

DEAN'S WORD OF WELCOME TO FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS 2015

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"Professor Eloff, why do you love the Faculty of Education so much?", asked a student of mine not too long ago. I was quite startled by the question, because, while I was impressed by her accurate observation, it has not been a question that I have answered before. I do love the Faculty of Education and I love the Groenkloof campus of the University of Pretoria, but I haven't thought much about the reasons.

So let me try to answer it in some way this morning:

* I love the way in which our students come to us in their first year, filled with hope and dreams and determination, and they leave a few years later, fully equipped to go out into the world to make a real difference in the realm of teaching and learning - whether it is with children, adults, in schools or in businesses.

* I love the fact that we work in the field of education. I love that we can wake up with a sense of purpose every morning. Education is an exciting field, it is a dynamic field and there is always something to be done.

* I love to see the faces of the truly remarkable staff in the Faculty of Education - whether it is the friendly faces as I come out of the lift at Academic Administration, the commitment of our professors and lecturers, the dedication of our librarians, or the resolve of our support staff to create an environment in which we all can flourish. I think of them warmly and I am thankful, on a daily basis, to be sharing my professional life with such high calibre colleagues.

* As I walk to my car in the late afternoons, I love to watch the students walking down to the gym or sitting under the trees or chatting at our coffee shop, enjoying the delights of being a student.

* I love the beauty of the Groenkloof campus. I love to sometimes sit on the little benches by the water or to walk the corridors of the Aldoel-building. I love the way the sun sets over the sports grounds in the evenings and I love the way the light shines through the leafy trees in the early morning. I love how you can move, within 50 metres, from a state-of-the-art technology lecture hall, seating 400 students, to small

consultation rooms, where we can have one-one consultations with our students.

* I love that fact that Education as a scientific field at the University of Pretoria have ranked amongst the best in the world since the inception of the QS World rankings for specific fields. We started out in the top 200 in the world, and we have been in the top 150 for the last two years.

* I love the fact that this Faculty has strong networks from Alberta to Perth, from New York to Nairobi, from Amsterdam to Namibia and from ChangChun in China to Washington, DC. These partnerships provide support for our research projects and exciting opportunities for our students.

* I love the fact that the education experts who write the leading books in Education in South Africa are the ones who walk past you on the way to your office. I love the fact that our researchers receive international acclaim for their work, yet they dedicate themselves to working right here on the Groenkloof campus to ensure that the next generation (read: you) will carry forth the ideals of quality education.

* I love the fact that everyone with a passion for Education is welcome here. Welkom. Welcome. Le amogetswe. Ni amukelekile. Amogela. Amohela. Die Groenkloofkampus is 'n plek waar alle studente welkom is en veilig kan studeer.

I can go on. There are many, many ways in which I love this Faculty and it is my hope that you will come to love it in your own way in the years to come.

Some words of advice, because this would not be a proper welcoming without some words of advice.

First: **Don't give up.** I know that by now you would have received many mini-speeches from those who love you on this topic. I am here to tell you again: Don't give up. When I say "don't give up", I don't only mean, don't give up on your studies. I mean, don't give up on your dreams. As you sit here today, on this hot and balmy January morning in Pretoria, you have ideas and dreams that are yours and yours alone. You may, or may not have voiced it yet. Keep it alive, no matter what happens. I do also mean, that you should not give up on your studies. It is extremely easy to give up and it can be very tough to keep going when

the obstacles arrive. This is true for all your years of study. There is a lot of focus on the first year of study, but the second and third years can be equally challenging. Keep going and don't give up. This is a marathon, not a sprint. You can stop for a moment to catch your breath, but you should keep going.

Second: **Phone home.** Keep connected to your family and your loved ones. Yes, this is a time of increased independence in your life and you do need to take more responsibility for your own life. You will be making your own decisions. When you make mistakes you will have to dust yourself off and try again, this time perhaps being a little bit wiser. But, as you do so, keep in touch with those who love you. I know for many of you, you just can't wait to be away and do your own thing right now, but trust me - you will miss them. So keep in touch.

Third: **Do something meaningful every day.** Your days will be filled with lectures and practicals and assignments and socials and sport and culture. You will escape into Whatsapp, Facebook, iTunes and watching *Modern Family* or vines. Your time will be taken up by many demands. So it is up to you, to carve out the space to do something meaningful every day. Something that is important to you. It can be something small, but it should be there and you should tend to it.

We have received 3 957 applications for studies in our Faculty of Education. We have accepted and admitted 2 424 new students - the ones who have met the entrance requirements. You are amongst the top young students in the country. Amongst you are 142 international students and you come from all nine provinces in South Africa. I hope that you will use this opportunity to forge new friendships, to seek new opportunities and to become actively involved in student life at the University of Pretoria. Get to know your professors. They are some of the best you will ever meet. They will guide you through key moments in your life and they may spark ideas in you that can change your life for the better.

Last night you went to bed as former matriculants and tomorrow morning you will all wake up as students of the University of Pretoria. What a marvelous moment.

To our parents: tomorrow morning you will wake up and there will be many things going through your mind. Longing and nostalgia for a childhood that has ended, but also hope for the future that awaits your child. I know, because I myself am a mother of two young students.

You have done well. The fact that your child has been accepted at this university is testament to your dedication as a parent.

I want to end by sharing with you parts of a message that one of our fourth year students posted on Instagram last year on the 4th of December as she was leaving the campus for the last time as an undergraduate student. She posted a picture taken of the entrance to the Groenkloof campus, in the car mirror. Her name is Nicole Adams.

"4 years at TUKS (@TuksEducation) have come & gone! I can finally say I'm GRADUATING and a Qualified Educator! Thank you to friends & family for your words of encouragement throughout! The BIGGEST thank you to my parents for making it possible for me to study again & for all their motivation, support & patience and believing in me! I'm grateful for the friendships made too. This journey I definitely don't regret embarking on, the small confirmations and rewards throughout the years have proven so. This year, my teaching prac year, was the highlight for me. Various moments just made me realise I was meant to be in a classroom... That was when I just knew I was born to educate...! So excited for this new chapter I'm about to embark on.... I'm blessed to not only graduate with 4 distinctions, also got accepted into Honours as well as have a job for next year! Hard work seriously does pay off! #borntoeducate #happy #graduating"

I look forward to reading your messages in four years time. Until then: enjoy the journey.

Hashtag: Welcome.

Irma Eloff
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