

VC ADDRESS - CONVOCATION AGM APRIL 2024

A very good morning to all members of Convocation and other esteemed guests, including those online and listening through MUT Campus Radio.

Sanibonani. Molweni. Goei more. Lotjhani. Thobela. Abuxeni. Ndaa. Eita daar.

It is a great pleasure to meet you again since our last meeting.

This year, we celebrate 45 years of existence here at Umlazi Township in harmony with the neighbouring communities. Our presence here has made a huge difference to our neighbouring communities. We plan to dedicate a day to celebrate this milestone in the next term and include our communities so they may appreciate our presence and that we may also pay tribute to their support. In advance, we pray for our 45-year anniversary and for all of you to be safe and to attain your personal and professional goals.

As EMC, we try as much as possible to be a listening Management Team and to that end, we will make every attempt to adopt recommendations made by Convocation as far as possible in the best interests of the University.

I am happy to inform you that our outlook for Year 2024 is positive. The total number of 2024 registrations for annual and first semester programmes stands at 12,365. This is virtually the same number as last year at the same point. The total number includes 3,457 First-Time Entering undergraduates.

This is an increase of 493 First-Time Entries, or 16,6%, compared to the same time last year. This is a great victory for all of us given that we started the year with water and energy challenges which posed a risk to the registration process.

Now, we have allocated 9,375 students in 37 external residences. In our internal residences we have thus far allocated 636 students, still short of 285 to reach our total which is 921. At least 80% of our students are provided with accommodation. We applaud our government for serving and giving access to previously disadvantaged students through NSFAS.

I am also pleased to announce to convocation, the arrival 44 new staff members who were appointed in 2023. They join MUT at a time when we have appointed a service provider to undertake a university-wide culture and climate survey. We hope this survey will enable all of us to create a future for the MUT which we want to be, even when all of us have left MUT. We are also in the process of appointing the Employee Assistance Services (EAP). The EAP services will deal with confidential and short-term services for employees with personal difficulties that affect their performance.

As EMC, we are humbled by the spirit displayed by Convocation in the past and we remain confident that after its recent short hiatus we can forge forward in pursuit of the attainment of the University's vision and mission, following today's AGM.

I wish to pay tribute to those warriors who present a compelling story for prospective students to choose only MUT. As MUT alumni nobody knows our motto of *'Shaping and Owning the future' better than you.*

This year we are determined to have a productive 2024. The level of cooperation between all constituencies is once more applauded and appreciated. Despite budget constraints, work is still progressing well. This is a sign of a united workforce, eager to advance MUT's vision and mission.

Resource mobilisation work is forging ahead to ensure that the University gets a bit of relief from using own Council approved budgets. Last year, and this year there has been some financial injection coming from funding agencies, foundations, and corporations, as follows:

- Institutional Advancement (IA) received R1.2m from the AgriSeta. In its Alumni Dinner held last year, IA received pledges to the value of R12 million and follow-ups to the pledges are ongoing.
- Based on stakeholder stewardship, the Dean of Students has once more received an amount of R1,1 million to help reduce student debt. A special committee commenced the disbursement process following guidelines that would ensure transparency and consistency. Over and above that Student Services' Trust Fund for Indigent students supported 146 students who are not funded by NSFAS. An amount of R1,345 million will be used to clear students for registration for the 2024 academic year. The students have been assisted with registration and concession fees.
- The MarComms directorate successfully nurtured relations with KZN's Department of Economic, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (EDTEA) resulting in MUT being awarded an amount of R30 million out of the R78 million allocated for KZN's higher education. The CFO is now leading the charge of the allocation so that the whole amount is used appropriately and equitably among recipients, who are predominantly engineering students between 2006 and 2022. The same department has been able to ensure that stakeholders such as Gift of the Givers which launched the Student Pantry in July 2023, continue their commitment to support over 500 indigent students with food parcels on monthly bases. Furthermore, efforts by this department to provide practical solutions to the university's strained finances are noted:
 - The facilitation for water supplies to MUT from Gift of the Givers which supplied at least 10 pallets of water which amounted to at least 2000 5litres of water.
 - Facilitation of interventions to Iqraa Trust and Gems school wear both of which extend their support to indigent high schools that work with MUT.

I have always maintained that stakeholder management is the cornerstone for maintaining relations if you want an institution to succeed. This is a good example of how we build relations overtime and sustain those relations. An African idiom *"If you want to go far, walk alone but if you want to walk further, walk together"*, cannot be truer for MUT.

I wish to express my gratitude to the MUT SRC 2024 for putting the students' interests at heart by negotiating on principles of fairness to students and to the University's strained finances We applaud

the SRC for great leadership. This shows the level of maturity our students have attained. The same applies to organised labour which has partnered with us to see MUT working, successful, and being at the forefront of a cutting-edge educational system.

Some of you may be wondering what is happening with the current state of venues at MUT. Take heart that we are currently refurbishing our lecture theatres and other venues so that we will be able provide a better teaching and learning experience for our students. The construction of new and upgrading of existing infrastructure is a commitment which EMC has made over the past few years. Our current infrastructure projects are as follows:

- The L-Lecture Venues are receiving a facelift through refurbishment programme that has completed 16 out of the 23 venues at the L-Block Building. The refurbishment programme is part of the university's effort to address the maintenance backlog and provision of infrastructure that supports teaching and learning. The current refurbishment work is scheduled to be completed at the end of March 2024.
- Refurbishment of the Biomedical Laboratories is critical to MUT retaining accreditation of the Bachelor of Health Sciences in Medical Laboratory Sciences Programme when the accrediting authority visits the institution this year.
- Furthermore, the refurbishment of C45 and C47 Computer Laboratories that started in December 2023 will be completed by the end of March 2024.
- Other projects underway include:
 - The construction of additional office spaces in the basement of New Engineering Labs Building, D-Labs Offices, new Student Residences.
 - Refurbishment of the Senate Chamber, and refurbishment of Hlanganani Lounge and the Dining Hall interior.
 - Upgrading of the Soccer Field and Construction of Athletic Track, Upgrading of Seme Road, Upgrading of Bulk Electricity Infrastructure, Upgrading of Bulk Water Infrastructure.
 - Upgrading of Bulk Stormwater and Sewer Infrastructure, delivery, and installation of generators at North Campus and Main Campus Administration Buildings.

While we are making efforts to address infrastructure deficit at the university, we have been overwhelmed with theft and vandalism. This has affected some of the repair work conducted by Operations Directorate. There have been recent reports of laptops being stolen from offices. As a result, improved security measures are being developed and will be implemented to avoid recurrence of these incidences. In addition, consequence management will be applied against those found guilty of these acts.

We are addressing the issues of leaking roofs at several buildings and the Operations Directorate has been hard at work to repair roofs at the affected buildings. To date, the repairs have been completed at Executive Hotel, Dining Hall, TSC, the Gym, Residence Block B – D, L-lecture venues. The repair work

will continue in other buildings (including Seme Hall, Block C Labs, East Wing Administration Building, North Campus Buildings) on campus and completion is scheduled for end of 2024.

With reference to our core business, teaching, and learning, I am happy to report that post its 10-Year Anniversary and its 10th Focus Conference hosted in August 2023, the Teaching & Learning Development Centre (TLDC), has published its conference proceedings with Springer Nature in the DHET-accredited: *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* in September 2023. A total of 33 papers were published in the scholarship of teaching and learning, of which 11 were from MUT staff members, representing a significant growth from the three papers published by MUT staff in the 2022 proceedings.

TLDC has established the e-Learning Unit to provide strategic support for the integration of technology in teaching and learning. TLDC is also providing support for MUT academics to enroll in the Postgraduate Diplomas in Education Technology at UCT and Postgraduate Diploma in Digital Education at Wits.

At least eleven academics have successfully registered for the 2024 academic year at UCT and Wits. This enhances the proficiency of MUT academics in understanding pedagogies and related practices but also expands the pool of knowledgeable professionals adept at leveraging educational technologies for enhanced learning experiences.

In the Faculty of Engineering, the Department of Electrical Engineering has received ECSA endorsement to offer the newly developed Advanced Diploma in Electrical Power Engineering and Advanced Diploma in Electrical Engineering in Process Automation and Control. In addition, the Department of Construction Management and Quantity Surveying has received endorsement from the South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP) to offer the newly amended Diploma in Construction Management and Quantity Surveying.

The Faculty of Natural Sciences has introduced the Advanced Diploma in IT and has now developed a Post-Graduate qualification for submission through statutory bodies for approval. The Master's degree in Biomedical sciences as well as the PhD in Nature Conservation have been submitted to CHE and both await accreditation. The Department of Chemistry has developed the Post-Graduate Diploma in Chemistry and they have submitted for PQM clearance.

The Faculty of Management Sciences' relentlessness on entrepreneurship needs to be commended for the spinoffs ranging from:

- Receiving seed funding amounting to R100,000 to establish an Economic Activation Office (EAO) from Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) in collaboration with USAf. This office will serve as a nerve centre in sharing information on entrepreneurship-related matters across faculties and other university structures.
- The establishment of the Student Women Economic Empowerment Programme chapter (SWEEP). The MUT SWEEP Chairperson Ms Mbalenhle Nzama, an Advanced Student in Human Resource Management has been afforded an opportunity by the British Counsel to

attend a SWEEP UK Exchange Programme at the London School of Economics from 24 June-01 July 2024. Only ten public universities have been afforded this opportunity.

- The Entrepreneurship Programme has seen two DVCs winning awards for spearheading the entrepreneurship programme, first with the DVC Teaching & Learning at the time, currently acting as VC and Professor Nokuthula Sibiya. To date MUT, has trained Social Entrepreneurs from various regions across KZN.

A University's stature is supported by a vibrant research programme. I am pleased to share that there has been a huge increase in DHET accredited research output. MUT attained a total of 82.42 units. This is an increase of 13.52 units from the 68.9 units awarded for 2021

In addition, MUT currently owns:

- Four South African patents from which two are also protected in 21 other countries and one provisional patent
- Two trademarks: the wordmarks 'Mangosuthu University of Technology' and 'MUT'. Unitary patents for the two Pharmacophore inventions were granted for 17 countries in Europe.

There has been an increase in NRF rated Researchers with six rated researchers in 2022 and 10 in 2023. Let me take this moment to congratulate Professor Babatunde Bakare who has recently received a C2 rating from the South African National Research Foundation.

As a university rooted in Umlazi, we have made great strides in the international space. First, I wish to acknowledge the fact that despite MUT not having a fully-fledged international office, and a full-time staff, we have more than 20 international partnerships in the USA, Asia, and Africa. This year alone, MUT has hosted three eminent international guests who are actively involved with MUT. The first one was Dr Victor Ibeanusi, Dean of the School of the Environment from Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University (FAMU). His visit was aimed at igniting participation in the planned EnergyWaterFoodClimate nexus summit to be hosted by MUT. This resulted in a series of successful engagements with stakeholders such as SANEDI which have since expressed an interest in signing MoUs with MUT.

Already, this summit has drawn positive media attention to MUT. At a national level, this summit is attracting partnerships across government be it provincially or nationally, together with South Africa's research agencies and various regulating bodies. Another visit international visit by Dr Hofecker from Ohio has sealed participation in this summit by Ohio State University and other universities. The Vice-Chancellor has made great contributions to the internationalisation agenda within MUT, and the results are astounding. To this end, Ghana's Communication Technology University visited MUT for a partnership. Ghana's Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor will be participating in the summit as keynote speakers. The summit attendees will include students from the USA, our partner universities, and some of our sister institutions.

In 2022, MUT joined the South African-Swedish University Forum (SASUF), and in the same year MUT participated in the *SASUF goes Digital Conference* and presented at the SASUF RIE Week in Cape

Town last year. I am happy to inform you that this year at least nine individuals will be presenting posters, running satellite and physical workshops across Sweden. For these papers and workshop concept papers to be approved by such an esteemed body, speaks volumes of the standard of work at MUT.

In conclusion, I hope that today's AGM is as successful as I know it will be and that going forward both Convocation and other related internal structures work jointly and seamlessly for the betterment of MUT.

Thank you and have a productive year.