

## **Farewell address**

**Professor Calie Pistorius, Vice-Chancellor and Principal  
University of Pretoria**

8 June 2009

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Prof Wiseman Nkuhlu, Chancellor of the University  
Dr Chris Stals, former Chancellor of the University  
Dr Piet Botha, Deputy Chair of the Council of the University of Pretoria, and other members of Council  
Former Chair of Council, Professor Esmé du Plessis  
Judge Frikkie Eloff, President of the Convocation  
Professor Chris de Beer, Senior Vice-Principal, and other members of the University's Executive  
Mr Jan van Deventer, Representing the Alumni Board  
Mr Hector Beyers, Chairman of the Student Representative Council and other members of the SRC  
Deans and Deputy Deans  
Directors and Heads of Support Departments  
Principals of our neighbouring schools  
Other members of staff  
Special guests  
All the spouses and accompanying persons  
And of course the master of ceremonies, Professor Ramaranka Mogotlane

Thank you very much to the orchestra who played so beautifully, and also to everyone who worked so hard to make this evening special.

Mr Chancellor, Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to begin by thanking the University for organising this farewell function. Michèle and I really appreciate it very much. Thank you also Professor Nkuhlu and Professor de Beer for those kind words.

As I step down as the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria, I look back not only at the eight years as Vice-Chancellor and Principal, but rather at a life-long association with the University.

I have literally spent my life associated with the University of Pretoria. As you know my father was also with University. I therefore grew up on the campus, often playing on the lawn in front of the Aula as a little boy when accompanying my father to the campus. I studied here and obtained two degrees in engineering (and shall forever be a loyal alumnus). I then proceeded to do postgraduate studies in the US, supported by bursaries from LGI, the original campus company established by the late Professor Louis van Biljon. Upon returning from the US, I was appointed as an associate professor, and later promoted to professor and head of the Department of Electronics Engineering. I then became the director of a research institute, director of Information Technology and dean of a faculty. I now conclude my career at the University of Pretoria having had the privilege to serve the last eight years as its Vice-Chancellor and Principal.

This is the place where I had the wonderful opportunity to study and work, but also the place where I have lived and learned. It has had a major influence on shaping my thoughts and my life. I highly appreciate this opportunity to express my gratitude to this fine institution and its people.

Let me start by acknowledging that I am very grateful for the excellent undergraduate education that I received at the University of Pretoria. It is one that enabled me to obtain masters and doctoral degrees in electrical engineering in the USA. It was there that I had the opportunity to compare with and compete against the world's best and where I learned the true quality and value of the education that I received here. It was also in the US that I first learned the greater significance of the notion of "international competitiveness", the importance of being able to compete with the world's best and to calibrate on an international scale.

This became one of the principles that guided my approach to higher education, and was also an impetus for my conviction as to the importance of internationalisation in general. As a corollary, I also learnt that when the world measures excellence, it does so on an absolute scale. It may emphasize and sympathize with your local problems and challenges, but when it comes to assessing "world-class", there are no compromises. I shall return to this point later.

After returning from the US in 1987, I started working at the University as an associate professor, joining Jan Malherbe's research group in electromagnetics. Jan's group, of which I was very proud to be a member, gained an international reputation for academic excellence. The textbook on electromagnetic diffraction that Jan, Derek McNamara and I wrote won the Bill Venter Literary Award. Both Derek and myself received P-ratings from the NRF (then known as the FRD). We built a compact antenna range laboratory, which I am happy to say is still considered today (twenty years later) to be a world-class facility. Jan instilled in everyone in his research group an enthusiasm for the pursuit of excellence and a passion for research. The group is now in its third generation, and Jan continues to inspire students with his special brand of teaching and research. His efforts have had a multiplier effect, and I would like to thank him and acknowledge the greater good that he has done. He certainly played a major role in my career.

As time went by, I worked in a number of different capacities in the University, as I mentioned. I was very fortunate to have been exposed to many different ideas, concepts and points of view, locally and abroad. I visited many universities in many different countries, not the least was the time I spent at MIT pursuing a masters degree and the time I spent at the Harvard Business School attending the Advanced Management Programme. I had the privilege of meeting many interesting people, which included prominent academics, a number of Nobel prize winners and various heads of state, but also many people who were none of the above but were clear and critical thinkers – they all in some way contributed a fresh thought and a new angle, and so challenged me to re-examine my own perspectives. I learnt and appreciated the necessity of constantly exposing yourself to the world out there, and not to fall into the trap of embracing comfort zones. I learnt that competition improves the breed and sharpens thinking.

Gradually I realised the value and importance of a “proper education”, as opposed to a mere “training”, and the necessity of a university to provide exactly that. I became convinced, as I am today, that this University must take the view that, as we strive to be a world-class university, we must deliver to society not only world-class scientists and engineers, world-class teachers, world-class economists or whatever field one studies – but rather world-class people. We must strive to ensure that our students acquire not only a world-class academic training in their fields of interest, but a proper education. It has been said that “...an education is what is left after you have forgotten all the facts that you have learnt”. Hence the education that one receives at this University must, in addition to providing an excellent academic education, also imprint timeless principles and values, sustainable life skills and people skills and promote ethics, morals and manners.

The principal instrument by which these values and attitudes are passed on to students is the organisational culture of an institution. It is therefore imperative that we must develop an institutional culture that promotes good governance, produces productive citizens and emphasizes inclusivity. It has also been said that “...the value of a principle lies in the number of things it explains”. Values and the value of a value framework are very important. In addition to the obvious academic values that must prevail at a university with the academic stature of this one, it is also important that a number of other, broader values permeate all aspects of campus life, whether in the formal academic setting, organised and disorganised student and residence life as well as in the management and in the administration. These are the values that students will hopefully come to appreciate and adopt during their years on the campus, for these are the values that will guide them as they take their positions in leadership in society, when others look towards them for guidance, as they shape the future.

The notion of contributing pro-actively towards shaping a better future for all, rather than reactively engaging with a world others have created, must be a corner stone of our approach. They say you get three types of people in life: those who make things happen, those who watch what happened and those who, after it is all over, wondered what happened. Pro-activity must be our credo. The University is a trustee of the future, and as such it must also contribute proactively to shape and create the future – hence the title of our current strategic plan. The expectation is that as the leaders of tomorrow, our graduates must and will take on the responsibility to ensure that the future that they help to create, is a better one – a future that is characterised by a higher quality of life. A quality future. We have the responsibility to prepare them to be able to do that.

It is important then to recognise the values that must permeate all aspects of campus life. To my mind they most certainly include respect for human dignity; a recognition of the value and strength of diversity, tolerance and inclusiveness. Embracing the enduring values of integrity and strength of character; of loyalty, righteousness and fairness and an appreciation for the environment. And recognising at the same time that an acceptance and preponderance – and even worse the promotion - of mediocrity and complacency, particularly when they become institutionalised as the norm, is done at one’s own peril and is a betrayal of a trust placed in a leader. Mediocrity and complacency are the kisses of death and the enemies of excellence.

And if we catch ourselves succumbing to mediocrity and complacency, whether by commission or omission, whether the decisions are dictated by the need for pragmatism, the politics of the moment or in hindsight an error of judgment, we must not let the moment slip by without reflecting deeply not only on the sin of the moment, but also on the larger and longer term effect and damage that the violation of principles has. It eventually kills the soul, of the organisation and the individuals. Of course this will never happen at this University, but it is worth keeping in mind.

Very often the question that we must ask is not what it will cost to do something, but rather what will it cost not to do it. And in this realm the currency is often not so much money, but rather moral courage and fibre to do the right thing.

Ladies and gentlemen, apart from thanking the University of Pretoria itself, there are a number of people that I would really like to thank as well tonight:

My academic mentors

My father, Prof Calie Pistorius Snr

Prof Louis van Biljon

Professor Jan Malherbe

Dr Rein Arndt

The latter three were all instrumental in sending me the US for studies, and I am very grateful to them for that

The Chancellors that I have worked with. They have done excellent jobs as role models and being the “face” of the University. The University is proud to have them as our Chancellors

Dr Chris Stals

Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu

Chairs of Council that I have worked with

Mr Ben Alberts, Prof Esmé du Plessis and Ms Futhi Mtoba

Council members that I served with, in particular

Dr Piet Botha, also in his capacity as Deputy Chair and particularly also as the former Chair of the Alumni Board

Mr Anton Botha, Chair of the Human Resources Committee of Council

Other members of Council who supported me in difficult times

Previous Vice-Chancellors and Principals, particularly those that I have known well, Professor Flip Smit and Professor Johan van Zyl. Newton said that the reason he could see so far was because he stood on the shoulders of giants. We could only achieve what we did during the last eight years because of the outstanding work that these people have done. I would therefore like to pay tribute tonight to my predecessors, their leadership and their accomplishments, particularly, as I mentioned, to Professors Smit and Van Zyl. Professor Smit approved my going to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to study the management of innovation. He also approved the establishment of the Institute for Technological Innovation when I returned and appointed me as its first director. Professor van Zyl seconded me to the position of Director of Information Technology and later appointed me as Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information

Technology. I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to Professors Smit and Van Zyl.

The members of the University's Executive with whom I have worked  
Vice-Principals, Professors Chris de Beer, Ramaranka Mogotlane,  
Robin Crewe and Nthabiseng Ogude  
Registrar, Professor Niek Grové  
Executive Directors, Professors Antony Melck and Antonie de Klerk  
and Mr Johan Nel  
My advisor, Professor Sibusiso Vil-Nkomo  
Also the members of the Executive with whom I have worked with but  
who have stepped down, Professors Jan Malherbe, Theuns  
Erasmus, Chabani Manganyi, June Sinclair and Dr Adi  
Paterson.

One would be hard pressed to find a stronger team with more capable people than those I have served with in the University's Executive. Their hard work, dedication, commitment, knowledge, skills and loyalty goes beyond words. I have learnt a tremendous amount from each, for which I am very grateful to each of them. It was a tremendous privilege to have worked with them.

The Deans present as well as Professors Vos and Sandenbergh who cannot be here tonight, as well as the Deputy Deans  
Directors and other heads of support services  
My personal assistants through the years  
Diana, Lenie, Lydia, Kirsten, Elmiën, Alet, Julia and Sylvia  
Professor Somarie Grey, the Executive Project Coordinator in my office. She has really been a tremendous help. Always friendly, always available and able to help with anything.

Students and SRC  
Alumni  
Donors  
Schools  
Colleagues at other universities, locally and abroad  
Ambassadors, High Commissioners and the other members of the diplomatic corps. We have worked to build good relations with the foreign missions. They have responded warmly, and many good things have followed.  
Friends and family

I would like to pay a special tribute to my wife, Michèle. In her leaving, the University is losing another capable academic, as Professor de Beer mentioned.

We first met in 1987 at a function for the article clerks at the company of lawyers where she did her articles at the time. Our paths separated for a very long time, but we met again here at the University soon after she joined from the Department of Foreign Affairs where she was a legal advisor. Not many people are aware that she was one of seven people on the technical team who actually drafted the current South African Constitution during the negotiations in the Trade Centre in Kempton Park.

As you may recall, we were married in August 2005 in the chapel next door.

The life of a vice-chancellor is a full and demanding one. I noted with amusement the ramblings in a newspaper of a social commentator, who suggested that the job of a vice-chancellor consists mainly of being a bureaucrat who occupies the “corner office in the [ship-like] building that houses the administration and chair (sic) unending meetings about obscure regulations in rooms where you cannot see the sun”. Upon reading the piece I was reminded of a professor’s comment on the essay of struggling student, where he wrote on the student’s paper: “Your work is both original and brilliant. Unfortunately the brilliant part is not original and the original part is not brilliant”.

But the truth be told, my expectations of the job were slightly different from that of a bureaucrat slogging in the dark – I must admit that when I first heard that the Principal was also called the Vice-Chancellor, I had hoped that there would be more of the vice-part than the chancellor-part, but it didn’t really turn out that way.

But be that as it may, it is certainly true that the social side of being a vice-chancellor is also a very full and demanding one. Michèle really went beyond the call of duty in attending many functions, locally and abroad, and in entertaining a large number and wide spectrum of people, always with her natural charm. She patiently waited whilst I spent many nights, weekends and sometimes days and weeks away at functions and trips. All of this whilst continuing to perform with distinction her duties as a full-time mother and full-time professor here at the University of Pretoria, initially in the Faculty of Law and lately in the Institute for Advanced Studies - often (through no fault of her own) under very difficult, strenuous and trying conditions. It is said that “sophistication is the art of handling ambiguity with grace”, and she certainly always presented herself with the utmost grace.

I would like to take this opportunity to give her the enormous credit that she deserves and to thank her very much not only for the great support that she has given me in my task as Vice-Chancellor and Principal, but also for her valuable but often unrecognised contributions and sacrifices to University.

During my term as Vice-Chancellor and Principal, the University experienced its moments of glory and great achievements, but we certainly also had our challenges as well as our share of interesting and trying times.

In retrospect, the major part of my first term was devoted to steering the University through the turbulent waters of the restructuring of the tertiary education landscape that followed the publication of the National Plan on Higher Education in 2001, ensuring that we stayed true to the University’s goals of the pursuit of academic excellence and the promotion of our transformation initiatives. I am happy to say that the University of Pretoria emerged from that period as “The University of Pretoria”. It did not merge with any other institution, and thus retained its name and its heritage. Many other universities did not. In January 2004 the University of Pretoria incorporated the Mamelodi campus of the former Vista University. The incorporation was beneficial to the University of Pretoria, inter alia in that it really stimulated our thinking regarding the nature and value of the notion of community engagement

tremendously, particularly how community engagement can become a third manifestation, like research on the one hand and teaching and learning on the other, of the University's academic endeavours. It gave us the opportunity to go beyond local relevance to local impact.

I think it is not surprising that the great institutions of learning also play special and important roles in their communities. They are respected icons of which their communities are very proud and loyal. This does not happen by itself, but rather because they constantly add value as they continuously engage with their communities. They provide intellectual leadership, they promote the arts, culture and music, they contribute towards sport achievements and they stimulate the economy. The great institutions of learning embody excellence in their communities – they are symbols of inspiration and they are symbols of hope.

Community engagement has now become a pillar of the University's academic thrusts. The new management model mandates one of the vice-principals with the responsibility of overseeing and coordinating community engagement on the institutional level, assisted by a Department of Community Engagement (which is headed by a Director). I shall not be surprised if we find that this University has become a market leader with regard to our approach and implementation of community engagement, particularly its integration with the academic core business of the University.

In addition to our successes and achievements, notably our research reputation and the international recognition of the University as one of the world's top universities, the success we have had with the companies enterprises during the last ten years should also be acknowledged. The campus companies have not only been spectacularly successful financially, but also contributed significantly to the University's academic activities, its stature and reputation whilst also supplementing the income of its academics staff. This is another area where the University of Pretoria has certainly become a market leader in higher education.

This University is committed on a path of transformation. As one of South Africa's premier universities, its vision is to be the "intellectual home for the rich diversity of South African academic talent". South Africans from all social, cultural, racial, language and religious backgrounds are actively encouraged and recruited to come to the University of Pretoria to study and to work. We are working hard not only to identify and remove all barriers that hamper this, but also to pro-actively endeavour to make the University of Pretoria the university of preference for students and staff. During the last decade we made significant progress in many areas of transformation, including governance, the normalising of student demographics, curriculum changes, procurement policies and also in changing the institutional culture. In some areas, notably in employment equity, we would have preferred our progress to be better. Even though the movement is in the right direction it is not yet at the desired rate. Nonetheless, we are forging ahead, and there can be no doubt as to our strategic intent.

The language policy is necessarily also touched by the transformation process. As part of our policy of inclusiveness, the University of Pretoria has a multilingual language policy, where we teach in Afrikaans and English. The introduction of

English as a language of tuition opened this institution to many South Africans who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to study at this wonderful university, like many of us had. The University subsequently grew not only in numbers, scale and scope, but certainly also in stature. The University can only benefit by ensuring that it creates an environment where the best and the brightest of this country's academic talent chooses to study and to work here.

The language policy is currently under review. It is my personal view that we must continue to teach in both Afrikaans and English. It is my belief that the problems that we encounter with regard to language are issues of implementation rather than of the principle of teaching in two languages, and that they can be solved by refining the implementation aspects of the language policy. Languages are like trees, in that they make the world a better and richer environment. But in order to do so, they must be cultivated and nurtured to ensure that they grow and bear fruit. Needlessly chopping down trees is a very destructive act, and the same with languages.

Transformation is a multi-faceted process. Transformation is also about change. It is a journey upon which we have travelled quite a distance, but there is certainly some ways to go.

Last year we celebrated the University's Centenary – a hundred years in the service of knowledge. We are privileged to have been part of the "Centenary Generation". We are all very familiar with General Smuts' words at the laying of the corner stone of the Old Arts Building in August 1910, but let me recall them for the last time. He said, "Maybe the day will come when this Transvaal University College will be for our country what Oxford is for England. Maybe the grass needs to grow for a hundred years before this happens, but a great start has been made". It was with these words that General Smuts created the expectation for this University to be one of South Africa's world-class universities.


Last year as the University celebrated its centenary, I celebrated my 50th birthday. As the end of my second term as Vice-Chancellor and Principal drew nearer, I realised that I needed to start thinking about a "career-after-UP". I was therefore honoured to have received an offer from the University of Hull in the United Kingdom, and look forward to joining them as their new Vice-Chancellor in September of this year. Although the prospect of a new challenge is always exciting, it is with a sense of sadness that I shall bid the University of Pretoria farewell.

During my time here at the University of Pretoria, I have endeavoured to add value here, and to leave it in a better state that I found it. The judgment of whether that is indeed the case, is however, best left to the future generation, who will also decide whether or not a good start had also been made at the dawn of the University's second century. In this vein, I would like to note that I really appreciated Dr Steve Booyesen's comment at the meeting of Council last week, when, after a discussion on the University's performance indicators and financial statements of last year, he summed up the discussion by saying "The University is in great shape". Dr Booyesen, the comment was very highly appreciated, especially coming at the end of my last meeting of Council.



Great expectations were created a hundred years ago. I think we are justified in acknowledging that, a hundred years later, this University has now become one of South Africa's prominent universities. A good start had indeed been made a hundred years ago. As the Centenary Generation, we inherited not only a fine university, but also a responsibility to ensure that it delivers on those expectations in the future. This University has always risen to its challenges, and I have no doubt that it will continue to do so in the future. The University emerged from the restructuring process stronger than ever. It enjoys an excellent international reputation for academic excellence, it is financially stable, it is progressing on its path of transformation and it attracts a high quality of staff and students. I leave the University confident in the knowledge that it is now firmly pursuing a trajectory to realise its vision to be one of South Africa's world-class universities.

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of Michèle and myself I would like to thank you again for coming tonight, for listening to my story, and most of all for your contributions and commitment to the University of Pretoria.



8 June 2009