graduates compared to 3 336 graduates that graduated in 2015, a 3.6% increase. In Engineering and Information Technology, we have graduated 893 compared to 859 in 2015; in Health and Environmental Sciences, 498 compared to 446 in 2015; in Humanities which includes Education and the Arts, 784 compared to 823 in 2015; and, in Management Sciences, 1 282 compared to 1 208 in 2015. You are one of these. Congratulations, again!

By the end of the 2016 graduations, CUT will have graduated a record 22 doctoral degrees compared to 7 doctoral degrees in 2015 – a 214% increase! Three (3) of these are from the Welkom Campus. We have also graduating a total of 31 master's degrees compared to 16 master's degrees in 2015, a 95% increase in master's degrees! Nine (9) of these master's degrees are form the Welkom Campus. Congratulations to the

black and red brigade behind me, the academics and the researchers, and their graduates!

The statistics I have provided above are no mean achievement for a small and relatively young university such as ours! Partly, these statistics represent our contribution to the production of high level skills and to broader human capacity development in the central region of South Africa, the country and the whole world. In turn, as our vision and mission implore us, we hope our graduates will use the skills, knowledge and innovation they earned to contribute to socio-economic development generally and regional development in particular.

✚ Ladies and gentlemen; and dear graduates

A graduation ceremony is an abrupt end of a long dream. Equally, it is a slow start of an even longer dream. The first dream you started dreaming - some of you more than 20 years ago even before you started school - just became a reality today. The next and longer dream is that of becoming a citizen that **p**articipates **p**roductively in the regional, the national and the global economy. This is yet to be realised for many of you.

Yesterday's long dream that just ended abruptly will soon be history. It is actually history already. So, we need to focus now on how we shall secure our longer dream into the future. The big question is: how shall we reflect on and tackle the challenges of your next longer dream so that it does not become an enduring nightmare?

My remarks will, thus, focus on the longer dream: that of becoming a good citizen that **p**articipates **p**roductively in the regional, the national and the global economy. In this 21st century, this longer dream has become a very elusive one across the world, more especially for the youth whose unemployment rate in South Africa stands at a whopping 54%. I will thus

focus on what you could do to realise this longer dream or stop it from becoming an enduring nightmare of unemployment and poverty.

✚ Ladies and gentlemen; and dear graduates

Having studied at a South African university, you are now part of an elite group constituting around 19% of 20-24 year olds privileged to receive university education. Thus, out of the 5.3 million¹ 20-24 year olds in South Africa, you are one of about only 1 million of this privileged group. The rest of the 4 million are out there eking out a difficult life without this game-changer university education you have.

Sometimes, when university students think innovatively about what's good for the 1 million they are part of they must also think innovatively about the 4 million in whom this country has invested much less than it has invested in them. Youth unemployment being estimated at about 54% as of the 2nd quarter of 2016 as I pointed out above, it is the 4 million other young people, not so much the 1 million that you are part of, that bulge the ranks of the unemployed youth in South Africa.

Thus, the bigger battle for the youth of South Africa is no so much just about university fees, but support to the totality of the 5.3 million young people in 20-24-year-old age group. In fact, if we use the liberal South African definition of youth that puts a threshold of 35 years of age, then there is an additional 9.5 million young people in the ages of 25-35, making a total of almost 15 million young people that require some support and innovative solutions to their sad plight. Those solutions have to come from, and be led by, the 1 million of you who have the game-changer privilege of university education that others do not have.

As we all know, South Africa is in a parlous state economically, socially, politically and in many other facets of our life. Excited as we all are that

¹ Mid-year population estimates, 2015. Statistics South Africa. Published July 2016.

you have now earned your diploma or degree, it is these stark and macabre South African realities and challenges that stare you in the face as the youth of this country. As you pursue this longer dream that could well turn into a nightmare, these realities need to be tackled head-on by you all collectively and individually. Otherwise, this longer dream may soon become an enduring nightmare.

“According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2015 Global Report (GEM, 2015: 30), some African economies showed the highest social values towards entrepreneurship. Among the sub-Saharan countries surveyed, Uganda recorded the highest youth entrepreneurial propensity with 55.4% followed by Malawi (52.3%) and Namibia (44.1%), and South Africa had the lowest of only 23.3%. Concomitantly, Uganda recorded the highest number of youth entrepreneurs with 55.6% of the youth population involved in nascent, new or established businesses and South Africa had the lowest at only 12.8%. At least 60% of the youth population in all countries except South Africa showed entrepreneurial propensity or were currently actively pursuing an entrepreneurial opportunity. South Africa recorded the highest level of non-entrepreneurial youth with 63.9% of the youth population who were non-entrepreneurs while 10% or less of youth population in Zambia, Malawi and Uganda were non-entrepreneurs (GEM, 2015: 45).”²

Educational institutions, more especially universities as citadels of creativity and innovation, ought to do something about our dismal state of innovation and entrepreneurship as South Africans. CUT’s response since 2015 has been to put in place a number of innovation and

² De Jager, HJ, et al. (2016). Towards an innovation & entrepreneurship ecosystem at a university of technology: implementation of a strategy to enhance socio-economic development. A paper to be presented at the SATN Conference, 12-14 October 2016.

entrepreneurship education programmes. Those may not have reached those graduating today. But, that is no reason to rest on your laurels assuming that your diploma or degree is a passport to a comfortable job and life out there. There is more you need to do with your knowledge and high level skills you have earned to achieve all this.

Part of the answer is in the little case study I have done for you about a small little country in South-east Asia, called Singapore. I chose Singapore because during the week of 22 February 2016 at the Bloemfontein Campus, we had an Innovation & Entrepreneurship Week during which we launched our Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy. As part of that programme, Professor Seeram Ramakrishna, from the National University of Singapore gave a public lecture that gave us a peek into the Singaporean miracle. Prof Ramakrishna is a highly cited engineering, nanoscience and materials science researcher who is ranked 3rd in the world in this field. The University of Singapore is ranked number 22 amongst the universities of the world by the World University Rankings.

Since then, I have been thinking about what South Africans could do. If Singapore, a city-region or country that is just as big as three (3) times the size of the city of Bloemfontein or, if you like, as big as the city of Pretoria (not Tshwane as a metro municipality), could do it and move from being a poor underdeveloped fishing village to what it is today, why not the estimated 55 million strong South Africans?

On a number of important measures, including those that are proxies for poverty, unemployment and inequality it is clear that South Africa is incoherent in policy, unimaginative, not innovative and is slouching big time at its own peril.

MEASURE	SINGAPORE ³	SOUTH AFRICA ⁴
Population	5.5 million (113 th); with 38% as permanent residents	53 million in 2011 (25 th); about 10 times the Singapore's population
Area	719.1 km ² , about 3 times the size of the city of Bloemfontein or just about the size of the city of Pretoria	1,221,037 km. South Africa is about 1700 times bigger than Singapore in area
Per capita GDP	\$82,763 (or R1,324,208) (3 rd) – 6 times higher than RSA's. U.S is 9 th , China is 83 rd	\$13,046 (or R208,736) (88 th) – lower than that of Mauritius which is at \$18,585 (or R297,360)
GERD (Gross Expenditure on Research & Development)	2.1% (2012)	0.76% (2013), having declined from a high of 0.92% in 2008. Target of 1.5% by 2019 looks like a will of the wisp
HDI (Human Development Index) - measuring the well-being of the population as in life expectancy, education and income per capita)	0.912 (11 th)	0.666 (116 th)
Gini (measuring inequality)	46.4 (30 th and high)	63.1 (10 th - Very High)
Mineral wealth; no water	None	Total reserves remain some of the world's most valuable, with an estimated worth of R20.3-trillion (\$2.5-trillion). Overall, the country is estimated to have the world's fifth-largest mining sector in terms of GDP value.
Economic activity	Market Economy: "Easiest place to do business" (World Bank) for ten consecutive years, most "Technology-ready" nation (EIU), top "International meetings city" (UIA), city with "Best investment potential" (BERI), 2 nd -most competitive country (WEF), 3rd -largest foreign exchange centre, 4th -largest financial centre, 3rd -largest oil refining and trading centre and	Market economy , that does not sit well with the ruling party and its tripartite alliance; with tendencies towards a social democracy without a strong economic base.

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore> [Accessed at 14h30 on 10 March 2016]

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/South_Africa [Accessed at 14h30 on 10 March 2016]

	one of the top two busiest container ports since the 1990s.	
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Unlike our South African socio-political dispensation,

*“Singapore's governance model **eschews populist politics**, focusing on the **nation's long-term interest**, and is known to be **clean, effective and pragmatic**. The nation's core principles are **meritocracy, multiculturalism and secularism**. It is noted for its **effective, pragmatic and incorrupt governance and civil service**, which together with its rapid development policies, is widely cited as the "Singapore model".⁵*

South Africa's socio-political dispensation is based on old and hackneyed ideologies, political sentiment, hardly any national interest, welfarist policies that drain instead of expanding the economy, affirmative action and deployment without meritocracy, brazen corruption, celebration of difference rather than our unity in diversity, and all sorts of things that will not make us get any close to the “Singapore model”.

My question to you dear graduates is: When shall you start to build the “South Africa model” that, for some time since 1994 we looked like we would build?

What we need in this country is simply innovative leadership amongst yourselves: innovative leadership in building institutions – political, social, economic and otherwise – that secure the nation's long term interest and that do not compromise our economy; innovative leadership in using those institutions to preserve a sustainable economic framework and not undermine it; innovative leadership to accept failures and begin to work doggedly, leaving no stone unturned, to solve our problems. We need a

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore> [Accessed at 14h30 on 10 March 2016]

leadership that does not focus on symptoms of a disastrous economy but the real problem of this disastrous state of our economy; a leadership that will accept that economic growth is the biggest challenge in South Africa. Where is that leadership? I believe it's among you as you graduate today.

Apart from a leadership that is not innovative, a lacklustre economic growth results from a dearth of innovation – social, technological and environmental. Further, it results from a failure to turn those innovations into goods and services through entrepreneurship. And, as university of technology graduates, you have an obligation to innovate in whatever field you find yourself. And, with the right spirit and attitude, some of you could, through entrepreneurship, turn those innovations into goods and services that will improve the quality of life of all our citizens.

I am not talking about a leadership that burns buildings meant to serve their educational and social needs; a leadership that blames everyone else – their parents and now lately even former President Mandela - for the challenges it faces and needs to respond to with determination, zeal, innovation, looking forward like it had blinkers. I am not talking about nepotistic leadership that only takes care of its political network at the expense of meritocracy.

With determined, strong, focused and innovative leadership acting in the nation's long term interests and not self- or party interest, we need to foster innovation and entrepreneurship amongst our people, especially our youth. This is something CUT has embarked upon with great zeal. The Innovation & Entrepreneurship Week I referred to earlier was part of our bigger programme on innovation and entrepreneurship.

Innovation and entrepreneurship are not about BEE benefits that have stunted some of our great business and entrepreneurial minds; not about tenderpreneurship in its banal form; not about affirmative action

appointments at the expense of meritocracy; not about social grants that people receive without lifting a finger; not about free houses, free electricity and free water as if there is anything free in this world.

I dare say, none of these freebies is productive; and, none of these freebies contributes to sustainable economic growth. All of them are short-term, and worse, short-sighted redistribution of rapidly diminishing resources. Rather than building our economy and enlarging the cake, all we are doing through these short-sighted redistributive schemes, is to make all of us poorer in the end; essentially fighting over bones like dogs. These schemes are like a pacifier or a dummy you give to a child for it to keep thinking it is eating something, but actually nothing in the end to sustain it beyond.

Innovation and entrepreneurship, rather, are about a **People of South Africa – rich and poor – Participating Productively** towards the growth of their economy, the growth of the cake and not waiting for service delivery as politicians have told our people to do all these years. This is the only way to keep your longer dream alive, that of your families and communities; that of the 5.3 million 20-24 year olds you represent; and if we add other categories of youth up to the age of 35 years of age, that of a total of about 15 million young people of this dear country. This is the only way to safeguard your longer dream from becoming an enduring nightmare.

I said earlier, you are part of a relatively small and elite group of about 1 million young people between the ages of 20 and 24 years. You are equipped with knowledge and high level skills that the rest of the 5.3 million 20-24 year olds do not have. This must mean something serious, indeed.

It means you have a colossal obligation on your shoulders with regard to your families, the communities you live in and the nation at large. You must be the catalyst whose future legacy will be that this generation changed the course of the country from the social, political and economic precipice that it risks falling into.

As CUT, we shall continue to innovate and foster entrepreneurship amongst our students. Indeed, our vision is that of focusing on producing social and technological innovation for socio-economic development in our central region. We have many wonderful plans that started in 2014 to do just that.

If our social, political and economic leadership could start to work in tandem and be responsive to the challenges we face; if our political and related state institutions could work collaboratively and not undermine and plot against each other; if our economic framework could be pragmatic and not ideological; and, if we could focus on our economy doggedly, then our people will need no pacifiers or dummies that we currently give them.

Yes, today is your day. A day to remember; a day to celebrate and a day to cherish. But, you should do all that with a sense of reality at the back or at front of your mind – whichever makes sense to you - about what your role in our society should be; about that longer dream you have to safeguard and not allow anyone to turn it into an enduring nightmare. No doubt, the celebratory parties will and must extend long into the night and there should be much merriment. Indeed, you have earned it!

On behalf of Senate and the whole university, have a wonderful and joyful weekend of celebrating not just your achievement, but your resolve to turn things around in this country through innovation and entrepreneurship using the knowledge and skills you have earned.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we approach the end of this ceremony, it is my pleasure to extend a vote of thanks to everyone who has made the event such a success.

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