

Alumni say 'no' to renaming Rhodes

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31 Jul 2017

Discussions over transformation "including a name change" were in the spotlight at Rhodes University this weekend, as the Rhodes University Alumni Trust released the findings of a recent survey.



Rhodes University - [Facebook](#)

The survey asked former students what they thought should be done to ensure transformation at the institution.

The survey of 2013 participants from across the globe showed that 79% of people surveyed did not believe a name change was necessary for transformation while 73% said they were strongly against it, with 56% claiming they could not identify any benefit to changing the name of Rhodes University.

The participants of the survey include alumni who attended Rhodes from as far back as the 1950s, with 45% having attended in the new millennium.

The survey showed that there was a strong emotional attachment to the Rhodes brand and that the surveyed alumni thought there was more to lose than to gain by rebranding.

Rhodes Alumni Trust USA chairman Donovan Neale-May, who graduated from Rhodes in 1973 and is now based in California, said name changes were always a subject of intense debate, adding that rebranding the already financially burdened institution would create hardship with little value or positive outcome.

"Rebranding is in vogue among transformation-minded universities in emerging countries with colonial roots," he said.

"Over 2000 diverse alumni of Rhodes University in South Africa have rejected the idea, but it appears the process has a head of steam and the political dynamic is conducive.

"Most participants in this process have no idea of the enormous cost, complexity and distraction it entails."

Neale-May said the university could do a much better job of positioning itself globally as a quality, post-graduate research institution with centres of excellence that produced significant scientific knowledge, thought leadership and insights across a range of disciplines.

Rhodes spokeswoman Veliswa Mhlope said the university was aware of the survey "as it is part of the transformation summit process under the institutional identity theme, which includes the future of the name of the institution".

"As part of the transformation participation process, alumni consultations were also held in Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Perth Australia, Namibia, Knysna, Grahamstown, East London and Port Elizabeth and convocation was brought forward in the lead up to the summit," she said.

The Rhodes transformation summit, which started on Friday and ended yesterday, involved students, staff, alumni and stakeholders discussing input and recommendations on a range of issues including living and learning spaces, community, disability, gender and sexuality, budget, student funding, research, teaching and learning, visual representation and culture, alumni, language, labour and the institution.

Rhodes vice-chancellor Dr Sizwe Mabizela said the summit was a great opportunity for the university to "pull together and chart a new course for ourselves".

"Through the transformation summit, we have an opportunity, collectively, to rethink and reimagine our place, purpose and value as an institution of higher learning. At the end of this summit, we need to emerge with an institution that is even better than the one we have," he said.

"It is important that whatever decision we take regarding all these key issues, we have a financially sustainable institution, a university worth the name that continues to provide quality education."

Source: Herald