FROM **HOPE** TO **ACTION** THROUGH **KNOWLEDGE**

The Renaissance of the
University of the Western Cape

2001 – 2014

Editors

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Reimagining UWC's Academic Enterprise

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Introduction to the O'Connell Vision

In May 2007, five months into my second year of a five-year contract as Dean of the Faculty of Science at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg, I received a telephonic request for a meeting from Prof Brian O'Connell, Rector and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape (UWC). I had not met him but was aware of his attempts to turn UWC around. We met in Johannesburg at a location near OR Tambo International Airport. Prof O'Connell informed me that UWC was searching for a Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) Academic and he was advised by, amongst others, Dr Molapo Qhobela, the then Deputy Director General in the National Department of Higher Education, to approach me.

A meeting scheduled for one hour lasted three hours. At the outset I was struck by the deep intellect of the man, his passion for his country and its challenges, and his understanding of the importance of the role of universities in addressing the challenges. In the same breath he spoke with pride of UWC's legacy as an engaged University grounded within society and focused on building an equitable and dynamic society, as well as its legacy role at the very forefront of the struggle against apartheid (Lalu & Murray, 2012). He recalled the leadership of former Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof Richard van der Ross who, despite being appointed

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by the apartheid government in 1975, created the space for student and staff anti-apartheid discourses to emerge and grow through strategically identifying his University as a microcosm of society, associated in particular with the struggles of the oppressed. Prof van der Ross thereby laid the foundation for UWC's legacy, including the emergence of the likes of Prof Jakes Gerwel. Prof O'Connell further recalled how in his inaugural address at his installation as the Rector and Vice-Chancellor of UWC in June 1987, Prof Gerwel boldly declared UWC as an intellectual home for the Left (Gerwel, 1987) and soon thereafter, against government decree, opened UWC's doors of learning to students of all races.

He then spoke seriously about UWC defining its own space within our fledgling democracy, of the opportunities available to UWC, while expressing his determination to create space at his University for the talented amongst the poorest of the poor. Concomitant with this aspiration was his determination to raise the University to perform academically at a competitive international level, underpinned by genuine scholarship, whereby it would be able to make high-impact contributions not only to higher education in the country, but also to the national agenda for socioeconomic development. He was determined that UWC, as one of the country's historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs), must dismantle and repudiate the purpose designed for it in 1959 by its apartheid creators within a discriminatory education system (in terms of the Extension of University Education Act, 1959) and become a metaphor for what great achievements are possible despite the inherited challenges and difficulties. His Vision extended beyond UWC and South Africa; it also embraced the Continent: "UWC must become a good South African and a good African university".

The meeting focused on just two issues. The first was Brian O'Connell's long-term Vision for UWC, and the second was his expectations of me so that his Vision could be realised. Having spent the first 29 years of my career of 48 years in higher education in South Africa at an HDI, I understood where he was coming from and where he wanted to take UWC. Consequently, our assessments of the challenges facing the HDIs were in accord on many of the issues we discussed that evening. We were at one also on how the situation could be changed going forward, with the realisation that excellence, impact and accountability were key underpinnings for an institution with limited resources. Prof O'Connell saw an opportunity for UWC to rise to the occasion and send a resounding message that it had outgrown the label of a 'bush' university. During our discussions he placed

on the table the brochure of the yet to be constructed state-of-the-art Life Sciences building – describing in his usual humble manner how he was able to raise R400 million for the project. He saw the project as a landmark initiative. Once completed, it would send a clear message that UWC was moving into higher scholarly terrains, determined to compete at the topmost levels among the best.

What Prof O'Connell presented was an ambitious, yet bold and exhilarating vision! It was, indeed, a most engaging and inspiring discussion, firstly, on the role of higher education institutions in South Africa, and secondly, on the exciting possibility of creating something special at UWC. He was steadfast in his belief that no challenge was too great. According to him: "We (the University leadership) have to believe in ourselves and be strategic in finding the solutions one step at a time with the necessary acquired knowledge". It was reassuring that we had arrived at a common understanding of the importance of both commitment and scholarship to the realisation of his Vision, of what was required to be a credible player on the national and international higher education landscapes, as well as how to attain these objectives. Prof O'Connell's firm conviction that, despite its limited resources, UWC was destined for outstanding achievements was most inspiring.

The role of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic as defined by Prof O'Connell was very clear. My responsibility, if I were to join UWC, would be to take the academic enterprise to new heights benchmarked by international best practices and levels of scholarship, underpinned by meeting the criteria of excellence, impact and accountability, and supported by an enabling environment, without compromising the institution's obligation to societal upliftment. From my experiences on various review panels and committees for the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the National Research Foundation (NRF), I had a sense of where UWC was located along the scholarly spectrum of South African universities. This knowledge led me to conclude that attempts to successfully achieve the goals set by Prof O'Connell were dependent on the existence of a critical mass of high-profile scholars who were acknowledged nationally and internationally. Such individuals would have knowledge of and experience in establishing cutting edge research programmes. As a cohort they were needed as the launch platform to jumpstart the final phase of the O'Connell Vision.

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Consequently, as we parted I informed Prof O'Connell that I needed to do some homework on UWC, in particular on the presence of the institution in the national higher education landscape and within the national Science, Technology and Innovation landscape, as well as on the platforms of the national science councils, namely the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Medical Research Council (MRC), and within the programmes of the NRF and the Water Research Commission (WRC). UWC's prominence on the international landscape was also of interest. We agreed that should my research on the current status of UWC convince me that there was potential for advancement to the desired new heights and that I would therefore like to be part of the team undertaking the project, then we had to proceed through a transparent process that is consistent with the institution's senior appointment procedures. After three weeks of researching the institution, I informed Prof O'Connell that I was available to present my plan for advancing the Academic Enterprise at UWC and to be interviewed for the position.

Following my presentation on the morning of 16 August 2007, I had a most engaging interview with a panel that consisted of Prof O'Connell, Prof Wieland Gevers (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, UCT) and the late Prof Russell Botman (Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University). I clearly recall my closing statement to the selection panel: "If you expect your DVC Academic to drive the research agenda of your university, irrespective of who you appoint, your senior management structure will have to change. You cannot have your Dean of Research reporting to your Vice-Chancellor. He/she must report to your DVC Academic." Two days later I received an offer from UWC. After a series of engagements with Prof O'Connell, which included a change in the reporting line of the Dean of Research, I accepted the position of DVC Academic and agreed to start on 1 January 2008. I did so with the blessing of my Vice-Chancellor at Wits, Prof Loyiso Nongxa, himself a former Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences at UWC.

Strategic approach to the desired goals

It was clear to me that in order to reconfigure the academic enterprise at UWC, I had to draw on my experiences of best practices at the four previous institutions at which I had worked, namely the University of Durban-Westville, the ML Sultan Technikon, the University of Natal/

KwaZulu-Natal and Wits. As part of the preparatory work, during the last two months of my stay at Wits I studied the existing academic structures and processes within UWC from documents kindly sent to me by the University on request. These included all academic policies, committee structures, faculty structures and entities reporting to the DVC Academic. Given the expansiveness of the portfolio that oversaw Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation, and Community Engagement, and a reporting line for Deans of all seven Faculties and Directors of all Academic Support Divisions (eventually growing to ten), I immediately realised the need to put in place an effective and efficient management system. This required, amongst other things, another look at support division structures, committee structures, membership and frequency of meetings, identification of overlaps and gaps, and a streamlining of processes for expeditious and informed decision making. Although it is important for academics to participate in the academic management of the University, it has to be recognised that this cannot be done at the expense of their core academic responsibilities of teaching and learning, research and innovation, and community engagement, on which the O'Connell Vision placed great demands. The time was also spent reflecting on the strategies and interventions required to accelerate the scholarly advancement of UWC.

As stated earlier, and as can be gleaned from Chapter 1, Brian O'Connell's Vision for UWC was indeed a very ambitious one. When I joined in January 2008, Prof O'Connell was already in his second, and normally last, 5-year term in office. Therefore, any planned interventions had to be more immediate and short-term rather than long-term. The O'Connell Vision was more than a focus on academic excellence, it was also driven by a passionate commitment to national development, of sense-making on the role of a university such as UWC in addressing the challenges faced by the majority of South African who had been severely disenfranchised during apartheid. Thus, the demand on the academic project was for holistic student development, producing excellent scholars and future thought leaders with a strong social commitment. They were to emerge as graduates who were taught, guided and inspired by a cohort of academics performing at very high levels. These factors were critical to developing the defining frameworks for reimagining Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation and Community Engagement at UWC.

In 2007 the South African Council for Higher Education (CHE) responsible for the quality assurance of higher education (CHE, 1997), conducted an institutional audit of UWC. The Audit report raised several concerns

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relating to the academic project at UWC. In discussions with Prof O'Connell, the DVC for Student Development and Support, Prof Lullu Tshiwula, Head of Institutional Strategic Planning, Mr Larry Pokpas and other members of the Executive Management Team, we decided that addressing the issues raised in the CHE Audit Report should not be done in isolation, but as part of a deliberate repositioning of UWC towards developing into a research-led institution through the embedding of scholarship, while simultaneously strengthening the institution's commitment to being an engaged university of relevance to the broader society. We agreed that this repositioning had to be accompanied by a drive towards effective and efficient management and operational systems, improved financial stability, good human resources policies and practices, and enhancing the quality of student life. Also, it was recognised that appropriate levels of engagement with staff from the academic, administrative and support divisions were necessary to ensure a shared, common vision in taking UWC forward. The chosen set of initiatives had to be integral components of UWC's next 5-year strategic Institutional Operating Plan, the process for the development of which was about to unfold, the IOP: 2010-2014.

My first few months in office as DVC Academic were spent on understanding and analysing the existing *modus operandi* of the institution. Important elements of this were processes and criteria in decision making, as well as understanding quality assurance, excellence, impact and accountability. This was accompanied by a historical study of the strengths and weaknesses of each faculty, which included the scholarly standing of each academic Department/School of the University. A detailed study was undertaken of the financial budget attached to the portfolio of the DVC Academic over the previous three years. This exercise included the quantum and breakdown of the budget allocated to each division within the portfolio, namely, to each Faculty and each Academic Support Division, which was then contrasted with performance. Based on the evidence obtained, I came to the conclusion that for us to achieve the desired goals, some changes were immediately necessary, while additional information had to be collected to justify the need for other changes which appeared necessary.

An in-depth analysis was undertaken of the level of scholarship that defined the academic profile of UWC. This necessitated a look at the standing of all academic staff members, which included highest academic qualifications, scholarly outputs, NRF rating (<https://www.nrf.ac.za/rating>), presence on regional/national/international committees and platforms, etc. The fact that in 2008 UWC had 56 NRF-rated researchers was most encouraging.

A sizeable number of these scholars were operating in the international space through their research programmes. Given at that point in time the NRF rating system was in its early stages for scholars in the humanities and social sciences (HSS), it was gratifying to find a cohort of HSS scholars at UWC who also had strong national/international partnerships within their research programmes. Also encouraging was the fact that some of UWC's research institutes, centres and units had extensive research programmes in collaboration with national/international partners. My analysis confirmed that the nucleus for launching a revitalised Academic Enterprise for UWC was in place. At the other end of the scholarly spectrum of the academic staff complement at UWC was the presence of a significant number of staff members whose academic world did not extend into the national/international space. They operated either within the regional space or, surprisingly in some cases, just within the University. Consequently, one realised the need for structured interventions to facilitate exposure to the national space through raising awareness of the opportunities and benefits such as, for example, the NRF's Thuthuka Programme (NRF, 2020) for doctoral candidates and emerging scholars. Participation in such programmes will enable the nurturing of emerging scholars and succession planning towards sustained scholarly excellence.

It was abundantly clear that in order to deliver on the defined outcomes of the new strategic initiatives that were necessary, the University's available budget would have to be realigned and redistributed. Optimal deployment of the limited resources available necessitated a strong emphasis, going forward, on accountability, while in some programmes the allocation of funds would have to be based on past performance.

Teaching and learning

It is common practice for universities to have a Research Office or a Directorate for Research, given the importance of research in the production and application of new knowledge. However, not all universities have an equivalent structure dedicated to teaching and learning. Towards the end of 2007 UWC took the decision to establish a Directorate for Teaching and Learning so as to ensure a strategic focus on enhancing teaching and learning, and in so doing to address the shortcomings highlighted in the CHE Audit Report. The earlier discussion had centred on a single Directorate that would consolidate all divisions and units supporting teaching and learning. The structure of the Directorate was not unpacked. At our first executive management meeting in January 2008,

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we decided to adopt a cautious approach, since I pointed out that without a Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (non-existent at UWC at that point) there was going to be a disconnect between the Directorate of Teaching and Learning and the Faculties and the University Senate. Consequently, UWC's Directorate of Teaching and Learning (DTL) was established, headed by a full-time Director of Teaching and Learning, in conjunction with the establishment of a Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC), which was approved by the University Council in September 2008.

As part of the rationalisation, the Writing Centre which assisted students to develop their writing skills was incorporated into the DTL. Moreover, the STLC was constructed to serve, together with the DTL, as a holistic platform for the development of teaching and learning at UWC. The DVC Academic served as Chairperson of the STLC. To ensure a cascading to the faculties and the academic departments, in response to the STLC each of the seven faculties had to establish a Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee, the chairpersons of which serve on the STLC. The Faculty representatives were complemented on the STLC by the Director of Teaching and Learning as well as the Directors of the relevant Academic Support Divisions: Library Services, the e-Learning Unit (which was strategically relocated shortly thereafter from within the Department of Information and Services to the portfolio of the DVC Academic, and later grew into the Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies (CIECT)), the Division for Lifelong Learning and the Academic Planning Unit. The Director of Community Engagement was also a member of the STLC to ensure our teaching and learning endeavours extended beyond the University and were connected to societal needs. The positioning of the institution's teaching and learning programmes on a professional platform that upholds excellence and scholarship entailed the University's Director of Quality Assurance being included as a member of the STLC. Within the framework of a student-centred approach, the Director of the Centre for Student Support Services and two representatives of the Student Representative Council were also members of the STLC. Since teaching and learning includes postgraduate studies, the Director of Postgraduate Studies, as head of the Division of Postgraduate Studies which was established in 2009, was also included as a member of the STLC.

It was envisaged that the STLC, together with the DTL, will oversee all initiatives and programmes related to the advancement of teaching and learning for all full-time and part-time student programmes and

community-based outreach teaching programmes, in conjunction with the relevant support divisions. The Director of Teaching and Learning served as Deputy Chairperson of the STLC. This holistic approach to teaching and learning placed the advancement of teaching and learning at UWC on a firm footing. It followed, therefore, that the Director of Teaching and Learning was the most appropriate person to lead the development of UWC's new Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning, together with the STLC. Prior to the development of the Strategic Plan, it was necessary to reflect on the desired set of attributes of a UWC graduate that are consistent with the institution's vision and mission. This required, as a precursor to the formulation of the Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning, the development of a UWC Charter of Graduate Attributes. Details on the process and the Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning, as well as the UWC Charter of Graduate Attributes, is presented by Prof Vivienne Bozalek and Prof Delia Marshall in Chapter 7. Emphasis on the scholarship of teaching and learning was embedded in the Strategic and Implementation Plans. Of primary significance, teaching and learning were now placed as a core academic activity, alongside research and innovation. The infusion of technology into teaching and learning and promoting the use of e-pedagogy were identified as pivotal components of the Strategic Plan, and they soon expanded rapidly into the research and innovation domain. How this evolved is discussed in Chapter 10 by Dr Juliet Stoltenkamp.

Research and innovation

In 2008 UWC already had in place a Research Office, headed by a Dean of Research who, until my arrival, reported directly to the Rector and Vice-Chancellor. With Research and Innovation (R & I) located within the portfolio of the DVC Academic, the reporting line was immediately changed.

For an institution such as UWC with limited resources, success in R & I is critically dependent on the ability of its scholars to successfully compete for grants from external funding sources. The O'Connell Vision towards creating a research-led university therefore required a strategic approach to strengthening established research niche areas as well as identifying and investing in emerging niche areas, with the objective of competing aggressively in the grant-funding programmes of government departments, national science councils and agencies, and international funding organisations. The need to be guided by national imperatives

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was critical for securing external support. UWC's physical location as one of four universities in relatively close proximity in the Western Cape, as well as the existing strengths of its neighbours, had to be factored into strategic decision making. The institution also had to take advantage of the range of external capacity-development programmes which were being implemented as part of the country's transformation and redress agenda, for example, the NRF's Thuthuka programme. Within the University, an internal programme to increase the cohort of staff with a doctoral qualification had to be considered, since a doctoral degree is seen by most research funding agencies as a prerequisite for submission of grant proposals. The national drive towards a knowledge-based economy was placing greater emphasis on innovation, technology transfer and new product development within the university sector. It was important for UWC to establish a footprint in that space. It was also necessary to strengthen the University's research and innovation infrastructure, especially in the natural sciences, as part of the enabling environment for staff to engage in the kind of high-impact research which is a characteristic of a research-led university. Finally, as part of the enabling environment, it was necessary to streamline operations so that our scholars could flourish without unwarranted impediments.

The incorporation of the above set of initiatives and interventions pointed to a repositioning of R & I at UWC through a new Research Policy. Details on the development of a comprehensive new Research Policy, which on implementation served as the backbone for UWC to emerge as research-led university, is presented in Chapter 8.

Community engagement

UWC's commitment to Community Engagement (CE) has been enshrined in its Vision and Mission Statements. The institution has over the past several decades established a reputation of being an 'engaged' university. Rector Brian O'Connell continuously reminded us of the role UWC had to play in the socio-economic transformation of our country. He emphasised the importance of sense-making, using the 85%-15% divide between the 'haves nots' and the 'haves', as shown so emphatically in Figure 1.1 of Chapter 1, to communicate a very powerful message about our social responsibility. Therefore, as part of the reimagining of the academic project, Community Engagement at UWC had to be strategically embedded within all sectors of the academic project.

To this end, it was decided by the executive management in 2010 to place the Community Engagement Unit (CE Unit) on a firm foundation with the appointment of a full-time Director. Moreover, in response to the IOP: 2010-2014, the activities and programmes of the CE Unit were so designed that they were integrated into the teaching and learning, research and student development programmes of the University. Scholarship became an important component of CE activities and programmes as the focus was on community engagement underpinned by excellence and impact. A multidisciplinary approach to community engagement was adopted, guided by the principle that every community engagement intervention should be structured as a research project. The net result was the development of a new strategic approach to community engagement that was holistic in design and mainstreamed within the University's academic project. Details on the advancement of community engagement at UWC during the period of Prof Brian O'Connell's leadership is presented in Chapter 9 by Prof Priscilla Daniels.

Conclusion

Guided by the eight pivotal Goals of the IOP: 2010-2014 (Appendix 1) and a parallel set of processes underpinned by inclusivity of stakeholders, social responsibility, student centredness, scholarship, excellence, impact and accountability, UWC's academic enterprise was now reimagined. In the implementation of the accompanying Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning and the new Research Policy, we emphasised to our colleagues in the Administrative and Support Divisions such as Finance, Human Resources, Information and Communication Technology and e-Learning were reminded that they all had a central role to play for UWC to succeed. The journey towards becoming a research-led university was led by Prof Brian O'Connell. His Vision, encapsulated in the motto he created, **'From hope to action through knowledge'**, galvanised and inspired staff across all sectors of the University into believing that the goals were achievable and that every staff member had a contribution to make.

Thereafter, it was necessary for us to remain focused on the deliverables through the agreed strategies, policies, practices, investments and interventions in a sustained manner. This had to be done without compromising the need for excellence, impact, accountability and proper quality assurance, with the Executive Management Team providing leadership in strategic decision making. For appropriate levels of delivery at the faculty level, it was necessary to raise the bar for academic

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leadership. Therefore, in 2008 a comprehensive review was undertaken of the processes and criteria for academic appointments and promotions with a much stronger emphasis on scholarship. As a result, the criteria became more stringent. The roles of faculty deans and departmental chairpersons were redefined to provide scholarly academic leadership at all levels of the academic project.

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Appendix 3.1

UWC Institutional Operating Plan (IOP): 2010-2014

GOAL 1: HOLISTIC STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AND RESHAPED PROFILE

To strategically attract, retain and enable the development of students in line with our vision and mission, paying particular attention to growth in business, natural and health sciences, and in postgraduate studies.

GOAL 2: TEACHING AND LEARNING

To provide opportunities for an excellent teaching and learning experience that is contextually responsive to the challenges of globalisation and of a society in transition, and which enhances the students' capacities as change agents.

GOAL 3: RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

To enhance UWC as a significant research and innovation university, regionally and internationally engaged with and connected to the public sphere.

GOAL 4: EXCELLENT TALENT

To attract, retain, diversify and develop excellent talent to enable UWC to realise its vision and achieve its strategic goals.

GOAL 5: SUSTAINED FINANCIAL VIABILITY

To develop a strong and diversified financial base to allow the University to make bold moves when opportunities present themselves and to provide a buffer against bad times.

GOAL 6: ENHANCING UWC'S STANDING AND PROFILE

To shape the internal and external standing and profile of UWC as a vibrant institution through the use of diverse communication and marketing strategies to support our goals.

GOAL 7: DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAMPUS AND SURROUNDING AREAS

To strategically influence and develop the campus and surrounding areas, and to develop and maintain a modern, coherent physical and ICT infrastructure.

GOAL 8: ENGAGED LEADERSHIP

To give effective leadership at all levels in order to maintain and develop a vibrant and viable institution of high repute.