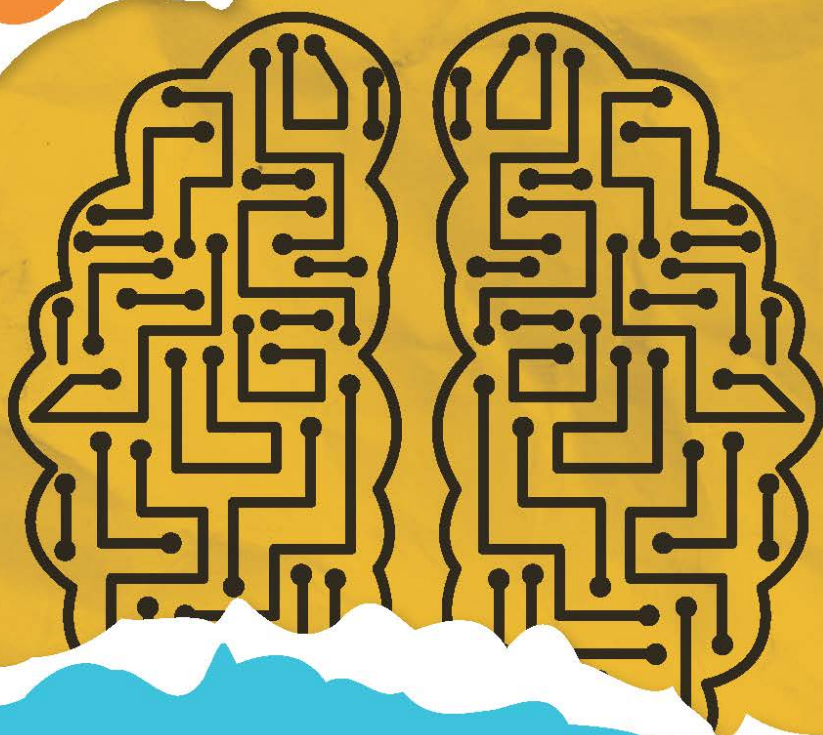


Reimagining South African Higher Education

Towards a Student-Centred
Learning and Teaching Future



Editors: Danie de Klerk, Greig Krull, Tshepiso Maleswena, Fiona MacAlister

CHAPTER 11

TOWARDS STAFF DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT AFFAIRS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Birgit Schreiber

University of the Western Cape

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2469-0504>

Oliver Seale

University of Johannesburg

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6161-1911>

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the needs assessment of staff who work in student development, support, and services¹, also called Student Affairs and Services (SAS), and its importance in enhancing student success in the South African university sector. The objective of the training needs analysis (TNA) undertaken by Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM), was to explore the development needs of this domain within universities by gathering data via a survey using a convenience sample. The results of this study (N=362) suggest there is a compelling need for staff development in this sector. The identified needs focus on the development of 1) general leadership and management competencies, 2) communication and digital competencies, 3) competencies related to social justice, transformation, and gender equality, 4) understanding of the higher education sector, and 5) theories and practices of the Student Affairs and Services domain. While the needs are framed as competencies, these are not understood, here, as discreet or performative, but reflect a deeper need to reflect on and feel confident to navigate the complexities at the intersection of multi-disciplinary and cross-boundary spaces in which Student Affairs often is located. This chapter contributes towards advancing a student-centred higher education sector by exploring the needs of the staff who provide student development, support, and services in higher education institutions in South Africa upon which a staff development programme can be premised.

Keywords: paradigm shift; staff capacitation; staff development; student development; student services; student support

1 Student Development, Support and Services is also called Student Affairs and Services, Student Life, Student Engagement and variations of these terms (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). For the purposes of this chapter, the terms Student Affairs and Services are used and are abbreviated as SAS.

1. Introduction

The theory and practice in the SAS, student development, support, and services domains in higher education have developed unevenly across institutions, countries, and the globe for many reasons (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). The reasons for the variations include different levels of higher education sector development, differences in the historical origins and trajectories of institutions, differences in the roles of universities in the national development plans, differences in social-economic resources and social welfare provisions in the national contexts, and a wide diversity of students' level of readiness, demographic profiles, and needs. Not only are the models and practices highly diverse across and within the domains, but so too are the nomenclature, the epistemic community, and scholarship for SAS, as well as the discourse and the underlying assumptions (Mandew, 2003; Torres et al., 2019).

This kind of disciplinary, conceptual, and practice medley complicates the development, professionalisation, and capacitation of the domain, and generates several diverse trajectories and models of how, mainly elsewhere in the world, this domain is capacitated (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Carpenter & Haber-Curran, 2013). Seale and Cross (2015) confirm that leadership development can be an enabling and empowering instrument of change in South African universities. Burgoyne et al. (2009) support the claim that leadership development, if conceptualised, planned and managed responsively in an enabling organisational setting, may enhance student success and contribute towards a student-centred institutional development. However, in South African universities, approaches to leadership development tend to neglect contextual complexity and underemphasise student-centred approaches to student and institutional success (Seale et al., 2021).

2. Student Affairs and Services

The domain of SAS is located in the "third space" of higher education, often located in academic management and institutional leadership, that is constructing and reconstructing its identity in line with increasing competitiveness and globalisation of higher education (Whitechurch, 2019a). These "third space professionals", positioned between formal leadership and teaching staff, are emerging as a critical staff component in higher education. This domain, wedged between academic and administrative domains, often works in cross-boundary and multi-disciplinary contexts, deals with complexity and ambiguity, and provides critical functions and occupies vital roles for higher education institutions to compete in the national, continental, and global landscape (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018; Whitechurch, 2019a, 2019b). Bernstein (2000) speaks about this 'third domain' as a re-contextualised field of knowledge and discourse that is "next to" or "beside" the disciplinary-academic domain and the administrative domain. Bhabha (2004) adds hybridity as a characteristic of this third space, and Behari-Leak & Le Roux (2018) emphasises the ambiguity of this space.

Student Affairs and Services (SAS)², also referred to as Student Development, Support, and Services, usually include a wide range of services, offices, programmes, and units that are positioned on a continuum from in-curricular, to co-curricular or non-academic in nature (Broido & Schreiber, 2016; Lumadi & Mampuru, 2010; Morrison et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). These student services, student development opportunities, student support functions, and Student Affairs departments typically comprise provisions that focus on academic development, psycho-social wellbeing, graduate attributes and living and learning spaces³, and many more that focus on the living and learning context of students, from entry to exit (Ciobanau, 2013).

According to Mandew (2003) the “nomenclature, definition, scope, configuration and modus operandi of these services and functions differ from institution to institution depending on a variety of factors, not least the availability of resources (human and financial), facilities and infrastructure” (p. 90). Usually, SAS divisions and departments are managed by an executive director, director, or dean of students, who reports to the vice-rector/deputy vice-chancellor. Staffing level ranges from entry, middle, senior, and executive, and appointments are administrative, academic, or professional. The divisions or departments are guided by a range of principles, professional guidelines, and theories, which inform practice. Moreover, divisions and departments are centrally managed or de-centralised into faculties (Botha et al., 2005; Morrison et al., 2006; Schreiber & Lewis, 2016; Schreiber, 2012).

SAS divisions in South Africa are important role players in addressing and changing the vicious cycle of universities reproducing existing and pervasive inequalities (Bawa, 2014; Luescher et al., 2021; Mandew, 2003). SAS needs to “critically reflect upon and consistently review the assumptions, content, delivery and appropriateness of student development programmes, support structures, services and initiatives” (Bawa, 2014, p. vi). According to Bawa (2014), this critical self-reflection of SAS must include propositions of solutions that contribute towards student development and success. Understanding the development and training needs of the SAS staff, as discussed in this chapter, is such a proposition that seeks to advance student development and success via staff development for staff in SAS domains.

3. Professional and Staff Development in Higher Education

A multitude of influences, such as massification, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, urgency around social justice, access, equity, increasing complexity and importance of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and various other factors impact SAS in higher education, not only in South Africa but across the

² See footnote 1 on page 1.

³ List of functional areas and services: student academic development and support, career advancement and career counselling services, psychological and personal counselling, disability services, life skills and mentoring programmes, community engagement, residential and catering services, health and wellness services, student governance and leadership, student societies, sport and orientation programmes, international offices, HIV-Aids and vaccination services, food security and gender equality, street law and volunteering, and many more such services.

world. Student success, at the centre of higher education, is the key focus area of SAS (Botha et al., 2005; Mandew, 2003; Moja et al., 2015; Nyar, 2020; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

In South Africa, no professional or staff development programme offers comprehensive, in-depth staff capacitation in the domain of SAS (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020; Mandew, 2003). This might be related to the absence of a normative national framework that defines requirements, norms, and standards for SAS, or because, in essence, the legislative or regulatory framework is unclear on the scope, role, and responsibility of SAS (Schreiber, 2012).

One response to the changes in higher education has been for SAS to improve its impact on student success via professional development in the form of strengthening capacity, competencies, skills, knowledge, scholarship, and developing relevant theories and coherent practices (Carpenter & Haber-Curran, 2013; Schreiber, 2014; Nyar, 2018; Moja et al., 2015). In this regard, a review of development trends and models in universities reveals events-based interventions rather than systemic and comprehensive staff development programmes (Seale & Cross, 2015). Although most universities have recognised and responded to the need for leadership and staff development, these interventions are mostly episodic, and issue-driven rather than aligned to institutional strategy and performance objectives (Seale & Cross, 2015). There have been some attempts to align leadership development for specific roles, like deans, with strategic objectives and performance requirements in international and local universities, but much more effort is required to develop higher education leadership and management more systematically and sector-wide (Seale et al., 2021; Seale & Cross, 2015). To respond to the South African higher education sector's capacitation needs, Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) at the Universities South Africa (USAf) is mandated to develop national capacity for the higher education sector. It is under the auspice of HELM that this research is conducted.

The professionalisation and staff development of SAS have taken on different trajectories in different regions across the globe (Carpenter & Harber-Curran, 2013; Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). Europe, for instance, with Germany and France as social welfare states, are not focusing on SAS *per se*, but provide much of their SAS services and functions integrated into and as part of the welfare and caring state, thus equipping and capacitating SAS, such as they are, with different professional development programmes, often linked to 'Bildungswissenschaften'⁴ and higher education management (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). A very different approach is followed in the USA, where the SAS domain is professionalised and developed in MA and PhD programmes, via research, scholarship, and professional associations, and in Canada, where competency development models focus slightly more on the personal leadership competencies of SAS staff (Cacuss, 2017; Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020).

4 Bildungswissenschaften – the English translation is 'educational sciences'.

Reimagining South African Higher Education: Towards a Student-Centred Learning and Teaching Future

Some of the programmes in South Africa that contribute towards aspects of SAS capacitation are in the Education Faculties, offering master's or doctoral programmes (for instance, a master's in higher education leadership at the University of KwaZulu Natal and Stellenbosch University), or specific thematic capacitation (for instance, the Association of College and University Housing Officers' [ACUHO] Student Housing Training Institute, an immersive two-week long staff development programme), or professional training for registered psychotherapists or social workers via Continuous Professional Development as required by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). Further informal and quasi-formal initiatives are offered by Professional Associations⁵, usually linked to their annual conferences.

At a national sectoral level, the South African higher education umbrella body, Universities South Africa (USAf) Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) is mandated to capacitate the higher education sector. USAf HELM has adopted an approach to leadership and management development that is bespoke for the personal, role-related, and institutional-contextual requirements of participants. Systematic leadership development involves more than training and includes developmental experiences that are meaningfully integrated with one another, focussing on skills and competencies, but more so on personal development and in-depth understanding of roles and responsibilities not only of the individual but also at a sectoral level, foregrounding the contextualised learner in a complex higher education environment that locates itself in a local and global context.

Since its inception in 2002, HELM has identified and responded to the leadership and management development needs in the South African higher education sector. The fundamental premise for a SAS staff development programme is to develop highly competent SAS staff who understand and function in a complex and changing higher education context and advance student and institutional success via engagement with and impact on the student, the institution, and the context into which these are embedded. HELM's programmatic epistemology and pedagogy are informed by an executive education modality, which includes self-directed learning, contact sessions, group engagement, and content-related exercises.

HELM programmes are premised on the notion that through staff capacitation, knowledge, and competencies, the participants are emboldened and equipped to provide effective and impactful support and development to students, and to contribute towards shaping student-centred spaces that recognise the contextualised student (Boughey & McKenna, 2021) and advance student success.

5 There is a medley of professional associations in South Africa (for instance: South African Association of Counselling and Development in Higher Education [SAACDHE], Higher Education Disability South Africa [HEDSA], National Association of Student Development Professionals [NASDEV], Association of College and University Housing Officers [ACUHO-SA], South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Practitioners [SAASSAP]) which define and guide their scope and practice and have a variety of specific professional development events and initiatives, such as workshops and conferences.

Professional and staff development, in the context of this chapter, is not defined as a static finite event, as a training process leading to accreditation with set norms and standards, or a process concluding with exclusionary criteria (Schreiber & Lewis, 2020). Rather, we propose a process of staff development for the SAS domain in the form of a national capacitation programme, which continuously re-imagines, re-constructs, and re-examines itself to evaluate relevance and impact in an evolving, pluralist, and complex higher education context. Through capacitation based on the expressed needs of this sector, we promote student-centredness by focussing on the needs of staff who are directly linked to student success. This chapter contributes towards shaping not a *re*-imagined staff development but a first iteration of a national sector-wide staff development for SAS that locates the student at the centre of support and development.

4. Notions of “Student Centredness” in Student Affairs and Services

Notions of student-centredness have been present in education since the time of enlightenment (see for instance the origins in writings by Rousseau [1712-1778] and Pestalozzi [1746-1827], and more recently in Montessori Education and Carl Rogers [1902-1987]), but precise definitions are somewhat elusive (McKenna, 2013; Tangney, 2014; Taylor, 2013).

Debates also surround the implications flowing from different terminology, either using learner-centred, learning-centred, or student-centred. The semantic connotations of “*student-centred*” may suggest a role and identity focus, whereas “*learner-centred*” may conceptually include notions of life-long and life-wide learning and puts emphasis on the inclusivity of the term “learning”, including staff, students, and everyone else who seeks to learn in their context, their space, and time. For the purpose of this chapter, we use the term student-centred.

In Student Affairs and Services (SAS) the notion of student-centredness is canonical, infused, and implicit. The notion is characterised by several assumptions about students, assumptions about the facilitator-teacher-practitioner, and by practices that reflect this understanding (Blackie et al., 2010; Schreiber, 2013; Schreiber, 2018). Taylor (2013) offers a synthesis of the complexity that surrounds student-centredness and distils several principles that inform student-centredness. The list provided here is not exhaustive but provides key aspects of this term as we understand it for this chapter and within South African SAS.

The practices that reflect student-centredness include:

1. Build on prior knowledge and personal experience.
2. Affirm students as experts in their lives, and promote the inclusion of their lived and diverse experiences.
3. Enable and promote active choices, autonomy, self-paced and self-driven activity, and engagement.
4. Construct opportunities that explore and challenge.
5. Maintain explicit high expectations.

6. Promote collaboration, cooperation, and group engagements.
7. Include reflection and focus on deep processing and understanding.
8. Shape engagements that are relevant and contextual.

The focus on student-centredness has profound implications for staff development (Blackie, et al., 2010). In line with the principles of “learner-centredness”, to build on prior knowledge and personal experience, including the lived and diverse experiences of the learner, a thorough training needs analysis was conducted on the staff of SAS. This has implications on two levels: the identified needs provide the basis for shaping a response for the SAS staff who are the learners in such a staff development programme, and secondly, the response (i.e., the staff development programme) locates itself within student-centred pedagogy.

5. Training Needs Analysis of SAS in South African Higher Education

Training Needs Analyses (TNA) are useful tools to collect data on activities that inform decision-making in relation to training and development, how this might improve performance, who needs training and development, and possible content of training and development interventions (Clark, 2003). TNAs assist in exploring not only specific development needs but also offer ways to explore the domains’ understanding of the scope of agency and purpose of work (Zahid Iqbal & Khan, 2011). The HELM TNA across the 26 public universities explored perceived training priorities, gaps, and needs. It also enabled a view of the staff’s understanding of their scope and role, and the internal and external contextual factors that staff perceived as relevant to their work, knowledge, and competencies. The TNA was developed focussing on four areas: 1) identifying training and development needs, 2) deriving information on the participants’ understanding of their role and scope of their work, 3) collecting information on the priority of development, and 4) gaining information on demographics to understand where the need is the most pronounced.

6. Methodology

This South African National Training Needs Analysis (TNA) survey investigated the training and development priorities and needs of staff and professionals working in the domain of SAS across the 26 public institutions in South Africa.

6.1. Research setting

HELM is mandated to conceptualise, design, and deliver relevant and responsive leadership development interventions for capacitation of staff across various leadership and management levels in South African higher education. As part of this mandate, HELM undertook a national, sector-wide TNA to explore what training, development, and capacitation needs exist in this domain. In addition, and subsequent to the TNA, the aim is to shape a staff development programme that equips and emboldens SAS staff to provide student-centric, impactful and relevant SAS across the higher education sector.

6.2. Method

Our research used an online questionnaire designed in SurveyMonkey, with closed response question on Likert scales. Given this was an explorative survey, we did not perform statistical analysis to verify hypotheses or theories but sought to illuminate insight and understanding. No identifying data was requested of participants, and by acknowledging the information about the survey, participants consented and were enabled to proceed to take part in the survey.

6.3. Survey tool, data collection, and analysis

The TNA questions aimed to explore a spectrum of training and development needs and contained 17 questions exploring, 1) demographics, 2) generic leadership and management capacitation needs, 3) content, role, and thematically specific needs, 4) higher education and institutional related understanding and skills, and 5) governance and regulatory framework training needs. Not all questions needed answering and a variety of question types were included, such as closed-choice options (using Likert scale), ranking, and graded questions (e.g., full, partial, no/none). The survey was open for two months during October and November 2021. The data results were summarised and analysed using SurveyMonkey tools, which offered the use of frequency tables.

6.4. Sampling

Survey respondents were sourced by virtual snowball sampling, also called chain sampling, or referral sampling (Creswell, 2013), which is a nonprobability sampling technique. The sample generated is a non-random, non-representative but stratified convenience sample and does not represent a statistically representative group. This kind of sampling enabled us to seek information from potentially hard-to-reach groups. This kind of sampling enables hypothesis development rather than hypothesis testing.

Our potential respondents were reached via emailing relevant leadership in SAS domains in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa, including using the researchers' virtual social and professional networks, via emailing professional associations, and via acquaintance pathways. Recognising the diversity of services, staff, and disciplines involved in the SAS domains, the participants were recruited from a range of departments, including Student Affairs, Student Support, Student Services, Transformation and Equity, Health and Wellness, Residences, Communications and Marketing, Registrars and Administration, and many more (see table 11.1 below). This method facilitated rapid responses that reached a level deemed adequate for statistical purposes and for meaningful interpretation (Goodman, 2011; Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004).

6.5. Sample

The total population of this sector is hard to quantify as the boundaries of the SAS sector are fuzzy. Nonetheless, we decided that if each public university (South Africa

Reimagining South African Higher Education: Towards a Student-Centred Learning and Teaching Future

has 26 public universities) has 50 SAS staff, then a N of 362 would be sufficient, representing more than 25% of that population (Goodman, 2011; Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). The realised sample were 362 SAS staff and practitioners who responded, either in full or in parts, to the online questionnaire, completed the consent form, and closed their responses, thus consenting and including themselves in the survey. The valid set of 362 responses included responses from 26 universities and all university types were represented, traditional (73,6%), comprehensive (15,3%), as well as universities of technology (11,1%). Respondents were recruited at all levels of practice, with entry-level practitioners making up 19,5% of the sample; those in middle and senior management constituting 72%; and executives at 8,5%. The female-to-male ratio of the survey respondents was 69:41 (3% of respondents chose not to disclose gender). Staff from a diverse and wide range of SAS domains responded, self-identifying as working in the domain of SAS as illustrated in Table 11.1.

SAS domain (self-identified)	% Of total sample	Number of persons who identified from this domain (33 respondents did not complete this item)
Student support	21,70%	46
Student Affairs	15,57%	33
Faculty administration	12,26%	26
Student services	11,32%	24
Library	10,38%	22
ICT	8,49%	18
Orientation	8,02%	17
Research office	7,55%	16
Postgraduate office	6,60%	14
Sports	6,60%	14
Health and wellness including counselling & HIV-Aids	6,13%	13
Residences	5,19%	11
Human resources and staff wellness	4,72%	10
Registrar	4,72%	10
Transformation and equity	4,25%	9
Communications and marketing	3,30%	7
International office	3,30%	7
Infrastructure and operations	3,30%	7
Community engagement	3,30%	7
Student leadership & Student Representative Council	2,83%	6

SAS domain (self-identified)	% Of total sample	Number of persons who identified from this domain (33 respondents did not complete this item)
Student societies	2,83%	6
Legal and procurement	1,89%	4
Bursary	0,94%	2

Table 11.1: Respondents from a range of SAS domains

When snowballing the survey to the HEIs, we intentionally left the invitation as open as possible, to explore who would self-identify as providing student development, support, and services across the institutions. In addition, we recognised that the terminology used in HEIs is diverse, and we sought to be as inclusive as possible. The data reveal that 33 persons did not complete this item, suggesting that they might work within a domain not listed here and yet is within student development and student support, according to how they understood their function and role.

6.6. Limitations

Creswell discusses the inherent limitations of online surveys (Creswell, 2013). Online surveys, by definition only include those who have online access, which may bias the sample. Although this method increases participation, bias might be towards participants who comfortably use online media, neglecting responses from subjects who are either not using online media readily or do not have access to online media, as might be the case in some areas where WiFi is fragile or only intermittently available.

A second limitation is the sample size relative to the unknown total population. We aim to develop hypotheses and generate insight into the needs of this SAS population to shape a meaningful development programme. Given our aim is to generate insight and understanding, and we are not making statistical hypothesis testing or aiming to predict within a certain margin of error, a sample size of over 300 is considered sufficient (Goodman, 2011; Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004).

7. Findings

Our national HELM Training Needs Analysis (TNA) survey investigated the training and development priorities and needs of staff and professionals working in the domain of SAS across the 26 public universities in South Africa. The data is reflected in percentages, and the findings are discussed in five emerging needs to develop competencies in:

- 1. Management and leadership.
- 2. Communication (digital, IT, diverse groups, etc.).

Reimagining South African Higher Education: Towards a Student-Centred Learning and Teaching Future

3. Transformation, gender equality, and social justice.
4. Contextual, sectoral, and institutional understanding.
5. Theories and practices in SAS.

Table 11.2 below shows responses to the question: *How important do you believe are each of the following competencies, skills, and knowledges in your current role, work, and context?*

Skills, competency, understanding and knowledge	% Of respondents who indicated high (4) or very high (5) for this item
Having adequate administrative and resource management skills for my current position.	89.42
Being able to use IT to communicate and perform work functions effectively.	87.44
Being able to manage my work and life balance effectively.	86.89
Being able to engage and communicate with diverse internal and external groups.	85.50
Being able to manage my own leadership/professional development.	85.02
Being able to manage my team's leadership/professional development.	84.13
Understanding, applying, and accelerating online engagement, support, and advise.	81.25
Understanding how universities plan strategically and operationally.	80.58
Understanding, applying, or accelerating diversity and equality.	78.85
Understanding, applying, or accelerating transformation notions, processes, and imperatives.	75.85
Understanding the higher education policy and regulatory environment.	72.56
Understanding the performance management system and how to implement it.	69.90
Understanding the regulatory and institutional requirements of academic planning for teaching and learning.	66.50
Understanding how universities are funded and financed.	64.25
Understanding the labour relations legislation and process.	63.91
Understanding the role of risk management and business continuity in universities.	63.60
Understanding the regulatory and institutional requirements for community engagement.	60.39

Skills, competency, understanding and knowledge	% Of respondents who indicated high (4) or very high (5) for this item
Understanding the regulatory and institutional requirements for research development and management.	60.20

Table 11.2: Responses to question about the importance of skill, competency, understanding, and knowledge in SAS work

Participants indicated how important they believe each of the competencies, skills, and knowledge appear in their current role, work, and context. Participants could indicate 1-5 on a Likert scale, from low (1) somewhat (2), medium (3), high (4), and very high (5). Table 11.2 above shows the results of the sum of scores 4 (high) and 5 (very high) on the Likert scale. The table is read as follows: for the first item, for instance, item 1, having adequate administrative and resource management skills, was given scores 4 or 5 by 89,42% of participants. In other words, 89.42% of the participants indicated that this competency ranks as high or very high in their current role. The following five themes are not mutually exclusive and represent a tentative grouping of competencies that appeared as important to the participants.

7.1. Management and leadership

Needs around leadership and management competencies are reflected in item 1, 3, 5, 6,12, 14 and 15 in Table 11.2 above. These reveal that generic leadership and management competencies are rated very highly by the participants.

7.2. Communication

As Table 11.2 above shows, competencies around communication, using IT, being able to communicate with diverse internal and external groups, employing online engagement for support and advice were rated as high (4) or very high (5) (see items 2, 4, and 7).

7.3. Transformation, gender equality, and social justice

As Table 11.2 above reveals, the competency around how to advance transformation, gender equality and justice, equity, and diversity were rated as highly important with item 9 and 10 speaking to these competencies.

7.4. Contextual, sectoral, and institutional understanding

Understanding universities, the sector and context, and the overall regulatory frameworks, organisational processes, institutional planning and financial processes, and various other such issues related to the context into which universities are embedded were also considered as important. This is reflected in item 8, and 11 to 18 in Table 11.2 above.

7.5. Theories and practices in SAS

Participants rated their knowledge of theory and practice in SAS. Rating was possible on a 4-point Likert scale (1=not really, 2=low, 3=medium, and 4=high). Almost a quarter of participants (22.6%) indicated that they felt they are “not really” familiar with theoretical frameworks and functional areas of SAS, and almost a quarter assessed themselves to have “low” (25.42%) knowledge. A larger group of participants (37.85%) indicated that they felt they have a medium level knowledge, and 14.12% indicated a high level of knowledge of theoretical frameworks of SAS.

Not really	Low	Medium	High
22.60%	25.42%	37.85%	14.12%

Table 11.3: Respondent knowledge of theoretical frameworks and functional areas of SAS

Participants were asked to rate their experience with research and scholarship in SAS. Rating was possible on a 3-point Likert scale (1=I’m fairly new, 2=I have working knowledge, 3=I’m experienced). A third (32.95) rated themselves as fairly new to the area of SAS research and scholarship, half of the participants (51.71%) said they have working knowledge, and 15.34% indicated that they are experienced in this area.

Fairly new	Working knowledge	Experienced
32.95%	51.71%	15.34%

Table 11.4: Respondent interest in research and scholarship in the areas of SDSS and/or SAS

8. Discussion

Ciobanau (2013, p. 169) states that “supporting and enhancing the student experience (academic, social, welfare, and support) from first contact through to becoming alumni is critical to success in higher education today for both the student and the institution”. Enhancing the student experiences, their sense of belonging, participation, and engagement are essential to advancing student-centred higher education spaces and, ultimately, student success. Hence, to improve the South African higher education sector’s performance, and more specifically, to make the sector, more student-centred, requires the capacitation of staff working in the Student Affairs and Services (SAS) domain within universities. For the capacitation of this domain, it is essential to understand the domain’s needs for training and development. To this end, the Training Needs Analysis (TNA) of this domain was undertaken and is reported on in this chapter.

While staff needs are discussed here in terms of competencies, this discussion risks a simplification and instrumentalisation of the role and function of SAS in higher education. The competencies, hence, are just *one* aspect of staff development and need to be augmented with a more profound understanding and analysis of the role and position of SAS and its role in the higher education sector (Carpenter

& Haber-Curran, 2013; Gansemer-Topf, 2013; Selznick, 2013). Selznick (2013, p. 11) highlights the importance of incorporating “an awareness of the complex and diverse nature of African student affairs work”, and any staff development programme would need to include dimensions of critical self-analysis, socio-political positionality, wider issues in the socio-cultural and economic context and how SAS positions itself as agents and role players within a wider context into which higher education is embedded.

Our study reveals that the sector’s need for capacitation, development, and training is widespread, explicit, and compelling. The priorities and needs range from general leadership competencies and management capacitation to skills-based needs such as digital communication and online engagement, as well as priorities to accelerate the sectors’ goals of transformation, access, equity, and diversity. Needs also include capacitation to understand the higher education sector and respond to university-specific issues, such as financing and funding, risk management, research and knowledge management, and labour relations. Participants in this survey also expressed the need to understand Student Affairs theory and practice to advance their impact on student and institutional success.

The themes emerging from this survey are grouped into and discussed in five clusters of competencies and needs: 1) needs and priorities around leadership and management development, 2) needs and priorities around communication competencies, including digital engagement, IT, and communication with diverse others, 3) competencies to accelerate transformation, advance equality and social justice, 4) understanding higher education context, organisational and institutional aspects, and 5) competencies around theories and frameworks of SAS and practices related to functional areas of SAS.

These clusters correspond to Student Affairs and Services competencies listed elsewhere across the globe, specifically the USA, where these competencies are part of the ten professional competency areas against which the SAS domain is measured in the USA (ACPA-NASPA, n.d.). In Canada the competency model for SAS staff is slightly more focused on personal leadership competencies (Cacuss, 2017) and Botswana, as the first country in Africa, has a set of National Norms and Standards for Student Affairs and Services which also reflect a similar list of competencies as the ones that emerge from this survey (HRDC, 2017). The cluster of development needs, as was found in this study, correspond largely to the competency frameworks from these international regions (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2017).

The specific competencies and needs listed by the South African SAS respondents which appear unique to this context and are less pronounced in other countries and regions focus on the need to accelerate transformation, diversity, and equality. More than three quarter of our respondents indicated that understanding, applying, and accelerating diversity and equality (78,85%) and understanding, applying, and accelerating transformation notions, processes, and imperatives (75,85%) features highly on their list of needs.

The need to understand how to accelerate transformation, equality and social justice is reflected in the South African sectoral aims and strategy and the national development plan (NDP, 2013). The need to develop competencies to advance transformation, diversity and equality is complex and requires knowledge, insights, and understanding, as well as a particular personal awareness, stance, and attitudes. The transformation competencies are not discreet or performative but require challenging prevailing implicit and explicit normative assumptions. This need might be unique to South Africa, more research is required to explore this.

The need to have leadership and management competencies is perhaps not unusual in the sector (Seale et al., 2021) and emerges here clearly as a priority. Overall, participants indicated that in their current work leadership, management skills, and competencies take on a highly important role, including having adequate resource management skills (89.42%), being able to communicate effectively, either via IT (87.44%) or with diverse internal and external groups (85.50%). Leading self and others also emerged as an important aspect of their work (85.02% and 84.13%) and addressing work-life balance (86.89%) emerged as a very high priority, perhaps because of COVID-19-related changes to blurring work-life distinctions. COVID-19 might have amplified the need for competencies in the online communication space (87.44%) or the competency to manage work-life balance (86.89%).

Competencies and skills that are related to the specific higher education and university context also emerged as uniquely important. This includes understanding university strategic planning (80.85%), understanding the higher education regulatory environment (72.56%), having knowledge of university funding (64.25%) and understanding higher education aspects around research (60.20%).

The respondents in this study also indicated that knowledge and understanding of the SAS theories and models for good practice, research, and scholarship is an important part of their work and occupies a priority for their role in supporting and developing students. This reflects the need to improve and enhance their work, their engagement with the principles that inform the work and their need to reflect on the underpinning values that frame their thinking and practice. It is pivotal that staff are grounded in SAS theory and good practice models, so that their engagement with students and the institution is more than intuitive or administrative, but is premised on evidence, theory, and good-practice models. The question around how existing theories and practices are contextualised and situated, are articulated to local indigenous experienced contexts presents itself when engaging with theory and practice models that are generated in other contexts.

In addition, transforming higher education into student-centred living and learning spaces requires not only staff competencies to deliver particular kinds of functions as discussed above, but a more reflective and critical engagement with

the role and function of SAS with regards to students, the institutions, and wider social justice issues and socio-economic context that impact on academic success.

Given the discussion of the results of this national training needs survey, the next steps might be to use this data to shape relevant and meaningful staff development opportunities which develop competencies – not discreet and performative skills, but competencies that are grounded in understanding, stance, and attitudes. But perhaps most importantly, a staff development opportunity needs to enable SAS staff to put the student at the centre and offer contextualised, relevant, and impactful engagements that support and challenge students, and in addition, assist the institution in changing culture and climate towards a student-centred higher education sector.

9. Conclusion

The Student Affairs and Services, student development, support and services domain are key contributors towards promoting contextual factors that enable institutions to become student-centred spaces in which students can thrive. Staff who deliver in this space require support, development, and training. The needs intersect and include leadership and management competencies, understanding of sectoral and institutional processes, competencies to advance and accelerate transformation and understanding of specific student support and development competencies.

This chapter contributes towards knowledge and scholarship on developing staff capacitation within a student-centred paradigm. It describes the kinds of competencies that capacitate staff, professionals, management, and leadership in this “third space” of the higher education sector which is characterised by ambiguity, complexity, multi-disciplinarity, and hybridity (Behari-Leak & Le Roux, 2018; Bhabha, 2004; Whitechurch, 2019a).

We assert that developing competencies is only one, albeit vital, aspect of a meaningful SAS staff development programme. Moreover, it is essential that such a staff development programme promotes a critical, insightful, and reflective stance, so that staff can contribute compellingly not only to student success, but towards a student-centred context that enables contextualised, relevant, and impactful development for students and institutions. A staff development programme, that develops competencies as discussed in this chapter, needs to reflect on wider social and cultural issues into which the universities are embedded and embolden staff to interrupt the vicious cycle of reproducing the pervasive inequalities that persist in our society (Bawa, 2014).

References

- ACPA-NASPA. (n.d.). *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators*. Available: https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/ACPA_NASPA_Professional_Competencies_FINAL.pdf. Accessed 7 May 2023.

- Bhabha, Homi K. (2004). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551>.
- Bawa, A. (2014). Foreword. In M. Speckman & M. Mandew (Eds.), *Perspectives on Student Affairs in South Africa*. v-vii. African Minds. <https://doi.org/10.47622/9781920677442>.
- Behari-Leak, K. & Le Roux, N. (2018). Between a rock and a hard place, third space practitioners exercise agency. *Perspectives in Education*, 36(1), 30-43. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-11a69cfae3>.
- Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control, and Identity: Theory, Research, Critique*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Blackie, M., Case, J., Jawitz, J. (2010). Student-centredness: the link between transforming students and transforming ourselves. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(6), 637-646. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2010.491910>.
- Botha, H. L., Brand, H., Cilliers, C., Davidow, A., de Jager, A. & Smith, D. (2005). Student counselling and development services in higher education institutions in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 19(1), 73-88. Available: <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/sajhe/article/view/25522>. Accessed 6 February 2024.
- Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), Botswana. (2017). *Norms And Standards For Student Affairs Services For Tertiary Education In Botswana*. Available: <https://www.hrdc.org.bw/?q=tertiary-education-institutions-capacitated-sas-norms-and-standards>. Accessed 8 August 2022.
- Boughay, C., & McKenna, S. (2021). *Understanding Higher Education: Alternative Perspectives*. African Minds. <https://doi.org/10.47622/9781928502210>.
- Broido, E. & Schreiber, B. (2016). Promoting Student Learning through Development. In Dennis C. Roberts & Susan R. Komives (Eds.), *Enhancing Student Learning and Development in Cross-Border Higher Education, New Directions for Higher Education*. 65-74. Wiley Jossey Bass Higher Education Series.
- Burgoyne, J., Mackness, J. & Williams, S. (2009). Baseline Study of Leadership Development in Higher Education. *Research and Development Series*, 3. 82-82. Available: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/216458704_BASELINE_STUDY_OF_LEADERSHIP_DEVELOPMENT_IN_HIGHER_EDUCATION/citation/download. Accessed 7 May 2023.
- Cacuss (2017). *Student Affairs and Services Competency Model*. Available: https://apps.nacada.ksu.edu/apps/intlconf_media/uploads/handouts/2018/190-H02.pdf. Accessed 7 May 2023.
- Carpenter, S. & Stimpson, M. T. (2007). Professionalism, Scholarly Practice, and Professional Development in Student Affairs. *NASPA Journal*, 44(2), 265-284. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.1795>.
- Carpenter, S. & Haber-Curran, (2013). The role of research and scholarship in the professionalisation of student affair. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 1(1-2). <https://doi.org/10.14426/jsaa.v1i1-2.20>.
- Ciobanau, A. (2013). The Role of Student Services in the Improving of Student Experience in Higher Education. *Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 92, 169-172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.08.654>.

- Clarke, N. (2003). The politics of training needs analysis. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 15(4), 141-153. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13665620310474598>.
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*. Sage.
- Gansemer-Topf, A. (2013). Enhancing the professionalisation of student affairs through assessment. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 1(1&2), 23–32. <https://doi.org/10.14426/jsaa.v1i1-2.33>.
- Goodman, L. A. (2011). Comment: On Respondent-Driven Sampling and Snowball Sampling in Hard-to-Reach Populations and Snowball Sampling Not in Hard-to-Reach Populations. *Sociological Methodology*, 41(1), 347–353. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9531.2011.01242.x>.
- Ludeman, R. & Schreiber, B. (Eds.). (2020). *Student Affairs and Services in Higher Education: Global Foundations, Issues and Best Practices (Third Edition)*. DSW Publishers. <https://shorturl.at/bpT25>.
- Luescher, M., Schreiber, B., Moja, T. Mandew, M. Wahl, W.P., & Ayele, B. (2021). The Impact of COVID19 on Student Affairs and Higher Education in Africa. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 9(1), vxiii. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v9i1.1721>.
- Lumadi, T. & Mampuru, K. (2010). Managing change in the student affairs division of higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 24(5). 716-729. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC37646>.
- Mandew, M. (2003). *A guide to Student Services in South Africa*. Centre for Higher Education Transformation.
- McKenna, S. (2013). The Dangers of Student-Centered Learning – A Caution about Blind Spots in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.20429/ijstol.2013.070206>.
- Moja, T., Luescher, T. & Schreiber, B. (2015). Equity and Social Justice in Higher Education. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 3(2), v-xii. Available: <https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/jsaa/article/view/657>. Accessed 6 February 2024.
- Morrison, J., Brand, H. & Cilliers, C. (2006). Assessing the impact of student counselling service centres at tertiary education institutions: How should it be approached? *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 20(5). 655-678. <https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC37279>.
- NDP (2013). *National Development Plan 2030: Our future – make it work (Executive summary)*. Available: <https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/Executive%20Summary-NDP%202030%20-%20Our%20future%20-%20make%20it%20work.pdf>. Accessed 7 May 2023.
- Nyar, A. (2018). The First-Year Experience (FYE): Moving Toward a Well-Defined Field of Study in South Africa. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 6(1), ix–xi. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v6i1.3061>.
- Nyar, A. (2020). South Africa's First-Year Experience: Consolidating and Deepening a Culture of National Scholarship. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 8(2), ix–x. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v8i2.4445>.

- Pascarella, E. T. & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research, Volume 2*. Jossey-Bass. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED498537>.
- Salganik, M. & Heckathorn, D. (2004). Sampling and Estimation in Hidden Populations Using Respondent-Driven Sampling. *Sociological Methodology*, 34(1), 193–239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0081-1750.2004.00152.x>.
- Schreiber, B. (2012). *Investigation into the role, scope and function of student development and support in South Africa*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa. Available: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/58915812.pdf>. Accessed 7 May 2023.
- Schreiber, B. (2014). The Role of Student Affairs in Promoting Social Justice in South Africa. *Journal of College and Character*, 15(4), 212–218. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jcc-2014-0026>.
- Schreiber, B. (2014). The co-curriculum: Re-defining boundaries of academic spaces. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.14426/jsaa.v2i1.54>.
- Schreiber, B. & Lewis, J. (2020). Professionalization of student affairs and services around the world: More than a matter of degree(s). In R. Ludeman & B. Schreiber (Eds.), *Student Affairs & Services in Higher Education: Global Foundations, Issues, and Best Practices* (3rd ed). 57-63. DSW Publishers, Berlin.
- Schreiber, B. (2013). Constructions of Students as Clients or Partners in Knowledge Creation. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 23(4), 85-89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2013.10820675>.
- Schreiber, B. (2018). Mental Health at Universities: Universities are Not In Loco Parentis – Students are Active Partners in Mental Health. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 6(2), 121-127. <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v6i2.3318>.
- Seale, O. (2015). *Building leadership and management capacity for deans in South African higher education*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/18232>.
- Seale, O. (2021). *Deanship in the Global South: Bridging Troubled Waters*. Brill. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004459861>.
- Seale, O. & Cross, M. (2015). Leading and managing in complexity: The case of South African deans. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(8), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.988705>.
- Seale, O., Fish, P. & Schreiber, B. (2021). Enabling and empowering women in leadership in South African universities – Assessing needs and designing a response. *Management in Education*, 35(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020620981951>.
- Selznick, B. (2013). A proposed model for the continued professionalisation of student affairs in Africa. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 1(1-2). <https://doi.org/10.14426/jsaa.v1i1-2.35>.
- Tangney, S. (2014). Student-centred learning: A humanist perspective. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19(3), 266-275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2013.860099>.

- Taylor, J. (2013). What is student centredness and is it enough? *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 4(2), 39-48. <https://doi.org/10.5204/intjfyhe.v4i2.168>.
- Torres, V., Jones, S. R. & Renn, K. (2019). Student Affairs as a Low-Consensus Field and the Evolution of Student Development Theory as Foundational Knowledge. *Journal of College Student Development*, 60(6), 645–658. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0060>.
- Whitechurch, C. (2015). The Rise of Third Space Professionals: Paradoxes and Dilemmas. In U. Teichler & W. C. Cummings (eds.), *Recruiting and Managing the Academic Profession*. Dordrecht: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-16080-1_5.
- Whitechurch, C. (2019a). *The Rise of Third Space Professionals: Implications for Individuals and Institutions*. DAAD, Bonn. Available: <https://www2.daad.de/medien/ida/archiv/2019/whitchurch.pdf>. Accessed 7 May 2023.
- Whitechurch, C. (2019b). *What is Third Space? Definition, developments, challenges and opportunities*. Available: https://www.sagw.ch/fileadmin/redaktion_sagw/dokumente/Veranstaltungen/2019/Third_Space/Celia_Whitchurch.pdf. Accessed 1 May 2022.
- Zahid Iqbal, M. & Khan, R.A. (2011). The growing concept and uses of training needs assessment: A review with proposed model. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 35(5), 439- 466. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090591111138017>.