Jonah and the whale: Restructuring as experienced by the soon-to-be-swallowed

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This chapter is based on a research diary detailing merger dynamics during last six months of 2003, in an institution with a merger date of January 2004. It gives a detailed and vivid account of the issues that arose as University C (UC) worked towards becoming part of a larger, comprehensive institution in combination with University B (UB) and Technikon A (TA). Here is the restructuring process as subjectively perceived by one individual: the multiplicities of issues and problems, the increasingly frenetic working pace, positive and negative developments, and how hard staff in all three institutions worked to meet a fast-approaching merger deadline. The diary records increasing scepticism about how merger developments met the restructuring ideals and a gradual discernment of important inequalities developing in the shape of imminent arrangements. It also bears witness to the personal toll exacted by involvement in the process.

July 2003: overview of meetings

21 July

Two major meetings were attended this month – one a workshop – introduction to the Department of Education (DoE) merger unit and sharing merger efforts to track the progress made in the three-way amalgamation. I left the workshop with the impression that the Unit, which has suddenly come to life, is making a tour of institutions, and gathering what can only be termed surface impressions on which to gauge the state of affairs. Whether the Unit is a help or a hindrance remains to be seen but to start with it does not help much if there is ambivalence, misinterpretation of queries, inadequate, incomplete, unhelpful responses, often from odd tangents, all of which were bossily and authoritatively advanced. Being neutral or appearing to be so raises questions about the existence of the Unit and the purpose it is meant to serve. If it is to be a soft hand in an iron glove, there will be many problems ahead.
22 July

... the overall concern at the moment is that of the name of the new institution. And as always, what to do with our administration is quite an issue. A meeting is scheduled for 31 July to discuss what happens to central administration staff.

25 July

This meeting was mainly about student problems and needs. Among the problems was the concern expressed about our principal’s participation in the merger process. The students would like to see him play a more prominent role than he presently plays. The chair of the student body was going to write to express this desire to management.

August 2003: overview of meetings

I attended five meetings this month which extended from the shortest of about an hour to a whole working day. Whatever they were labelled, the meetings turned out to be about mergers and merger issues. There are – from what I have been able to gather at the meetings – several levels in operation.

At the top are senior management and merger managers discussing the names of merged institutions, agreement documents and merger offices. These seem to be the most significant issues to those closely involved at that level. And without sorting them out nothing else, it would appear, can happen.

While this may be true, and given the rapid passing of time, other crucial issues – such as the enrolment and registration of students, what to teach next year, the printing of teaching materials and who is responsible for the sub-departments at UC – are all put on the back burner.

Then there are the students who are concerned about what happens to them next year and whether it is business as usual or if something else – what? Besides these levels there are the task groups and faculties operating in merger discussions. There is a great deal happening and being discussed and quite often it seems that that is all that is going on – with very little being finally settled and documented. It is probably a state of affairs that will continue for some time.

In all of this, however, the restructuring of higher education is pushed into the background. Foremost of concerns among staff members is job security and holding onto what can be clung to at this crucial time, e.g. the modules taught, staff complements and in short a desire to keep on doing things as we have always done them. I have also been involved in requests with petitions from students (probably instigated by lecturers) for extension of hourly appointments and lecturing help. It had to be explained that, according to FTEs, such requests were futile. The significant point, however, is that some staff members are totally
unaware of staff/student ratios, that we are in the midst of merger procedures and that their salaries will be paid by merging institutions next year. I have even had requests to extend contracts for next year and retain lecturers due to retire at the end of this year. This is also a reflection of the high unemployment rate in the country and the concerns about finding other employment.

The power play, though tempered somewhat, is also very much at work – particularly at lecturer-lecturer and department-department level. Depending on who or what you are, it can get quite acrimonious at times – for example, in one department there are more than 90 staff members at UB who could easily swallow up the three or four staff members at UC. As a result of that, the staff at UC are beginning to act quite irrationally as to what to offer next year. One particular staff member is keeping to himself and not joining up with UB whatsoever, in spite of or because of the number of their staff members. This lecturer would like contracts of temporary staff extended, so UB does not get the few students we do get. The Faculty of Commerce on the other hand is really cosying up to its counterpart at UB, almost eloping into a new relationship without quite ending the old with the other faculties at UC.

What has also emerged rather late in the day, but nonetheless significant, is that UC will be merging with Afrikaner institutions with very organised, authoritarian work cultures. Taking that into account and the absenteeism, apathy and low morale of staff, very strict measures such as work schedules and disciplinary measures are being invoked to get staff in line. Getting teaching and assessment quality management measures back to what they were years ago or something close to that is also proving to be an uphill battle. The document on enrolments and their implications in the mergers was not very difficult to put together and review, because the data was easily available on the Management information systems. But to get module pass rates and assessment of exam questions in relation to tuition material is like getting hen’s teeth.

It has not helped that staff numbers and student enrolments have gone down. But the usual easygoing UC work atmosphere hardly helps to get ourselves into working gear. At one campus, for instance, the deteriorating behaviour of both staff and students is put down to the insecurity and uncertainty of the mergers. But there is a great deal more than that, and has to be acknowledged.

**6 August**

Interviews for the Director of Library Services: these were interviews that should have taken place sooner. The position was only advertised internally. To lead library services during this trying period of transition, what was required was someone with the ability not only to know and run the complex UC library system but also to predict and prepare for the mergers with neighbouring institutions. As academic representative, I chose to ask questions
about coordinating the activities of the various campuses from an office at one campus, and what needed to be taken into account library services-wise before and during merger operations.

It was apparent that none of the candidates had given this part of the leadership job much thought. In the main, the merger boiled down to job security and not the continuation of UC services or serving the students. None of the candidates stood out in any way and had any of them been selected only routine tasks would have been carried out. Morale was another problem and since this was pretty low and affected staff functioning, each of the candidates was asked about this, but from their answers it would seem that they are not immune to the malady either.

No appointment was made, mainly because nobody stood out as a likely candidate who would be able to come up with anything unique during this transition period. What was brought to the fore, though, was the anxiety about job security. The restructuring process was intended to create new institutions to serve the access, redress and equity requirements of the new democracy. And yet that does not even occur to the people working in the institution who are worried more than anything else, not about education or service to the community, but about how they will survive this very trying time. Adding to the anxiety is the length of time it is taking to happen and in the meantime morale goes down even further.

11 August: Faculty Board meeting

A number of issues at this meeting were about mergers or merger-related concerns. The first to be discussed was the departmental research funds which on paper amounted to a few millions in the faculty. For the most part, these funds were generated from publications by a number of staff members who have since left. At the time and until 1999, monies generated were kept in a departmental pool. In 1999, a process was put in place to divide the Department of Education (DoE) funds for publications three ways — one-third to the University Research Fund, one-third to the departmental research fund, and one-third to the author of the article. The concern is now about what happens to the anonymous accumulated general funds, that is, monies accumulated pre-1999. Heads of Departments (HODs) have been worrying about this for some time now, since they would like the monies to be equitably divided among the various sub-departments. The matter was referred to the University Research Committee, but nothing definitive emerged about the accumulated general funds — until a memo received on 22 August. It would seem that the funds are just figures on paper because the memo says, 'As you know, the University has in the past effectively borrowed the funds set aside for departmental research to cover the costs. There is no provision in this year’s budget to reimburse the
departmental research funds. The Committee has therefore decided to freeze all expenditure against the departmental research funds for the rest of the year, with the exception of that portion of the fund allocated to individual academics ‘(i.e. the 1/3 of subsidy generated since 1999 that is allocated to the academic personally – provided it has not been spent.).’

Insofar as fundamental merger talks across the campuses go, contact and exploratory meetings have been ongoing for the most part; there is a diminishing of political posturing, names of new institutions have come up for discussion, task-teams have been set up, programmes of institutions have been compared, enrolments and registration of new and pipeline students for 2004 have been or have yet to be discussed, UC examination arrangements have to be reviewed, so that students are not disadvantaged in comparison with UB and TA students – and the issue concerning History, Psychology and Sociology not fitting into the technikon structure have all come up.

Faculties have also reported that meetings were held with merger partners. From these meetings, the following have emerged: quarterly reports, usually about needs and complaints, should also be sent to merger partners, morale is pretty low and so is the work ethic, students are also performing badly with not attending lectures, not getting and reading prescribed texts, and high failure and drop-out rates. Apart from the quarterly reports, the general behaviour of staff and students is attributed to the uncertainty and insecurity brought on by the mergers. At UC on the other hand, some faculties are going on ahead to negotiate arrangements for next year, such as catering only for pipeline students and not recruiting new students at all ... This puts the other faculties in a quandary, not only because of the divisive attitude but also because of programmes such as the BA – which Commerce, for instance, was quite happy to be a part of until now. Staff at UC also expressed the need for assurances that they would be employed for the next two years (in accord with labour legislation), the importance of foundation courses during the merger process, and that all members of the faculty be involved in all merger decision-making. One faculty also expressed doubts about meetings, discussing issues, making submissions and proposals to a management which seemed to do nothing significant with them. They felt it was a waste of time and effort, since the work it did seemed to disappear into thin air and nothing more was heard.

12 August: Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) visit

The panel of HEQC members began proceedings with a presentation to tell us the purpose of their visit, what they were mandated to do in general and what they could learn from us. They were also prepared to answer any questions that we might have about themselves and quality concerns. It would seem that the HEQC visit was to find out about UC quality measures that could be used
in the new merged institutions. Many of the new tertiary complexes would be very much like the old UC organisation, apart from one another, and they could learn a great deal from us about management and quality management in particular. The Council Chamber in which the meeting took place was full of UC staff members and many were the questions put to them and by them. For example, I asked about the differences – if there were any between the broader definition of quality, a la HEQC and the masses of educational documentation pre- and post-1994; the old fashioned and lambasted term ‘standards’; and academic creep – that is, universities becoming more like technikons. Finally I asked whether the educational levels, primary and secondary school levels, need also to be jacked up if HEQC initiatives were to be worth anything at all. The leader of the delegation went into a lengthy spiel about the old-fashioned standards and what was envisaged as a consequence of that. In the process, the questions put to the panel were barely touched upon. If statutory quality management bodies are really serious about transforming education in South Africa, they seem to be going about it in a very unfocussed, lackadaisical way. In spite of the fact that they were apparently there to gather what they could from the UC set-up, it would seem that their ideas of quality management have not been thought through. When I spoke to the departing group at the end of the day, they jokingly referred to my comments as ‘Hitler-resque’, to which I commented that if there is no structure and organisation there is not going to be much quality, the state that UC is at present experiencing in some parts of the system more than others.

The most crucial issue for the HEQC party was the measures that UC would take to ensure adequate services for students come 2004. To tell the truth, there are so many issues about mergers that have to be considered and prepared for, that the question took most of us off-guard. At any rate besides everything else, it made us aware that some thought needs to be given to serving students next year. One HEQC member was also under the impression that merger negotiations were hunky-dory and that staff would happily be teaching joint programmes next year. She had to be disabused of this rosy view of the merger process so far. Although the UC merger partners had for the most part replaced political posturing with more cordial partnership talks, the restructuring of higher education was hardly likely to be a tea-party. Broadening access, effectively integrating disparate institutional programmes and coordinating examinations were all knotty activities that would take some time to look at, compare and shape into commonalities.

What this particular aspect of the discussion brought to the fore was that government bodies which are far away from institutional battle-grounds had benign, rose-coloured spectacle views of how various parts of the merger process would progress and develop. Meeting merger institutions occasionally
gives overseeing government bodies insights, but not a deep knowledge and understanding of the battles and skirmishes that are taking place and the other issues besides the ultimate transformation of education that muddy the restructuring waters even more. Our Vice-Chancellor suggested that when overseeing quality at the institutional level, the committee should also not neglect to take into account staff upgrading with specific time limits, staff development and throughput rates.

Faculty Meeting, scheduled for 21 August, was cancelled at one campus because it was closed to students who were protesting about two students and the campus principal, all of whom have recently been suspended. Only staff members are now allowed on campus.

21 August: Faculty Board meeting

The rest of us were informed about what was happening on the merger scene. So far the name issue has temporarily been put on hold because UC will not contribute its share of the costs to test the change in brand name. A merger office with a paid staff member is soon to be established to coordinate and speed up activities. A meeting is to be held on 3 September, at which what the person in this office will do will be spelt out.

Besides that, staff from all three institutions have been encouraged to socialise with one another, but not get into substantive merger issues. It would seem that talks far from social have already taken place—insofar as UC Commerce at least is concerned. The talk so far is that they as a faculty have decided that they share enough commonality with UB to forego registering first-year students next year. The faculty will however service UC pipeline students as it integrates more fully into UB. What they overlook, something they have been determined to hold onto in the past, is that general BA students take a great number of first-year courses from their offerings. This was pointed out to the UC Merger Manager, who with the UB Merger Manager needs to structure the interdepartmental and interfaculty talks in a much better way than mere socialising.

From the general atmosphere that prevailed during the meeting, it emerged that some issues were being paid enormous amounts of attention, such as governance measures and merger documentation finalisation for next year—while other more immediate practical 2004 concerns, such as registration matters and calendar offerings, are yet to figure substantially in any agenda. To add to these, central administration staff have yet to learn what happens to them, as does UC about printed materials for next year. The UC Commerce initiative at the invitation of UB is also fragmenting the UC scene. The conclusions reached during the meeting with UB will be considered later and how they impact on other faculties, e.g. the BA of the Faculty of Arts. The UC leaders told us that for the UB leaders, the merging was going to be friendly and cordial. This attitude
however needs to be conveyed to all the UB components — some of which are openly hostile or, if not that, then clearly of a colonising mentality.

September 2003: overview of meetings

At this crucial time of the year and the merger process, speed is now of the essence, as can be seen by the summaries of the meetings. So far the main achievements have been the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA), the finalising of the name of the new institution and the establishment of the Project Office. There is now a harmonious working relationship between the three institutions, with hiccups now and then. The speed of events has obviously caught up and there would appear to be very little time to expend on in-fighting, etc. An enormous amount of work still requires doing, so that the three institutions will be ready to register students for next year. The most urgent concerns for 2004 are branding and marketing of the new institution, registration procedures that would need to be put in place, registration systems that would need to be made operational, compiling budgets for next year, paying the members of the joint project office, deciding on definitions of pipeline students, fee structures, new management structures apart from interim councils and top management, calendars and offering and programmes for 2004, what to do with central administration staff members, lack of information from UC, new banking details, managing change, developing a communication website, interactions with DoE, supplementary exams, graduation ceremonies for 2004 and the UC legal successor.

Besides these restructuring ‘musts’ that will need to be done, UC has also to deal with staff problems such as low morale and job insecurities (which may or may not be connected with absenteeism), inability to follow protocols, and a general lassitude insofar as taking responsibilities seriously is concerned. As a result, top management has had to remind staff of professional obligations and spell out the action that will be taken if necessary, according to the human resource policy.

A number of operational items have yet to be decided upon in the midst of beginning the examinations process at UC. The difficulty is carrying on with business as usual and at the same time contending with all the other events taking place. Not all staff members are involved but everybody is affected in some way or other.

At the Dean’s workshop, I presented a paper on assessing quality management practices at UC and from what I was able to see for myself and the information from the information management system and staff, that is HODs mainly, it is becoming more difficult by the day to carry on as usual with such crucial changes taking place. In terms of quality management in our faculty, the most crucial conclusion was that change is very much in the
hands of the individual staff member who is now being made to feel extremely vulnerable. The pressure of change, as well as of feeling highly dispensable in the restructuring process, does not augur well, either for the well-being of the individual or the transformation process. Very little is being done about the human factor in the change process, and we might have to pay very heavily for this somewhere along the line.

UC top management, which includes Council, have been far too slow to resolve what happens to central administration staff members – and the DoE being reluctant to soil its hands has not helped much either. The staff have also only now realised that they are currently in limbo, so it is ‘panic stations’ and much talk of lawsuits against UC and the DoE. This is the fallout, unexpected for the most part, when the national concern should be transforming education for the national social and economic good.

3 September

This meeting was held at UB and was very well attended by TA, UC and UB personnel. The purpose was to introduce the appointed Project Management Team which has since the beginning of September been running the Joint Merger Office together with the merger managers, to get feedback from merger managers and task teams, to consider written reports by the task team and task team convenors on the progress made and implementation of work plans. The meeting was opened by the UB Vice-Chancellor with a welcome, and he reported that the name had been settled on after some consultative work as UB – but that the name would need to be re-branded in keeping with the three entities that the new institution will now comprise. The package of materials we were given consisted largely of reports from UB-based reporters. This was commented upon and later explained.

The Project Team Manager then told us what he and his team would and would not be able to do, what their brief was and that they hoped to have a successful relationship – until the end of this year at any rate. It was explained that, in order to keep up with the proposed 1 January deadline, there was no alternative but to enlist extra help. One particular question that stands out from those posed was that the institutional marketing and communication people felt overlooked. They were re-assured that that was not the case and that they would be part of the process whenever necessary. The convenors, beginning with the merger managers, then gave us their reports. For the most part, they explained how they were structured, what they would deal with, the progress made so far and what their future priorities would be.

For the most part and starting with the UB Vice-Chancellor’s inputs, it was a very cordial meeting with some discordant questions posed now and again, about equitable representation during presentations and the composition of the
Project Team. It would seem that in spite of our differences we are beginning to learn to work with one another.

**9 September: UC management meeting**

Most of the time was spent discussing the arrangements that would need to be made for the running of the campus. It would seem that registration for next year and the exact definition of who constituted ‘pipeline’ students has yet to be sorted out. It also seems that the new merger office would also in some way be involved in registration for next year. There was also mention of a suggestion that each centre, that is TA, UB and UC, would prepare to register students for all three institutions. That would take some planning as well as incorporation of registration systems. Whether that is possible or not at all three institutions is also questionable at this stage. As to fees for next year, only the new interim council would, it appears, be able to decide. The new management structure for next year – that is at UC, and for positions such as HOD and Dean – has also to be discussed. These matters would probably also have to be taken to the UC Senate. As to information brochures and calendars, UC calendars are at present being updated and will be available electronically for whatever transpires next year. Attached to the agenda were a number of annexures that dealt with, for example, working hours and official lines of authority and responsibility. These problems have been growing for some time and become exacerbated as a result of the uncertainty and anxieties caused by the restructuring process. Lecturers have to now submit time-tables and account for how they spend their official working hours. These are submitted to HODs, campus heads and Principals, and counterchecked by Deans. There have also been tiresome habits such as approaching the upper echelons of management whatever the problems and completely ignoring line management protocol. Staff therefore have to be reminded of the proper procedures to follow. A notice board dealing with merger matters is now on display in the UC foyer to keep staff informed of the latest information.

**9 September: UC Merger Task Team**

A sudden meeting was called … The UB merger manager reported that a Joint Merger Office had been established which would meet with merger managers from the three institutions every Monday and Wednesday. Because of the speed at which things were now happening, it was therefore important that she report and consult with us during this time. Meetings at UC would be held every Tuesday at 2 pm for feedback from her and discussions if necessary. The MoA between the institutions had been signed. The discussion dragged on a bit and I had to leave before the end.
15 September: Vice Chancellor’s Forum

Student recruitment and marketing – there is still no clarity on lines of authority for approval of different aspects of communication. Study material and legislative responsibilities and integrating student administration processes were concerns, and again UC was waiting to be told what to do. The Joint Merger Office would need to be budgeted for, as would action plans for the next three years. After 1 Jan 2004, DoE would not fund change management which was a major point of concern. In fact DoE would finance very little, necessitating the need for clarity before the compiling of budgets. The legal successor for UC had yet to be settled. It would seem that DoE would be responsible for all UC liabilities – an undertaking that would be put in writing by the Minister. The central administration issue which comes up over and over again in this month’s report of meetings attended was mentioned as well. TA and UB, would, it seems, have to absorb them. Our central administration would also be involved if UC supplementary exams were to be catered for. The DoE felt that the merger institutions should take over this job. UC could not be incorporated until the issues of legal successor, staff concerns, registration process, supplementary exams, graduation ceremonies and pipeline students had been properly dealt with. More frequent meetings would be held, and joint decisions would need to be made about contracts. All stakeholders would also have to be informed of the new institution and its name. Interim management structures would also have to be decided upon for 2004.

17 September: English Departments meeting – TA, UB and UC

The meeting opened with a welcome from the chair. She also outlined the arrangements for future meetings and course plans for 2004. The institution’s new name would be UB but there would be new branding. She also talked about the Joint Merger Office and the personnel who would be running it. So far it seems that there are overlaps in courses which will have to be dealt with. There are also commonalities in distance teaching, the use of contract tutors, group visits and video-conferencing which will facilitate developments in the future between the three institutions. The next meeting is scheduled for 17 November. At the meeting, joint first-year undergraduate and post-graduate (honours) programmes will be discussed. Study materials would have to be sent in preparation for that meeting. Distance Education and Training Council criteria for academic courses would also be sent to serve as guidelines and not evaluation tools just yet. Future approximate dates for meetings were also settled. The merger committee would also have to deal with a common plan for university and technikon entrance requirements and articulation between differently credited modules. This was important to resolve because of the cost implications to students.
17 September: Union meeting

This meeting was called on account of the central administration issue. There are rumours about voluntary severance packages (VSPs) being introduced. We were informed that a meeting with DoE had brought no solutions. It would seem that according to some government ruling, which could be applied to the central administration, this part of UC could be closed down. Someone mentioned that the Minister had assured Council some time in the past that nobody would lose their jobs. Since Council had also failed to get anything better from the Minister, it would seem that there is no alternative but to go to court. So, the union would be taking the UC Council and the DoE to court. The atmosphere was very tense since members were very uncertain about what was going to happen to them. They had also not realised that they themselves should have done something about the situation a long time ago. Council and the University management had also not helped much, and the DoE is seemingly afraid to commit itself to anything definite.

16 September: UC Merger Task Team

From the reports received, it would seem that the Joint Merger Office is getting into gear. They have had meetings with most task teams and the DoE (to clarify guidelines and budgetary queries), put a draft communications strategy in place, and investigated change management options. They have drawn up a schedule for meetings with task teams, reviewed the status of task teams, and found that UC falls short on policy for the registration of students and data for due diligence. Branding of the new institution as well as the merger office is also being worked on. The 2004 course offerings, fee structures, account numbers for payments, handling of outstanding fees, systems to be used and support infrastructure are main issues that will need to be dealt with. The teaching and learning task team is lagging behind, with the only progress so far being with the Library sector. From the task teams, a number of high priority concerns have been tabled which will also require decisions to be made. For next year, it seems that programmes and offering would remain 'as is' for the most part with UC/UB duplications being addressed first. The Finance Task Team is being held back by UC, which is not adequately represented, nor does it seem to have the capacity for the job. A critical component of the merger process is managing the change, which DoE would not like to finance. For communications institution-wide, a website is being organised for public information, press releases, newsletters, joint declarations, suggestion box, intranet access, discussion forums, progress reports, and project calendar. The deadline for the site structure is 26 September 2003. The priorities for the next six months are finalising the merger project plan and budget, which have to be submitted to and discussed with DoE; task
teams have to be engaged with, a newsletter produced by 19 September and the website put in place by 26 September.

23 September: UC Merger Task Team

It seems that central administration has now been transferred to part of the UC payroll. It was also reported that the DoE does not pay for much of the merger activities. Setting campus-specific UC budgets, something that the campuses have not ever done for themselves before, is well underway. An allocation has also to be made for external markers and it seems that the interim new UB council is to be announced this Friday. It was reported that student debtors, UC student fees and initial minimum payments – plus the issue of increased fees which will have to be ratified by the UC Council – were also discussed, as were student services for pipeline students, whatever way they are defined.

25 September: Vice Principals’ Meeting

This was to have been an 8 a.m. meeting but it had been cancelled and I only got to hear about it when I arrived. The whole idea of having a vice-principals’ forum is being reconsidered and may or may not be reconvened depending on the necessity to do so.

I stayed on for the 11 a.m. meeting on academic programmes and structures, attended by one person (the chair) from TA, three from UB and two from UC. Each group reported first, and then there was a general discussion and the drawing up of a priority list. UB reported on degree programmes, meetings between departments across institutions which had either gone too fast or slow and the DoE meeting which was meant to clarify the notion of pipeline students and registration for 2004. UC reported that the academic audit was complete, which led into a discussion of what constituted a ‘comprehensive’. It was, from the discussions, held to be a definition that would evolve and not be based on an import from abroad. There were no clear definitions or descriptions as yet, but it would emerge during the years of transition and integration of the three institutions. At TA, the audit process was stalled because of the many activities that were ongoing.

Composition: We then talked about who was to attend future meetings of this grouping which would investigate, discuss and make recommendations to the Vice-Chancellors’ group. It would include merger managers and five representatives from each institution. We would try to meet every two weeks, on a Thursday, but that would depend on the need.

We then had a very fruitful discussion of all the items/activities/definitions that needed attention if the merger was to materialise, and within the time frame that was already in place. The most important were as follows.
Table 5. Merger activity requirements, UB–UC merger

| A. | Pipeline students  
|    | 2004 intake – similar or different programmes  
|    | Line-management  
|    | Academic marketing  
|    | Registration dates  
|    | Teaching and learning  
|    | ‘Going concern’ issues  
| B. | Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM)  
|    | Status and audit calendars  
|    | Academic administration rules  
|    | Admission requirements  
|    | Learner support  
|    | Study material  
|    | Structures of delivery  
| C. | Admission requirements  
|    | Joint curriculum committee  
|    | Structures of delivery  
|    | Research output in 2003  

There was also mention of agendas of intergroup departmental discussions, the ‘as is’ picture, comparison for duplications overlaps and unique courses, a language audit in preparation for a language policy, the PQM format, graduations and student services. The meeting of this group for 9 October was cancelled.

26, 27, 28 September: Stress Workshop

I attended only two days of this workshop, Friday and Saturday, where I met, probably for the last time as part of UC, other members from outlying sections of the HIV/AIDS unit, HR people and a lecturer or two. It was clear that mergers were very much on everyone’s mind and the stress that that caused as we attempted to go about our daily business as usual. In the discussions that were held on the Friday led by a professor from Psychology, it emerged that stress was related to fear of the unknown, job security, January salaries, the pension fund and benefits, and general uncertainty about the future which impacted greatly during this time on job security. However, it was also interesting to see the positive light in which staff members saw themselves: as UC staff and students who had developed healthy relationships over the years. They agreed that at UC there was commitment to the community, that we were liberal and progressive, practised an open-door policy, enjoyed the latitude to work with diversity, and had certain values and beliefs. In contrast, institutions that UC would be merging with were for the most part authoritarian in the Afrikaner
sense, and this would have to be dealt with, particularly since UC was not a rigid organisation. In fact, if the truth be told, there is also the perception – over and above differences from one campus to another – that UC is a very loose, lax organisation which operates very much in an ad hoc fashion without many policies and procedures. This has also emerged in various merger operations; for example, when policies are called for, UC has very few written-down policies or procedures.

On the Saturday, we spent the day at the Pretoria Zoo, when the camaraderie and the easy association was very much at the fore as we all shared the work of preparing for a very late meal. It was an excellent idea, but as I told the organiser, we were trying to do too much in too short a time. It also demonstrated how, although we have transformed race-wise and get on fairly well with one another, we need to learn to focus and plan more carefully so that we are taken seriously in the merged organisations. For me, from what I observed, it also revealed to me why UC was targeted for incorporation. Getting along with one another is one thing but running an academic concern is another, and what we have failed to develop in the transformation process is a seriousness about our core business: teaching.

30 September: Senior Management Committee

At this meeting, Campus Heads were asked to report what was happening merger-wise ... The reports were very useful in bringing us up to speed with the merger processes at all the UC campuses and showed how merging partners, generally Afrikaner institutions, were responding to the mergers. The ‘separate business as usual’ option which is emerging has to be dealt with. The Chair of the meeting emphasised that the UC merger manager would need to intervene on a large scale in order to ask what this meant and to point out very clearly to merging institutions, virtually all of them who resisted the merging with the UC campuses in the first place, that this does not fit in with the national restructuring and transformation plan. And as usual the central administration issue raised its head again, with no relief of the problem anywhere in sight. It also seemed from what the chair said that the DoE had no idea of the complexities and legal ramifications of the merger process and if matters continued as they now are, the DoE is opening itself up to legal anomalies and litigation. There were also conflicting understandings of the term ‘legal successor’. The other matters that impinged directly on mergers during this meeting were the renewal of contract staff and the early retirement trust. There were no clearcut answers to these queries. We were also given copies of two newspaper articles that dealt with the UC merger fiasco, threats of litigation and an overview of the restructuring process and its handling by the state by the UC merger manager.
October 2003: overview of meetings

New arrangements – this is also turning out to be a time of self-reliance and learning new jobs. The budget, for example, is something that UC is now learning to do for itself. We have also to come to new arrangements for registration next year. While these processes for next year are gradually coming together, some issues – e.g., defining ‘pipeline’ – have yet to be settled.

The discussions for next year revolve around UC campuses being ‘incorporated’, which means different things to the different role players involved. From the campus reports, though, the campuses seem to be responding to merger issues from subordinate positions; if not imposed immediately, they are gradually exercised in subtle or unsubtle ways.

There is a great deal of talk and some legal action has been taken to put right the central administration staff issue and that of the legal successor. From what has emerged, whenever the DoE are approached about money, they say that they would like to pay nothing for the restructuring process. So possibilities of early retirement and accessing the Trust Fund are clearly out of the question.

UB departments have also been making great advances into UC – generally being very friendly and seemingly accommodative. In the process, the lecturers from UC have been generously sacrificing their teaching modules apparently because they overlap with UB offerings. But that is not always so if one takes the time to look carefully at the situation. In the first place, the new approach is proving so overwhelming that UC staff (if not for reasons of their own) are willing to discard the teaching of a number of modules. It may also be to relieve future workloads – which would eventuate in leaving them with very little to do if that is all that they have to do next year. But it also leaves them vulnerable to retrenchment if and when that happens. We also have other motives at play – self-interest, survival, jumping onto the new bandwagon, seeing the immediate gains as the only gains worth having right now, jumping the doomed UC ship which is on the rocks at any rate, jumping back onto the UB academic mothership. Not surprisingly, all this often plays out in racial groupings – as it always does in the old or new South Africa. Departments driven by UB drivers are also proceeding as if they are making final decisions – generally speaking, maintaining the status quo and discarding many UC modules – and, so it seems, often with the consent of UC staff!

3 October: Faculty Merger meeting

Of the choices proposed in the document entitled ‘Pipeline Students ….,’ the faculty chose Option 2 (B) – that is basically ‘business as usual’ in 2004. But some questions were raised about the differences between options 2 (B) and 2 (C), what were the arrangements for procuring learning material for next year, the practicalities of the registration process (e.g. dates, fees, venues etc),
the management structure for the faculty, how future students were being informed about registration for next year, whether the MoA goes into detail about management and working relations between the three merging partners, whether current UC programmes were registered with the South African Qualifications Authority, and what eventually happens to intellectual property rights during the integrating process.

It was also reported that different departments were already in discussions with counterparts at UB and TA departments (History Department possibilities are copied). Concerns were raised about support systems and resources for registered new students in 2004, and about the one-member Psychology Department, which would need assistance if option 2 (B) became a reality. As to undergraduate programmes and modules, there was a difference in credit weighting between UC and UB which would have to be dealt with – besides what to do with old teacher-training modules. The transfer of credits between institutions would also have to be discussed. At this meeting, we were also given a policies and procedures document, presumably from the Vice-Principal (Tuition) UB. It deals with registration, tuition and learning, research supervision, UC research output subsidy submissions, and alignment of learning programmes as if they are now settled issues. The questions raised have not as yet resolved into clearcut answers and procedures.

7 October: UC Merger Task Team

I had to forego last week’s meeting because of the Senior Management Meeting. But it seems that the UC Merger Task Team meeting on 30 September was very short, with a progress report on the budget. The plan was to finalise it or bring it closer to completion this week.

The draft budget was submitted for trimming before final submission. There was some debate about cutting back on vacation classes or chopping off a million or so from the Information Technology (IT) budget. The lift in one of the major buildings which is in urgent need of replacement would also seem to have to be put on hold, since it would cost about R1.25 million. It was suggested that the IT budget be generally reduced all round by 13 per cent. IT may also be taken over by the merger partners. In that case, there would be no need for an IT budget – but that remains to be discussed further. It also seems that UC will need to enlist the aid of a full-time finance person – something which the campus will not be able to get by without in future.

It was also reported that the central administration issue is now holding back crucial finalisations such as the name change, the interim council and the legal successor to UC. It seems that the above will have to be settled before the new institution can be promulgated. UB and TA do not welcome the inclusion of the central administration staff. This also impinges on the opening of a new
bank account and the transfer of assets. The new students/pipeline lack of clarity continues, and the choices now seem to be that first years in 2004 do the first-year UB programme or that the first-year UC failures be shifted to UB. The lawyers involved in the merger opine that there should be no first year at all, that is legally speaking.

14 October: UC Merger Committee

At this meeting, banking arrangements for UC in 2004 were still unclear. The central administration was still not included in the new UC budget, although they are on the UC payroll without any official announcement being made or formalised. At the Vice-Chancellors’ forum, issues such as the budget, policies, vacancies, student recruitment, academic structures and management structures were discussed, but no final decisions have yet been made on a number of them. The second merger week was planned for the end of October, from Monday 27th to 31st October. Every task team would be expected to make a report on the progress made so far.

30-31 October: Merger Week

I was requested to attend the meeting on the Wednesday, the day after I returned from an overseas conference trip. It would seem that UC staff, in spite of transport being provided, did not take the opportunity to make an appearance. This does not augur well for what happens to us in the future. I saw that when I did get to the plenary session, UC was scarcely represented and the merger manager was battling for the most part by herself to see that UC was treated fairly. At the small task teams programmes alignment meeting with UB and TA, I was subjected for the first time to the team hard/soft approach of dominate and takeover. The male from UB was annoyed that we (the UC merger manager and I) were questioning the UB decision about unique programmes while UC was required to justify theirs. He asked if we did not trust them – which tongue-in-cheek I had to say was not so. He has an interesting repertoire of behaviours to dominate and achieve his ends, which I shall describe below.

This meeting was so very different from UC meetings where we are 'post-1994 equal' that I think it is necessary to comment on the differences. This white Afrikaner male from UB seemed to me a relic from an age long gone. He comes across with crude sexist power used to dominating, being obeyed and having his own way. His consort, I presume an English white woman, seemed to encourage this type of behaviour, and for me, with my background researching gender and race in South African life and literature, both of them generally exhibited patterns of behaviour that I have identified before in patriarchal South Africa. The pattern has not changed that much, and if we are talking about institutional culture then that is probably what we are going to have to deal
with among a host of other elements in close merger encounters. He also talked about the need for deadlock-breaking mechanisms, and said that no provision had been made for them in our group. Eventually it was agreed after much more of ‘don’t you trust me’ and looks of annoyance mainly from the male, that all three institutions would list and describe their unique programmes. As will be indicated below, that did not happen.

Friday was a summary day, with reports and feedback to round off the week mainly about registration, marketing, IT systems and offerings for the following year.

November 2003: overview of meetings

The period covered in this report has been a really trying time insofar as merger activities are concerned. For me, it was close encounters of the nastiest kind, enough to raise hackles permanently. What added to tensions were the crucial and far-reaching decisions that had to be made about defining ‘pipeline’ students, aligning academic modules and programmes, specifically at UC which is being incorporated rather than merged. The difference between ‘merged’ and ‘incorporated’ which I had not taken seriously up to now means that UC is treated as an underdog for the most part, in comparison to the other ‘merging’ partner with UB, TA. In contrast to us, they will continue ‘as is’ in 2004 and programmes will be gradually aligned with UB and whatever is left of UC. Oddly and in spite of the word ‘incorporated’, most of the other campuses will be going into the new year ‘as is’ as well.

As indicated in the journal of meetings, many meetings were held to sort out registration, financial budgets, calendars, staffing arrangements, and what UC will be able to offer its continuing students in 2004. Reading through all the details provided in the journal of meetings, what stands out is the determination of UB to define ‘pipeline’ narrowly, the narrowest definition that I have heard of so far from what has been happening at other campuses. Integration, whatever that eventually means, is rapidly being planned to take place just as rapidly in 2004. If the Vice-Chancellors agree to it broadly, it will – with the ‘pipeline’ definition adopted by UB and the equivalences worked out to substitute for UC modules – turn out that the pipeline period for completion of programmes that UC students originally registered for will be utterly compressed. At registration time next year, most students, even those who do not volunteer to migrate into UB equivalent programmes, will, when their modules passed at UC are equated with UB modules, become UB students. They will have to continue the completion of the degrees with UB modules – which have also been re-aligned credit-wise with UC modules. Problems may arise further with the different fee structures, since on the whole UC is cheaper than UB, but there has been some
talk about the DoE making up the deficit or UB re-adjusting their fees for UC students. That has yet to be resolved.

More than that, however, is the issue of not changing programmes as such, but rather internal tinkering with the modules that make up programmes. Outcomes, manner of assessing student efforts, assignments, etc., that were designed for UC programmes will no longer be the order of the day. In reality, students are being switched voluntarily or otherwise (it does not matter which, because the result will be the same when equivalences come into play, as they will willy-nilly) to common programmes that have been specifically designed for UB and not UC students. When I asked at the group meeting whether any academic law was being broken, I was assured that they were not.

An added problem that I foresee is registering returning UC students who would like to complete programmes that they have started with UC. My sympathies go out to those who will have to explain all of this to the students and omit that fact that they will for the most all become ‘old UB’ students starting in 2004, since the modules that they will have to do are ‘old UB’ modules carried forward into the ‘new UB’. It rests with the Vice-Chancellors who will have to make the final decision. If they go along with what is planned, it may eventuate in narrowing access and influencing throughput rates as well, apart from cost factors (if it turns out that students have to pay more for remaining modules in programmes which they first began with other intentions at UC).

3 November

When this meeting was decided upon, it was debated whether it was necessary or not on the Friday before. Finally it was decided to go ahead, since many Deans from all three institutions had not been at all the merger week meetings. The chair of the meeting made a presentation and then invited questions. The very first question reverted to unique programmes and the fact that UC was asked to justify them which took us back full circle to the previous task team meeting, where after much acrimony it was decided that all three institutions would do the same thing – justify their unique programmes. That, so it would seem, did not make an iota of difference and makes me wonder whether anything said by UC is ever taken seriously. I mentioned that unique programmes were dealt with the week before and we now seemed to be rehashing old ground. We seem to have to prove that we are worthy of being incorporated, as if that is not bad enough. This I learnt when I queried the different treatment meted out to TA in comparison to UC. What I also should have asked was why the dominant constant is always UB, while UC is asked constantly to prove itself. Are claws being sharpened on us in preparation for the bigger clashes ahead (as they were with the incorporation of the teaching colleges) with TA, who are going to proceed ‘as is’ for next year? I also pointed out that the labelling ‘new UB
courses’ was incorrect, because as yet there were no such offerings. This was the first time I also mentioned the ‘equal partners’ clause in the MoA and that when it suited the dominant partner we were treated equally and when not, we were treated unequally. It would be interesting to draw up a comparative list to see where concessions are made to the term ‘incorporate’ and when they are not. By the by, in all the documents I checked, the word ‘incorporate’ went unmentioned. Where did it come from and why is it not specifically mentioned in the documentation? If it were especially in the MoA, I for one would not have problems understanding the underdog position we now occupy.

Looking back on the meeting and the sheer numbers of UB people present and the three UC people, we are outnumbered and out-discoursed. If we are swallowed up with a mere whimper, we have only ourselves to blame. UB in contrast presents a united solid front while we are fragmented, at loggerheads and at worst self-serving, myopic individuals. I will say more, below, about the characteristics that now seem to be coming to the fore and that clearly are being exploited in the merger.

7 November

This meeting was suddenly called for the day before, probably to prepare for the 10 November meeting and Vice-Chancellor Forum presentation. It was really friendly in comparison to the Deans meeting of 3 November. It was mainly called to fine-tune general recommendations – which we did with a number of clause, phrase and sentence erasures, and replacements of terms. When it came to departmental and course/module arrangements, however, which the UC staff were seeing for the first time, it seemed like a race to get it done quickly and with not the same care as the general recommendations. I should mention at this point that given the short notice for the meeting, TA were unable to come and tendered apologies. When the English Department recommendations were first mentioned, I said that they were yet to be discussed. At the time I had not had a chance to read the document, nor had I the authority to speak on behalf of the English Department at UC without having first discussed it with them. Whether what I said was taken seriously or not I cannot say. But after my return to campus and discussions with UC English and the merger manager, I decided to get in touch with the UB people to ask them not to include departmental recommendations at the Monday Vice-Chancellor Forum meeting. But as will be seen below, I did not reach the right people and had to exchange many vexed words on the Monday.

The tactics at this meeting were worth noting. Of the four people present, I was partnered on one side of the room with my UB male colleague and the UC male colleague was partnered by the UB female colleague. And as indicated above, the first part – dealing with general recommendations – was
meticulously dealt with. It was material that I was familiar with. The second part was generally above my head, since they were the result of UB-initiated departmental meetings and was finalised mainly while being dialogued by the UB people. My UC partner had not much to say for himself or the arrangements at hand. Like a ‘Survivor’ game, negotiating or rather listening to arrangements that are being made for us are turning out to be mind games and speed games: outwitting, outsmarting and outplaying partners.

**10 November**

This turned out to be a very distressing Vice-Chancellors’ forum meeting. UB colleagues seem to be controlling the process and results. Basically, these results are to cut UC to a size much smaller than it is already, replace UC modules with what are called new UB modules, encourage the migration of UC students into UB, and recode UC offerings – all of which goes under the name incorporating or merging – depending on the occasion and the mood of the dominant players, UB.

The question of ‘pipeline’ students also came up again and there was an exchange of views, which in the opinion of the UB convenor of the task team was ultimately, definitively and authoritatively defined by the UB Vice-Chancellor.

The presentation made by the UB convenor of this task team was abbreviated, as departmental recommendations were left out because I objected to the including of the UB English department recommendations – mainly to replace so-called ‘inadequate’ UC modules with their equivalents from UB. They also included an uncalled-for critique of our Communication modules – said to be text-book based, with no added value, lacking in self-assessment exercises, unglossy production and overweighted credit-wise. During the weekend before this Monday meeting, I tried unsuccessfully to get in touch with the UB people to inform them that UC was unaware of these recommendations, and like me saw in writing what was planned only on the Friday.

Many words that comprised the following: barely subdued anger, threats, emotional blackmail (humiliating the convenor by stopping the presentation, as if I should care), and appeals to a higher authority (‘the Vice-Chancellors are expecting us to resolve these matters speedily’) from the UB male side. From the female, it was her version of meetings (that I had also attended) that was the only truth, and assurances that I was in possession of documents much earlier than I could say I had them, and that I only got at the last meeting (7 November) and not any day before that. I was told to keep my voice down, since we were outside the Vice-Chancellors’ forum. She denied that she was humouring and patronising me when I labelled her actions. It was eventually decided to present general principles and omit the details proposed for departments.
When talking to these two from UB, it feels as if 1994 did not happen at all— or, at the very least, superficial behaviour concessions are paid lip service. As in all power games, the underdog is never taken seriously and is a passive victim of the dominant agent.

I feel caught up and cast back into a time-warp of the dominating paternalistic Afrikaner male overlapping into the ‘bad’ cop image and the softly spoken, reasonable white English woman (the ‘good’ cop) who pretends to listen but does not hear a thing you are saying. If the pair has been given a mandate to crush and swallow, then there is no need even to pretend to have meetings in order to consult and reach consensus about our common fate in the future. The ironies multiply when you consider that we are supposed to be in the new South Africa. These two selected to act on behalf of UB use ‘unreason’ and ‘illogic’ because it does not matter what they say. In comparison, apartheid as separate development was better justified. For the sake of appearances and since they are the carriers of civilisation into Africa, no matter how crudely they do it, they reserve the right to bludgeon us into oblivion. But the old oppressions and the old methods are being used: divide and rule, threats, force of speech (it would be interesting to record our meetings to see who talks more and who drives the process, how speaking turns are taken or permitted, and what the others say— if anything at all— under the forceful chairmanship of the UB convenor), body language to the point of the male crushing my hand in what is supposed to be a friendly handshake, ignoring everything said in opposition, pretend nothing was said at all and when the written documents reach us, it is as if we had not been there at all. The behaviour is dominating and bullying, and reminiscent of apartheid supremacist patterns which are being used in the new South Africa in what is turning out to be ironic power play in the ‘reform, transformation’ process.

At the Vice-Chancellors’ forum, the question of pipeline came up again, and as far as I could gather was in no way resolved. But in the view of the convenor of this team, it was definitively defined by the UB Vice-Chancellor. I also complained about deflecting from the MoA and urged that the Vice-Chancellors use their influence to ensure that a collegial atmosphere prevails, not only at their meetings but further down the chain of command.

11 November

At this UC merger meeting, the merger manager brought us up to speed with what had occurred in the merger week and the Vice-Chancellors’ meeting. The budget had been approved for the interim council, the group in charge of harmonising policies would seem to be in need of applying their minds, and the ICT data tables were sorted out with the transfer of staff and student data. Arrangements for graduations next year were also resolved. We then heard
that ‘pipeline’ was for the first time brought to this forum for definition. After much discussion of many conflicting views, the matter seemed to me to be left very much in the air, but not according to the UB people from my group, who believed that the term had been conclusively defined. I do not see how, since the fees mentioned by the acting UC Vice-Chancellor impacts on any definition. There seems to be some resolution of students’ services and the UC calendar, registration codes, equivalent codes and fee structure. But I am never certain at the end of these meetings exactly what has been finally settled. Many words are spouted, but what is required is a final summation and decision.

At the UC meeting, although the central administration staff are now on the UC payroll, it is more of a holding position than anything else, because the Minister has to say the last word, and it would seem it is the mystery of the century since it is taking such a long time to put these people out of their misery. In the meantime, there are court cases in process and even the opening up of the UC Trust Fund.

13 November

The UC English Department attended a meeting at UB to clear up misunderstandings about the critiquing of study guides (not the brief of the last meeting, but which was carried out nonetheless to the detriment of UC). As reported to me, what stood out in the mind of the chair of the meeting was her need to get some clarity on student/staff ratios, funding for herself to attend a conference in early January next year, and lastly the calendar entries made for the UB calendar. I pointed out the implications of the crediting of UC modules into the UB credit system. If carried through, the UB proposal will violate ‘pipeline’ requirements, do away with second-year literature teaching, and leave the lecturers at UC teaching the communication modules, the law module, third-year literature modules for the last year, and Honours modules. They were also led to believe that this was final, although it was never discussed with them and had to be resolved for the calendar. Furthermore, there are a number of lists in circulation which have to be put together, discussed and agreed upon about what UC teaches next year.

17 November: Task Team meeting

At this meeting, TA also pitched up. There was mention of calling meetings at short notice, making it difficult for TA to be present. At this meeting there were more changes made, removal of phrases and often whole sentences. I submitted what I could obtain from UC departments to be included in departmental arrangements for 2004. For the most part, the meeting proceeded without significant incident worth commenting on. Again, however, I have to say something about the way these meetings are chaired. It is clearly dominated
and shaped by the convenor, who takes the floor and makes you struggle to get a word in edgeways. This, I have since learnt, may be the UB style of male-dominated top-down meetings, which could very well turn out to be rarely discussions, but rather meetings to issue directives.

At any rate, I agreed at the meeting to check the departmental arrangements with the departments at UC and get reps to sign off as what they have agreed should happen to their departments next year. From the thick sheaf of paper, it is a great deal more than some changes that are going to take place next year with UC programmes. For me, this violates the notion of ‘pipeline’ and the grace period students from UC have been legally given to complete programmes for which they originally registered.

18 November

The UC merger manager summarised what had been happening so far in the merger and expressed concerns about the module and programme alignment. It would seem that the greatest tinkering was suffered in the Arts Faculty, which was approached, overwhelmed and dominated by their UB counterparts. The merger manager was a great deal more sympathetic than I was to the situation created — as I see it — by the complicity and self-serving motives of UC staff. At the same time, most of the staff involved, I will have to admit, were arranging their own futures for the first time in their lives. All these years they had been told what to do, and probably for the first time in their lives, many of them were now asked to make student, programme and possibly career decisions. Simultaneously, since most of the staff are grown adults, they were also taking care of themselves as best they could, without taking into account the fact that they were being incorporated; despite the friendliness of overtures towards them, they were being taken over by UB. After much discussion of some of the details involved, the only general conclusion that could be arrived at was that ‘pipeline’ had been very narrowly defined. Migration and finding UB equivalences (credits) for UC modules amounted to chopping down the notion of ‘pipeline’ to its lowest possible level. Even if UC students did not migrate voluntarily, it would not matter in the least because of the equivalences which would be brought into play willy-nilly. Once a student had UC modules converted to UB equivalences, the student would have to complete the UB programmes and possibly pay the higher fees.

In order to achieve that, however, registration would to all intents and purposes be a rather messy business, because of the pages and pages of arrangements that had been made. The UC registrar described how it would be done for UC. Registration would be at UB. I did hear later from him, though, that plans had changed and there would now be cubicles at UB for UC staff to register former UC students. It has probably dawned on someone at UB that it
would require a genius to figure out how to and what to register the continuing
students, formerly from UC, into the UB system. These matters are only finally
settled when they are presented at the Vice-Chancellors’ forum. What they
decide – especially the UB Vice-Chancellor – remains to be seen.

18 November: Staff Assembly on Merger

This meeting was supposed to be broader than it eventually turned out. There
were only two management people present. We were told of the latest
developments in the merger and the fate of the central administration staff
members. Although they were on the UC payroll, the minister has yet to finalise
what happens to them. It would also seem that winding up UC at the end of
the year cannot be legally done. The university as an entity – even if not a
going concern – will therefore continue into next year most probably under an
administrator. In the meantime, UB and TA, so it seems, do not welcome the
idea of the staff from central administration swelling the ranks of personnel
of the new UB. UC closes on 12 December and we learnt that Council will
probably be making a ruling on a second round of voluntary severance packages
for all UC staff.

For the most part, the meeting was handled with a light humorous touch
– which did not satisfy the many people present from central administration.
They would have liked to hear straight out that they would be unemployed
and what was going to happen to them to terminate their services. But because
of the manner in which the meeting was conducted, many were afraid to ask
directly about this and instead shut up for fear of being ridiculed. The meeting
was also advertised in quite a different manner from what actually took place.
The merger manager explained later when I asked, that Marketing (who put out
the notices) had not prepared for what they had advertised. Had the meeting
followed the advertisement, it would have lasted a great deal longer than the
hour taken. Refreshments were also served after the meeting – perhaps to soften
people and to make up for the lack of real information that should have been
 imparted.

Conclusion

‘Incorporation’, when put into action, seems to mean obliterating, even more than
assimilating and absorbing. This has implications for the new comprehensive
university that the ‘new UB’ is planned to become. If UC is half or virtually
erased at this point in the merger game, what influence, if any, will its staff have
in shaping the new comprehensive or carrying forward the good (whatever that
may be) of its own practices into the practices of the future?
Because of the power games that are being played, there is the possibility that dominating patterns will prevail even in the new institution. I wonder if the Minister had this in mind when it occurred to him to restructure higher education. Instead of innovation and the creation of a new South African institution, what we could very well end up with are recycled old institutions, practices, policies, teaching and learning, because of the power play that is an inherent part of the reform process. How new institutions for development and the correction of social and economic ills come to occur in post-apartheid South Africa will be very interesting to see, given the legacies of the past and the power play that is unleashed in order to retain that past and the status quo in every sense and aspect of academic practice.