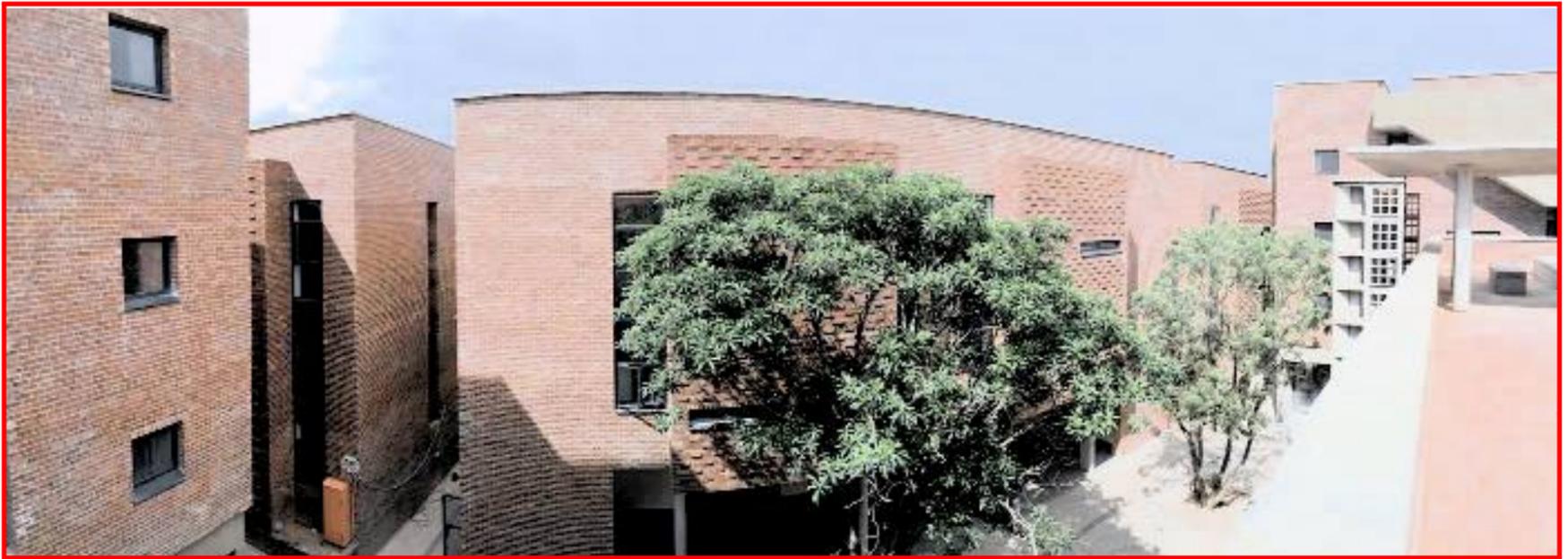


FREE TO DEVELOP

Pioneering a new dawn



HOLISTIC "LIVING AND LEARNING": Residences at the University of Mpumalanga.

THOKO MAYEKISO

THE University of Mpumalanga (UMP) is an African university rooted in its home province and responsive to its political, socio-economic, geographic and historic context, as well as its place in the world.

The university was established on 22 August 2013 as one of three new post-apartheid universities and embodies all the ideals and aspirations of an inclusive, non-racial, non-sexist, transformed and democratic society.

UMP enrolled its first cohort of 169 students in 2014 in three programmes: the Diploma in Hospitality Management, the Bachelor of Agriculture and Agricultural Extension and Rural Resources Management and the Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase Teaching.

This year, the university has enrolled 1 344 students in nine academic programmes.

The university has its main campus in the fast growing city of Nelspruit, in the scenic lowveld of Mpumalanga. The university's second campus is in the peri-urban settlement of Siyabuswa, where the focus is on qualifications in education.

This campus hosts the Centre for African Languages Teaching, which supports the use of Sepedi, IsiNdebele and SiSwati as mediums for teaching in the foundation phase.

It is envisaged that the centre will develop a strong research focus on teaching and learning in the three languages.

We offer a range of academic programmes and hope that in a few years' time these will range

from higher certificates to doctoral degrees with excellent articulation possibilities.

We aspire to offering a full range of programmes including Science, Engineering and Technology (SET), Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, Business and Economic Sciences and Health Sciences.

We offer our students a life-changing experience through high-quality curricula and co-curricular programmes, which promote the university's values of excellence, free enquiry and academic integrity, and which foster creativity and an entrepreneurial spirit.

Our teaching emphasises the interconnectedness of teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and engagement, and is theoretically informed, pedagogically appropriate, and sensitive to diversity in all its forms in the educational environment.

Our academic staff are reflective and reflexive practitioners who use information communication technologies to improve learning, which occurs in a diverse range of formal and informal settings.

The university has developed its vision which is to be an African university leading in creating opportunities for sustainable development through innovation.

Being an "African university" does not merely refer to our geographical location but, more importantly, to our character and identity, which are informed firstly by an African paradigm of indigenous knowledge, culture and life orientation and secondly by a broadly Western paradigm.

To this end the recent launch of a partnership with the African

Presidential Leadership Centre (APLC) is significant.

The work of the APLC will be integrated into our teaching and learning through the introduction of qualifications such as the Bachelor of Administration, short learning programmes, research projects focusing on leadership within the African context, and engagement with critical stakeholders.

The socio-economic development challenges facing the province of Mpumalanga are important in shaping our future direction and strategy.

These include building on the competitive advantage of the province in agriculture, mining, conservation and services such as tourism.

These areas of focus are already reflected in our academic activities.

The evolving programme and qualification mix includes qualifications in agriculture, hospitality, conservation, ICT and education, and will be expanded to include qualifications in tourism, science, commerce, the humanities, and health sciences over time.

Our research is currently focused on agriculture, hospitality management and education, and this will broaden as the university grows.

The emphasis of university stakeholders on UMP contributing to finding knowledge-based solutions for many of the social and economic challenges faced in our country, requires establishing high-quality postgraduate academic programmes and research centres as soon as possible.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Professor Ric

Bernard, eloquently expresses this aspiration and spirit: "A defining characteristic of the new University of Mpumalanga is the freedom to think beyond the norm and for those thoughts to be free of shackles that come with a long institutional history."

As an engaged university, we place great value on partnerships, linkages and networks as both drivers and enablers in achieving our vision.

Currently, all of our qualifications are offered in partnership with established universities to help ensure quality.

These include the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, University of Johannesburg, Rhodes University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

We have established partnerships with the University Novi Sad in Serbia and are currently exploring partnerships with the University of Central Florida, United States, Muni University in Uganda and Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique that will see the exchange of staff and students, resulting in benefits to the university and the region.

The newness of the university provides space and opportunity for us to define ourselves as a distinctly African University, which does different things differently.

There is the opportunity to design and shape almost everything de novo, from symbols and buildings to qualifications; and to develop an environment and culture that embraces diversity in all its manifestations and a culture that supports the concept of "Living and Learning", where the emphasis is on the

holistic development of our students.

In short there is an opportunity to learn from the past and shape a new African University for the future. We are at the dawn of something yet to be delivered, against a backdrop of great expectations, and the realities of our time.

Those who have charged us with the responsibility to be the pioneering staff at this university have entrusted so much into our hands and have shown confidence.

The ring-fenced funding for major infrastructure development and renewal, creates the opportunity to design and build a university that is fit for purpose, reducing financial burden on the institution.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Institutional Support), Professor Rachmond Howard, aptly said: "UMP prides itself on its iconic infrastructure and quality support services surrounded by breathtaking scenic views contributing to an inspirational and conducive environment for students and staff."

It is this new infrastructure that will allow us to increase student numbers from less than 200 in 2014 to 18 000 in 2025.

Finally, UMP enjoys high levels of goodwill and support from many stakeholders in Mpumalanga and further afield.

Staff and students acknowledge that they are active participants on a pioneering journey in which we contribute to the establishment of a new African University for the 21st Century.

Professor T Mayekiso is Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mpumalanga



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