

EDITORIAL

Supportive contexts for student success

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Student affairs and services practitioners in African higher education are challenged to provide transformative student development and support to a very diverse body of students, and they often do so without the level of resources – human, financial, and infrastructure – that their counterparts in other world regions can draw on. For African student affairs practitioners, drawing from the ubuntu philosophy and their African collectivist practices, their strategy is often to design supportive *contexts* for success and collective approaches to support, rather than individual support *interventions*, to maximize their reach despite limited resources. This is an acknowledgement of the social articulation of student success, an articulation that communicates success from personal development to academic achievement and real-life outcomes, and a relation between notions of success within higher education and beyond to the world of work and achievement of sustainable livelihoods.

The resource constraints facing African student affairs practitioners are not only of a human, financial and infrastructural resource nature; context-relevant knowledge resources are also a constraint to supporting student success. The *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* (JSAA) has sought to address the latter gap with its mission “to contribute to the professionalization of student affairs in African higher education”. Since 2013, JSAA has been publishing original articles dealing with the theory and practice of student affairs in universities in Africa and related relevant contexts.

This issue of JSAA, entitled ‘Supportive contexts for student success’, delves into the multifaceted dimensions of student support across different contexts – from the campus environment to the classroom, from residence life to life online, and from psychological well-being to collective student organization. The articles investigate not only the traditional forms of direct support, but also the broader contextual conditions that either facilitate or hinder student achievement.

The first article, ‘Hauntological engagements: Visual redress at Stellenbosch University’ by Elmarie Costandius,† Gera de Villers, and Leslie van Rooi, sets the tone for this theme. It investigates how visual and cultural redress at Stellenbosch University impacts student experience and institutional transformation.

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Following this, ‘Cyberbullying in Kenyan universities: Lessons and insights from personal experiences of deans of students’ by Angella Kogos, Tom Kwanya, Lucy Kibe, Erick Ogolla, and Claudia Onsare, provides a critical examination of the challenges posed by cyberbullying and the strategies employed by university administration to mitigate these issues.

Mpho P. Jama and Pulane Malefane contribute with ‘Reflective perspectives of residence heads’ experiences and responses during COVID-19 at a Free State university’, offering a detailed look at how residence life practitioners navigated the complexities brought on by the global health crisis.

In ‘Student motives, expectations, and preparedness for higher education: A gender-based study’, Jade Jansen, Badrunessa Williams, and Azmatullah Latief present insights into how gender influences student motivations and readiness for higher education.

The mental health and coping mechanisms of postgraduate psychology students during the COVID-19 pandemic are examined by Tasneem Hassem, Victor de Andrade, Sumaya Laher, Nabeelah Bemath, and Katherine Bain in their article, providing valuable lessons learned from this unprecedented period.

Naadhira Seedat and Rishen Roopchand explore ‘The role of the Muslim Student Association at a South African university in promoting a sense of belonging, community service, and a student-centred environment’, highlighting the significance of faith-based student organizations in fostering a supportive campus climate.

Nina Rossouw’s study, ‘“Did ‘Step-Up’ help in stepping up?” Transition programmes as a factor to improve student academic performance’, evaluates the effectiveness of transition programmes designed to aid students’ academic progress.

Linda Meyer and Birgit Schreiber shed light on the unique challenges faced by first-generation students at private universities in South Africa and the opportunities these institutions have to address these challenges in their article on ‘South African private universities: The unique challenges of private university first-generation students – The unique opportunity for private higher education institutions’.

The procedures and practices in providing student support services at a nursing college in South Africa are scrutinized by Thembekile P. Skakane-Masango, Ntombikile G. Mtshali, and Sandiso Ngcobo, who offer a comprehensive look at the state of student support in nursing education.

Jessica Versfeld and Caitlin Vinson delve into ‘Exploring first-year engineering student perceptions of peer-led study groups in a Global South context’, presenting a study on the role and impact of study groups on student performance in demanding environments.

Bernadette Johnson’s ‘Disturbed: Doing deep transformative work – Reflections on social justice work in South African higher education’ provides a reflective account on the progress and challenges of social justice initiatives within higher education institutions with a focus on Wits University, discussing their unique approach to institutional transformation.

In keeping with our striving to bridge the gap between Anglophone and Francophone African higher education and contribute to the decolonisation and African academic

language development in African higher education, last year, JSAA started to translate all the abstracts of its research and reflective practitioner articles into a second African official language. In this issue we are proud to have eight French abstracts, one Afrikaans and one isiXhosa abstract translation. We thank our translation editors for their sterling work.

Added to the eleven research and reflective practice articles, we publish in this issue a report on the 7th Global Summit of the International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS). In this report, David Newman offers insights into the global discourse on student affairs and services. Two renowned keynote speakers, Professors Juhaina Gherib from Tunisia and Birgit Phillips from Austria enriched the participants of this 7th Global Summit held in Korea in May 2024.

Finally, Jia Zheng reviews the special issue 'Towards professionalization of student affairs across the globe', edited by Lisa Bardill Moscaritolo and Birgit Schreiber, providing a critical analysis of this seminal work published by *New Directions for Student Services* in Fall 2023.

JSAA announcements

Starting mid-2024, JSAA will be formally hosted by the Centre for the Advancement of Sustainable Higher Education Futures (CASHEF) in the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria, South Africa. With this move, JSAA can cement its existing strong relations with the University and the Faculty. We are grateful for the support provided by our affiliation with CASHEF for our journal manager, and the affiliation with the Faculty and University more broadly, for the hosting and technical support we receive. At the same time, we recognise Prof. Kolawole Samuel Adeyemo, the director of CASHEF, and the outgoing dean of education, Prof. Chika Sehoole, who have enabled this. On behalf of JSAA, Prof. Birgit Schreiber – JSAA Editorial Executive – has entered into a formal affiliation with the Centre and is also on the board of the Centre. We look forward to a long and fruitful collaboration.

At this occasion, we would also like to congratulate some more members of the JSAA Editorial Executive and Editorial Board for professional achievements. First, two of our editors have received research ratings from the South African National Research Foundation.

Dr Henry Mason, who serves on our Editorial Board, has received a C2 NRF rating in April 2024. This is a huge achievement, and we are so happy for him! We are grateful for the contributions he makes to South African scholarship and African knowledge about student success in higher education. Dr Mason contributes to our knowledge with research and publications, with teaching and mentoring emerging scholars. Dr Mason, too, contributes significantly by supporting the editorial work of the Journal with energy, enthusiasm and a critical scholarly eye. The work that is required to publish this journal, twice per year, is mostly invisible and often goes unnoticed and Dr Mason continues to contribute towards this Journal in extremely valuable ways. Thank you, Henry, and heartfelt congratulations on the NRF C2 rating.

In 2024, Prof. Thierry Luescher has been re-rated by the NRF and improved on his original NRF rating to a C1 rating. According to the NRF, Thierry is recognised nationally and internationally as a well-established researcher with a body of high-quality research output in the field of higher education studies. In particular, the NRF rating outcome letter to Thierry notes:

The reviewers were unanimous in recognising the significance of your research and indicated that you had made a significant contribution to the study of student politics and representation, student affairs and higher education in Africa more broadly, and with major contributions on understanding of transformations in African higher education.

As JSAA we are particularly proud to see the NRF mention “student affairs and higher education in Africa” as among the fields where Thierry is internationally recognised to have made important knowledge contributions. This is a great achievement for him personally, but it is also an achievement for the Journal, and the college of editors who have built student affairs in Africa as a recognisable field of research.

Second, we want to congratulate Dr Birgit Schreiber’s appointment as extraordinary professor by the Faculty of Education Faculty at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town. The University of the Western Cape is Birgit’s alma mater, and she was for many years the director of the Centre for Student Support Services of this university. It was during her tenure as director there that JSAA was established, with Birgit as one of the founding editors. We are immensely proud to have Birgit receive this recognition.

Lastly, we congratulate our Editor-in-chief, Professor Teboho Moja for a student nominated award she received – the James Johnson Distinguished Faculty Award. The award was given as an honour by the New York University Black Student Union.

We hope this issue not only enriches your understanding of the supportive contexts necessary for student success but also inspires further research and practice in this vital area of student affairs.

Happy reading!

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