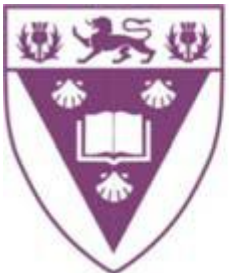

RHODES UNIVERSITY

INVESTEC BUSINESS SCHOOL

The value of a Rhodes University Degree and Securing Employment

By

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ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
CHE	Council for Higher Education
CHET	Council for Higher Education and Transformation
DoE	Department of Education
EAP	Economically Active Population
HBU	Historically Black University
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HWU	Historically White University
NCHE	National Commission for Higher Education
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
DMU	Data Management Unit (Rhodes University)

Declaration

I, Tracy Laura Chambers, hereby declare that this research thesis is my own original work, that all reference sources have been accurately reported and acknowledged, and that this document has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted to any University in order to obtain an academic qualification.

T L Chambers 16 January 2010

Abstract

In South Africa, reform policies and frameworks introduced since the 1994 democratic election have sought to bring about change to a highly ineffective and unfair system. In spite of all the changes which have occurred, however, there is evidence to suggest that the system is still not functioning as effectively as it might, given that a relatively large number of graduates remain unemployed in a country with a high skills shortage. This thesis aims to explore the experiences of graduates from one university, Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape, as they enter the job market. It does this through the administration of a first job destination survey administered at the 2009 Graduation Ceremonies held in Grahamstown.

Analysis of the survey takes into account the idea that it is not a degree *per se*, or even a degree from a prestigious university which brings employment, but also the social, cultural and human capital that graduates can bring to their job search.

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Explanation of terms

Demographical terms:

Black: refers collectively to Africans, Coloured and Indians.
White**:** refers to people of European descent with the Chinese as "honorary Whites".
African: refers to indigenous people of South Africa.
Coloured: refers to people of mixed origin.
Indian/Asian: refers to people of Asian descent.

Other terms used:

Higher Education System – comprises the twenty-one public higher education institutions.

Higher Education institutions – unless otherwise stated comprises the eleven traditional public universities.

Private Higher Education: for-profit higher education institutions.

Throughput rate or graduation rate: the average rate at which students complete the qualification.

Participation rate: the participation rate is the percentage enrolments of 18-24 year olds into higher education.

Success rate: the ratio of exams passed to the number of exams written.

Graduate: a student who has qualified for a 1st degree.

Employability: the 'potential' to be employed.

Attrition rate: the rate at which student's drop-out of institutions or the system as a whole.

CHAPTER 1: Background to study

1.1 Introduction

Since 1994, much of the focus of higher education in South Africa has been on increasing student enrolments in an attempt to overcome the inequalities of the past (DoE, 2001a). While the majority of universities have been successful in increasing enrolments so that they are more representative of the demographics of the country, the gross participation rate of 16% is still one of the lowest in the world (Cloete, 2009b). In the context of the need for 'high skills' (Brown, Green and Lauder, 2001) in the new global economy, this low participation rate arguably contributes to the alarmingly high unemployment rate in South Africa. In 2007, due to a highly constrained labour market for school leavers, 750 000 students in the age group 18-24 were not in education, training, or employment, and this claims Cloete (2009a) is "an educational and social disaster".

However, employment of graduates also appears to be a problem. In 2006, the South African Graduate Development Association (SAGDA) reported that South Africa had 30 000 unemployed graduates (Garrun, 2006). A recent article in the Mail and Guardian (2008), moreover, claims that many of those who were historically disadvantaged before entering tertiary education experience further disadvantage after graduation in that many are unable to find employment. Besides the normal supply and demand factors of the labour market, other factors including varying levels of social and cultural capital, broader social dynamics, fields of study, employers' perceptions regarding the value and quality of degrees from different institutions and work readiness (Moleke, 2005a) are factors which differentiate amongst those seeking employment.

In the context of graduate preparedness, globalisation has brought the need for higher education to be more responsive to the need for high quality skills, especially in some 'scarce skill' areas, if the country's social and economic needs are to be met (DoE, 2001a). In many respects, this relates to the 'commodification' of knowledge associated with the new global economy and in a relinquishing of the Enlightenment idea of knowledge as absolute truth (Muller, 2000). This brings new challenges at all levels in institutions of higher education. Although the South African higher education system has had to respond to issues related to globalisation, there has also been a need to be mindful of the country's status as a fledgling democracy and of the role higher education has to play in contributing to the 'public good' (Singh, 2003) through the creation of a critical citizenry.

Since 1994, therefore, the South African higher education system has been subject to ongoing processes of transformation which have included policy development, the introduction of new frameworks and a series of mergers which have reconfigured the institutional landscape. Transformation challenges have affected universities in different ways, but all have been required to respond at profound levels.

As Chapter 2 of this thesis will describe in more detail, Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape, has been historically privileged because of its status as a white, English-speaking liberal university and part of its reputation is undoubtedly due to this privilege. At the same time, however, the University is also renowned for its high levels of scholarship and the quality of the graduates it has produced. Since 1994, the University has had to respond to policy and other demands at nearly every level. In some ways, the University has changed

enormously. As Chapter 2 will show, for example, the composition of its student population is very different in 2009 from what it was in 1994. In other respects the University has chosen not to respond to change. At the level of curriculum, for example, it chose to continue to offer the dual major formative degree rather than move towards more vocationally based programmes preferred by many other institutions.

Rhodes University admits students from what might be termed the 'upper end' of the matriculation pool. Given the configuration of the South African schooling system and the fact that, fifteen years after apartheid, the quality of schooling available is still linked to social class and thus to race, the ability to gain a place at the University is linked to social privilege. Although there has been a huge increase in the number of Black students admitted to the University, on the whole the student body tends to draw heavily on middle class backgrounds because of entrance requirements.

Claims are made by Rhodes University regarding the value of its degrees. "Rhodes produces outstanding graduates who are sought after and make a vital contribution to human and social development. The University takes pride in its motto, "Where Leaders Learn", and producing graduates who are knowledgeable intellectuals, skilled professionals, and critical, caring and compassionate citizens who can contribute to economic and social development and an equitable, just and democratic society" (Badat, 2009a).

The extent to which graduates from the University find jobs, which of those graduates find jobs and how they find jobs is a test of the claims made regarding the value of the degree.

1.3 Research Goals and Questions

Given the changes to higher education in South Africa, and the data on graduate unemployment cited above, this thesis aims to explore the experiences of graduates of one university, Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape, as they enter the job market. As it does this, the study aims to explore graduands' perceptions of the value of the degree awarded by the University in the light of their experience in the job market and, also, to gain some insights into the effect of the social background of graduands on job-seeking behaviours and success. More specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What do holders of three-year Bachelor degrees from Rhodes University do once they complete their programmes of study?
2. In what ways might social background impact on the experiences of the graduating cohort either in seeking employment or choosing to study further?
3. What can this information tell us about the value of a Rhodes degree?

1.4 Thesis Organisation

The thesis is organised into five chapters.

- Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to the study.
- Chapter 2 contextualises the study. In order to understand the challenges facing the higher education system in South Africa, change at global and national levels is discussed and the development and implementation of policy intended to address these changes reviewed. Having surveyed the higher education landscape more generally, the chapter focuses on the way one South African university, Rhodes

University, used as a ‘case’ in the study, has confronted change and engaged with policy. Given the observation made earlier in this chapter that social and cultural capital appear to be implicated in the employment prospects of graduates, Chapter 2 then moves into a discussion of social, cultural and human capital theories in order to better understand how these factors affect Rhodes University graduates entering the labour market.

- Chapter 3 introduces the research methodology and describes the way the research was conducted.

- Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the data and the research findings.

- Chapter 5 offers some concluding remarks and identifies directions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: Understanding Higher Education

2.1. Introduction

This section provides a review of previous research on the South African higher education landscape in order to gain an understanding of the changes that have taken place. The chapter therefore serves to provide a context for the study on which this thesis is based.

2.2. Change in Higher Education

"One thing we can be sure about, change is constant".
(Anonymous)

Although change in higher education has not been restricted to South Africa alone, public higher education in South Africa has had to confront challenges to change which have been shaped by the impacts of the technological evolution and the country emerging from the apartheid era. Following the shift to democracy in 1994, much of the literature on South Africa's higher education system highlights the need for change in order to provide for a democratic society and to rid institutions of higher education of some of the politically-driven structures and policies steering the system.

Change in South African public higher education has been wide-ranging, from the fundamental reorganisation of the distribution and character of higher education institutions (Jansen, 2003) to the redesign of higher education curricula governed by a national qualifications authority (Ensor, 2002).

Some of the changes in higher education have been driven by the Department of Education (DoE) through the implementation of policies and legislation, some by new forms of

leadership within the universities themselves (CHE, 2007). Some of the most significant drivers of change have included:

- The emergence of new modes of delivery thanks to advances in information technology (Kraak, 2000).

- The emergence of private providers of higher education, most of whom offer commercial and business courses (Jansen, 2003).

- Acknowledgement of the need for shifts in the size and shape of the higher education system overall. Previously, the size and shape of the higher education landscape had largely been dictated by the "geo-political imagination of apartheid planners" (Asmal, 1999). After apartheid, a founding policy document on higher education – *A Framework for Transformation* (produced by the National Commission on Higher Education in 1996) made the case for fundamental change to the size and shape of higher education in South Africa.

- The changing needs of students. Students themselves are forcing change on higher education as they no longer study at university for academic interest alone but demand transferable skills which are flexible, adaptable and can span multi-faceted career paths (Corkill, 2007).

- The changing organisation of university management and governance. This is not confined to South Africa alone but is considered an outcome of a broader neo-liberal discourse (Jansen, 2003) which has altered the relationship between the state, civil society and universities throughout the world (Webster and Mosoetsa, 2001). The

growing emphasis on measurement, accountability, competitiveness, and of government funding being linked to the performance of institutions has challenged the autonomy and the traditional role of universities, resulting in managerialism in higher education (Webster and Mosoetsa, 2001).

- The principles underpinning higher education. These have primarily been based on increasing participation and have, unfortunately, sometimes been in contradiction with quality. This has brought into question the effectiveness of higher education and what it is able to deliver to society as a whole (Strydom and Strydom, 2004).

- Changing notions of the role to be played by public higher education. These have ranged between understandings of higher education as a commodity which can be traded freely and as a public good (Jansen, 2003). Although the role of higher education as a public good has traditionally enjoyed prominence, there is a view that higher education should be regarded as, simply, another form of economic trade (*ibid*.). This has resulted in universities competing for the best students. It has also resulted in an increase in the number of private providers, and in the increasing interest of public institutions in business education, resulting in more students selecting business and commercial sciences as their preferred field of study. As noted by Ntshoe (2004), the competitive quasi-marketisation in public higher education often undermines the role of education as a public good.

- Government and industry concerns regarding shortages of skills in the area of science, engineering and technology (SET) has resulted in calls for the focus and value of

higher education programmes to shift from the humanities to science, engineering and technology (SET).

- Perceptions related to the value of higher education programmes. These have resulted in the rise of the economic sciences and a corresponding decline of the humanities. The decline in enrolments in humanities has necessitated the termination and restructuring of certain humanities programmes. Jansen (2003) cites a combination of factors explaining the decline in the humanities programmes and the subsequent retrenching of humanities academics which has resulted in an erosion of a culture of critical and creative thought in the social sciences and humanities.

2.3. The Vision for Higher Education in South Africa

In the Preamble to the Constitution, the vision for higher education is stated as to "improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person." The strategic objective of higher education was identified by the Minister of Education, Prof Kader Asmal (2004) to:

> "Produce graduates who are well rounded and thoroughly grounded; who are skilled and competent; who are creative, flexible and adaptive to new challenges; who are adept in critical thinking and cultural literacy; who are enabled and empowered to participate fully in their economy, their society and their globalising world".

The White Paper on Higher Education (DoE, 1997) set out to establish a policy framework which sought to address the inequalities of the past and establish a coherent system that would be better able to face the challenges of the future. The goals of higher education are stated as:

"To meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes throughout their lives. Higher education equips individuals to make the best use of their talents and of the opportunities offered by society for self-fulfilment. It is thus a key allocator of life chances, an important vehicle for achieving equity in the distribution of opportunity and achievement among South Africans.

To address the development needs of society and provide the labour market, in a knowledge driven and knowledge dependent society, with the ever-changing high level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy. Higher education teaches and trains people to fulfil specialised social functions, enter the learned professions, or pursue vocations in administration, trade, industry, science, technology, and the arts.

So too, it contributes to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens. Higher education encourages the development of a reflective capacity, and a willingness to review and renew prevailing ideas, policies and practices based on a commitment to the common good.

To contribute to the creation and evaluation of knowledge, higher education engages in the pursuit of academic scholarship and intellectual inquiry in all fields of human understanding, through research, learning and teaching" (DoE, 1997:7-8).

2.4. The Role of Higher Education

In order to understand the challenges facing universities, it is necessary to understand the core characteristics of universities and how their roles have been challenged.

2.4.1. Core Characteristics and Roles of the University

According to Badat (2007), universities:

- produce and disseminate knowledge which advances our understanding of our natural and social worlds, and enriches our accumulated 'cultural inheritances' and heritage;
- cultivate and form the cognitive character of students;
- must be committed 'to the spirit of truth' and to allow intellectual inquiry 'to go where it will';
- must possess the necessary academic freedom, self-rule and institutional autonomy to effectively produce and disseminate knowledge.

Manuel Castells (2001:206) describes universities as "dynamic systems of contradictory functions" which perform four major functions. Historically they have played a major role as ideological apparatuses and, as such, they are subject to the "conflicts and contradictions of society and therefore they will tend to express – and even to amplify – the ideological struggles present in all societies" (Castells, 2001:211). Secondly, universities have always been mechanisms to select dominant elites. Thirdly, universities play a role in the generation of new knowledge. Finally, universities have focused on training the bureaucracy. Castells (2001) argues that the balance between these functions changes. Because universities are social systems and

historically constructed, all these functions take place simultaneously, although with different emphases. It is therefore not possible to have "a pure or quasi-pure model of universities" (Castells 2001:211). Castells (2001:212) concludes: "the real issue is… to create institutions solid enough and dynamic enough to stand the tensions that will necessarily trigger the simultaneous performance of somewhat contradictory functions".

Pursuing these goals requires that universities are both elite and mass training institutions whose goal is to provide skills to as much of the population as possible (Brennan, 2006). This poses the question of whether universities should be providing a broad general education, whereby the skills learnt are transferable in order to prepare students for the labour market or whether universities are required to equip students so that they are fully-qualified for a particular position in the labour market (Brennan, 2006).

2.4.2. Knowledge as a 'public good'

In contrast to the idea of universities as providers of future employees, Singh (2003) argues that the university must contribute to the 'public good'. In order to do this, the state needs to guarantee a measure of autonomy and academic freedom to institutions, and yet ensure effective accountability. The university must serve, as Singh (2003) puts it, as a "discursive community, enabling society discourses and their associated interests to assert their claims and concerns in a context where other more powerfully driven discourses are seeking to shape the meanings of the knowledge society" (Singh, 2003:5).

The literature pertaining to universities as institutions contributing to the 'public good' acknowledges that, for this to happen, a curriculum which goes beyond professional and vocational training is required if graduates are to be prepared for world citizenship (Habermas, 1972). Secondly, a compulsory policy of incorporating more people into education is required so that knowledge cannot be consolidated as intellectual property amongst a few. This is the epistemic point of "affirmative action" (Fuller, 2005).

2.4.3. Social Transformation

In South Africa, the period since 1994 has seen much of the democratic government's agenda being focused on change and transformation. It is in this context that the state's demand that universities act as critical instruments to bring about change must be seen. This requires that universities contribute towards the economic and socio-political transformation along democratic and more equitable lines. As Reddy (2004) notes, under the conditions inherited from apartheid, this requires that procedural changes to the higher education 'system' are implemented, and then regulated and co-ordinated by the state. What is also evident from the literature is that the relationship between higher education and the state changed dramatically after 1994 in that the state recognised that a higher-education system that privileges some and continues to disadvantage others is not sustainable. The state therefore requires higher education to play a pivotal role in social transformation; justifiably so, as, if the state is to be the major investor in higher education, then the state is entitled to require some clear deliverables in return.

However, Badat (2007) criticises the highly unrealistic expectation placed on higher education as an instrument of social transformation, and points out:

> "Higher learning is less the education of the intellect in what to think as much as how to think. And in as much as universities must take their point of departure as the social and moral imperatives that flow from our apartheid legacy and our Constitution, and engage with the pressing development challenges of our society and continent, they cannot, however, on their own transform society. This requires political and social programmes and interventions through principled political leadership and a developmental state. Universities can through their core functions, and under appropriate conditions, only contribute to social transformation, and perhaps given their nature, even this in only contradictory ways" (Badat, 2007).

2.4.4. Economic Responsiveness

For many students attending university the expectation is that, by acquiring a degree, employment will follow, or that at least their chances of employment will have increased. Some would argue that many students attend university for this very reason and, should employment not follow, then it is surmised that higher education has failed in its role. However, as this chapter has tried to indicate, the role of higher education is in itself more complex than that single factor in that its function is not solely to supply the labour market with high-level skilled graduates, but also to provide society with people who can engage with a variety of social, political, cultural

and community roles. In short, universities are required to produce graduates who are socially productive as critical and democratic citizens (CHE, 2000), as well as who are economically responsive. As Asmal (2002) points out, a primary function of higher education institutions is to provide society with the tools for liberation and to support the government's commitment to improve the quality of life of its citizens.

2.4.5. Contradictions of Roles

The objectives set out in the South African Constitution hold many contradictions for higher education and are termed by Singh (2003) the "antinomies of demand for change and continuity". As Singh (2001) also points out:

> "Some critics seriously misconceive the core purposes and functions of universities and appear to seek a populist (and essentially conservative) redefinition of their role. In the name of responsiveness, universities must serve purely utilitarian ends and become instruments of the economy, the labour market and skills production."

However, as she goes on to point out:

> "The responsiveness of universities cannot only be economic in character; especially in a developing democracy, it has to be of a more complex and wider social character" (Singh, 2001 in Badat, 2007).

Moja (2004) argues that the varying and complex roles of universities need not be inherently contradictory, but in a country with deep class, race and gender divisions they are, and this has resulted in these roles frequently pulling in opposite directions.

What has resulted is a very complex and diverse higher education sector in which, as Cloete *et al.* (2002:237) point out, universities are having to:

- Diversify their income streams with less reliance on government funding.
- Reconfigure their institutional missions and ways in which they traditionally produced, packaged and disseminated their primary product – knowledge – in order to meet the challenges of a diversifying student population, as well as an increasingly technologically-orientated and globalising economy.
- Forge new relationships with other knowledge producers both within and outside of higher education, especially in industry and the private sector.
- Ensure a system which is both effective and efficient to ensure improved educational outcomes and value for money.
- Ensure an overall capacity to respond flexibly and selectively to changes taking place within knowledge domains of the university world itself (Ferreira, 2003).

At the same time as meeting the imperatives identified above, South African universities have also had to deal with issues related to the under-preparedness of students. According to some commentators (see, for example, Fuller, 2005), the quality of the schooling system has declined significantly over the past decade and has resulted in higher education assuming the role previously performed by the secondary educational sector. As a result, it is argued that universities are now performing a remedial function in order to compensate for deficiencies at the lower educational levels.

From the discussion above, it is clear that the functions and role of the university have become blurred, if not contradictory, as changes occurring in the country and abroad have placed greater expectations - from both government and society - on the higher education system. This has resulted in higher education grappling to deliver on the objectives set by different stakeholders and brings into question the key role and function of the University in the 21st century which is seen, too narrowly, as providing people with the skills and competencies required by industry (Badat, 2008).

This is not to say that these skills and competencies are unimportant. The question, however, is to what extent the higher education system is responsible for preparing individuals for particular occupations and how much higher education is expected to bring about the social transformation so deeply desired and needed in South Africa.

2.5. South African Higher Education

This section focuses on the fragmented higher education sector which was inherited by the democratic government in 1994. It looks at the reform policies and frameworks which aim at ensuring equity and the social transformation necessary for a democratic society and which were introduced to bring about change in a highly ineffective system.

2.5.1. Education under Apartheid

For decades South African universities served the ideological purposes of apartheid and this resulted in a diverse, unequal and discriminatory system. Under the Nationalist Party pre-1994, the South African state organised civil society along the lines of "race" and ethnicity. Those classified as Black were expected to assume roles expressing subordination to secure the basis of White privilege and superiority. The Nationalist Party structured universities around different racial and language groups and ensured inequality through the allocation of unequal funding and resources. This was not unique to higher education as the same principles were applied throughout the educational system. As a result, figures for 1991 show that, of the 323 000 students enrolled in South African universities overall, more than 50% were White (or 3.5% per 1000 of the White population) and only 23% were African (or 0.5% per 1000 of the African population) (Vally, 1998). On the eve of democracy, the gross participation rate for Africans enrolled in higher education at South African universities was approximately 9% compared to approximately 70% for Whites (Jansen, 2001).

While the education system was aimed at preparing White children for positions of leadership, it also aimed to train Blacks for employment in low-level occupations. This was evident in the difference in expenditure on education, with more being spent on White

learners than any other student. In 1993 the *per capita* education expenditure was R1 659 for Black learners, R2 902 for coloured learners, R3 702 for Indian learners and R4 732 for White learners (Wolhuter, 2004).

In 1994, when South Africa started its transition to democracy, the new African National Congress (ANC) government inherited a fragmented, divided and unequal higher education sector which comprised twenty-one universities and fifteen technikons. The system therefore required restructuring around a clear set of goals aimed at transformation. The twenty-one universities were made up of ten generously funded 'historically White' universities, organised into Afrikaans and English-language sectors; seven universities for Africans; the University of the Western Cape for Coloured students and the University of Durban-Westville for Indians.

With segregated universities for Blacks and Whites, the differences between the universities were vast. As the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA, 2001:1) observes:

> "Gross distortions and inequities existed in the system as manifested by inequitable distribution of resources to institutions; enormous disparities between historically Black and historically White institutions, and a skewed distribution of the student population in the disciplines with only a handful of non-White (sic) students in fields such as sciences, engineering, technology, business and commerce".

The abolition of apartheid in 1994 provided South Africa's higher education system with an opportunity to respond to the changes necessary to "overcome the material and psychological

poverty suffered by the majority of citizens which disadvantages them in exercising the rights enshrined in the new constitution and accessing the resources available to society" Reddy (2004:68). This called for greater participation (especially from Black South Africans), greater responsiveness by higher education institutions and improved governance to eradicate the inefficiencies of the system.

From 1994 to 1999, through the introduction of new policies and legislative frameworks, government and higher education made significant progress in addressing the imbalances of the past. The National Commission on Higher Education (NHCE) (1996) became the policy platform for the development of higher education in South Africa. Its mandate was to advise the Minister of Education on how to implement a policy on higher education that would allow "higher education to play a pivotal role in the political, economic and cultural reconstruction and development of South Africa" (NCHE 1996:1). In 1996, an extensive report prepared by the Commission set out proposals to reform the higher education sector. The major recommendations of the NCHE report informed the Green Paper on Higher Education (DoE, 1996), the Draft White Paper on Higher Education (DoE, 1997) and finally the White Paper on Higher Education (DoE, 1997). The White Paper, entitled *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education,* identified increased participation, greater responsiveness and increased co-operation and partnerships as strategies for the future (Bundy, 2006). The National Plan on Higher Education (DoE, 2001b) then identified a set of specific goals. Together with the Higher Education Act, 1997 and the South African Qualifications Act, 1995, the National Plan became one of a set of core higher education policy documents which established a framework for systematic steering of the sector through planning, regulation and funding with a particular focus on quality (SAQA, 2000).

In order to maximise integration and diversity, promote equity and increase access (DoE, 1997), South African higher education institutions underwent fundamental reorganisation through a series of mergers and incorporations. The twenty-one universities and fifteen technikons either remained as they were, or were re-classified or merged with other universities and/or technikons, resulting in the public higher education sector comprising twenty-two institutions. This means that the sector currently comprises eleven traditional universities, five universities of technology and six comprehensive universities (offering both technikon and university type programmes). As emphasized in the National Plan:

> "...the rationale for restructuring the higher education system is to ensure the fitness of purpose both of the system and of the individual institutions. The fact is the higher education system is currently not operating efficiently in terms of its core mandate, i.e. the production of knowledge and graduates. In this context, the starting point for restructuring the higher education system must be to ensure that higher education institutions, as they are structured, become more efficient and effective, before embarking on new roles and functions." (DoE, 2001b:59)

Despite the reshaping of the higher education institutional landscape through mergers, White students remain concentrated at the historically White universities with little or no entry of White students into the historically Black institutions (Badat, 2008). Today institutions are referred to as "historically advantaged" or "historically White" universities (HAUs / HWUs) and "historically disadvantaged" or "historically Black" universities (HDUs / HBUs) due to the fact that institutions continue to have different capacities brought about by the financial

resources that were made available, and by the social and academic roles that were respectively allocated to each under apartheid (*ibid.*).

The collapse of the apartheid state has constituted a fundamentally different relationship between the state and the higher education sector in South Africa and this has consequently changed the role of higher education institutions. In the post-1994 period, government has achieved much in the form of legislative policy to transform higher education institutions and to make them more socially responsive and critically engaged in deepening and broadening South Africa's democracy (Reddy, 2004).

2.5.2. Re-design of Higher Education curricula

Another fundamental change which took place involved the redesign of higher education curricula.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was formed to establish a certification framework regulated by the state which would recognise educational qualifications from pre-primary level to tertiary level into a single system of certification (SAQA, 1996).

At the same time as a single qualification framework supporting a programme-based approach to higher education was developed, an effective regulatory environment was created and a quality assurance system was introduced. The regulatory environment and quality assurance system contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the framework (Reddy, 2004).

2.5.3. Outcomes Based Education

Since teaching was previously authoritarian in nature and was concerned with the transmission of information and learning with the retention of facts (Ensor, 2002), Outcomes Based Education (OBE) was identified as a means of overcoming poor educational outcomes at school levels (DoE, 2003). OBE was accepted and introduced to drive the new curriculum, Curriculum 2005, in a system in which both educators and learners become responsible for the achievement of learning outcomes. OBE involves a shift from teacher-centred practices to learner-centred practices, is consistent with constructivist educational perspectives and aims at developing higher-order cognitive abilities. The Revised National Curriculum Statements aim is to develop people who are critical, independent thinkers, who can solve problems, be reflective and confident, have life skills, and who are able to participate as responsible citizens (DoE, 2002).

2.5.4. New Entrants

Following South Africa's transformation to democracy and the ending of sanctions, a number of new foreign-based and local private educational providers saw an opportunity to enter the South African market to take advantage of the anticipated demand for higher education (Sedgwick, 2004). It was perceived at the time that the public higher education sector would not be able to address the skills shortage needs of the labour market and therefore the entry of private providers into the market was welcomed by the South African government (Sedgwick, 2004), who also provided skills development incentives Private higher education became an attractive alternative due to the negative perceptions of declining quality and standards at public institutions (CHE, 2007) and the reluctance of universities to adapt their existing programmes. Public institutions also faced serious fiscal constraints as the

government's macro-economic policies excluded additional funding being allocated to higher education (CHE, 2007). As a result, some public institutions entered into partnerships with both local and foreign institutions to supplement declining government funding. The increasing dependence on what is termed 'third stream income' has already been noted as "business in education" (Nayyar, 2008:9). According to Nayyar (*ibid.*), the entry of private players in higher education "meant education as business" (Nayyar, 2008:9). The plethora of private players (offering mostly business qualifications) brought into question the quality and efficiency of these qualifications. This issue has subsequently been addressed through the Higher Education Act (DoE, 2001b) which now provides regulation of private higher education.

Through addressing the right of all learners to have equal access to the widest possible educational opportunities and the re-designing of the curricula, "the foundations have been laid for a new higher education landscape" (Badat, 2008). This is critical in ensuring that the higher education sector is better able to achieve the goals of a more equitable dispensation and develop a critical citizenry which is able to meet the economic and social development needs of a democratic South Africa.

Through the policies developed, there has been considerable progress over the past fifteen years towards ensuring that the higher educational landscape is more democratic, although implementation of these policies has not been as swift as may have been desired, and has resulted in several competing discourses – that of equity and economic growth to mention two. These have resulted in "discursive tensions" (Kraak, 2004) concerning the role of universities in South Africa and their response to the challenges with which they are faced.

2.6. Equity in Higher Education

In order to address the high skill-needs required for national economic growth and to reduce the social inequalities of the past, increased participation (massification) was identified as a strategic objective by the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) in its report published in 1996.

2.6.1. Objective of Massification

The emphasis placed on increasing participation and that of equal access required a shift away from a higher education system which privileged the children of the middle class by providing an education which was scholarly and/or professional to one which provided access to a variety of educational opportunities to diverse social groups (NCHE, 1996: 76; DoE, 1996: 18-19).

The NCHE explains massification thus:

> "In the international literature on higher education . . . expansion is usually described as a transition from an 'elite' to a 'mass' system, or as 'massification'. The terminology denotes more than a mere increase in enrolment. It also refers to a series of concomitant changes that must accompany greater numbers. These include the composition of the student body; the diversification of programmes, curricula and qualifications; the introduction of multiple entry and exit points; new relations between study and the workplace; and shifts in institutional functions and missions" (NCHE, 1996:5).

According to the NCHE (1996), massification would contribute to equity while also producing more high-level skills that were necessary for economic growth. The NCHE thus considered massification to be a driver of both differentiation and efficiency. The concept of efficiency was important as increased funding was not available to support the increase in numbers. Instead, higher education institutions were expected to manage the envisaged increase in student numbers innovatively. However, "doing more with the same" raises concerns about declining standards (Cloete *et al.*, 2002). Concerns such as these prompted the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), the body responsible for the assurance and promotion of quality in higher education in South Africa.

The use of massification as a driver of equity requires management. The DoE set about this process by requiring universities to submit three-year rolling plans which take into account mission statements and which identify race and gender equity goals. At the time, requirements for the accreditation of new programmes were made more stringent. Institutions are also required to report to the Higher Education Quality Committee on quality assurance structures and systems introduced (DoE, 2001b).

2.6.2. Student Enrolments

The composition of the student body in the South African higher education system changed significantly between 1993 and 1999 with numbers of White students dropping from 55% to 35% and numbers of Black students increasing from 32% to 53%. In 1995, enrolments dropped in higher education systems around the world. This was in contrast to the South African system where enrolments actually increased in the same year (Reddy, 2004).

As already indicated in this chapter, over the last fifteen years a great deal of effort has been expended on improving access to higher education. The enrolment of students into higher education has grown from 590 000 to 741 000 students (DoE, 2009). However, the graduation rates are cause for concern in the system as a whole. The Department of Education has emphasised the need to improve student output to at least 77%, from 120 000 graduates to 150 000 (DoE, 2009). To achieve this, individual institutions have negotiated enrolment targets and success rates.

Table 1 illustrates National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001b) data which shows that the enrolment of Black students increased from 249 000 students (53%) in 1993 to 414 000 students (70%) in 1997 of the total head count enrolments. Between 1993 and 1999, African student enrolments increased by 80%, from 191 000 to 343 000. By 2007, African students constituted 61% of the total head count enrolments in higher education compared to White students who shrank to 25% from 47% in 1993 (DoE, 2009).

Proportion of Headcount enrolment by race. 1993, 1997, 2001 and 2005				
	African	Coloured	Indian	White
1993	40%	6%	7%	47%
1997	58%	5%	7%	31%
2001	61%	5%	7%	27%
2005	61%	6%	8%	25%

Table 1: Proportion of Headcount enrolments by race 1993, 1997, 2001 & 2005. Source: DoE, 2009.

However, the substantial rise in African student numbers has been termed 'the skewed revolution' (Cooper and Subotzky, 2003) as many of these are enrolled in distance programmes, in the humanities as opposed to science, technology and business degrees, and in undergraduate and diploma courses which means that they are not contributing to the illumination of the scarce skills required in these areas (Bundy, 2006).

After student numbers increased between 1993 and 1997, universities registered a decrease in numbers between 1998 and 1999. Enrolment at historically Black universities declined by 13000, or 14% from 1995 to 1999 (Reddy, 2004) and former Afrikaans-language universities and distance education providers attracted the greatest number of Black students.

A number of reasons for the overall decline in enrolments have been identified, including the poor state of secondary education in the country, an increase in the number of private providers of higher education and the government's macro-economic framework and fiscal policies. However, there was confidence that the number of enrolments would increase once the school system had improved from the poor state it found itself in as a result of the apartheid years. In 2001, The National Plan for Higher Education set a participation rate goal of 20% to be reached within the next 10-15 years (between 2011 and 2016), which is a comparable benchmark for middle-income countries (DoE, 2001b). However, having increased at an average of only 0.6% between 1995 and 2000 (Bunting, 2002), Jansen (2001) claims that the projections of the NPHE are optimistic, considering that the schooling system has problems in producing the required number of learners at Grade 12 level and that the problem of HIV and AIDS has resulted in fewer Grade 1 enrolments.

Between 2001 and 2004 enrolments suddenly increased again to an average annual rate of 6.1%. In 2004 the student enrolment had increased to 744 489 students and in 2007, this number had increased further to 761 090 (CHET, 2009). However, in 2009 the participation rate of 16% is still below the 20% goal of the National Plan. Therefore the higher education sector has not been considered "massified" as this requires that a gross participation rate of 30% is achieved.

2.6.3. Participation Rate

Despite the widening of access, and the 'ethnic composition' of South African universities changing beyond recognition since 1994 (Hugo, 1998), the low gross participation rate of 16% is still cause for concern, especially since it is made up of only 12% Black, 12% Coloured, 51% Indian and 60% White (Scott *et al.,* 2007). There remains further concern regarding the contact undergraduate success rate, which should, according to the Department of Education, be 80% 'if reasonable graduation rates are to be achieved' (DoE in Badat, 2009b). Instead, they range between 59% and 87% with an average of 75% (*ibid*.). It was also found that in almost all cases the completion rate of Black students is less than half the White completion rate and the number of Black graduates is less than the number of White graduates (Scott *et al*., 2007).

According to Letseka *et al. (*2009), in 2000, 30% of students dropped out within their first year of study and 20% dropped out between their second and third year. Of the remaining 50%, half of the students failed to graduate within the prescribed course period (see, also, Scott *et al*., 2007 for similar findings).

The low participation rates and poor performance of students in higher education point to improvements required in the schooling system, and also to a need to place emphasis more on success, rather than access alone. According to Scott *et al.* (2007), in an attempt to bring about equity, the increase in enrolments has resulted not only in capacity problems, but also in a diverse student body whose varying needs have different implications for the educational system. Dealing with the under-preparedness and diversity of the student body brings new challenges requiring other interventions that address systemic issues in the educational process (within both the schooling system and tertiary education). Failing to do so will mean at best perpetuating, or more likely worsening the negative aspects of the current performance patterns, since gains made in access are being neutralised by the lack of equity of outcomes (Scott *et al*., 2007).

According to Scott *et al.* (2007), the implication of persistent unsuccessful completion of students' studies is that the national needs in respect of 'economic growth.....and social cohesion' (Pandor, 2005) will not be met, nor for that matter the ongoing need of the majority of South Africans for social upliftment.

By dramatically reducing the participation rate of Whites from 60% to about 25% and increasing the number of Black students from around 35% to 75%, no other country in the world has been as successful in changing the racial composition of the student body as South Africa (Cloete, 2009a). However, the shortage of qualified Black students indicates that there are still continuing obstacles to equity of access and, more importantly, equity of outcomes given the overall low completion rates (Scott *et al.*, 2007). The equity agenda, pursued through 'massification' of higher education, has therefore not been deemed successful (*ibid*.).

Two consequential deductions may be made in this regard: first, transformation of higher education is only possible if institutions pursue greater institutional efficiency and effectiveness. Second, quality is a critical and non-negotiable standard (Asmal, 2001) that universities cannot ignore if they are to produce graduates who are able to make a meaningful contribution to society and the global economy.

Arimoto (2002) describes how massification in Japan has brought about tensions and conflicts between quantity and quality, as quantitative expansion through massification brings about homogeneity, uniformity, and standardisation, all of which are in direct qualitative conflict with some of the traditional objectives of elite higher education – namely, heterogeneity, disparity, diversification, and individuality.

This has raised the question of how South African higher education institutions will respond to these challenges if the system is to deliver on the goal of broadening access and increasing participation amongst those who have been historically excluded from higher education. Most importantly the question is raised, how, in the process of addressing equity, universities will ensure a convergence of equity and outcomes whilst maintaining high quality standards and performance to ensure that both society and individuals benefit from a higher education (Jansen, 2001).

2.7. Globalisation

Whilst the South African higher education system was still grappling with the need to deal with issues related to equity, it also had to deal with the country's need to compete in a rapidly changing and competitive global economy (DoE, 1997 8:10).

This required enormous change from institutions of higher education institutions if they were to contribute to South Africa becoming a "knowledge society" (Castells, 2001).

2.7.1. Globalisation Defined

Globalisation has been defined as the "disappearance" of national boundaries as a result of the rapid development and unprecedented diffusion of information and communication technology, a rapid process which has led to the redefinition of this era as the "information age" and our society as the "knowledge society" (Castells, 2001). As such, national economies have been replaced by a global economy in which previous Fordist models of production have been replaced by an economy dependent on high skills, and on knowledge and information which is constantly changing.

Globalisation has resulted in the emergence of a learning society comprised of individuals demanding opportunities to learn and who must be acceptant of fluidity in the job market. Learning and applying new skills, which are broad, generic and transferable, is necessary to succeed in the new economy (Moja, 2004). In a country where the majority of its people have never had an adequate education, nor an opportunity to properly learn skills, and where the skills of others have been displaced due to technology, in South Africa there is a dire need for adult education, re-skilling, and mid-career development.

In the context of globalisation, Castells (2001) warns that integration of those who have previously not been integrated will be unlikely. Of major concern to higher education and government, therefore, is the anticipation that globalisation will intensify inequality, polarisation and social exclusion for those who do not have access to education.

The challenges caused by globalisation and the high skills thesis (or the idea that success at both national and individual levels is dependent on 'high skills') are no less challenging for developed countries. This is highlighted in the United Kingdom's Leitch Review of Skills Report titled "*Prosperity for all in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*" (Leitch, 2006). In the context of globalisation, the report examines skills shortages in the United Kingdom to identify an optimal skills mix which, by 2020, will maximise economic growth, productivity and social justice (Leitch, 2006). In a developing country such as South Africa, globalisation poses even greater challenges due to low enrolments in tertiary education and high unemployment rates. The Centre for Higher Education and Transformation (CHET) reported that, in 2007, 43% of 18-24 year olds were not in education, or employed. To overcome this, the enrolment goal set by the DoE by 2010 requires that institutions of higher education should grow by an average of 2% annually, which should result in enrolments increasing from 760 000 students in 2007 to 820 000 students by 2010 (CHET, 2009). In South Africa then, massification has been identified as a key to the achievement of equity and also as a response to globalisation (Seepe, 2006).

Currie (1998) has examined the economically motivated reforms associated with globalisation which have been defined as 'Toyotasm', 'post-Fordism' or 'neo-Fordism' and 'Macdonalisation'. All have a tendency towards homogenising practices, although Currie

(1998) warns that globalisation cannot be reduced to trans-national homogenisation. He contends that specific historical, political, cultural and economic characteristics influence the way in which globalisation has unfolded and these produce differing effects in different countries (*ibid.*).

Undoubtedly there is inequality in the global economy as regards trade, technology and labour supply which all exacerbate the divisions between the developed and developing world.

A report by the World Bank (1994), which sponsored studies to determine the impact of globalisation, states unambiguously that "knowledge has become, more than ever, a primary factor of production throughout the world" (World Bank, 1994: ix). As a result, and as already noted, new terms such as "the knowledge economy" (Castells, 1994), "knowledge society", "knowledge era" and "knowledge management" have emerged.

A critical moment of 'take-off' towards a 'Knowledge Age' was reached in the 1990's (Castells, 1998:Introduction) when it became evident that a country's competitive advantage lay in the knowledge and capacity of individuals and their ability to use it effectively, rather than in the production processes of the past.

Subotsky (1998) offers insights into globalisation and an understanding of South Africa's socio-economic conditions as it pertains to higher education. He proposes a 'complementary alternative' in place of the 'marketization of knowledge' (Subotzky, 1998) which has

implications for a new mode of producing knowledge that it is claimed will narrow the gulf between what higher education has been offering and what society demands.

2.7.2. Under-education and poverty

Given South Africa's history involving the systematic under-education of the majority of its population, it is today faced with addressing inherited inequalities and urgently increasing the number of skilled professionals and 'knowledge workers' capable of improving and strengthening the South African economy in order to compete globally.

Another major consequence of apartheid is the severe poverty of many of South Africa's citizens. In a 2002 World Bank report titled "*Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education"*, it was noted that higher education can contribute in the following ways to assist in the development of South Africa and in so doing, indirectly alleviate poverty:

- Higher education can contribute to economic growth by supplying the necessary human resources for a knowledge-driven economy, by generating knowledge and by promoting access and use of knowledge;
- Higher education has the potential to increase access to education and in turn increase the employability of those who have the skills for a knowledge-driven economy;
- Higher education can play a role in supporting basic and secondary education by supplying these sub-sectors with trained personnel and contributing to the development of the curriculum (World Bank Report, 2002).

Universities also contribute to the development of our society and alleviation of poverty through drawing on research conducted by different disciplines within the university (Hall, 2007) and by developing professionals both in government and civil society. According to Dison *et al.* (2008), universities are also instrumental in improving the quality and skills levels of public services - such as schooling, health care and welfare - which is needed to transform these institutions, and improve capacity for social delivery.

It was within this global context that Nelson Mandela, the President of South Africa in 1996, issued a proclamation appointing the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) "to preserve what is valuable and to address what is defective and requires transformation" (NCHE, 1996:1).

2.7.3. High Skills Thesis

The high skills thesis has emerged due to the massive challenges that globalisation poses. Globalisation requires a highly skilled labour force that is able to employ new technologies and add value to existing goods and services. This requires well-rounded and diverse skill competencies and a labour force which is able to adapt to unpredictable and volatile global product markets and rapid technological changes (Kraak, 2004). This requires that employees have broad problem-solving skills to anticipate flaws in production and who have the ability to retool and respond quickly to rapidly changing market conditions. The high skills thesis was very influential in the development of the neoliberal Growth, Employment and Re-distribution (GEAR) macro-economic policy framework and educational policies between 1990 and 1994 (Kraak, 2001). This resulted in the idea of shifting away from the

divided, elite education and training system of the past, towards a unified, single co-ordinated national system (Kraak, 2004) with credit accumulation transferable between institutions (Gibbons *et al*., 1994). The high skills thesis became part of official government policy in the White Paper on Education and Training and the passing of the South African Qualifications Act (1995) (Kraak, 2004).

2.7.4. Mode 2

Knowledge was traditionally produced at universities and then transferred to society. Knowledge produced in this traditional manner has been termed 'Mode 1' knowledge (Gibbons *et al.,* 1994) and has been criticised as being the product of nineteenth century industrial societies where universities were elitist and the knowledge they produced was linear and compartmentalised into separate disciplines and subjects (Robertson, 2000).

The pre-eminent role of higher education in knowledge production has since been challenged through the production of knowledge in multiple sites of research occurring outside the higher education system. Knowledge is no longer necessarily generated within the disciplines, or in universities, as knowledge production takes new forms in the market and community and, most crucially, in the interface between higher education and society. This type of knowledge is termed 'Mode 2' knowledge (Gibbons *et al.,* 1994).

Competing views are held as to whether Mode 2 knowledge is beneficial to the social reconstruction and development of post-apartheid South Africa (Kraak, 2000), and whether Mode 2 knowledge accentuates the commodification of knowledge in higher education

institutions. This has led to further debate about the role and function of universities which were traditionally "detached from society to pursue pure disciplinary research and higher learning in a state unhindered by the narrow interests of government and business" (Kraak, 2000:33).

As already indicated, this shift in knowledge production to Mode 2 has provided competition for universities, and has reinforced the need for universities to perform as "corporate enterprises," which are more competitive and business-like in producing more graduates to help steer South Africa into a competitive global economy (Reddy, 2004). The shift has also produced a challenge to universities which previously not only had a monopoly on knowledge production, but also on teaching about knowledge production. As some institutions have become more like income-generating businesses, they have disposed of unproductive programmes and encouraged students to take degrees in the natural sciences and commerce, rather than the arts and the humanities (Reddy, 2004). They have also introduced management procedures and a management ethos not previously associated with public higher education institutes (Ntshoe, 2004).

2.8. Employment of Graduates

Although the graduate unemployment rate of 3% is relatively low in the broader context of unemployment, it equates to 200 000 unemployed individuals holding certificates, diplomas and degrees out of 7.8 million unemployed people in South Africa (Scott *et al.*, 2007). Within the context of an increased demand for a highly skilled workforce and reported skills shortages, graduate unemployment is a cause for concern.

2.8.1. Demand Factors of Employment

Table 2, provided by Bhorat and Lundall (2002) indicates that between 1995 and 1999, both the demand for labour and the economically active population increased for all race groups. However, while African employment grew by 12.23% from 1995 onwards, the number of new African entrants seeking employment grew by 27.17%, indicating that while growth occurred, it was not sufficient to provide employment to all new African entrants to the job market.

	Employment		Economically Active Population			
Race	Change	% Change	Change	% Change	Target Rate	Labour Absorption Rate
African	737 834	12.23	2 567 538	27.17	42.56	28.74
Coloured	182 668	16.38	262 238	18.31	23.52	69.66
Asian	44 890	12.78	89 817	22.14	25.57	49.98
White	148 850	7.84	199 281	10.00	10.50	74.68
Total	1 131 647	12.04	3 140 862	23.65	33.42	36.03

Table 2: Employment and EAP changes, by race. Source: Bhorat and Lundall (2002)

In order for the approximately 2.5 million African new work-seekers to have found employment, African employment would have needed to increase by 42.56% from 1995 onwards. For Whites, however, it only had to grow by 10.5%. The absorption rate indicates that only 28.74% of Africans were employed, whilst 74.69% of Whites found employment. This is significant, as an increase in employment is required by all race groups in order for higher education to be able to contribute to the alleviation of poverty in South Africa and to contribute in "building a new citizenry" (NCHE, 1996:24).

2.8.2. Race and Degree/Diploma differentiations

In a cohort study conducted in 2003 by Moleke (2005a), it was found that, although higher education graduates experience a persistent advantage in the labour market, this advantage is not experienced by all segments of people with higher education degrees, since there are differentiations by race and gender (Moleke, 2005a). The study reported that 82% of unemployed persons in 2003 had a diploma compared to 18% with degrees. It also found that 85% of those unemployed with a tertiary qualification were Africans, with 73% holding diplomas and 12% degrees.

The Council for Higher Education and Transformation (CHET) conducted a study in 2007 and found that there were 6 061 (Statistics South Africa, 2007) unemployed graduates with degrees in 2001 and that this number had increased substantially to 27 000 unemployed graduates with degrees in 2007 (Statistics South Africa, 2009).

2.8.3. Meeting National Needs

As already noted, high-level skills development is imperative if South African citizens are going to succeed in the global environment. However, the shortage of high-level skills and the existence of graduate unemployment is evidence that higher education is not providing the required development needs of the country (Scott *et al.*, 2007).

Research shows that unemployment is highest for those individuals with a Grade 12 qualification or less (Statistics South Africa, 2009). This highlights the need for individuals

to have access to tertiary education if they are to reduce the possibility of avoiding unemployment and the social consequences associated with unemployment.

In spite of this, significant numbers of graduates still fail to find employment in South Africa. Research on graduate unemployment in South Africa offers contradictory results. This could be a result of some of the studies being conducted before the mergers which, as noted earlier, were part of the transformation of the South African higher education system. Contradictory results can also be accounted for by the fact that some studies do not differentiate between unemployment of those with degrees, diplomas and certificates whilst others do not differentiate between contact universities and distance education. All of these variables have the potential to reveal different results. In general, however, the studies show that:

- Unemployment of those with a tertiary *qualification* (i.e. degree, diploma or certificate) has increased, with the bulk of this increase being amongst those with a diploma or certificate;
- There are insufficient numbers of graduates with specific skills that are in short supply.
- Although the growing representation of Africans amongst graduates is a positive sign, a disproportionately large number of female African graduates who studied humanities and arts are unemployed. Moleke (2005a) cites the mismatch of skills possessed, with those required by the economy. Moleke (2005a) contends that gender, race, the quality of the qualification and the reputations of institutions are all factors responsible for the decline in employment of female African graduates.

- The inadequate schooling afforded to Black pupils, particularly in rural areas and the fact that the majority of Black graduates are from historically Black universities, calls into question the (perceived) quality of these institutions. It has also been noted that Black graduates from historically disadvantaged institutions do not enjoy the same opportunities (including participation on student bodies and opportunities to gain work experience at the institutions where they study) as their White peers studying at historically advantaged universities (Moleke, 2005a).
- Both the study by Bhorat (2004) and that of Moleke (2005a) found that employment rates were influenced by the field of study.
- Graduates are not of a sufficiently high quality. This can be attributed to lack of capacity in some institutions, and to the fact that many university entrants enter higher education at a comparatively low level anyway because of problems in the school system.

Although access to higher education for previously disadvantaged people is improving, according to Moleke (2005b) there are still inequalities at the level of employment in spite of the laws, policies and other initiatives developed since 1994. The Employment Equity Act (1998) was introduced to ensure that people with equal skills are treated equally in the labour market, and the Skills Development Act (1998) was introduced as a strategy to encourage training within companies and institutions, especially in relation to previously disadvantaged social groups.

2.9. Rhodes University

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire"

William Butler Yeats, 1923

Having reviewed the changes which have taken place in the South African higher education system since 1994 and the relationship of employment to education, this chapter now moves on to look at one South African university, Rhodes University, in the context which has been sketched in the preceding pages.

2.9.1. The Mission of Rhodes University

Rhodes University states in its vision that it aims "to be an outstanding internationally-respected academic institution which proudly affirms its African identity and which is committed to democratic ideals, academic freedom, rigorous scholarship, sound moral values and social responsibility (Rhodes University Vision, 2001). In pursuit of its vision, Rhodes University claims that

> "…the University will strive to produce outstanding internationally-accredited graduates who are innovative, analytical, articulate, balanced and adaptable, with a life-long love of learning; and to strive, through teaching, research and community service, to contribute to the advancement of international scholarship and the development of the Eastern Cape and Southern Africa" (Rhodes University, Vision and Mission, 2001).

In order to achieve its vision and mission the University attempts to ensure that it achieves equitable participation and output by ensuring quality in research, teaching and learning.

2.9.2. History of Rhodes University

Rhodes University, established as Rhodes University College in 1904, is the smallest university in South Africa with approximately 6981 students enrolled in 2009 (Rhodes University, DMU, 2009). It is a public English-medium university, predominantly offering contact undergraduate degrees. The majority of first year students are accommodated on campus in one of the forty-nine student residences. Rhodes University is organised into six faculties: Commerce, Education, Humanities, Law, Pharmacy and Science. The majority of enrolments (undergraduate and postgraduate) are in the humanities and social sciences (including education), followed by commerce and science.

Rhodes University can be characterised as an institution specialising in the academic and professional disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. In many respects it can be said to affiliate itself to the Jeffersonian ideal of an educated democracy which requires a breadth of education best provided by the classical liberal arts disciplines (Hooker, 1997).

2.9.3. Structure of the University

South African traditional universities have tended to model themselves on what is often termed the 'Humboldtian' model. According to Krull (2005), universities based on a Humboldtian model rest on:

- The integration of teaching and research

- The complementary principles of *Lehrfreiheit* (freedom to teach) and *Lernfreiheit* (freedom to learn)
- The demand for *Einsamkeit* (solitude) and *Freiheit* (freedom) in the autonomous pursuit of truth
- The seminar system as the backbone of a community of teachers and students.

As noted by the CHE (2005), Rhodes University exemplifies the Humboldtian model of a university because of the organisation of disciplines into departments and the pyramid structures within the university, with each department having a Head of Department who acts autonomously with regards to academic research and course content, and the University's strong focus on postgraduate degrees and research. However, as already indicated in this chapter, developments in modes of knowledge production and the call for universities to contribute to the development of skilled workers, present challenges to such a traditional model.

Undergraduate teaching is the largest core of the higher education sector in South Africa (CHE, 2006) and this is reflected in Rhodes' composition of 77% undergraduate and 23% post-graduate student enrolments (Rhodes University, Digest of Statistics, 2009).

The university does not see its role as providing skills training in order to ensure preparedness for a particular job and thus made a strategic decision not to introduce vocationally based qualifications into its curriculum offerings, but to continue offering a general formative degree comprising two major subjects in the majority of faculties. The

university does, however, offer vocational qualifications in Pharmacy, Law, Accounting, Journalism and Education.

The university has a student-to-lecturer ratio of 15:1 whereby it seeks to create an environment which is conducive to research and to providing students with a life-long love of learning (Rhodes University, Quality Improvement Plan, 2009).

2.9.4. Enrolments

Since 1996, Rhodes University has grown by almost 42% from 4905 enrolments to 6981 enrolments in 2009. In 2009 the university increased its enrolments by approximately 10.5% over 2008, exceeding the target of 6% growth rate negotiated with the Department of Education.

Table 3 illustrates an average of 2.6% growth in student enrolments during the period 2004-2009. During this period, 2006 was the only year which reported a decline in student enrolments. This was largely due to a decrease in Education undergraduate diplomas.

Rhodes University Enrolments 2004 to 2009						
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**
Total Student Enrolment	6166	6313	5914	6069	6320	6981
% Increase / (decrease) over previous year		2.4%	(6.3%)	2.6%	4.1%	10.5%

Table 3: Rhodes University Enrolments 2004-2009. Source: Rhodes University, DMU, 2009.

2.9.5. Change in Student Composition

At a national level, following the 1994 election, enrolments in the Humanities and Social Sciences increased more than in other faculties. This prompted a call in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (DoE, 2001b) for the reduction of students taking Humanities courses from 49% to 40% and for Commerce and natural Sciences to each increase to 30%. The national ratio for these fields of study would thus be 40:30:30.

At Rhodes University, the Humanities faculty has always dominated headcount enrolments and, in 2008, accounted for 53% of enrolments. In an attempt to assist the country in meeting its national needs of skilled persons in the Sciences, the University has undertaken to pursue a trajectory of enrolling a higher proportion of students in this area, as is depicted in Table 4 (Rhodes University, Digest of Statistics, 2009 and Rhodes University, Enrolment Plan, 2009). This will result in the universities ratio changing from 63:15:22 in 2008 to a planned ratio of 61:16:24 (Humanties, Business/Commerce and SET respectively) by 2011. In line with DoE reporting, Humanties includes Education, Law and Economics departments, Business and Commerce includes Accounting and Management departments, and SET includes all Science departments, including Pharmacy.

Percentage Student Enrolments by field of study				
	Actual 2003	**Actual 2006**	**Actual 2008**	**Planned 2011**
Business & Commerce	14%	15%	15%	16%
Education	15%	11%	10%	10%
Humanities	47%	51%	53%	51%
SET	24%	23%	22%	24%

Table 4: Percentage Student Enrolments by field of study. Source: Rhodes University, Digest of Statistics, 2009 and Rhodes University, Enrolment Plan, 2009.

As illustrated in Table 5, in 2002, White students constituted more than half of Rhodes' total headcount (52%) and African students 36%. The situation is quite different in 2008 with African student enrolments constituting 46% (including international African students) and White students 45%.

Proportion of Head Count Enrolments in Each Race Group: 2002, 2005, 2008 and planned 2011				
	Actual 2002	**Actual 2005**	**Actual 2008**	**Planned 2011**
African	36%	44%	46%	51%
Coloured	4%	4%	4%	3%
Indian	7%	6%	5%	4%
White	52%	46%	45%	42%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 5: Proportion of Head Count Enrolments in each race group: 2002, 2005, 2008 and planned 2011. Source: Rhodes University, DMU, 2009 and Rhodes University, Enrolment Plan, 2009.

Table 6 illustrates the changes that have occurred in the student body by faculty between 2000 and 2009. Whereas the Education Faculty showed the highest concentration of Black enrolments in 2003 with 47%, in 2009 the highest concentration is in the Commerce and Humanities faculties, each with 31%. Apart from the decline in the number of White students in the Science Faculty, their concentration has remained relatively constant with the highest number registered in the Humanities Faculty.

	Percentage Black Student Enrolments			Percentage White Student Enrolments		
Faculty	**2000**	**2003**	**2009**	**2000**	**2003**	**2009**
Commerce	14%	14%	31%	12%	17%	19%
Education	30%	47%	15%	5%	6%	4%
Humanities	34%	26%	31%	55%	55%	54%
Science	22%	13%	23%	28%	22%	23%

Table 6: Black and White student composition - 2000, 2003 and 2009. Source: Rhodes Univeristy, DMU 2009.

The gender composition of Rhodes University students is consistently dominated by females with 2008 being no exception with an overall enrolment of 59% females.

2.9.6. Graduate Data

Graduate data is used by higher education as a measurement of equity, access, efficiency and effectiveness, as who graduates in what discipline area is an indication of the institution's ability to provide teaching and learning experiences to a cross-section of students (CHE, 2005). Graduation rates (the number of graduates per year in relation to the number of

enrolments in the same year) and throughput rates (time taken to complete a qualification taking into account the programme's minimum formal time) are both indicators of the appropriateness of a range of pedagogical issues that include entrance requirements and teaching and learning strategies (CHE, 2005). Moreover, graduation rates raise the issue of access in relation to success in higher education (CHE, 2005). However, for institutions which are constantly growing, graduation rates might be considered a contested indicator because as a university grows, the graduation rate naturally declines until a static relationship between enrolments and graduation rates is achieved i.e. no growth (Ripley, 2009). Rhodes University has traditionally maintained a graduation rate above 30%, however, both graduation and success rates are slowly declining. This has resulted in the university setting a new target of 27% for 2013 (Rhodes University, Enrolment Plan, 2009).

2.9.7. Graduates by Qualification Type

The DoE's shift towards putting greater emphasis on outputs has required universities to include output targets in their formal enrolment plans (Scott *et al.*, 2007) and to aim towards reaching national benchmark goals. Although Rhodes' achievement in graduation rates for three-year undergraduate degrees of 20% is below that of the national benchmark of 23% (see Table 7), overall it has achieved above the national benchmark (see Table 10).

GRADUATION RATES BY QUALIFICATION TYPE								
	GRADUATES							2008 TOTAL ENROLLED
Qualification Type	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2008 %	National Benchmark	
Undergrad Diplomas	241	442	162	31	84	26%	23%	323
3 Yr Bachelor Degrees	635	718	738	809	695	20%	23%	3465
4 Yr Bachelor Degrees	206	253	257	236	239	22%	18%	1072
Postgrad Diplomas	114	130	134	160	158	83%	54%	190
Hons & PG Bachelors	298	294	320	356	360	90%	54%	400
Masters	156	159	167	170	176	27%	30%	650
Doctorates	36	31	43	48	26	11%	18%	244
Total	**1686**	**2027**	**1821**	**1810**	**1738**	**27%**		**6344**

Table 7: Graduation rates by qualification type. Source: Rhodes University, Digest of Statistics, 2009.

2.9.8. Graduates by Race

Of significance, given the context of its location within the South African higher education system, is the fact that the number of Africans graduating from Rhodes University has improved over the years. In 1986, the University graduated only 116 African graduates (14% of total graduates). By 2007, 34% of all graduates were African and by 2009, 38% of graduates came from this population group. White, Coloured and Indian graduate rates have stayed constant from 2006 to 2009 with an average of 54% for Whites, 3% for Coloured and 6% for Indians. With the student composition comprising 57% African students, there is concern that although the number of African graduates has increased, they only make up 38% of the proportion graduating (see Table 8).

Rhodes University Graduates by Race 2006-2009				
	African %	Coloured %	Indian %	White %
2006	37.7%	2.8%	6.1%	53.3%
2007	33.6%	3.4%	5.8%	57.2%
2008	37.3%	2.6%	5.8%	54.3%
2009	37.8%	2.6%	5.7%	53.9%

Table 8: Rhodes University Graduates by Race 2006-2009. Source: Rhodes University, DMU - unaudited 2009.

2.9.9. Graduates Studying Further

With the need for a highly educated workforce, emphasis is placed on ensuring that Rhodes University creates an environment which is conducive for students to study further and to "create a life-long love of learning" (Rhodes University, Vision and Mission, 2001). Although the number of students studying further cannot be used in isolation to determine whether Rhodes University is achieving this objective, it does indicate that the university is contributing to the national goals of producing highly skilled graduates.

Table 9 illustrates the number of first degree Rhodes University graduates who registered to study further at Rhodes University the following year. In 2009, except for the Education faculty, all faculties experienced an increase in the number of first degree Rhodes University graduates deciding to study further at Rhodes University. In the Humanities, the number of students studying further increased by 13%. In the Science faculty the number of White students studying further in 2009 increased to 81% from 73% in 2008. Black students studying further in the Science faculty has remained the same at 51% for 2008 and 2009.

First Degree RU graduates registered at Rhodes University to study further				
Faculty	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**
Commerce	44%	44%	54%	58%
Education	4%	0%	8%	5%
Humanities	56%	60%	50%	63%
Science	65%	70%	68%	73%
Total	27%	31%	33%	35%

Table 9 : First Degree Rhodes University graduates registered at Rhodes University to study further. Source: Rhodes University, DMU, 2009 - unaudited.

2.9.10. Attrition Rates

Whilst Rhodes University attracts some of the country's top academic achievers, like other universities, it is also concerned about its high drop-out rate. **Error! Reference source not found.**Table 10 illustrates the number of enrolments compared to the number of students graduating the same year. In 2004, students graduating as a percentage of enrolments for the same year constituted 27%. In 2009 this dropped to 25%, although enrolments in 2009 increased by 10% when compared to 2004. The drop in enrolments in 2006 was largely due to a decrease in education undergraduate diplomas.

Total Enrolments and Graduates 1996, 2003 – 2009			
Year	Enrolments	Graduates	% Grad of Enrolments
1996	4905	1316	27%
2003	7526	2395	32%
2004	6193	1691	27%
2005	6334	2027	32%
2006	5936	1821	31%
2007	6096	1810	30%
2008	6344	1738	27%
2009	6981	1745	25%

Table 10: Total Enrolments and Graduates 1996, 2004-2009. Source: Rhodes University, DMU, 2009 - unaudited.

A study of the cohort of first time students entering public South African higher education institutions in 2000, conducted by Scott *et al.*(2007), found that 38% of first-time students entering into higher education graduate within five years. After five years, 17% are still registered and 45% leave without graduating. These statistics include UNISA, South Africa's public distance education institution. Excluding UNISA figures still provides statistics which are concerning - 50% graduate within five years, 12% are still registered after five years and 38% left without graduating (Scott *et al.*, 2007). "Leave without graduating" refers to students who left their original institution without completing a qualification, as a result of withdrawal, 'dropout', or academic exclusion. The DoE estimates that 10% of this number transfer to other institutions (Scott *et al.,* 2007). In the same study it was found that in almost all cases the Black completion rate is less than half the White completion rate.

In comparison, for 2008, 25% of Rhodes University students left without completing a qualification. Of the total undergraduate student body, 13% could not complete their qualification and left at the end of 2008, despite being in good academic standing (Rhodes University, Digest of Statistics, 2009). The exclusion rate (or "left without graduating") percentage for Africans decreased from 16% in 2007 to 9% in 2008 and overall the White exclusion rate is considerably lower than the Black exclusion rate at 3% (Rhodes University, Digest of Statistics, 2009).

2.9.11. Articulation Rates

In 2009, of the 752 Rhodes University graduates who were enrolled for a three-year undergraduate Bachelor degree, 119 (16%) completed their degree in more than three years (Rhodes University, Digest of Statistics, 2009). It needs to be taken into consideration that this figure also comprises those students who changed degrees.

The unsatisfactory performance of the school system, and the inequalities of the past, have had a profound effect on the readiness of students to engage with higher education, and this clearly shapes success at tertiary level. However, institutions of higher education need to consider how they would cope should the schooling system improve and also not rely solely on this improvement materialising but be proactive in improving the poor performance as it stands (Scott *et al.*, 2007).

As student numbers increase and the student composition changes, Scott *et al.* (2007) emphasise articulation as one of the structural aspects which needs to be addressed in

educational planning. Students who are unable to cope adequately with the transition to tertiary education require the appropriate support. If this is not forthcoming, problems which affect output results will occur and, since, for both individuals and society, successful completion of study is paramount, it becomes the over-arching challenge (Scott *et al.*, 2007).

This requires that the university ensure that substantial and continual improvements are made to ensure the creation of conditions conducive to the results sought. Concerted action is therefore required by institutions to ensure that systemic obstacles that prevent talented students from completing their degrees are removed.

The higher education funding framework and the DoE's requirements of institutions to be more accountable, regarding both enrolment and graduation targets, indicates that government expects institutions to take responsibility for these outcomes. According to Scott *et al.* (2007), the reason for institutions not being more proactive in assuring student performance is the traditional view that it is "beyond the sector's control" and that the high attrition rate is attributed to external factors – these being "money and poor schooling" (Mail and Guardian, 2006).

The arrival of the lifelong learning society and the expansion and diversity of student enrolments has resulted in the recognition that 'doing more of the same' will not be effective, and that focusing on enrolment growth alone, rather than improving the efficiency of the educational process, is unlikely to produce optimal returns (Scott *et al.*, 2007).

As pointed out in the Rhodes University Quality Improvement Plan, 2006:

> "The building of environments and cultures in which students can, through academic support, excellent teaching and mentoring and other initiatives, genuinely have every chance of succeeding and graduating with the relevant knowledge, competencies, skills and attributes that are required for any occupation and profession, to be life-long learners and to function as critical, culturally enriched and tolerant citizens must be a critical policy goal".

This requires that graduate output is improved through a focused approach involving policy, planning, resources and capacity building (Scott *et al.,* 2007) to ensure that higher education has the education expertise required (and necessary) to bring about substantial improvement of the current performance patterns.

Failing to cater for the diversity of students through curriculum frameworks, course design and approaches in delivery and assessment will continue to affect the performance of institutions and the outcome of national goals of equity, effectiveness and efficiency. It requires that a continuous process of quality improvement is ensured in the delivery of teaching and learning, research, community engagement and to the goal of higher education transformation (Rhodes University, Imbizo, 2006).

Scott *et al*. (2007) point out that institutions need to shift their focus from expansion alone, to how quality will be maintained in the process of expansion. As development and equity agendas converge, institutions will need, in his view, to recognise that initiatives are required

to improve the teaching ability and skills of academics so that they are more responsive to the varied learning needs of an increasingly diverse student body (Scott *et al*., 2007).

2.9.12. Improving the quality of Teaching and Learning

Historically, academics have focused more time on research than teaching, given that disciplinary research remains the predominant route to access to funding (Scott *et al.,* 2007). In this climate, teaching is often less valued and less evaluated (Arimoto, 2002). Scott *et al.* (2007) also emphasise that historically, academics have taught as they were taught, and their teaching is influenced by traditional approaches strongly reinforced by departmental cultures (Scott *et al., 2007).* Known as 'craft knowledge', this approach is no longer effective in an environment where there are students from highly diverse educational and linguistic backgrounds. According to Scott *et al.* (2007), the key limitation of 'craft knowledge' is that the "lack of a systemic or theoretical basis does not provide conceptual and analytical tools for dealing with 'non-traditional' situations".

The provision of epistemological access (Morrow, 1993) and to make provision for the 'under preparedness' of students requires that the higher education system becomes more efficient through systemic change with regards to ensuring that curriculum design and expected outcomes of courses are aligned, that a high level of quality is ensured in teaching and learning, and with the integration of these functions and research (Arimoto, 2002).

To ensure that educational specialists lead, manage and provide specialised educational design and teaching services, the University created the new Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL) out of the former Academic Development

Centre. The Centre has the responsibility of promoting and assuring quality in teaching and learning and is also responsible for research on issues of learning and teaching, mentoring, and also for academic development initiatives intended to ensure that all students have an equal chance of a successful graduation (Rhodes University, Quality Improvement Plan, 2009).

The Department of Education has also recognised the importance of education improvement initiatives. Scott *et al.* (2007) note that "given the high financial and opportunity cost of poor performance in higher education in South Africa, investment in improving graduate output through educational capacity development is necessary, which requires professional, committed and sustainable improvement". Although to date the Department of Education has earmarked a very small fraction of the total budget for this task and capacity building, the Department of Education's introduction of Foundation Programme Grants is an important step in curriculum reform (Scott *et al.*, 2007). Consequently, Rhodes University has made efforts to increase internal funding for academic development initiatives to provide the necessary support to assist students to succeed (Boughey, 2009).

2.9.13. Leadership of Rhodes University

The appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor at Rhodes University in 2006 came at a time where change was necessary to a university which, although it did not ostensibly support apartheid policies, had a reputation of being a White elitist university which had been dependent on government funding under apartheid (Quinn & Boughey, 2009). The incumbent brings with him a history of activism and of experience of the wider South African society and has implemented structural changes and challenged the dominant culture within

the institution (Quinn & Boughey, 2009). The Vice-Chancellor has considerable expertise in higher education, having been the Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Higher Education. This is beneficial to the university as he brings with him experience of implementing both national and institutional policies. Through these policies he has sought to build commitment to improve performance by means of restructuring and by making appointments in key positions, as well as clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the university (Rhodes University, Quality Improvement Plan, 2009).

2.9.14. Student diversity at Rhodes University

Rhodes University provides an education to a very diverse student body. As it is located in a rural area, it relies on attracting students from all over the country, other parts of Africa and, to a smaller extent, from other continents. The student population therefore does not constitute a homogeneous group. In fact, the differences between students are vast. They speak different languages, have very different cultures, come from different financial and schooling backgrounds and have different personal circumstances.

This diversity means that students bring a range of social and cultural capital to the university and to the job market once they graduate. Scott *et al.* (2007) point to the fact that the educational process itself is a major variable affecting who succeeds and who fails. As students enter the labour market they differ according to field of study, operate in different labour markets due to geographic limitations and experience variations in demand conditions. Poor academic background or performance, actual and perceived differences in the quality of the universities attended, the qualifications offered by those institutions and in the various types of qualifications themselves – all play a major role in perpetuating the inequality of

opportunities afforded to graduates (Moleke, 2005b). Moleke (2005b) points out that the field of study plays a significant role in employability, as qualification differences translate into different types of skills acquired and these in turn are used as a major indicator of employability. However, the lack of access to employers and to networks, a lack of soft skills amongst graduates (including interpersonal, communication and presentation skills), their attitude, and their lack of work experience are some factors which are cited as affecting graduates' potential of employability. In some instances the graduates have the formal qualifications, but their training falls short of industry expectations. Moleke (2005a) emphasises that although discrimination in terms of physical appearance (race and gender) are declining, racial disparities in the labour market due to acquired human and social capital is increasing.

Brennan (2006) notes that employers seek the 'best' graduates which they assume are concentrated in a limited number of places and thus the social capital acquired by attending a reputable institution is an important factor which affects the employability of graduates.
The research conducted by Moleke (2005a and 2005b) and Bhorat (2004) highlights that irrespective of race, gender or field of study; graduates from historically White universities (HWU) seem to have more success in the labour market stemming from the perceived quality of the institution attended.

Graduates who belong to an educational group with excess supply (Try, 2005) of human and social capital compared to those with a low supply, along with those who live in areas with weak labour-market conditions, and thereby do not have equal access to resources (eg.

Internet, national newspapers) are disadvantaged as regards job searches and resultant job opportunities.

2.10. Social, Cultural and Human Capital Factors

Higher education should confer upon graduates an advantage in the labour market. However and as already indicated, other important factors need to be taken into consideration which might affect, or influence graduates' employment outcomes. From a social capital aspect, factors such as graduates' networks - how they find jobs, their connections in the labour market, whether the person has had to move from their home town, how many jobs they applied for, how many job offers they received - are taken into consideration to determine whether those with higher social capital have greater opportunities.

2.10.1. Social capital

Social capital is understood as a resource for collective action (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1988), the outcomes of which concern economic wellbeing and the acquisition of human capital in the form of education (Stone, 2001).

The concept of *"capital"* represents investment in certain types of resources of value in a given society (Lin, 2005). As a theory, it describes the process by which capital is captured and reproduced for returns (Lin, 2005).

The key characteristics of "social capital" include social relations, formal and informal social networks, group membership, trust, reciprocity and civic engagement. Social capital theory conceptualizes production as a process by which "surplus value" is generated through investment in social relations (Lin, 1999).

Daniel, Schwier and McCalla (2003) refer to the earliest definitions of social capital by Hanifan (1916) who stated that social capital included "those intangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people – namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse among individuals and families who make up a social unit".

Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as "actual or potential resources within a social structure that collectively supports each of its members, and that it is linked to the possession of a durable network of relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". Bourdieu (1986) also states that a central proposition of social capital is that "relationships constitute an important resource for social action and the conduct of social affairs".

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) define social capital as the sum of actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit.

Putnam (2002) refers to the connections among individuals and the trust that arises from these connections and their norms of reciprocity. Putnam (2002) also suggests that networks serve as a channel for information dissemination that contributes to the achievement of personal goals. Cohen and Prusak (2001) extend Putnam's definition as "a stock of active connections among people, which covers the trust, mutual understanding, shared values and behaviours that bind people as members of human networks and communities".

Granovetter (1973) introduced the hypothesis of strong and weak ties and claims that the strength of ties within a network defines the strength and quality of relations. Strong ties are those involving frequent interaction (for example, within a family) which are developed on the basis of trust, expectations and the family bond (Jack, 2005). Granovetter (1973) claims that strong ties (such as family ties), provide emotional support, help, and sometimes monetary assistance. In his view, such ties are characterised by respect, knowledge about and familiarity of an individual, generated through experience and trust over time.

Granovetter (1973) claims that most people seeking employment receive assistance from those with whom they do not enjoy regular contact with, the 'weak ties'. This is because the weak ties "move in different circles and can provide different information" (Granovetter, 1973:87). Weak ties represent nodes operating in a wider social context that can be used to provide resources, generate business and enhance reputations. They are represented by friends of friends and are established as secondary links from existing strong ties. Personal links are considered to be weak ties and rely more extensively on a two way process of give and take between those involved in the network. Normally, the relationship with friends involves a degree of exchange where information and resources are 'traded'. In weak ties, this is not always in monetary terms, but more a trade of favours between those who are party to the network. Weak ties are reached and activated through strong ties, which rely on the establishment of trust in the individual, gained through knowledge and experience (Jack, 2005).

Jack (2005) argues that contrary to Granovetter's (1973) findings that strong ties are based on the frequency of contact and the quality and intensity of a relationship, it is the function of a tie (and how that tie can be utilised) that is important, rather than the frequency of contact.

Daniel *et al.* (2003) describe social capital as circumstances in which individuals can use membership in communities and networks to secure benefits, such as easy access to information and knowledge gathered by others in the community.

From an analysis of the above literature on social capital, it can be concluded that the following denotations are attached to the concept of "social capital":

- Relationship / membership based on trust
- Achievement of personal goals / trading of resources
- Human networks / ties with other individuals and networks
- Access to information / dissemination of information / knowledge.

Social capital can therefore be defined as an intangible resource gained and used through access to ties with other individuals or networks, which are based on trust and reciprocity. These networks are used to facilitate access to information and knowledge which the individual can use for the achievement of personal goals.

For the purposes of the research reported upon in this thesis, social capital is conceptualised as access to resources within a network which can reach beyond small clusters of intimate relationships (Bourdieu, 1996) through 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) and 'friends of friends'.

For graduates seeking employment, the first step in finding employment is gathering information about vacant positions. Employers provide that information in an attempt to attract and employ qualified workers. Therefore, those graduates with many 'weak ties' have an informational advantage over those that have a small clustered, 'strong tie' network. As Granovetter (1974) argues, 'strong ties' link close friends while 'weak ties' link acquaintances and therefore 'weak ties' are beneficial when seeking employment.

As economic changes cause turnover and mobility to become more frequent, (and consequently formal organisational channels become less reliant to job-seekers and employers), different recruitment strategies become more frequent. Coupled with this, employers often seek to reduce hiring costs by turning to social network hiring as an alternative (Godlonton and Burns, 2006). However, the decision to recruit through social networks has consequences that go far beyond reducing employers' search costs. Social network hiring has the effect of excluding those who do not have access; this is why there is often concern about the "old boys" network and why organisations which consider equity and diversity as part of their strategic objectives ensure public posting of job vacancies, rather than social network hiring. Exacerbation of inequality and workplace segregation resulting from these processes can echo through other layers of society. It also means that resources may not be efficiently allocated and workers and jobs not being matched properly – which is bad for workers, firms and the economy in general (Fountain, 2006).

However, there are numerous reasons why an employer might prefer to hire an applicant through a social tie over a non-referred applicant, including greater confidence in the quality of information (Fountain, 2006). Therefore, this type of referral can be thought of as a type

of influence on the hiring of employees because of the trust between the employer and the social tie in that the employer found more trustworthy the information offered by the referee than the information contained in a CV, job application or even an interview (Fountain, 2006).

Social networks provide opportunities for graduates, both in the form of strong and weak ties, as it is not only a matter of one's own social ties but also the networks of one's friends and acquaintances, their labour force participation, the connectedness of the entire network and the structure of the labour market (Fountain, 2006). However, social networks only provide an advantage if others in the market don't have them (*ibid*.).

In almost every definition of social capital, trust is treated as a central variable. Most approaches for measuring social capital, whether quantitative or qualitative, ask questions directly aimed at measuring the level of trust. Trust is important in the context of using it to either gain access to networks, or in the trust placed in the value of a Rhodes University degree by a potential employer.

Research conducted by Grayson (2004) shows that getting a job soon after graduation is influenced by 'connections' or social capital, and by labour market conditions. Students who must rely on their own efforts are less likely to secure employment than those who have connections of various sorts. Moreover, graduates from relatively affluent and educated families are more likely to have connections, or strong social capital, that can assist in the search for suitable employment, than those from poorer ones.

2.10.2. Human Capital

The shift to an economy increasingly based on knowledge has led to an increased demand for employees with certain forms of "human capital". Human capital has been defined as 'the knowledge, skills and competencies and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to economic activity' (Sullivan, 2001). Employers now demand that graduates have 'generic' skills (such as literacy, communication and cognate skills) and that they have the ability to adapt to change and are capable of learning new things. These generic skills are not necessarily associated with a particular field of subject matter but are acquired at university in order to participate in a knowledge economy.

2.10.3. Cultural capital

Cultural reproduction theory advanced by Bourdieu (1986) embodies the idea that parents transmit "cultural capital" in the form of dispositions, habits and attitudes to their children. Bourdieu (1986) claims that differential academic and educational attainment, and eventually social status, is a result of background inequalities.

Society can be viewed as a market in which people exchange a variety of goods and ideas in pursuit of their own interests (Burt, 2000) which results in the formation of social capital. Certain people, or certain groups of people, do better in the sense of receiving higher returns on their efforts. Bourdieu's (1986) work maintains that educational choice and occupational attainment is, directly or indirectly, a result of parental levels of educational and occupational attainment.

It therefore follows that students' background characteristics (cultural and social capital) have the potential to influence various learning outcomes, or human capital development (Grayson, 2004).

Coleman (1990) looks at the way that social organisation affects the functioning of economic activity and argues that "there is a failure to recognise the importance of concrete personal relations and networks of relations in generating trust, in establishing expectations and in creating and enforcing norms". Coleman (1990) claims that social capital, like other forms of capital, is productive, "making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible" and that social networks and social organisation are important in the functioning not only of society but also of the economy.

Whereas human capital is created by changes in a person that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways, social capital comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action. Therefore social capital is less tangible than human capital as it is exists in the *relations* among persons but both social and human capital facilitates productive activity. As people become more self-sufficient they depend less on their social structures but remain within the social network to provide others (and to pay back) the social capital that was bestowed on them to become self-sufficient in the first place. Coleman (1988) refers to people becoming self-sufficient as being "credit slips", or obligations that become less and less as the person becomes more self-sufficient.

Goddard (2003) claims that one effect of social capital that is especially important is its effect on the creation of human capital in the next generation. When examining the effects of

achievement, "family background" is considered which is made up of financial capital, human capital and social capital. Financial capital is measured by the family's income or wealth. It provides the physical resources which can aid achievement, examples of which include: a fixed place in the home to study, materials to aid learning; and financial resources to smooth family problems. Human capital is measured by parents' education which provides a cognitive environment for the student which is conducive to learning. Social capital is embodied in family relations and therefore, if the human capital possessed by parents is not complemented by social capital, human capital possessed by the parents is irrelevant to the student's educational growth (Goddard, 2003).

Coleman (1988) claims that social capital within the family that provides the student with access to the adult's human capital depends on the physical presence of adults in the family. The physical absence of adults (or in the case of modern families, single-parent families) may be described as structural deficiency in family social capital. Even if adults are physically present, there is a lack of social capital in the family if there are no strong relations between children and parents, therefore whatever *human capital* exists in the parents, the student does not benefit or profit because the social capital is missing. Coleman's (1988) research shows that younger siblings and children in larger families have less adult attention; therefore they possess less social capital, which in turn produces weaker educational outcomes.

Coleman (1988) also looks at social capital outside of the family, whether students went to public or private schools, and the effects of this on the dropout rate of students. He does so to demonstrate the effect of social capital in aiding the formation of human capital. He concludes that a property shared by most forms of social capital that differentiates it from

other forms of capital is its public good aspect: those who generate social capital only capture a small part of its benefits, a fact that leads to underinvestment in social capital.

Grayson's (2004) research on social and cultural capital of graduates at a Canadian university found that cultural capital is a function of the education, occupation and income of parents, individual ability and, among other influences, educational attainment. From this theory Grayson (2004) posits that students with relatively privileged backgrounds will acquire good jobs and that education translates into advantages associated with initial privilege into later occupational and economic advantages. Cultural capital acquired at university can collectively be translated to institutional experience (coursework, curricular, classroom and out-of-class experiences). The institutional experience contributes to various learning outcomes; these result in the development of human capital in the form of 'generic skills' development and subject matter expertise. Grayson (2004) claims that learning outcomes is influenced by 'pre-university traits', such as gender, high school marks, racial origin, private or public school. Most importantly - and embodied in status attainment and cultural reproduction theories - is the inclusion of family income and parental education as pre-university traits (Lin, 2005).

Grayson (2004) pays much credence to the idea embodied in both status attainment and cultural reproduction theory that advantage is passed on from one generation to the next. However, 'learning outcomes' (finishing a degree, developing general skills such as being able to work with others) or human capital developed in university is essential to the effective functioning in the knowledge economy.

2.11. Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed the challenges confronting the South African higher education system as a result of apartheid and has described and attempted to evaluate the changes that have been made at the level of policy in order to meet these challenges. The chapter then described one South African university, Rhodes University, and the way those changes have impacted upon it and how it has responded to those changes.

As a historically White English-medium university, Rhodes University arguably enjoys a privileged position in the South African higher education system which the University itself has tried to build upon by attending to quality in teaching and learning as its student demographics have changed. The possession of a degree from Rhodes University would therefore appear to augur well for the employment prospects of its graduates. The extent to which the quality of perceived quality of the institution awarding a degree impacts on a graduate's chances of securing employment is, however, also influenced by other factors related to social, cultural and human capital. The chapter therefore also reviewed literature related to these concepts in order to justify the research questions identified at the end of Chapter 1. The next chapter of this thesis addresses the methodology used to answer those questions.

Chapter 3 : Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the design of the research reported upon in this thesis, the process of data collection, and the methods used to analyse the data. The chapter will also consider the limitations of the research in the context of its methodology.

3.2. Research Goal

As already indicated in Chapter 1, the research reported upon in this thesis seeks to explore the experiences of one cohort of graduates from Rhodes University as they enter the job market.

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, the changes which have taken place in the South African higher education context in order to meet the challenges presented by the shift to democracy and the need to engage with globalisation were sketched in order to provide insights into the way the system interacts with the employment market. The way one university, Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape, has responded to both the challenges and changes were then described.

In exploring the experiences of the cohort of graduates, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What do holders of three-year Bachelor degrees from Rhodes University do once they complete their programmes of study?

2. In what ways might social background impact on the experiences of the graduating cohort either in seeking employment or choosing to study further?
3. What can this information tell us about the value of a Rhodes University degree?

3.3. Research Design

As the research is exploratory, it was deemed appropriate to use a case study methodology (Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

Rhodes University, a South African public higher education institution was used as a single case study or single unit of analysis (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). The use of the case study methodology allowed for the detailed collection of data which would take into consideration the interrelationship among people, institution and events (Yin, 2003). As Gray (2004) also points out, this method of research is applicable when the researcher is trying to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between a phenomenon and the context in which it is occurring. In the case of Rhodes University, it tries to understand the phenomenon of employment of graduates in the national context where there is evidence that there is a need for high skills for both social upliftment and economic responsiveness of the country.

As case studies are not representative of the population as a whole (Gray, 2004), it is not possible to make generalisations through a single case study. The aim of the research was therefore rather to add to a body of knowledge and to lay the foundation for similar case studies to be conducted, so that the generalisations will become less 'fuzzy' (Bassey, 1999). As Yin (2003) points out, generalisation can be minimised if other similar studies are

replicated in similar settings elsewhere and that generalisation may be appropriate for other cases if the 'fit' between the cases is close enough.

Data was collected using a survey as this method is deemed appropriate when using people as the units of analysis for "descriptive, explanatory and exploratory purposes" (Babbie and Mouton, 232:2007).

3.4. Research Orientation

The research is located in the practical orientation (Habermas, 1972). Habermas (1972) makes a distinction between three 'knowledge-constitutive interests'; the technical, the emancipatory and the practical. According to Habermas (1972), the technical interest aims to produce knowledge which can *control* the world in which we find ourselves. It does this through the use of empirical-analytic methods of research, hypothetical-deductive theories and empirical testing in order to predict, control and manipulate the natural environment under specified conditions. Habermas (1972) classifies the natural sciences research domain as located in this interest.

The emancipatory knowledge interest is based on the way reflection on one's history and biography result in 'self-knowledge' (how one sees oneself, one's roles and social expectations). This research interest aims to free us of those beliefs, roles and expectations which constrain us. Knowledge is produced in the emancipatory interest using critical social theories, for example, feminist theories.

The research on which this study is based is located in the 'practical' interest in that it seeks to *understand* other people and social norms. The hermeneutic or cultural sciences are classified by Habermas (1972) as belonging to this domain of knowledge which uses interpretive research to gain, secure and expand on the possibilities of mutual and self-understanding, in order to make sense of what is happening. As interactions within society become more sophisticated, formal and strategic structures are established. Through discussion and argument, consensus is gained regarding the cultural expectations and strategic influences affecting a situation. However, this process is by no means a linear progression from understanding a situation to reaching consensus. The historical-hermeneutic sciences, argues Habermas (1972), arise through a practical interest in the establishment of consensus through restoring broken channels of communication by linking and re-establishing mutual understanding of situations, the tradition to which one belongs and understanding the relationship between different individuals, groups and traditions.

3.5. Research Instrument

Following an extensive literature review, a survey instrument focused on the use of social capital in finding employment was designed. The design of the survey instrument was also guided by examination of numerous first destinations surveys used at other institutions, for example, the Graduate Exit survey used by the University of Cape Town. This process of examining other first destination surveys not only guided the formulation of questions but also attempted to ensure that the design, layout and format of the questionnaire was appropriate and that the questions themselves were clear and unambiguous (Babbie *et al.*, 2007). A pilot copy of the questionnaire was printed on A4 paper and folded to form an A5 leaflet. Feedback on this pilot copy was then sought from a senior researcher in the Social

Sciences and from another senior researcher who provided advice on the formulation of the income bands indicated on the survey. The income bands used are those used by the Bureau of Market Research which was deemed appropriate for the survey. Following this feedback from senior researchers, the survey instrument was printed and piloted on three groups of students numbering approximately 150 in total, in order to ensure that all the questions were unambiguous and that possible options for answers were covered. The Dean of Students and the Registrar of Rhodes University granted permission to administer the survey at the graduation ceremonies.

The survey was designed primarily with "closed" questions in order to allow for the uniformity in answers necessary for the descriptive analysis of quantitative data (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Open-ended questions were asked for exploratory purposes and in order to allow for insights and more in-depth understandings of some areas to be gained (Babbie *et al.*, 2007).

The survey questions consisted of two themes, "About You" and "About your Employment". The "About You" section required respondents to provide demographic data so that the relationship between demographic factors and the first destination of Rhodes University graduates could be clarified. This section also asked specific questions pertaining to graduates' social capital and their impressions of the usefulness of the knowledge and skills acquired at Rhodes University in getting a job. This section concluded with an open-ended question "If you have not yet secured a job, what is the reason for this?" When analysed, the

response to this question allowed various themes to be identified and coded for analysis purposes.

The "About your Employment" section provided information regarding the number of positions applied for, how many offers had been received and how employment (if any) had been secured. The survey was designed in a way which allowed information from this section to be correlated with information from the 'About You' section. The survey concluded with an open-ended question "Why or how has the Rhodes degree been influential?" to gain insights into graduates' perceptions of the value of their Rhodes University degree in the job market. A copy of the survey instrument appears as Appendix A to this thesis.

3.6. Administration of the Survey

As already indicated, the survey was distributed at the annual 2009 Rhodes University Graduation Ceremonies. All students who had completed the requirements for the award of a qualification and who attended the graduation ceremonies (a total of 1 287 respondents) were therefore asked to complete the survey. The survey was distributed by placing it on the seats reserved for graduands along with a pen. Graduands were requested to complete the questionnaire during the graduation ceremony. The surveys were then collected as the graduands proceeded to their graduation.

The focus of the research was on graduates who qualified for a three-year undergraduate Bachelor degree only. Due to time constraints at the ceremonies, it was not possible to

distinguish between those who were graduating with a three-year Bachelor degree and those who were graduating with other degrees. For this reason it was necessary to distribute the survey to all graduands and sort them accordingly, after they were collected. In 2009, 696 graduates received a three-year Bachelor degree and 567 respondents in this category attended the Ceremony and completed the survey. The other 129 degrees were awarded in absentia. This meant that 82% of graduands receiving three-year Bachelor degrees completed the survey. This was deemed to be representative of the population sample.

The data from the survey were captured into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and imported into Statistica. The data were analysed using frequency tables.

3.7. Limitations of the Study

The status of this study as a case study has already been noted. Within the case of Rhodes University, the focus on only one cohort of graduates is such that the study is limited in its potential to provide over-arching understandings. In addition, the study only looks at a transition period of six months between leaving university and reporting on employment. As already noted, however, the research was essentially exploratory in nature and the thesis should be read with this proviso in mind.

Whilst every effort was made to ensure that graduands completed the survey, it was voluntary and self-administered. Given constraints on the time available to administer the survey and also the awareness that questions should be kept short and precise (Czaja and Blair, 2005), the design of the survey instrument was necessarily limited.

The total number of graduates who did not participate in the 2009 graduation ceremonies, for various reasons, was approximately 18%. Taking into consideration that some of these graduates qualified for a degree other than a three-year undergraduate Bachelors degree, the possibility is slight that the omission of these students may have introduced an element of bias in the survey results.

As the research conducted in this thesis was aimed at understanding the employment of graduates, it did not attempt to explore graduates studying further, or the nature of these studies. Further research in this area is therefore recommended.

3.8. Ethical considerations

As already indicated, the survey was completed voluntarily. The survey instrument was left on the seats of graduands who were then free not to complete it. No pressure was exerted to ensure completion. The surveys were completed anonymously and no effort was made to match data provided with individual student profiles. In the event, all graduands completed the survey.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter reported on the research design and orientation, the research instrument and the method used to analyse the data. It therefore provides a satisfactory backdrop for the discussion of the research results reported in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4 : Analysis of Research Findings

4.1. Introduction

With reference to the research methodology reported in Chapter 3, the objective of Chapter 4 is to provide an analysis of the research findings.

4.2. Respondents

As already indicated in Chapter 3 of this thesis, Rhodes University awarded 1 745 degrees in 2009. The survey designed for the purposes of this research was distributed to the 1 287 graduands who attended the graduation ceremonies in Grahamstown in April 2009.

The focus of the research reported on in this thesis is on graduates who qualified with a three-year undergraduate Bachelors degree. In 2009, 696 three-year undergraduate Bachelor degrees were awarded. Of these, 567 graduates completed the survey representing an 82% response rate.

The composition of the respondents was as follows:

- Asian – 5%
- African – 37%
- Coloured – 4%
- White – 54%

The percentage of Asian and Coloured was relatively low compared to African and White respondents. Therefore it was deemed appropriate to combine the results of Asian, Coloured

and African and to use the generic “Black” when referring to the race distribution of respondents.

4.3. Findings of the Research

Of the 567 respondents surveyed at graduation:

- 35% had found employment (200 respondents).
- 33% of graduates had decided to study further (187 respondents).
- 14% were searching for employment (80 respondents).
- 6% of respondents were travelling, taking time off, doing community service, or exploring other opportunities (34 respondents).
- 12% of respondents did not provide a reason why they were not employed, or why they were not seeking employment (66 respondents).

4.4. Graduates who had found employment

From the analysis of the 200 respondents who had found employment, a profile was created which indicated the following characteristics:

- 61% were female.
- 60% were Black.
- Most employed graduates grew up in an urban area.
- 51% had attended a public school.
- 21% used isiXhosa as a home language.
- The graduate was more likely to have studied in the Commerce faculty (62%) and to have completed their degree in the regulation time of three years (53%).

- Most graduates had a family member who had either a Bachelor degree or a post graduate qualification (71%) and most were raised by both a mother and a father (76%).
- 66% of employed graduates responded that they had participated in part-time vacation work ("vac work").
- 51% of employed respondents indicated that their studies had been paid for by their family. 22% of employed respondents claimed that their studies were funded by a bursary.
- The average salary of those employed was R10 500 per month.

4.5. Job Search Methods

The analysis of the data indicated that 59% of the graduates had found their jobs through formal channels, i.e. by means of job advertisements, graduate recruitment programmes on campus, through their bursars or sponsors, or by approaching employers directly. 41% of employed graduates indicated that they had found their jobs through informal channels i.e. through friends or family, through vacation work, because they knew someone in an organisation, or because they had been head-hunted. Some were recommended to employers by the academic department in which they had studied and some had joined the family business. According to Bourdieu's (1986) definition of social capital, these informal channels are indicative of social capital.

Job search methods were evenly distributed between the groups of job searchers (i.e. by faculty or race) with the majority of all groups applying for vacancies through

advertisements. There was no evidence in the data of unequal access to employment networks which would have a direct effect on equality of opportunity.

4.6. Graduates not employed

Of the 582 respondents, 80 (13%) respondents indicated that they do not yet have a job and that they are actively searching for employment. The reasons cited by this group of respondents as to why they had not secured a job ranged from the recession, being unsuccessful in interviews, being a foreigner and some indicating that they had not yet decided what they were wanting to do or were waiting for responses.

The racial composition of graduates unemployed and reasons mentioned above is equally distributed between blacks and whites. The majority of this group graduated with a Commerce degree (46%), followed by Humanities graduates (35%).

4.7. Graduates pursuing further study

33% of Rhodes University graduates surveyed indicated that they were studying further.

Comparison with a national study surveying the employment experiences of 2 672 graduates from 1990 to 1998 (Moleke, 2005a) shows that, on average, 71% of this sample were studying further after obtaining their first degree. In United Kingdom, however, in 2006/2007 only 16% of graduates with a first degree were involved in further study while 64% were employed (HESA, 2009). In the United Kingdom, however, the first degree is an

honours degree. It could be the case, therefore, that in South Africa an ordinary three-year Bachelor degree is no longer considered sufficient to provide an 'edge' in the job market.

Moreover, although it is possible to make comparisons between national higher education systems and within systems, it is necessary to exercise caution before coming to any conclusions. In any one cohort, the economic climate, the supply and demand factors of the labour market, different cultures within the student body and the need to support families financially could influence the decision to study further. However, decisions to study further could also depend on the desire of graduates to increase their employment opportunities and earnings and whether the investment in additional years of education is perceived as beneficial. The research reported on in this thesis did not seek to explore decisions to study further at this level and therefore comparisons are for illustrative purposes only.

The following profile emerged from an analysis of the 33% of graduates who indicated that they were studying further:

- Of this group, 62% were White.
- Of the group, 64% were female.
- Of those who had chosen to study further, only 4% had attended a former DET school. Letseka and Maile (2008) note that, since 1994, there has been an increased migration of the Black middle classes from the Black townships to suburbs which were previously reserved only for White population groups. As a result, an increasing number of Black middle class children now attend historically White schools. Given

that school of origin is an indicator of social class, the data analysed in this study would suggest a correlation between social class and postgraduate study.

- 82% of the graduates studying further had completed their degree on time. According to the DMU, of the 2006 intake at Rhodes University (i.e. the intake matching the graduating cohort surveyed), 46% completed their degree in regulation time. The completion of a degree within regulation time would appear to be a factor in decisions or opportunities to study further.
- 85% of graduates studying further spoke English as their home language. Arguably, this is another indicator of social class.
- 81% of respondents studying further claim to have been raised by both their mother and father.
- 50% of graduates studying further were doing so in the Faculty of Science. Since the Faculty of Science is one of the smallest faculties at Rhodes University, this is an indication that more science graduates choose to pursue postgraduate work than those from other faculties.
- 62% of those studying further reported that their postgraduate work was being funded by their families. This is yet another indicator of the link between social class and the decision and/or opportunity to study further.
- Only 13% of those studying further reported that no one in their immediate family held a Bachelor or postgraduate degree. This is yet another indicator of the effect of social capital on the decision and/or opportunity to study further.

As already noted, the survey attempted to explore respondents' perceptions of the value of a Rhodes University degree (as opposed to a degree from another university) in the job market.

91% of graduates in employment felt that having a Rhodes University degree had been a factor in securing employment. Responses to a follow up question, "If Yes to the above question (Do you think that having a Rhodes Degree has been influential in getting your job?), WHY or HOW has the Rhodes Degree been influential?" graduates cited the University's reputation and perceptions of its prestige:

- "Good reputation"
- "High reputation and employers respect it"
- "Degree well-recognised".
- "Prestigious".
- "Rhodes is a well-known university and has a good reputation".
- "Stature – Rhodes has a good reputation and they provide you with excellent backing".
- "Recognised on broad level across the country and abroad".
- "Rhodes graduates are first choice because of the Rhodes reputation – so we stand better chances of getting jobs - worldwide".
- "Previous Rhodes graduates are well thought of and employers look to employ Rhodes graduates".

However, respondents also identified Rhodes networks as important in securing employment:

- "Also my employer has a close relationship with Rhodes".
- "My employer was an ex-Rhodian".
- "Because my employer (an ex-Rhodian) thought my degree would help with the job".
- "My boss did the same degree as me at Rhodes".

These statements give credence to the theory that reputation is a form of social capital termed "prestige social capital" (Manning, 2006). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) define social capital as the sum of actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. The examples above indicate that the reputation of having a Rhodes degree is a form of social capital that graduates felt was advantageous.

4.8. Knowledge and Skills acquired by Rhodes graduates

All respondents (567) were asked if they believed the knowledge and skills acquired at Rhodes had equipped them to get a job in their intended field. 94% of this group felt that Rhodes University had prepared them adequately for employment. This indicates that, whether graduates were employed or not, the majority felt that the knowledge and skills acquired had adequately equipped them for employment.

Many respondents commented on their overall development during their time at the University as the following examples show:

- "Disciplined and high standards"
- "Self-disciplined and efficient"
- "Character development"
- "Acquired the relevant skills of critical thinking"
- "It has helped me realise my potential and capabilities. I have grown as an academic and know that I can do well"

- "Rhodes always produces the best – what we learn here prepares us for the outside world"
- "Provided me with the qualifications I needed"
- "Critical thinking"
- "Time management skills"
- "Pressure at Rhodes prepared me for the workload"
- "Professionalism"
- "Community engagement"
- "Hard working and setting of high standards in the workforce"

The above statements show that some of the individuals surveyed felt that their time at Rhodes had provided them with the opportunity to build on their human capital over and above the knowledge gained from their particular degree.

4.9. Satisfaction of Rhodes University graduates

As already noted, the aim of the research reported upon in this thesis was to explore graduates' experiences in the job market against the background of change which has occurred in higher education in South Africa since 1994. More specifically, the aim was to explore the experiences of Rhodes University graduates.

The majority (92%) of employed graduates felt that having a Rhodes University degree had prepared them well for their current position and 6% felt that it had prepared them "to some extent".

Of those graduates who have found employment after studying at Rhodes, 85% are satisfied with their current job. This can be an indicator that students feel that they are employed in positions which are suitable for the utilisation of their knowledge gained at Rhodes University and that there is a positive relationship between these graduates' field of study and the positions in which they have been hired.

Some graduates felt that specific courses had been more beneficial than others with comments such as "My Rhodes degree has benefited me a lot, especially Psychology because it has assisted tremendously with understanding sales and marketing" and other graduates felt that it was the entire experience. This is evident from the feedback from graduates, such as the following:

- "The WHOLE university experience has prepared me for my current job"
- "It taught me how to set up a business which I have done"
- "We are well prepared for the real world"

Graduates' responses to why they had chosen the degree which they had completed were varying. The majority of graduates in particular disciplines, such as Journalism, cited the reputation of the degree as the reason for choosing that degree. Responses such as:

- "I am working in Radio – my Rhodes degree has certainly helped"
- "The journalism degree is known for its excellence"
- "My degree in Journalism has equipped me for my current position"

This highlights the social capital attained through the reputation of a particular faculty or department in which students have been enrolled and which they feel has been influential in gaining employment. This again highlights the "prestige social capital" that Manning (2006) refers to which is the potential resources available through the network of relationships possessed by a social unit.

CHAPTER 5 : Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

As already noted, the goal of this thesis was to gain a practical (Habermas, 1972) understanding of the experiences of graduates with a three-year Bachelor degree from Rhodes University as they entered the employment market.

Social, cultural and human capital factors were explored in order to better understand whether it was the degree *per se* (and more specifically the Rhodes University degree) that was beneficial in gaining employment, or whether social, cultural and human capital factors were influential in determining employment opportunities.

5.2. Discussion and Conclusion

The study showed that Rhodes University's reputation appeared to serve graduates well in the job market. Reputation was cited by graduates who have found employment as being a factor which might have influenced their success in gaining employment. Graduates, whether employed or not, largely felt that having a *Rhodes University* degree was beneficial as it was considered to be of a high quality and provided them with the knowledge required by the labour market.

As this thesis has attempted to show, the phenomenon of graduates' transition from higher education to employment is an area of enormous interest involving many elements affecting graduates' transition from education to employment. Worsening employment prospects and the constantly changing needs of the labour market have not been addressed in the thesis but

no doubt impact on the unemployment of graduates and their motives for studying further, or doing other things after graduating.

As Chapter 2 showed, perusal of quantitative data shows that Rhodes University has made progress in achieving a more equitable profile in its student body with regard to both enrolments and graduation rates. Examination of the data from the survey administered as part of this study shows, moreover, that graduates largely seem to be satisfied with the way the University has served their entrance into the employment market.

As public universities are increasingly held accountable for their funding, debates centred on performance indicators being used to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the higher education system are taking place (Bruwer, 1998). First destination surveys, which look primarily at the employment of graduates, are used by many higher education institutions to assess their performance with regards economic responsiveness. In conducting this research, I initially felt that the extent to which graduates were finding employment was a good indicator of whether Rhodes University was being efficient and effective. However, the literature review and the research itself have created an understanding for me of the many purposes of higher education and have led me to believe that determining how many graduates find employment cannot be used in isolation to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of a higher education institution. Even if a graduate is unemployed, the extent to which a university has been able to instil in him/her the criticality needed to participate as a member of a democratic society is a measure of the effectiveness and efficiency of the system.

This is not to say that graduate employment is not important. Initially, one of the main objectives and expectation of students attending university is that, as graduates, they will secure a place in the labour market, be provided with better opportunities and contribute to the social upliftment of the country. This is a necessity for graduates in whom a large amount of investment has been placed by various stakeholders in the hope that employment and higher incomes will bring about social upliftment. The need to realise this investment would appear to be more of an imperative in some social groups than in others – an observation which is supported by the data which shows that more White students had chosen to study further than other groups.

It could also be the case, however, that, in the context of affirmative action, more Black students receive what are perceived to be positive job offers than other groups - a hypothesis which would need to be confirmed with further research.

Another goal of higher education, besides providing a pathway to employment, is to instil a life-long love of learning. It could therefore be argued that some students develop a passion for learning and this could explain the reason for students choosing to further their studies.

5.3. Recommendations

It is evident that the transition from university to employment is a complex one which requires further research.

The phenomenon of graduates studying further, where they choose to study and their reasons for deciding to study further, requires further research. The role that career guidance and

graduate recruitment play are just some of the areas that also need to be researched further as this would provide a better understanding of the impact on more purposeful preparation for the job market on employment prospects.

Much research is also needed into the relationship between studies and work further into a graduate's career which would require an easily accessible alumni database which could provide constant polls for alumni to complete. This would be cost-effective and provide a clear picture at the point in time when the question is posed.

As no other studies, other than the research reported in this thesis, which look at the destination of graduates of Rhodes University, have recently been conducted, it is recommended that ongoing research is conducted into the destination of students and their perceptions of their experience at Rhodes University. This should be done in order to continuously evaluate whether graduates perceive having a Rhodes University degree as being beneficial in creating employment opportunities, and whether they perceive their experience at university to be of a high quality. This can then be used to assess whether the university is achieving its goals and objectives of providing a quality education.

Although the transition from graduating to employment might vary between institutions, research by other universities would also assist in gaining a better understanding of the transition of graduates nationally. It is hoped that the research reported in this thesis will assist in providing other universities with a framework in which to conduct such studies.

This is necessary if higher education institutions of South Africa wish to focus on improving the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the sector as the perceptions of graduates should be taken as an indicator of an institutions success in reaching these imperatives.

List of Tables

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