Editorial

Towards community-engaged, student-centred universities

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The last decade has witnessed increasing calls for universities to dispose of their 'ivory tower' reputations and engage more with the communities that surround them, and for them to be relevant and attuned to the lived realities and inclusive of all involved. There is also a growing scholarship that attempts to generate and share knowledge on what it means to be a community-engaged university and to be student-centred. Community engagement and student-centredness are built on shared principles of relevance, inclusion, and relatedness. Cherrington et al. (2019) and McKenna (2013) argue that true engagement requires constant dialogue, reflection, intentionality, and commitment by all parties involved. Malm et al. (2013) also make a case for more faculty involvement in community engagement including teaching courses on community engagement.

The imperative for universities to be community-engaged is not isolated from global challenges and translates into engaging with these issues, including the conflicts in the Middle East, coup d'états in some African countries, wars in Azerbaijan and Ukraine, threats of war in Kosovo/Serbia and Guyana/Venezuela, or the war games in the South China Sea. It is through community engagement and student-centred principles that learning becomes relevant and meaningful – and references real events and lived experiences.

The articles in this issue and editorial comments underscore the importance of addressing pressing issues – global and local – within the framework of community engagement and student-centred practice. We need to encourage our students to become global citizens who are not only informed but also actively engaged in efforts to promote peace, justice, and stability in their communities.

Wright (2011) provides examples of instances where university teachers across the academic and professional spectrum are moving more towards student-centred teaching, learning, support, and development. Likewise, the articles featured in JSAA 11(2) present strategies and cases for universities in becoming student-centred, community-engaged, relevant, and inclusive, with some using the African philosophy of ubuntu as an analytical lens for understanding inclusive, interdependent relations in learning environments. The issue thus emphasises the idea that when students and

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staff live and learn in relation to a community, to each other and to pedagogy and the academic material, this is part of a larger thrust for a shared humanity. This shared humanity, humanity to others, or 'I am what I am because of who we all are' is what ubuntu promotes.

The principles of ubuntu, akin to community engagement and student-centredness, are indeed relevant at local level. They are also relevant in relation to the geo-political hostilities we are currently experiencing across the globe.

Finally, on behalf of the JSAA Editorial Executive, we would like to thank Dr Martin Mandew for his decade-long service to the Journal as one of the founding editors. Dr Mandew is retiring at the end of 2023 from his position at the University of the Free State and he has requested to be reassigned to the International Editorial Advisory Board of JSAA.

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