

Rhodes University Transformation Summit

Financial Development and Budget Group

Saturday 29th July 2017

School of Languages Building ~ German Seminar Room

Participants: 4 tables were set up in the room and participants sat in groups of 4/5 per table. The following took part:

Geoff, Gavin, Eureka, David, Matthew, Peter, Santy, Désirée, Owen, Bongomez, Iain, Dave, Hugo, Asephelele, Roman, Nommso, Evert, Remy, Rui, Johnathan, Greg and Vuyo.

Demographics: 17 men, 5 women. 5 blacks, 1 Indian, 1 Coloured, 2 students.

10.30am Kirsten and Tsitsi introduced themselves.

Kirsten then outlined the principles of engagement as well as those previously outlined by Andre Keet. It was agreed that there would be no rank or the use of titles. It was agreed that we would try our utmost best to accommodate competing views since the meeting was not about consensus but rather about striving to listen to each other.

The 1st exercise was to form a triad for group introductions based on the following questions posed by Kirsten:

Who are you?

What is your link to Rhodes University?

What draws you to the financial management conversation?

Responses and issues raised by the participants:

Eureka (white woman academic at Rhodes): I came to Rhodes University as a Research Chair 6 months ago. It is difficult to get funds for a research proposal. We need a strategic plan and to increase our 3rd stream income.

Remy (black North African man): there is a huge potential to optimize our system by growing the 3rd stream income – although you can't bet on it. Currently, we are running an inefficient system because we have the lowest ratio of staff to student. That ratio is 1:15 at Rhodes.

Santy (Indian man): normally that ratio is 1:38 at the Pharmacy Department. As a department, we need to price degrees that make more money higher than those that

don't. We need to find an Alternative Model because 1 size doesn't fit all. Also, 26 to 28 weeks is too short a period to train a Pharmacy student.

Bongomezzi (black male Pharmacy student): There is an unequal distribution of pricing for degrees. How do we deal with that? Also, most students in the dining hall have 7 meal options, now if you cut down the meal options, for example what will be the implications?

The general question: If we are going to be efficient and cut down extra expenses, how will it impact our students?

Matthew (White professor from the Business school): There are too many differing agendas – everyone is doing their own thing. The Council needs to communicate their objectives and plan to the Rhodes University and the community.

10.55am **Constellation exercise** – this was designed by the Facilitator. Kirsten explains that the objective of the exercise was to get a physical idea of the roles we play in the university. This took place outside the German seminar room for about 45minutes.

Questions asked:

What is your role?

How do you locate yourself within the system?

Ideas expressed by the participants:

Johnathan (White man from the Alumni): The Alumni wants to positively influence events at Rhodes. Let's just not focus on the name change. We want people to know that even the name changes, we will still support the institution and we are worried about maintaining high academic standards.

Evert (White man from the Business school): I occupy multiple roles. We need to reflect if it is better to cut expenses or to pay the staff more. Spending less does not mean that we are being sustainable. Is sustainability maintenance? It is a very nuanced question and we need to clearly define it.

Bongomezzi (Black male Pharmacy student): Sustainability is important but it must not lead to the collapse of academic standards.

Asephelele (black male BA student): Many students are in the dark about these issues. Not sacrificing standards is important but then, what does it mean? Why are there few students at this event, for instance?

Roman (white male staff member): We don't see the Alumni. Students disrupt. Until then, we didn't know anything about the different constituencies. Where have you all been? We're trying to protect the academic project. We can align our efforts. We all care and are concerned about Rhodes University.

Jobnathan (white male Alumni representative): We are willing to help. For us, financial sustainability is number 2 after keeping our academic reputation.

Geoff (white male member of staff): We need to be cognizant of our natural and social environment. For instance, we are at times constrained by the Makana Municipality.

Jen (white female staff researcher): Being involved with research and community engagement, I see finance as not important in itself but as an enabler for every project and the profound impact of budget constraints on the research that we are able to do. That's why I am here.

Rui (white male staff member): Yes, finance is a tool that takes us closer to where we want to go. Concerning the sustainability debate, how do we cut costs? And we need to be aware that there could be negative effects that come as a result of cutting costs.

At this point, Kirsten asks the participants:

What are you all noticing about the fluidity or the movement in the constellation> what are your observations? There seem to be blockages but the interesting thing is that there is no polarity in the system.

Nommsso (black female member of council): We need to meet parents of Rhodes students and attend to their needs. We need to ask our self: who is the main decision maker: the parent or the child?

Eureta (white female academic): True, there will always be financial consequences for parents.

Asephelele (black male BA student): It is a tricky situation – Do I prioritize my education versus prioritizing the change that I want to see in the system and the space that I live? For example, I have 4 cousins, my aunt was the one who sent us all to high school and for us to attend university, and we had to take bursaries or loans. So, I can't afford to participate in the student protests and not get my degree at the end of the year.

Roman (white male staff member): We don't often get postgrads that are South African. Rhodes University is aware of the financial problems experienced by black students but it is unable to fully help. There are circumstances and other factors besides funding that overwhelm them, one of that is social integration. For a department to assist even 5 people over the course of a few years is quite an immense strain.

Gavin (white male academic): But Rhodes could do more!

Matthew (white male professor from the business school): The Corporate Sector is missing from the university scene. They have ducked out.

Owen (white male professor from the business school): It is a fact that you have to spend money to make money. We haven't made good decisions as a university. We could be making money and profiting from foreign currency – using the South African rand. We have to be smart about what we use our money for. And most importantly, there needs to be a plan!

Kirsten asks if someone would like to give a closing remark to conclude the constellation exercise.

Remy (black male West African): There certainly needs to be a plan – there has to be a structured effort. How do we increase enrolment? How can we overcome the geographical limitation and design correspondence courses for online learning which might help us?

The group agreed that there is no single view of what sustainability is and this needs to be unpacked before a plan can be drafted. They also agreed that it was disconcerting to not be able to understand the absence of students and the drop in enrolments. It was recommended that the university review their operating model and encourage e-learning.

11.40am Writing exercise

The Facilitator asked the participants to form new groups and to work in groups of 4/5 to answer the following questions below.

Write down 3 things that you think are important for transformation.

What do you think is the most urgent? And what do you think has the most impact of Rhodes university? What should be prioritized: the urgent or the most impactful?

It emerged from this exercise that these issues were important after 22 participants voted on the 4 issues that they were most keen to discuss.

1. Defining the academic project – 19 people voted
2. Marketing – 12 people voted
3. Cost Management
4. 3rd stream income

Please note that the other 3 issues that were highlighted were raised were: Creating an integrated/inclusive approach with stakeholders. Protection against disruption as well as developing a short term crisis plan. However, the group agreed that the 4 listed above were the most important and those were then discussed in-depth.

Discussion after the tea break focussed on the following questions:

What is an integrated approach?

Owen (white male academic from the business school): We need to look at our investments. If we spend money, what will then be the returns? It is not just about corporatizing. We don't have any idea about a growth strategy – there is an uncoordinated use of money.

Matthew (white male academic from business school): We need to engage with the Alumni as partners not as beggars. There needs to be a strategic plan – cost optimization and revenue generation. Our costs increased more than inflation because we increased the number of students which meant that everything increased. This are the “economies of scale” that we need to factor in.

How do we create a good strategic plan? What is the process for developing a strategic plan and what are the issues? How would you best monitor the progress of that plan?

Concerning the issue of postgrad and undergrad students, the group asked: Did we make a good decision to increase the number of postgrad students and limit the

undergrads? How do we define the academic project and convince all stakeholders that we will maintain high academic standards?

Feedback from the group presentations

This is the feedback that was given to the plenary after lunch.

1st and 2nd stream income

presented by Owen (white male academic from the business school)

We are concerned about the drop in enrolments. We would like to find out why we are no longer 1st choice when it comes to university choice. Marketing needs to be improved so as to communicate and increase a good perception of Grahamstown and Rhodes University. We need to map out these issues – to highlight the cause and effect.

The application process is a nightmare and we need to develop Apps that make it easy to apply. These Apps need to be multilingual, with podcasts and video clips of lecturers to attract more students. Why don't we also eliminate the application fee? We need the name, Id number and email of a prospective student. Once we have them in the data base, we can then send more marketing material to lure them.

We need to try blended learning and really consider if we just want to be a residential university or have e-learning. We need to do a S.W.O.T analysis. If we create an enabling environment, we can increase enrolments which will increase subsidies from the government. Also, we need to have courses that appeal to the students – relevant courses. And, we need to review how we rate our staff: is it possible to have Staff that teaches only or does both research and teaching? If we improved staff development, it would help maintain academic standards.

3rd stream income

presented by Gavin (Coloured male staff member)

Gavin: The definition of 3rd stream income covers contractual agreements, corporate endowments which are problematic because they have been ear-marked. We recommend that the university change the percentage of levies on it. Alumni and other businesses want to be more involved. We recommend that a Central Resource Office be set up to identify sources of income and other departments to earn more. It will help to structure contracts, reports as well as form the legal structure for B.E.E status. Corporates need legal work before they can enter into any agreement with Rhodes. For instance tax clearance certificates for staff doing research or consultancy work, VAT issues.

Rhodes research staff and consultants need help with contracts to increase the research being done and also students may also want to work with corporates and government organizations so there must be a way to negotiate all those working relationships.

For example: we recommend waivers for academics who need to do private consultancy work.

We recommend that a data base of Alumni contributions be made if we are to get substantial contracts. We need to market and have a “begging bowl” to encourage Alumni to help us. Stellenbosch gets plenty of money because of a well-networked Alumni. The Council and the governors need to be persuaded to use more money to advertise.

3rd stream income needs to be made a central part of governance issue.

Cost optimisation

presented by Rowan

We recommend a more corporate outlook – meaning using certain business principles to increase efficiency in the Rhodes system and structure.

Use of outdated information system has led to difficulties in sharing policy forms or any other professional information. Gaps in information decrease efficiency. We recommend that we use Google Scholar classrooms. Communication must link together with the planning unit.

Justification of HR requirements – we need to make appointments more transparent and justify the existence of a post. Strategic performance monitoring framework needs to be established and we need to make periodic reports especially concerning the strategic plan to find out what has been achieved and what else needs to be done. And to do this, we need to revise how we measure indicators of success.

Marketing

presented by Asephelele

Issues that were important to the group members were that of integration. Particularly, student recruitment, marketing and communications. It is necessary for the marketing unit to partner with departments.

We need to reflect on: What do we market? Should we market departments or degrees or great things about the university or success stories?

We need a target market and to fully understand it– students enrolling as well as parents paying. We need strong communication vehicles. Is our current system working? No. How do we improve? Marketing team must include other stakeholders like Alumni. We must market to elevate our success.

How do we market Grahamstown and Rhodes university together as a package?

What can we afford? Print/ e-marketing. Using the news or TV?

Highlight “The Rhodes experience” in our marketing campaigns. Should our emphasis be on residential life, the community or e-learning?

Marketing – ease of access, “instant evangelists”.

Consider artificial intelligence

“The new wealth is data and Rhodes has been squandering it” (said Matthew Lester, one of the participants present).

We collected the flip charts and cleaned the venue. The group finished just before lunchtime and joined the rest of the congregation at the Barat lecture theatre.