

HOT TOPIC: FeesMustFall campus disruptions

Now our graduates need a future

DURING the course of last year, at a time when it did not appear that we would complete the academic year at NMMU, the silent majority began the process of salvaging the academic year. I am one of those “silent majority”.

We did not hold any mass meetings or marches, nor did we know what we as individuals were doing – where we were meeting our students, how we had to use Whatsapp groups to communicate, provide accommodation, meals and so forth. We went about the business of providing the space for our young people to complete their studies.

In most instances we went the proverbial extra mile and way beyond our job descriptions. We delivered on our obligations as responsible citizens in a democracy.

We, the silent majority, were united –

as cleaners, academics, administrators, parents, students, the community at large – for the common good. I know I reflected on the situation.

I also had students from every culture, race, creed and gender contacting me and insisting that they wanted to learn, and parents who wished for their children to complete their studies. The sheer numbers of students who wrote their exams in November-December attest to this desire to complete their studies.

I also knew that if my students from low socio-economic areas did not make it, the consequences would be devastating, not only for them, but for their families. It would also be devastating for middle-class students whose parents had taken out loans.

It would also be devastating for

students on bursaries. It was a no-win situation all round.

I had to be responsible and do the right thing. The majority had similar thoughts, because we did the right thing.

We persevered and found inner strength to ensure that students completed the academic year.

The economic policies that impact on job creation will need to be addressed by those more qualified. That is the next step – our qualified students need jobs and, more importantly, they need to be creators of jobs.

As academics we need to scrutinise our curricula to ensure that our students are adaptable. Professor Derrick Swartz raised a very valid point in his welcoming address: our graduates need the skills to be more flexible to

adapt to an ever-changing environment.

It is not my intention to debate the merits of a university education versus not having one. Clem Sunter in his book, *Pretoria will Provide and Other Myths*, is eloquent on the topic.

I am also not pursuing a discussion on economics. The purposes of this letter are manifold.

To list a few reasons: I salute the broader NMMU community for successfully completing the academic project and I salute Swartz for his boldness in speaking as a responsible leader in a democratic country. I agree with him that we do need to find creative solutions to solve the challenge of funding higher education.

As a fellow scholar of democracy, I, like him, support the basic tenets of democracy. Among others, these are the

rule of law, the foundations of freedom and justice, responsibility and respect for diversity.

Therefore, like Swartz, I do not support or encourage activities that are unlawful, in gross violation of our constitution and border on sedition. I do not support activities that would make criminals of our students placed in our care.

I, along with many others, would like to see our students and graduates thrive and be successful, responsible citizens who make a positive contribution in a democratic society. I would like to rephrase W B Yeats: I hope this new year will see a turn of the tide, where the best of us are filled with passionate intensity and conviction.

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