

## HONORARY GRADUATE

### Mervyn Shear

Professor Shear is a scholar of international repute, has exercised a leadership role in the academic community of Southern Africa and has served this university extraordinarily well in his office as Deputy Vice-Chancellor holding the portfolio of Student Affairs.

Mervyn Shear grew up in Johannesburg. He attended Rhodes University in Grahamstown and in 1949 successfully completed all the first-year courses for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. In 1950 he enrolled as a dental student at this university. He was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Dental Surgery (as it was then called) in 1954 and was appointed Junior Lecturer in 1956. He proceeded to London and became Senior House Officer in Oral Surgery at the Eastman Dental Hospital. In 1957 he moved to oral pathology in the same hospital - thus began his career as an oral pathologist. In 1958 he returned to our Dental School to a lecturership in oral histology. He obtained the Higher Diploma in Dentistry in 1959 and the degree of Master of Dental Science in 1961. He became a Member of the Royal College of Pathologists of Great Britain in 1965 and was promoted to Senior Lecturer and Head of the Joint Oral Pathology Unit. In 1968 he was appointed Professor of Dental Science. A year later the chair was redesignated as one of Oral Pathology and he became Head of the newly established Department of Oral Pathology. Several high academic honours were to come his way; the senior doctorate in his discipline at this university, the degree of Doctor of Science in Dentistry in 1973; election as a Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists in 1977; and election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of South Africa in 1978.

Mervyn Shear has been the recipient of various academic awards, including the Floyd Memorial Medal of the Dental Association, the J C Middleton Shaw Fellowship, the Julius Staz Award and the R V Bird Gold Medal. He has published prodigiously, has been editor and associate editor of learned journals and a member of numerous learned and scientific societies. He has been a visiting lecturer and visiting professor in the United States, Denmark, Australia and the Netherlands. He was the founder of the South African Division of the International Association for Dental Research. Perhaps the greatest acclaim he received from his peers was his election as President of the International Association of Oral Pathologists for the period 1981 to 1984.

He has played a very significant role as a leader in the university community of Southern Africa. Within our university he was Chairman of the Academic Staff Association from 1968 to 1970, a member of the Academic Freedom Committee and of various Senate and other committees, and Chairman of the Senate Library Committee. In 1982 he was elected a Senate member on Council. Since leaving this university he has been invited by sister institutions to advise on matters relating to student affairs, in which he is a recognized authority. The confidence of his academic colleagues that he enjoyed at Wits for his sound and fair judgement and for his integrity has resulted in his reputation in university circles being very high. He is also a member of the Council of the University of Lesotho.

Mervyn Shear held the office of Deputy Vice-Chancellor of this university from January 1983 until his retirement at the end of 1990. His initial appointment was for three years on a part-time basis and he continued to hold the Chair of Oral Pathology and the Headship of the Department. His portfolio was formidable. In general he

was responsible for matters relating to student affairs, a term embracing all the business of the Students' Representative Council, the myriad of student societies, Rag, national and international student organizations, sports, student publications, bursaries and scholarships, residences, catering, campus health services, student discipline and student employment on campus. In addition he was responsible for the administrative procedure relating to the filling of chairs in the Faculties of Arts and Education, and for the art galleries on campus, the planetarium, the libraries, the schools liaison service, admissions procedures, the day-care centre and the counselling and careers unit.

During the eight years of his Deputy Vice-Chancellorship Mervyn Shear's portfolio was modified from time to time as fellow DVCs came and went, but he retained the central core of student affairs. It became a progressively more important responsibility as the rising temperature in national politics was manifest also on campus. In addition, as the influx of black students gathered pace, the increased heterogeneity of the student body brought with it new demands on administrative resources. It became evident that, superbly well as Mervyn Shear was managing it, the student portfolio was placing an impossible burden of responsibility on top of his academic, professional and administrative commitments. His reappointment in 1986 for five years was accordingly as a full-time Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and he relinquished his chair, while retaining a close connection with the Department of Oral Pathology and its research programme.

One of the most memorable aspects of his work as Deputy Vice-Chancellor was the courageous and skilful role he played in confrontations between students and police, a role which was not without both danger and great personal cost. He displayed courage, leadership and skill as a negotiator and peacemaker.

Mervyn Shear's deep concern for the well-being of his students earned him their affectionate respect. Always he conducted himself with sensibility and dignity, whether seeking to assist students arrested after a demonstration or as an honoured guest at a rugby dinner. He was an extraordinary man in extraordinary times, with profound insights into the nuances of the social and political environment through which the university was then passing.

How fitting it is that his Alma Mater confer on Mervyn Shear, one of her most distinguished sons, the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* as a tribute to his scholarship, his leadership and his achievement in the field of student affairs.