

## EDITORIAL

# Living Communities

Birgit Schreiber,\* Thierry M. Luescher\*\* & Teboho Moja\*\*\*

We want to open this issue with special acknowledgement of Prof. Teboho Moja, our Editor-in-chief, who has been recognised and esteemed with a number of national and international awards. Prof. Moja has been honoured in 2019 with the South African National Research Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award, the Women in International Education Award as Teacher/Academic Director of the Year, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Faculty Award.

Prof. Moja has committed her career and life to the development of higher education with special focus on South Africa and Africa. She has been absolutely instrumental in strengthening Student Affairs in Africa as a field of knowledge and as a practice domain. All the editors, reviewers and authors who have published in the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa (JSAA)* have benefitted from her guidance, vision and encouragement and we continue to be grateful for her tireless contributions to higher education in Africa.

Most open access academic publications, and particularly open access academic journals that publish following a regular schedule, face the challenge of securing sufficient funding to finance the basic processes for publication. The *JSAA* is intentionally open access – for both readers and authors – which means there are neither page fees for publishing nor fees for accessing our articles. We deliberately designed our journal publishing model in this way from the inception of the journal in 2013 as we want to promote wide and open access by and from our readers and authors. It is obvious that financial sustainability is this model's weakness, hence we are always grateful to the sponsors of special issues and to our host institution for supporting the publishing costs of open submission issues.

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We are grateful for sharing our vision for the professionalisation of Student Affairs in Africa and her unconditional support of the journal.

We are also grateful for the enthusiastic contribution of our Journal Manager, Maretha Joyce, who has taken on the pre-publishing aspect of the work. She is supported by Stellenbosch University and we are grateful for this support. Again, sustainability is an area that the *JSAA* will need to consider much more critically in the future.

### *In this issue*

Three themes are the focus of this issue of the *JSAA*, all within the core focus areas of Student Affairs and Services as understood across the globe. The first theme is student residences and student living communities, and how residences policy, and living and learning experiences play a role in institutional and student success. The second theme is the focus on disability in higher education, and the third is the experience of first-year students and their adjustment to the new challenges in higher education and the political pressures on campus. The articles present a collective theme on the importance of Student Affairs in shaping an environment that is conducive to institutional and student success.

This issue illustrates that it is not one approach or one intervention that creates a change in status quo, but a joint and collaborative approach and a systemic understanding of what makes a successful or less successful living and learning environment. This is a finding that has repeatedly been made in past articles published in *JSAA*. In this issue, Groenewald and Fourie-Malherbe emphasise a ‘holistic and integrated’ approach to make a difference in the living and learning environments when it is conceived as the partner site to in-classroom learning. They emphasise that a holistic approach is as much about a skill set and relevant competencies of staff as it is about the essential nature, the ‘being’, of staff and of the institution. Xulu-Gama, in the second article, employs an ethnographic methodology to conclude along similar lines of Groenewald and Fourie-Malherbe, namely that the “strategic positioning of student housing in building sustainable communities of living and learning uncovers the often not-so-obvious connections between academic success and students’ socioeconomic backgrounds and their psycho-social issues”, which emphasises the influences within the broader context as contributing towards a holistic understanding of the factors which impact on success.

The next four articles focus on various aspects of disability and jointly argue for the value of learning communities as supporting agency and participation in the learning process of students with unique needs. The voices of students, in the qualitative articles, speak for themselves when they point out the subjective experience and sense-making in the living and learning context for students with different needs. What is particularly interesting about this section is that we have articles from South Africa (including Venda) and Zambia, bringing a unique richness to the discussion of this theme from across Africa.

The next two articles on particular experiences of first-year students focus, on the one hand, on intervention frameworks and, on the other, on the subjective adjustment aspect of first-year students. The article on the political climate on Ghanaian campuses concludes our set of research articles.

The issue is rounded off with a wonderfully rich review by Vicki Trowler of the book, *Decolonisation in Universities: The Politics of Knowledge*, edited by Jonathan Jansen and published in 2019 by Wits University Press.

We wish the readers of this issue much enjoyment and use of the articles, and thank all our reviewers who have contributed tirelessly with very helpful and developmental reviews.

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