

ON CAMPUS

Global Summit on Student Affairs and Services

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In the most recent issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa (JSAA)*, readers were introduced to the 3rd Global Summit on Student Affairs and Services that was hosted by Stellenbosch University (SU) in Cape Town, South Africa, this past October 2016. This summary will provide a more detailed outline of the organisation of the summit, its processes, and the final written product for the 2016 summit, which was initiated by the International Association for Student Affairs and Services (IASAS) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA).

The first Global Summit in 2012 was held in Washington, D.C., which is the home office of NASPA and in 2014 the summit was held in Rome, Italy and was hosted by the European University College Association (EuCA). Perozzi, Giovanucci and Shea (2016), note that the summit “is not a ‘conference’ in the traditional sense; rather, the methodology allows for emergent issues and a discussion of concepts that are most relevant to participants” (p.24). Following the same ideals, forty participants, from 19 different countries, who support students on college and university campuses around the world, were invited to South Africa for a rich dialogue around critical issues facing student affairs and services. Some of the issues that surfaced in 2012 and 2014 were used as a basis for further reflection in the 3rd summit. These themes included professionalisation and internationalisation of the field, employability and soft skills, engaging in student activism, and access and inclusion.

While planning each summit and choosing a framework or theme for the summit, a deliverable was discussed early on. In 2012, the output was an Executive Summary of the proceedings including the themes and recommendations suggested, as well as a video. In 2014, a summary was written on the event and outcomes. The planning committee identified deliverables for the summit and the 2016 IASAS/NASPA/SU planning committee feels that the process and outcome was fully realised with the 3rd summit.

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The Wallenberg Research Centre at STIAS in Stellenbosch was the perfect venue for the two-day dialogue on the *UNESCO Operational Strategy on Youth (Medium Strategy 2014–2021)*, concentrating on access to tertiary education in Africa and gender. This document was sent to participants ahead of time.

While at the summit, participants first worked in groups based on their region in the world, to consider the impact of the UNESCO Medium Term Strategy on Youth on their specific work. Professor Adam Habib, Chair of Universities South Africa (USAf) helped to set the stage by contextualising higher education in South Africa and provided comparisons to other parts of the world during a most inspiring opening address. Mr Yousaf Gabru, Chair of the South African Commission for UNESCO, provided further perspectives on the Medium Term Strategy document and the connections to student affairs and services work.

Participants used the overarching UNESCO document as high-level goals for our work in student affairs and brought these goals into their local environments, while commenting on the global goals from an indigenous perspective. Participants also worked in cross-border teams to continue analysing the UNESCO publication and specifically make affirmations and suggested contributions that can be shared with UNESCO in relation to the work of student affairs and services. This collaborative work allowed for a shared understanding of the UNESCO objectives and provided a platform for embracing the most salient concepts.

The Summit allowed for large group discussion with all participants on four topics that had surfaced in past summits. As noted above, the 2012 topics were professionalisation and internationalisation of the field, employability and soft skills, engaging in student activism, and access and inclusion. The UNESCO Medium Term Strategy was cross-referenced with these topics to further understand student affairs and services work globally, help practitioners develop shared goals and outcomes, and work toward attaining these outcomes.

The end result of the summit was a global response on the impact that student affairs and services have on students and how our work contributes to the objectives in the UNESCO strategy. The Medium Term Strategy articulates the shared goals of the member states and a vision for the attainment of peace and equitable and sustainable development with two global priorities focused on Africa and gender equality. Education has a key role in achieving human rights for all.

The UNESCO strategy describes nine strategic objectives and five of these are particularly aligned to the global aims of student affairs and services in higher education. These are:

1. Developing education systems to foster high-quality and inclusive lifelong learning for all;
2. Empowering learners to be creative and responsible global citizens;
3. Advancing Education for All (EFA) and shaping the future international education agenda;
4. Supporting inclusive social development, fostering intercultural dialogue for the rapprochement of cultures and promoting ethical principles; and
5. Fostering creativity and the diversity of cultural expression.

In response to these objectives, several themes emerged in the global discussions at the summit as delegates shared their local knowledge and expertise. There was a strong commitment to high-quality lifelong learning grounded in holistic and inclusive approaches. Delegates reflected on the challenge of achieving human rights through education for all and our responsibility to contribute to addressing peace, sustainability and gender equality. The value of multiple voices was noted, along with the need to empower students to act as partners and change agents in their educational experience. A reframing of co-curricular design was seen as a way to value indigenous knowledge and unique ways of sharing knowledge. While recognising different worldviews, through collaboration there can be greater alignment of educational systems and institutions as we shape the future international education agenda.

Achim Meyer auf der Heyde, President of IASAS and General Secretary for the Deutsches Studentenwerk, is working with UNESCO to promote the recommendations of the Global Summit 2016. Our UNESCO response as well as the finalised documents on previous summits can be read at <http://iasas.global/global-summit-student-affairs-and-services/>.

The gains of the Global Summit in 2016 can be understood in our response to UNESCO but can also be described through the following thoughts.

The Summit “constitutes a precious opportunity to share experiences, highlight problems and identify possible common solutions. As some participants at the Global Summit of Stellenbosch explain in an interview, “it’s an opportunity to compare one’s experience with the world” (Ceccarini, 2016, p.4). Barbra Pansari from Botswana University adds that for her “the value of the Summit is our networking and sharing experiences and lessons with colleagues from all continents of the world”.

“Discussing student affairs initiatives with colleagues from around the world helps to enhance overall student learning and success,” noted Achim Meyer auf der Heyde, President of IASAS (personal communication, 28 October 2016).

References

- Ceccarini, I. (Dicembre, 2016). Student affairs and services – Open to the world. *Universitas: Studi e Documentazione di Vita Universitaria*, (142), RUI Fondazione.
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