

## **UCT is not for sale - Dr Russell Ally**

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Executive Director of Development and Alumni responds to Graham McIntosh's missives

### **UCT response to "UCT should take a stand against racism" - Graham McIntosh, 9 September 2015**

Twice now I have received emails from Graham McIntosh in my capacity as the head of the Development and Alumni Department at the University of Cape Town. On both occasions these emails were subsequently published in Politicsweb as open letters, although they were addressed personally to me. Until now I have resisted the temptation to respond publicly – mainly because I have replied privately to Mr McIntosh, as every responsible head of an alumni department should do when an alumnus does you the courtesy of writing to you directly.

Unfortunately, however, the present circumstances force me to also go public, as it were, because Mr McIntosh's emails have generated so much publicity - maybe the original intention all along - but also to prove that I really do exist (even if Mr McIntosh paints me, graciously no less, as a straw man). And moreover, that I exist as a person of principle.

UCT's Development and Alumni Department exists for two main reasons: to raise funding for the university, and to keep alumni connected to their alma mater and informed about what is happening at the university. The two are obviously related: we hope that our alumni not only remain engaged and committed to their alma mater, but that they will also consider making donations to the university. And many of our alumni do, for which we are sincerely appreciative.

Most of the funding we raise goes towards bursaries and other forms of support for students who would otherwise not have the financial means to study at UCT. We pride ourselves on the fact that we have a 'needs-blind' student admission policy. If a student is academically eligible to study at UCT, we do not turn that student away on financial grounds. We make every effort to find the money for that student to study at the university. This is core to our transformation mission. And the only criterion we apply is financial need. Of course, given our historical legacy, the majority of students we provide bursaries for are black students, but we also have a number of poor white students on bursaries.

Our bursary programme is close to R500 million a year and we are able to offer these bursaries mainly because of the generosity of our alumni and other donors.

When an alumnus therefore comes forward and says that he is considering leaving a substantial bequest to the university (in this case Mr McIntosh), but that he is concerned about how the university is dealing with transformation, then the responsible thing is to invite the alumnus to engage with the university leadership. And that is what the university leadership did -- no more, no less, which is indicative of the seriousness with which we take

our role of raising funding for the university to ensure that we are able to offer places to the brightest young minds in our country regardless of their financial status.

Now comes the part where I disappoint my late mother, who always advised me never to look a gift horse in the mouth. At UCT, we not only make sure the horse is not an ass, but - if you will pardon the clumsy mixed metaphor – we make doubly sure that we are also not taken for a ride.

Mr McIntosh may indeed have tens of millions to leave as a bequest. And we certainly hope that he will consider leaving some of these tens of millions to UCT, if he genuinely wants to offer opportunities for disadvantaged students to study there – opportunities that the old dispensation made possible only for a privileged minority.

But UCT is not for sale. And UCT will certainly not accept donations that stand in contrast to the values we uphold. We never allow donors to dictate the terms of their donations to us. It is always a relationship of mutual respect, based on shared values of fairness, equity, social justice and transformation. Underlying this partnership is always (and uncompromisingly) a commitment to excellence.

Mr McIntosh, you have always been exceedingly polite towards me personally. And I may be biting the hand that has yet to feed me, but sir, we have embarked on a process of transformation at UCT from which there is no turning back. Not for all the bequests in the world. Removing the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from its ill-conceived place of prominence at UCT was a necessary step in this journey. And we will continue with this process, which will be characterised by inclusivity, transparency and accountability.

Most of our alumni who have benefited so greatly from their alma mater do not make their support of the university conditional upon the university bending to their wills. They understand that a university is a complex place with many competing interests and that it is the pursuit of knowledge which is paramount in the end, not the feeding of individual egos.

With or without your endowment, UCT will continue to pursue transformation as an integral part of academic excellence. For us you cannot have the one without the other. Your endowment could undoubtedly make a huge contribution towards this effort —but only if it is given as a commitment to a real partnership. In the spirit in which you presently propose to make your gift, I'm afraid it will seriously undermine the advances we have made. And no gift is worth compromising our integrity for, even less sacrificing our future for.

If you decide sometime that you want to be on the right side of history, I will look out for your email in Politicsweb. Regardless, you will always remain an alumnus. And my responsibility will be to continue to engage with you.

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