

GUEST EDITORIAL

## South Africa's First-Year Experience: Consolidating and Deepening a Culture of National Scholarship

Annsilla Nyar\*

This special edition of *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa (JSAA)* represents an important milestone for South Africa's First-Year Experience movement. This milestone is about reaching a particular stage of maturation in the drive to cultivate national First-Year Experience scholarship. It also shows the importance of the continued development of South Africa's only dedicated national centre for First-Year Experience, i.e. the South African National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience (SANRC), in terms of helping grow and nurture scholarship in the field.

Having once described the field of South Africa's First-Year Experience scholarship as "an aspiring academic community that is poised for future development" (Nyar, 2018, p. ix), it is now possible to say that the First-Year Experience is no longer at a developmental stage in South Africa. The collection of articles assembled in this special journal edition bear testimony to a now-thriving culture of scholarship, which helps define and consolidate South Africa's First-Year Experience as a coherent field of study and most importantly, ultimately helps academics and practitioners to better serve South Africa's student population.

A diverse range of topics are presented in the contributions chosen for this journal. This special edition begins with an important aspect of the First-Year Experience: the examination of stress, coping and adjustment strategies of first-year students by scholars Engelbrecht, Mostert, Pienaar and Kahl. Though limited by a small sample size, this study offers valid insights about the complex nature of the stressors associated with the adjustment of first-year students to university. The article invites serious questions about how best to effectively support students at this stage of their transition to university.

Scholars McGhie, Venter and Dos Reis address the problems confronting business education learners in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase of their education through a case study of two Western Cape schools. Through adopting a longitudinal research approach, they argue that the development and application of a South African readiness model for learners would make a significant contribution towards helping resolve some of the problems in South Africa's schooling system. This article is particularly distinguished by its strong engagement with relevant literature.

Scholars Combrink and Oosthuizen insert the COVID-19 theme into this special edition in a timely fashion through their thoughtful account of the effect of the COVID-19

\* Dr Annsilla Nyar is Director of the South African National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (SANRC) at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. Email: anyar@uj.ac.za

pandemic on first-year students at University of the Free State (UFS). This article presents some serious questions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on first-year student transition.

The article by scholars Kapp, Mostert and De Beer sets out to address the all-important question of student motivation through an analysis of the psychometric properties of the Academic Motivation Scale-College version for South African first-year university students. The authors conclude that the scale holds value as a means to better understand the relationship between student motivation and academic success.

The article by Van Zyl, Dampier and Ngwenya proposes a model of student success intervention through a case study of the Integrated Student Success Initiative (ISSI) at University of Johannesburg (UJ). The ISSI is an interesting institutional initiative that uses data to identify at-risk students, design interventions, and evaluate associated outcomes.

Scholars Motsabi, Van Zyl and Diale present intriguing insights in terms of research on first-generation students, and further, those whom the authors deem as *black African* first-generation students. It is hoped that research of this calibre will help stimulate much-needed national conversations about the necessary support systems and structures for first-generation students.

The academic contributions in this journal reach a significant level of sophistication through the work of Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)-based scholar, Mason. Mason's two articles "Towards a Learning Mindset: First-Year University Students' Qualitative Perspectives on Gratitude in the Context of Learning Effort" and "My name is Matshepo ... Mother of Hope: Examining Hope amid the First-year Experience" situate traits such as gratitude and hope as intriguing 'new' factors that can contribute to student success. Mason's scholarship prompts us to re-examine our existing narratives of student success, and opens up possibilities of a whole new field of enquiry around the implications for practice.

Orientation practice is often not conceded the critical attention that it deserves in the broader context of first-year experience and student transitions, more broadly. This edition concludes with the only Reflective Practitioner account in the form of a considered account of how to improve existing orientation practice at a national level. This article presents seven good practice strategies, as a means of helping improve national orientation practice.

I am confident that this journal edition contains some of the best, most readable and most stimulating articles on the subject of South Africa's first-year experience. The articles in their entirety serve as worthy reminders of the path that South Africa's first-year experience has and is taking, in the course of helping to change the futures of the country's students. It is anticipated that, with continued encouragement from the SANRC, further scholarship will emerge to 'drill deeper' into the many areas of possible analysis raised herein and provide finer-grained insight into the national FYE. It is also hoped that the contents presented here will inspire more contributors, particularly young and emerging scholars, to make future submissions to this journal and others, addressing topics of South Africa's first-year experience.

#### *How to cite:*

Nyar, A. (2020). South Africa's First-Year Experience: Consolidating and Deepening a Culture of National Scholarship. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 8(2), ix-x. DOI: 10.24085/jsaa.v8i2.4445