Contextualising student affairs in Africa: The past, present and future

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Higher education executives, student affairs professionals, higher education academics and students in Africa have received the 2013 launch issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* (JSAA) with a lot of enthusiasm. This is evidenced by over 25 000 views of the JSAA website since the launch issue went live in December, and 55% of visitors returning. The majority of visitors have come from across Africa, especially South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Tanzania; the second highest number of visitors come from the United States and the Commonwealth countries; while the third highest number of viewers come from the other BRICS countries and from across the developing world. From the start, the website has been fully indexed, the articles harvested by Google Scholar as well as all major search engines, and assigned a DOI. In addition, with our recent listing on the international directory of open access journals (DOAJ), the visibility of JSAA is further extended to provide access to African scholarship and debates on student affairs in the international arena. In this issue, the majority of papers published have been received as open submissions, emailed directly to one of the editors or submitted online via the website. We take all this as a signal that there is indeed need for a platform for sharing scholarly work and experiences among professionals from an African perspective. It is our aim to ensure that JSAA will become the foremost academic journal dealing with the theory and practice of the student affairs domain in higher education on the African continent, and an indispensable resource for the executive leadership of universities and colleges dealing with student affairs, deans of students and other senior student affairs professionals, as well as institutional researchers and academics and students focused on the field of higher education studies and student affairs.

The African continent, comprising of 54 countries, brings to the fore a great diversity in terms of higher education systems that have been shaped by colonial legacies, subsequent administrations and global, local and continental influences. Each country is uniquely shaped by, among others, its history, politics and cultures, and there are lessons

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and experiences to share among professionals who work with students and are interested in delivering professional and discipline-based support, development and services that contribute to broadly defined student success.

Student affairs, support, development and services refer broadly to student lives – personal, social and academic – and aim to enhance students' experience and contribute to their development. There is a broad base of student development theories developed in the western world that draw from disciplines such as psychology and sociology and contribute to student affairs professionals' knowledge of how to understand their own profession and how to render discipline-based services in a professional manner. However, given that these theories have been developed in contexts very different from our own and are often not tested by research conducted in Africa, it is up to student affairs scholars and professionals in the African context to interrogate these theories for their transferability and applicability in our own context. This journal certainly aims to contribute to student affairs in Africa in this way.

The past

Student affairs as a profession is said to have established itself mainly in the 20th century, motivated by factors such as the increase in numbers of students accessing higher education, particularly in countries where participation rates increased, where the student bodies of universities became increasingly diverse, and where the model of higher education came to emphasise research – hence the growing need for additional services to be provided to students by administrators who were hired specifically for those roles (UNESCO, 2002, p. 29). In the late 1990s the field became more textured and specialised into divisions or units, such as academic advising and counselling, admissions, services for mature and returning learners, student organisations, multi-faith services, and many more (UNESCO, 2002, p. 32–56). The same trend is observable in Africa with the growth and expansion of higher education in Africa. While it is estimated that there were only 120 000 students in African universities at independence (in the early 1960s), this number has dramatically grown to 9.3 million students in less than 50 years (Marmolejo, 2011).

To discuss the history and evolution of student affairs in the African context we need to look back at the introduction of the modern university as a Western institution on the continent. The scope of this editorial reflection does not allow for a full history of the introduction of western universities in Africa but a few points are worth mentioning. There is a comprehensive history of higher education in Africa, and it shows that there were several institutions that existed in the pre-colonial period (Lulat, 2005; Zeleza, 2006). Various scholars have written in detail about higher education in different historical periods and across the diverse geographic areas of Africa. The history of the modern university in particular in Africa dates back to the early 19th century with the establishment of universities in Algeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Madagascar. They were explicitly modelled on the European university in terms of their institutional form, purpose, and disciplinary divisions; in various regards they were very different from the earlier apprentice training or monastic reading models common before that. In brief, the

history of the provision of higher education in Africa provides a context for understanding the development of student affairs that has not been sufficiently documented or researched.

Currently, higher education studies in Africa is still an emerging field of study. The agenda of higher education research tends to centre around governance, leadership and management issues, higher education policy, funding and quality assurance, the contribution and role of higher education in development and democracy, and matters related to the increasing privatisation of higher education in Africa. For a long time, research into student life has been focused mainly on student activism, studying student protests aimed at ending colonialism and establishing democratic governments, opposing political corruption and interference in education, the introduction of cost-sharing and fees in higher education and, more recently, the harassment of marginalised students (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). Only a few studies have studied students in terms of student support and development. What we know is that historically student support has been provided informally and in an attempt to assimilate students into the status quo; student support has not been provided in a structured, professionalised or discipline-based way (Assie-Lumumba, 2006). There is, therefore, a lot of history that we need to uncover and explore in order to better understand the African history of student support and development and what theoretical frameworks implicitly or explicitly informed the kinds of support and development we have offered and continue offering.

From the present into the future

Following the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in 1998, UNESCO initiated a project to focus on the development of a manual that would guide the development of student affairs programmes worldwide and encourage the provision of student services in a professional manner for the enhancement and development of students during their studies. Over a decade ago, student affairs were identified in a minority of African countries and even fewer had professional organisations (UNESCO, 2002, p. 50). Much has changed in student affairs since the UNESCO World Conference, and more changes can be anticipated as the higher education sector becomes a key driver of the social and economic reconstruction and development of the African continent.

Student affairs is emerging as the new frontier for higher education in Africa. Clearly there is recognition that student affairs is making significant contributions to the higher education sector (CHE, 2014; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). Thus, the professionalisation of student affairs is imperative for the continent and for the benefit of higher education and student success. Student affairs in the southern African region in particular is beginning to professionalise as the result of three substantive influences. First, this is due to the quest for data-based and evidence-driven policy development and institutional decision-making across the higher education sector (Leibbrandt & Ranchhod, 2014; Lange & Luescher-Mamashela, forthcoming). Various census data, higher education data (on students, staff, finances and quality), student engagement data, and other data are providing the necessary evidence and knowledge on which to base knowledge-based management and policy-making. Increasingly, this kind of formerly neglected source of information is now used to

shape institutional and system-level policies (Swing, 2014). Data analytics is employed to answer key questions about student success, student cohort and cross-sectional studies, and student engagement trends are used to shape institutional responses to enhancing student success (CHE, 2014). Student affairs, certainly in South Africa, is increasingly required to provide credible data and research-based evidence that support its claims and institutional position.

The second key influence on the professionalisation of student affairs in the southern region of Africa is the continued and persistent emphasis on student–institutional integration and questions about how best to accelerate this while considering issues of assimilation (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). Institutional culture is comprised of many ingredients, some of which concern peer interaction, student-staff interaction, the campus environment, academic preparedness, classroom pedagogies, co-curricular and life-wide learning experiences (Jackson, 2010). We are reminded of Astin's assertion that "the student's peer group is the single most important source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (1993, p. 398). Student affairs is ideally positioned to guide the institutions on how to utilise this to the benefit of all. Student affairs is increasingly mandated to address issues of institutional culture and student integration and the search for discipline- and research-based answers compels the drive towards a professional approach to student affairs.

The third compelling influence on the professionalisation of student affairs emerges from the shifting organisational landscape of student affairs. Not only is South Africa establishing a federation of its numerous student affairs associations – i.e. the South African Federation of Student Affairs and Services; it is also the forerunner for Swaziland, Botswana and Namibia equally to establish an organisational infrastructure that strengthens student affairs' role within the higher education sector. Clearly, the future for student affairs is full of opportunities to develop a discipline-based domain that can respond with evidence about the pressing issues of student success (Lewis & Mawoyo, 2014).

Contextualising student affairs in Africa: In this issue

In the launch issue of JSAA, several authors reflected in great detail on different theoretical models and practical approaches to the professionalisation of student affairs in Africa. In this issue, the thematic focus is more especially on present-day student affairs practices in the African context. It comprises a variety of contributions, including several research-based articles focusing on professional development and student experiences and perceptions, with one of the common threads being different approaches to questions of diversity: gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, multiculturalism. The issue further includes contributions by two esteemed members of the profession internationally: the preface to this issue written by John Schuh, Distinguished Professor, Emeritus, and a very personal, reflective account by the founder and Emeritus President of IASAS, Roger Ludeman.

The question of how to build women's leadership in student affairs in the African university context leads the first article in this issue authored by Dawn Person, Katherine Saunders and Kristina Oganesian. The article is based on a qualitative case study conducted

with the cohort of five women participants of a pilot doctoral programme in student affairs offered in collaboration between the University of the Western Cape (South Africa) and California State University, Fullerton (USA). It shows in detail the students' expectations and challenges as they participate and progress in the programme. In due course the article highlights the importance of professional development and formalised training programmes in student affairs and provides an innovative and valuable way of understanding both the potential value of the programme and the very real experiences of the participants as black women who are grappling with the challenges of being adult learners within a complex, and often exclusionary, higher education landscape. The article concludes with a number of observations regarding the value of international collaborations in the development of student affairs professionals and with recommendations for how to improve such programmes.

Botswana is one of the few African countries that has a massified higher education system and a deliberate policy of growing its human resource base through higher education and the development of innovation hubs (Bailey, Cloete & Pillay, 2011). This has not only resulted in a rapidly expanding institutional landscape of higher education, including new public and private institutions, but also in more diverse institutional student bodies. Writing from the country's flagship institution, the University of Botswana, Thenjiwe E. Major and Boitumelo Mangope make a passionate plea for the deliberate development of multicultural competence among student affairs practitioners. In particular, they focus on the in-service professional development of student housing administrators, noting the increasingly diverse student populations encountered on university campuses and the need for practitioners to become self-aware, to self-reflect, and to gain multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills.

The challenge of an increasing diversity in the student body is the point of departure of the articles by Samantha Shapses Wertheim, and Mathew Smorenburg and Munita Dunn. Shapses Wertheim investigates students' perceptions of cross-racial interaction on the campus of a previously segregated (whites-only) Afrikaans university in South Africa, and how these perceptions reflect the larger post-apartheid social dynamic after twenty years of democracy. It is a case study that shows, among other things, the transient stage of students' views on race evident in narratives riddled with unsettled contradiction; it also invites deep reflection on how higher education institutions, such as the one in this study, may ever be transformed to engage effectively with the interpersonal/intrapersonal, historical and institutional factors that shape students' meaning-making process on key aspects of their personal and social identity. Using the Critical Race Theory lens as part of her theoretical framework, Shapses Wertheim shows the value of engaging with existing theory to guide an inquiry into a difficult and sensitive subject such as race relations in South Africa, and to eventually gain a deeper understanding that is immediately valuable for student affairs practitioners.

Smorenburg and Dunn's case study is also based at a historically white, Afrikaans university in South Africa, the University of Stellenbosch, and it also deals with student diversity in the student housing domain. In particular, the article discusses a student

housing programme called 'Listen, Live and Learn' and it assesses the programme's student application and selection process as a standardised tool to enhance student diversity in the programme. It shows in great detail the lengths to which student affairs professionals attached to the programme have gone in order to develop a transparent and fair selection process attuned to the aims of the programme. In this respect, the described process may be considered as a model for student selection into similar student development programmes. Moreover, according to the authors, the 'Listen, Live and Learn' model was developed originally on the basis of social contact theory; in reflecting on Shapses Wertheim's study, it would be interesting to see if the theory's claims hold – namely, that if students of different genders, races, ethnicities, and/or religions, make contact and interact with one another on an equal level, then less stereotyping by them will occur.

The final peer-reviewed contribution published in this issue features a very personal, reflective account of the establishment of the International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS). It outlines the association's genesis and early history from the perspective of its founder, president emeritus and first executive director, Roger Ludeman. In the process, the paper addresses some of the important factors and elements that laid the foundation for a more cooperative approach to student affairs work, and it touches on some important similarities and differences of student affairs work around the world. Ludeman's contribution is therefore not only highly relevant in its own respect as a record of IASAS' organisational history but also in that it provides inspiration and lessons for establishing professional organisations in countries and domains where they do not yet exist and/or for professionals and scholars to become involved in IASAS at a regional, African or global level.

This issue of JSAA's dialogue section features three brief presentations made at the 2014 Co-curriculum Colloquium organised by the University of the Western Cape. It deals with questions that are fundamental to student affairs practice: What is the co-curriculum? Is it something at the fringes of university life or has it the potential to influence the very culture of our institution and higher education in general, redefining what we traditionally consider legitimate learning? Birgit Schreiber introduces in her paper the colloquium and the debate by considering different purposes and notions of the co-curriculum: as an institutional marketing tool; a means to improve the employability of students; and a palette of institutional service offerings to enhance students' 'customer satisfaction'. How are we to translate into student affairs practice a notion of the co-curriculum that encompasses issues of student engagement, life-long and life-wide learning, student development and support, authentic learning and graduate attributes, and what Schreiber calls "the uncommon-traditional and the ubiquitous-non-traditional student"? How, ultimately, can the co-curriculum thus conceived significantly enhance student success? The presentation by Ronelle Carolissen picks up on the topic by exploring the co-curriculum from a critical feminist perspective. In the process, Carolissen provides a powerful critique of the notion of a confined and finite co-curriculum as a construct emerging from traditional notions of citizenship. Finally, Teboho Moja and Monroe France discuss the idea of the relevance of an integrated co-curriculum for student engagement, student persistence and student success, in relation to the concept of 'seamlessness' in the student learning and development experience.

Like the previous issue, this issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* includes three authoritative book reviews relevant to student affairs in Africa. Firstly, Joy Papier reviews the book *Higher education for the public good: Views from the South* edited by Brenda Leibowitz. As Papier shows, Leibowitz has succeeded in bringing together a valuable compilation of essays by prominent South African and international academics on the theme of higher education and the public good. She starts her review with provocative questions that must be asked from the outset, namely, who is this 'public', and how is its 'good' defined? The second review is conducted by Ellen M. Broido and looks at the 2014 edition of *One size does not fit all: Traditional and innovative models of student affairs practice* written by K. Manning, J. Kinzie, and J. Schuh. The book provides an update of its 2007 edition and describes eleven models of student affairs practice, divided between "traditional" and "innovative" types. Finally, the book *Discerning critical hope in educational practices* (2013) reviewed by Denise Wood engages with contemporary educational practice in terms of Paulo Freire's notion of hope. It is a collection of diverse essays edited by Vivienne Bozalek, Brenda Leibowitz, Ronelle Carolissen and Megan Boler.

The issue of JSAA concludes with conference announcements, calls for papers, and invitations to join professional student affairs associations.

With this diversity of research articles, reflective accounts, seminar papers and book reviews, we hope to provide our readers with a relevant, interesting and empowering perspective on the diversity of scholarship and practice in the domain and give a starting impression of the profession in the African context as it presents itself, as it is analysed and understood. We thank all the contributors and peer reviewers, our esteemed members of the JSAA Editorial Executive and the Journal's International Editorial Advisory Board, the layout editors and proofreaders from our publisher, African Minds, and the technical team from e-publications of the University of the Western Cape, who are administering the www.jsaa.ac.za website.

For the Editorial Executive,
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