

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S SPEECH AT THE FOURTH CONGREGATION OF THE MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY – FRIDAY 26 AUGUST 2005

It gives me great pleasure to address you on this Fourth Congregation of the Midlands State University, where we are about to witness the graduation of yet another cohort of our students, this time a total of six hundred and eighty two (682) graduands. This brings to a total of one thousand nine hundred and sixty nine (1969), the number of graduates of the Midlands State University to date. Your Excellency and Chancellor, allow me to express my gratitude for this privilege to address the gathering on this particularly significant day on the University Calendar.

For this address, I have deliberately avoided dwelling too much on future plans. Instead I have opted to make it an information giving address. I gave consideration to the need to be introspective by looking down the road that we have travelled since our inception, with a view to making a realistic assessment of our achievements as well as our shortcomings.

Our institution was born against a background of an economically, socially and politically challenging epoch in the history of our nation. We came into existence during an era when ramifications arising from the land reform and land redistribution programmes had triggered multifaceted challenges for the nation and for our institutions. In the circumstances we found ourselves challenged as universities to employ dynamic and innovative strategies that would not only ensure our survival but provide a blue print for our long term growth and sustenance.

In that context the Midlands State University has grown from a mere four hundred (400) students in March 2000 when the University started, to over eight thousand five hundred (8 500) students as we stand today. This phenomenal growth is attributed to a conscious, purposeful and deliberate effort on our part to respond to the overwhelming demand for university education in our communities. A unique feature of this graduation ceremony is the capping of our first post graduate products, the Master of Business Administration graduands. This milestone is evidence of our coming of age as an institution of higher learning. Henceforth, we intend to expand our higher degree training programmes in all faculties. In this regard your Excellency and Chancellor, I am pleased to note that the Midlands State University has been identified by the National Council for Higher Education in consultation with our parent Ministry, as one of the first three universities that should embark on a program to locally train lecturers for the nation's higher and tertiary education institutions.

This initiative by our national Council is a most welcome innovation that will alleviate the gross human resource inadequacies in our universities that have resulted from the brain drain and other challenges. Accordingly, in the forthcoming year the University is set to introduce postgraduate degree programmes in all faculties. This year the faculties of Commerce and Education have already taken a lead in this direction by launching the Master of Commerce (MCOMM) and Master of Education (MED) degree programmes respectively in their various departments. We have also, across the faculties, activated our Faculty Higher Degree Committees with a view to enrolling Master of Philosophy (MPHIL) and Doctor of Philosophy (DPHIL) students.

The expansion in the University's postgraduate degree programmes is progressing in tandem with our innovative approaches to broaden the undergraduate programmes on offer in line with the specific demands of our communities. We are running undergraduate programmes of study under four schemes. Firstly, the conventional scheme which absorbs most of the A level school leavers, secondly we have the full-fee paying scheme, known as the Parallel Programme which absorbs more A level school leavers who attend classes in the late afternoon and evenings, thirdly, we have the Visiting School scheme which enrolls those in employment who wish to acquire new skills and competences at degree level and finally, we have the Block Release Programmes in the Faculties of Education and Natural Resources Management and Agriculture which enroll holders of the diploma in Education and the Diploma in Agriculture, respectively. This year, two new undergraduate programmes have been introduced namely the Bachelor of Commerce Insurance and Risk Management and the Bachelor of Laws. This brings to a total of thirty two (32), the number of undergraduate degree programmes offered by our young institution.

Your Excellency and Chancellor, it is our submission that gender biases, stereotypes and prejudices have systematically slowed down the pace of development the world over. In Africa in particular, where women are undisputedly the backbone of development, deliberate efforts to empower women to play their critical role in all levels of development are not an option but an emphatic must. This process can only be meaningful when women, who have largely been disadvantaged in the past, acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies to execute their task. To that end, it therefore becomes imperative for universities as agents of growth and development, to demonstrate a predisposition to embrace and promote the total integration of women in development. Indeed Your Excellency and

Chancellor, failure to develop a society's women, is tantamount to positioning that particular society at a major disadvantage in the world of today. It is within that context, that as a matter of policy, the Midlands State University strives to achieve a fifty – fifty balance of female to male students in each class. Although this ratio has been achieved in the commercial subjects and humanities, it becomes a tall order when we come to the natural sciences where fewer and fewer women attain the required Advanced Level grades. Given the key role that women play in all levels of development, the University strongly believes that they should not be confined to particular disciplines but that conscious efforts must be made to ensure that women have choices. In an initiative to get more women into the hard sciences, the University has identified the Rockefella Foundation as a potential donor of funds that we are going to use to run a six month bridging course to enable women to upgrade their grades before enrolling into science programmes.

Last year I intimated to this gathering our intention to introduce gender studies into our curricula. I am pleased to report that a full-fledged department of Gender Studies is now in existence. Your Excellency and Chancellor, the teaching of Gender Studies to all our students stands out as one of the most fundamental innovations that the University has introduced to its curricula to date. The teaching of a compulsory and examinable module in Gender Studies is intended to produce a different kind of graduate whose view of the world is more realistic, more progressive and indeed, more development-oriented.

Many could be wondering how the University is managing given the rapid expansion in student numbers that I have already alluded to. Our innovation has not only been confined to our teaching and learning methodologies, but has also been evident in our resourcefulness in securing additional accommodation for teaching and learning purposes.

Soon after its inception, the institution successfully negotiated to lease part of the Senga Institute of Manpower Planning and Development, where our Faculty of Commerce is currently housed. In August 2005 the University also successfully negotiated for the lease of the Tel-one Learning Centre near Mambo Press where our Law and the Graduate Business Schools and the Masters programmes of the Faculty of Commerce will be based.

Conscious of the inadequacy of teaching and learning facilities and equipment, this year we deliberately embarked on a programme of re-equipping and refurbishing our lecture rooms and laboratories. In the same vein, we also remain convinced that the development of sound

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) at the University would go a long way to address the challenges that are presented by the shortage of teaching, learning and research materials. It is the University's vision that through the use of ICT, the introduction of the 'Virtual Classroom' would make higher education more accessible to many who yearn for it in our society. Your Excellency and Chancellor, allow me to take this opportunity to express the University's sincere gratitude to the First Lady, Amai Grace Mugabe who generously donated forty (40) computers which have helped us to set up the African Virtual University (AVU). The increasing number of students and computers has created a heavy demand for internet connectivity. As you were driving from town via Mambo Press and Senga Township, you might have noticed some workers digging trenches on the roadside. The trenches are part of the project by Powertel, who were contracted by the University to construct an appropriate infrastructure to facilitate wider internet connectivity through fibre optic cables by linking us to the Bulawayo – Harare backbone. The installation of the data communications infrastructure will link the institution to Africa-Online, the service provider who will in turn facilitate wider bandwidth for efficient internet connectivity.

The University is also involved in various community outreach programmes aimed at enhancing the quality of life of the local community. Tangible examples of extension services embarked on by the University include the new farmer educational and training programmes carried out by the Faculty of Natural Resources Management and Agriculture, the consultancy services to small and medium scale enterprises by the faculty of Commerce, the joint research projects across all faculties and the deployment of students during the Work Related Learning year to assist with the teaching of science subjects in rural based schools. Your Excellency and Chancellor, of particular interest is a recent project embarked on by the University to provide Information Technology training to teachers in the schools which were recipients of your computer donations. The University would like to assure you that the computers will definitely no longer remain in their boxes within these schools and that they will be put to good use in accordance with your noble intentions. Finally, Your Excellency and Chancellor, the support that we receive from Government, through our parent Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education cannot be overstated. On behalf of the University Community, I sincerely wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to Government, for its generous and unwavering support in all our efforts and activities. Indeed as a university, we take pride in a Government that is fully awake to the crucial importance of higher education as an engine of development. **I THANK YOU!!**