

EDITORIAL

Lived Barriers to African Knowledge Production: Beyond – *and Before* – Accessibility

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This issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* bears testimony to the advances that research into African student affairs and services has made over the last decade. The 11 research articles published in this issue span the diversity of the research interests and knowledge needs in the field. It includes research into the experiences of African international students, student leadership development in the residence sector, the experiences of students with disabilities, student activism, protest behaviour and university transformation, student psychology and thinking styles, access to online counselling services and student satisfaction with campus facilities and infrastructure. As in every issue, author collaborations are the welcome norm. Authors collaborate across countries and institutions, between practitioners and academics, early career and seasoned researchers, and from different disciplinary backgrounds. It is also encouraging to see almost equal numbers of female and male authors contributing to the production of knowledge on student affairs in Africa in this issue. The substantive research presented in these articles is accompanied by two that reflect on research into student affairs in Africa. Reflecting on the same is also our purpose in this editorial.

On 10 June 2022, the *JSAA* Editorial Executive made a presentation at the conference of the Association for African Studies in Germany hosted by the Africa Centre for Transregional Research of the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg. The presentation entitled “Lived barriers to African knowledge production: beyond – and before – accessibility” was essentially our reflection on the challenges of publishing an open access,

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accredited, high quality, peer-reviewed, scholarly and professional journal in the African knowledge production context. We argued that the development of African knowledge bases by Africans, for and about African higher education is an undisputed necessity and of great significance. Africa is the continent of the future – and this future is omnipresent in the challenges and opportunities that are present all around us. African knowledge production, as shown in a range of recent scientometric studies, is expanding rapidly and widely. Yet, creating equitable and sustainable knowledge-sharing processes is fraught with barriers to overcome.

Our paper presented our experience as the Editorial Executive of an African journal wedged uncomfortably into the intersection of the desire to enable fee-free publishing of African authors' work (no article processing fees/APCs) and to enable fee-free access to the published work of African scholars (no subscription or access fee to the individual) and yet finding ourselves hamstrung by costs that inevitably accrue in the process of journal administration and publishing. As much as our own work and that of all colleagues on the Editorial Board, the International Advisory Editorial Board and all peer reviewers is *pro bono* and thus entirely unpaid, the professional copy editing, proofing, and typesetting, as well as the hosting and administration of the journal are not. Having quality-assured, professionally produced articles with DOIs, indexed and without errors, is time-consuming and costly. Altogether, knowledge production does not pay for itself. Or should it?

This volume might be the last of *JSAA* which we are able to keep truly open access for both authors and readers. The struggles to overcome the barriers to African knowledge production are weighing on us heavily and we might need to charge publishing fees to fund the publishing process. Over the last ten years, the costs of production have been carried by the Editorial Executive by means of project funding available from research projects funded by international funders such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; by the African Minds Trust as part of its journal development commitment; by budget allocations from the journal's host institutions, the University of the Western Cape, Stellenbosch University and more recently the University of Pretoria; and by the contributions of guest editors to the production of their issues. While some scholarly journals receive funding from scholarly societies, others have long gone the route of charging subscription fees, APCs, or both. If we choose to retain independent editorial rights, then we may need to charge APCs in the future to cover the costs of publishing. We are currently in the process of exploring a variety of models that enable sustainability, that include fair access for authors and readers, and that maintain editorial independence.

Lastly, with the Journal's move to the University of Pretoria in 2021 we changed our article submission process to run exclusively via the journal website and away from the former email system. Our hope is that the renewal and expansion of the Editorial Board at the end of 2021 and eventually with a new financial model we will be able to streamline our overall processes to cut the time from submission through to the editorial decision and publication. Moreover, the *JSAA* team hopes to collaborate with professional SAS associations in developing a much "thicker" model of research support and authorship development by creating a Community of Practice on Student Affairs Research. These

considerations are all alive and under debate among the editors and we are happy to receive comments from our readership.

And finally a comment on our choice to have the peace flag on our cover. We are deeply concerned about the welfare and safety of students and the success of higher education across the war-torn parts of the world. We are concerned about the continuing humanitarian crisis in other parts of the world, terrorist threats and the threats of hunger and impact of the environmental crisis. These are some of the factors that derail all efforts to bolster education.

Disengaging from students, terminating study permits, withdrawing from dual degrees and severing research projects – while gratifying our frustrations with war-mongers – contribute to deepening the divide between aggressors and victims.

Our pledge is to commit to continued support and engagement with regions and countries suffering the brutalities of war. It is in the engagement with both sides – the aggressors and victims – that we can contribute to deepening understanding. Severing relations should not be an option for higher education and student affairs across the globe.

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