

EDITORIAL

Advancing student success in higher education through scholarship

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This is the second guest-edited issue in partnership with the South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals (SAASSAP), led by guest editors Drs Neo Pule, Irene Mohasoa, and Prof. Matete Madiba. Heartfelt congratulations on this impressive JSAA 12(2) guest-edited issue!

The title of this issue, 'Advancing Student Success in Higher Education through the Scholarship of Integration' is used as basis for the title of our editorial which emphasises the importance of scholarship. *Period.*

For scholarship in Africa to be successful we require a conducive ecosystem that advances knowledge creation and facilitates the publishing process. Many factors within and beyond academe enable or hinder knowledge production.

The advancement of scholarship in Africa, particularly in the realm of student success, is deeply reliant on the collaborative efforts of reviewers, authors, and researchers. These individuals, most often voluntarily, with low incentives or rewards, contribute their expertise, time, and insights to ensure that research is rigorous, relevant, and impactful. By critically evaluating manuscripts, voluntary reviewers uphold the quality and credibility of academic publications, fostering a culture of critical scholarship. Authors and researchers push the boundaries of knowledge by addressing local challenges and proposing innovative, context-sensitive solutions. Their collective work not only enhances understanding but also informs policy and practice, ultimately driving improvements in student success across the continent.

Such voluntary efforts are especially critical in African contexts, where unique socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors require tailored approaches that are locally generated and have local relevance. The dedication of the voluntary reviewers, authors, researchers and contributors ensures that scholarship remains a powerful tool for transformation, equity, and the empowerment of the next generation of students.

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We are grateful for the many submissions we receive and are inundated with submissions that are relevant, of high quality and reflect an increasingly emboldened voice in African knowledge production. Moreover, we also hugely appreciate the academic peer reviewers who play a critical role in the knowledge creation process by ensuring the rigour, credibility, and validity of research, thereby upholding the standards that advance scholarly discourse and innovation.

Here a short reflection on this issue, which is made up of articles edited by our guest editors and in addition is comprised of additional articles from our open submissions, which are a compelling collection of studies that explore key themes of resilience, identity, mentorship, and well-being among students in diverse contexts. Each article highlights unique challenges and opportunities faced by students and professionals, offering evidence-based insights and practical implications for fostering growth and success.

By linking the principles of positive psychology to future-oriented thinking, Henry Mason's piece, 'Envisioning my best future self: Integrating positive psychology and prospection in student affairs practice,' highlights how student affairs practitioners can inspire resilience and optimism, equipping students with the tools to navigate uncertainty and aspire towards their goals.

Shifting focus to behavioural patterns, Andile Masuku and colleagues present findings from their exploratory study on alcohol consumption among students at a university of technology in KwaZulu-Natal. Their research sheds light on students' perceptions and practices surrounding alcohol use, providing crucial insights for developing targeted health promotion strategies.

Nokukhanya Thembane tackles the realities of 'Navigating the power outages: Impact and coping strategies of students in a South African university during loadshedding'. This timely contribution examines the intersection of infrastructural challenges and academic resilience, highlighting the adaptive strategies students employ to mitigate the disruptions caused by persistent power outages.

The importance of mentorship is spotlighted in Sindi Msimango's article, 'Mentorship in undergraduate studies – Building block for postgraduate success'. Msimango emphasises how structured mentorship programmes can bridge the gap between undergraduate and postgraduate success, fostering a culture of support and professional development in academic institutions.

Kolisa Siqoko and Saloshna Vandeyar bring an intersectional lens to the discussion with their piece, 'Constitution and negotiation of rural students' identities at an urban South African university'. Their work explores the identity negotiations of rural students transitioning to urban academic settings, offering a nuanced understanding of the cultural and social adjustments required in this context.

The final research article from the open submissions is by Janice Moodley-Marie, Bianca Parry and Itumeleng Masisi, who focus on 'Student experiences of attending the first online Southern African Student Psychology Conference at an open distance e-learning university in South Africa'.

Finally, this issue concludes with Xena Cupido's insightful review of the book *Reimagining South African Higher Education: Towards a Student-Centred Learning and Teaching Future*. This review underscores the importance of student-centred pedagogies and institutional reform in shaping equitable and transformative higher education systems.

This collection of articles would not have been possible without the largely invisible work done by the dedicated reviewers who give their time and expertise in advancing scholarship in Africa.

At this point we want to thank Dr Angelina Wilson-Fadji who has been part of the Editorial Board for the past 3 years and will step down from her role in 2025. Her contributions have played a big role in the growth of the journal to becoming a highly respected platform for advancing the discourse and scholarship on student affairs across the continent and beyond. We wish her the very best and thank her for her energy, her time and her commitment to scholarship on student success in Africa.

We wish Bronwin Sebonka, our Journal Manager, the most heartfelt congratulations on completing her Master in Education at the University of Pretoria – well done and enjoy the well earned accolades!

Ending this editorial on a high note: we received a grant by EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) with AJOL (African Journals Online) and WACREN (the West and Central African Research and Education Network), who offered this grant to support no-fee open access publishing in Africa and creating a Sustainable Diamond Open Access Future. JSAA is using this grant to build capacity and guidelines, create a financial sustainability plan, renew the editorial team, and operationalise the Community of Practice for the Journal of Student Affairs in Africa. We are very excited about and grateful for this opportunity and know that JSAA's sustainability is bolstered by this grant.

We hope this issue inspires further dialogue and innovation within the field of student affairs and reaffirms the collective commitment to advancing higher education and students as architects of our shared futures.

Enjoy the read!

Birgit, Thierry and Teboho

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