

EDITORIAL

Co-constructing academic advising and shaping a framework for student affairs in South Africa

Birgit Schreiber,¹ Teboho Moja² & Thierry M. Luescher³

Welcome to volume 14, issue 1 of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*. This issue entitled 'Sharing Practices to Co-construct the Profession of Academic Advising' is guest-edited by Gugu Khanye and François Strydom from the University of the Free State, South Africa. The collection of articles brings together research, reflective practice and institutional experience that significantly advance our understanding of academic advising in the South African higher education context and also, and perhaps most importantly, begins to shape a national framework for academic advising and student affairs in South African higher education.

Academic advising has increasingly become recognised as central to student success, yet it remains unevenly theorised, conceptualised, organised and practised across South African higher education institutions. The articles in this issue demonstrate that advising is a relational, developmental and educational practice that helps students interpret the university, make informed choices, develop agency and navigate the multiple academic, personal and institutional factors that shape their educational journeys.

The emphasis on sharing practices and co-constructing the profession is therefore particularly valuable. A profession is shaped through institutional initiatives and develops when practitioners and scholars make their knowledge visible, name their practices, test their assumptions, articulate shared standards and learn from one another. This guest-edited issue offers precisely such a space. It brings practical knowledge into dialogue with theory and research, while recognising that academic advising must be shaped by the realities of South African students and institutions.

Academic advising occupies a crucial position between the academic project of the university and the broader work of supporting students. Advisors frequently work at the points where students encounter uncertainty, transition, complexity or difficulty. They help students understand academic expectations, interpret feedback, reconsider unsuccessful

- 1 Prof. Dr. Birgit Schreiber, Member: Africa Centre, Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, Germany; Extraordinary Professor: University of the Western Cape, South Africa; President: International Association of Student Affairs (IASAS). JSAA Editorial Executive and founding editor. Email: birgitedewes@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0003-2469-0504
- 2 Prof. Teboho Moja, Clinical Professor Emerita: Higher Education, New York University, USA; Visiting Research fellow: Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship, University of Pretoria; Extraordinary Professor: Institute of Post School Studies, University of the Western Cape, South Africa. JSAA Editor-in-chief. Email: teboho.moja@nyu.edu. ORCID: 0000-0001-6343-3020
- 3 Dr Thierry M. Luescher, Director: Postgraduate Studies and Researcher Development, University of Cape Town; Adjunct Professor: Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation, Nelson Mandela University; Research fellow: Higher Education, University of the Free State, South Africa. JSAA Editorial Executive and founding member. Email: thierry.luescher@uct.ac.za. ORCID: 0000-0002-6675-0512

choices, identify opportunities and connect with appropriate support. They may also be among the first institutional practitioners to recognise when a student's academic difficulty is connected to financial pressure, mental-health concerns, family responsibilities, language, belonging, accommodation or other circumstances.

Academic advising is a key aspect of student affairs, which provides a purposeful point of connection within what can otherwise be a fragmented institutional environment and alienating experience for students. Student affairs enables students to move from receiving disconnected pieces of information towards making meaning of their educational experiences.

This is not only significant in South Africa but across the continent. Our national higher education systems in Africa serve exceptionally diverse student populations (and indeed societies), including many students who are the first in their families to attend university. Students enter higher education through unequal schooling systems and with unequal access to social, cultural, financial and technological resources. They encounter institutions with different histories, missions, structures and capacities.

Academic advising can help make the implicit more explicit. It can help students learn how the institution works without positioning them as 'deficient' because they do not already possess this knowledge. At its best, advising does not merely direct students through institutional procedures. It helps them develop the capacity to ask questions, evaluate alternatives, make informed decisions and become increasingly confident participants in their own education.

Towards a South African framework for student affairs

One of the most important contributions of this guest-edited issue is the impetus it provides towards developing a South African framework for student affairs. Such a framework is increasingly necessary if approaches to student and institutional success are to develop as a coherent and recognised professional field.

At present, institutions may use student affairs to describe substantially different roles and activities. Some institutions have developed comprehensive student affairs models, while others rely on fragmented or informal arrangements. The location, mandate, training and professional recognition of student affairs practitioners also differ widely.

A South African framework should not prescribe one rigid organisational model for every university. However, diversity without a shared conceptual foundation can lead to inconsistency, role confusion and uneven quality. It can also make the work of student affairs less visible and limit opportunities for professional development and career progression.

A national framework could articulate the purposes, principles and ethical foundations of student affairs while allowing these to be implemented in contextually appropriate ways. It could clarify the relationship between student engagement, teaching and learning, student development, counselling, career development and administrative support. It could identify the knowledge, capabilities and dispositions required for effective practice. It could also establish expectations regarding training, supervision, reflective practice, evidence use, student participation and institutional responsibility.

Importantly, a South African framework should not simply import models developed elsewhere. International scholarship provides valuable resources, but student affairs in Africa must respond to our own educational histories, institutional arrangements and social realities. It must address historical and current inequality, multilingualism, transformation, belonging, student mobility, financial vulnerability and the continuing consequences of our histories. It should recognise relationality, community and interdependence, alongside individual choice and agency. It must also draw on the considerable expertise that already exists among South African practitioners.

The development of such a framework should itself embody the co-constructive approach promoted by this guest-edited issue. Student affairs professionals, academic staff, institutional researchers, students, university leaders and professional associations all have knowledge that should contribute to this process. Student experiences provide essential evidence about what makes student affairs accessible, credible, respectful and educationally meaningful.

What the collection of articles in this issue provides is a substantial starting point. It offers language, concepts, evidence, competency considerations and examples of practice through which the field can continue to define itself.

This issue offers a starting point for a framework for student affairs and demonstrates how a field can move towards professional coherence by sharing practices, generating evidence, developing competencies and making its educational contribution visible. This co-constructive process is required for student affairs more broadly across Africa.

The next step for student affairs, not only in South Africa, but across Africa, is to continue the conversation across institutions and professional communities, to deepen the evidence base, and to co-construct frameworks that are sufficiently clear to guide practice and sufficiently flexible to respond to the diversity of South African higher education.

Peer reviews as academic citizenship

Our Journal, like all journals, relies on the critical work of peer reviewers. Peer review is one of the most important forms of academic citizenship. It is often invisible, unpaid and insufficiently recognised, yet disciplines, scholarship and publications depend on it. Reviewers help safeguard the quality, credibility and integrity of scholarly work by testing arguments, identifying weaknesses, questioning assumptions and assisting authors to strengthen their contributions. At its best, reviewing is a gatekeeping exercise, a collegial and developmental practice through which knowledge is refined and scholarship is advanced. It is also a shared responsibility. Every author and researcher who benefits from the peer-review system has a duty to contribute to sustaining it by reviewing the work of others. Without scholars who are willing to give their time, expertise and careful attention, journals cannot function, emerging researchers lose opportunities for constructive guidance, and disciplines become less capable of correcting errors, developing new ideas and maintaining rigorous standards. Reviewing is not an optional extra to our student affairs practice, theory, practice and leadership. It is part of the collective efforts through which scholarly communities reproduce, interrogate, strengthen and renew themselves.

In memoriam: JSAA editor, Dr Dominique Ngoy Mwepu (1971–2024)

The JSAA community mourns the passing of Dr Dominique Ngoy Mwepu, who died on 30 September 2024 at the age of 53. Born in Kamina in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dr Mwepu completed his undergraduate and master's education at the Institut Supérieur Pédagogique in the DRC before obtaining a postgraduate diploma in Education and a PhD from the University of Cape Town. His doctoral research examined translation and interpreting as instruments of language planning in South Africa, with particular attention to court interpreting.

Following his doctorate, he held an A. W. Mellon Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at UCT and subsequently worked at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and the University of the Witwatersrand. He later taught at the University of the District of Columbia and, at the time of his death, was a lecturer in the Department of Hearing and Speech Sciences at the University of Maryland, USA.

Dr Mwepu joined the JSAA Editorial Board in 2022 and served as the Journal's first French-language and translation editor. In this capacity, he supported the transition of JSAA towards becoming more multi-lingual and particularly facilitated the introduction of French titles and abstracts. In this manner, Dominique helped extend the Journal's engagement with francophone Africa. We remember him as a dedicated scholar, editor and colleague and extend our sincere condolences to his family, students, colleagues and friends.

Upcoming changes at JSAA

JSAA is entering an important period of transition as the journal moves its institutional hosting from the University of Pretoria to the University of Cape Town. In the course of August–September 2026, we are expecting JSAA's online presence to be relocated and newly hosted on the UCT Libraries journal platform at <https://journals.uct.ac.za/>. We are excited for this move as much as we are grateful for the past five years of association with the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Education.

At the same time, JSAA is currently significantly oversubscribed, with a substantial pipeline of accepted and in-process manuscripts. We have about two years of manuscripts currently in the process of editing. We are therefore using this transition period to put a moratorium on new general submissions for several months while we consolidate the move, manage the existing manuscript backlog responsibly, and protect the quality and timeliness of the editorial process.

During this period, JSAA will continue to accept and publish guest-edited special issues, which remain an important way of advancing focused scholarly conversations and strengthening collaboration across the student affairs community. Thus, manuscript submissions that are specifically in response to calls for papers will continue to be accepted by the corresponding editors of that guest-edited issue. All current and future calls for papers are published on the JSAA website (under current issues, archive, and announcements).

This issue

This guest-edited issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* (JSAA), volume 14 issue 1, is dedicated to the theme of 'Sharing Practices to Co-construct the Profession of Academic

Advising.’ The guest editorial, authored by Gugu Khanye and Professor François Strydom from the University of the Free State, sets the tone by emphasizing the collaborative efforts and innovative strategies shaping academic advising in Southern Africa.

This issue features a diverse range of added contributions, which are selected from the open submissions of the JSAA. Mthokozisi Mpofo and colleagues investigate international student adjustment and success at the University of Namibia, while Maretha Visser and Eloise Law-van Wyk analyse predictors of student mental health and academic competence. Joy Petersen and Aslaam Fataar provide a morphogenetic analysis of student development during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Tebello Mduduma et al. focus on first-year students’ resilience and well-being as key factors in adapting to higher education. Starford Osabutey examines the impact of homeowner behaviours on academic performance at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. Casey Botha and Janine Senekal present a systematic review of postgraduate retention strategies, and Sandla Nomvete et al. analyse leadership dynamics and the use of ICT during the 2015 #FeesMustFall protests. Finally, Shingairai Chigeza and Angelina Wilson Fadji explore relational experiences and meaning making as pathways to academic adjustment among African international students in South Africa.

Altogether, this issue brings together a rich tapestry of research and reflective practice, showcasing the evolving landscape of academic advising and student support across the continent.

We congratulate Gugu Khanye and François Strydom from the University of the Free State on leading this guest-edited issue so successfully.

Enjoy the read!

Birgit, Teboho and Thierry

How to cite:

Schreiber, B., Moja, T., & Luescher, T. M. (2026). Co-constructing academic advising and shaping a framework for student affairs in South Africa. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 14(1), ix–xiii. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v14i1.7411>

