CREATING CONDITIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

**Social justice
perspectives from a
South African university**

**EDITOR
MAGDA FOURIE-MALHERBE
CODA BY JENNIFER CASE**

"I KNOW I BELONG HERE ..."

CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING AND PARITY OF PARTICIPATION FOR COMMUTER STUDENTS

Benita van Zyl

... we have long known that students living on-campus enjoy larger and more varied benefits of college attendance than do commuting students. How can the most educationally potent characteristics of the residential experience (e.g., frequent academic and social interaction among students, contact with faculty members, more opportunities for academic and social involvement with the institution) be made more readily available to students who commute? (Terenzini & Pascarella 1994:32)

INTRODUCTION

A significant body of literature on student success and the student experience exists internationally (Astin 1984, 1993; Kuh 1995, 2008, 2016; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Witt 2011; Pascarella 2006; Terenzini & Pascarella 1994; Tinto 2003, 2006, 2012) and in South Africa (Ashwin & Case 2018; Boughey 2003; Case & Marshall 2015; Case, Marshall, McKenna & Mogashana 2018; Fataar 2018; Schreiber & Yu 2016). One group of students that has, however, received scant attention in research and literature as well as in practical arrangements is commuter students. The exception is the work of Jacoby (1989, 1990, 2000, 2014, 2015) in the United States. In South African higher education research, there is a paucity of studies focusing specifically on commuter students. The study (Van Zyl 2018) being reported on in this chapter aimed at making a contribution to fill this gap.

The term 'commuter students' refers to those students who do not live in university-owned accommodation and who can be distinguished as 'walking' or 'driving' commuters (Jacoby & Garland 2004). In this chapter I discuss the influence of the growing numbers of commuter students in higher education, and what Stellenbosch University has done to address some of the needs of commuter students in order to enhance their student experience and sense of belonging.

PART THREE • OUT-OF-CLASS EXPERIENCES

Drawing on Fraser's (2000, 2013) evolving theory of justice as participatory parity, the data of an evaluation study of the cluster system and amaMaties hub at Stellenbosch University were reinterpreted to determine whether the steps that have been taken to integrate commuter and residential students and to provide a facility for commuter students are indeed serving their purpose by giving commuter students equal experiences and improving their sense of belonging.

MASSIFICATION AND COMMUTER STUDENTS

During the past two decades, there has been huge growth in higher education enrolments in South Africa, increasing from 578 134 students in 2000 to 1 085 567 in 2018 (CHE 2020). The rise in student numbers concomitantly resulted in an increase in the numbers of commuter students, because due to fiscal constraints, higher education institutions (Chang & Lebdioui 2020; Sidelinger, Frisby & Heisler 2016) cannot offer beds for all their students.

As pointed out above, very little research has been done in South Africa on commuter students and national data on commuter students is virtually non-existent. For this reason, the *Report on the Ministerial Committee for the review of the provision of student housing at South African universities*, released in September 2011 (DHET 2011), is particularly informative. The Report revealed that the total number of beds available in residences at all public residential universities in 2010 were 107 598, which equalled only 20% of all the contact students enrolled at the (then) 22 universities (DHET 2011). Only 5.3% of first-year students (who are the most vulnerable group) were placed in residences (DHET 2011). This emphasises the fact that the majority (more than 80%) of contact students are commuter students.

The Report also confirmed what other scholars (Ike, Baldwin & Lathouras 2016) had found, namely that residence life can make a positive difference in student success and retention. Pascarella (1984) summarised some of the advantages that residential students enjoy over their counterparts who commute, positing that they:

- participate more in on-campus activities;
- interact regularly and informally with academics and students;
- are satisfied and have a sense of belonging to the campus environment;
- are more successful in attaining degrees;
- are socially and mentally better integrated;
- are more open to voice their opinions and have a set core of values.

From experiences at other universities around the world (Guzman 2019; Jacoby 2000; Lipka 2007; Newbold, Mehta & Forbus 2011) and at Stellenbosch University

(SU 2007, 2009), it has become clear that commuter students need special attention for their student experience to become more comparable to that of residential students, which could also have an impact on their academic success. Though residential and commuter students share the same experiences inside the classroom, the commuter students' experience outside the classroom is very different from that of residential students. According to Thomas and Jones (2017), it is tiring and stressful to commute, because commuter students often face adversities related to mode of travel, parking issues, traffic jams and accidents. They also face challenges such as institutional context and culture, and security issues associated with public transport, driving and walking (Thomas & Jones 2017). Since social activities are mainly organised in the evenings, commuting students are more often than not excluded from participation. Mainly because they lack social networks, this group of students prefers to focus on academic engagements at the expense of social engagements and personal enhancement. They are thus unaware of the advantages of social engagements that can secure enhanced employment outcomes after graduation (Thomas & Jones 2017).

The strong residential tradition (Pascarella 2006), the lack of understanding of the needs and concerns of commuter students (Jacoby & Garland 2004) and the resultant absence of focus on commuter students in institutional policies and programmes contribute to the difficulty of integrating commuter students in the campus environment (Thomas & Jones 2017). Tinto (2012:17) posits that student success and improvements in throughput rates do not happen by chance, but are the result of “intentional, structured, and proactive actions and policies directed towards the success of **all students**” (emphasis added). Key challenges related to student success and development therefore require that universities carefully consider how actions and policies affect commuter students and how activities involving commuter students should be arranged, such as the timing of the events (Lipka 2007) and the educational value thereof, compared to enhancement and social engagement (Thomas & Jones 2017). Universities need to purposefully create ways to support specifically commuter students, while considering their particular circumstances and the challenges they face. There is, however, little agreement as to what these obligations involve and how academic and social practices can fall short of this responsibility (Bozalek, Hölscher & Zembylas 2020). In this regard, the notion of learning communities requires consideration.

THE ROLE OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN STUDENT SUCCESS

In the context of higher education, learning communities involve groups of students who work collaboratively and who share common academic goals (Kuh 2016).

PART THREE • OUT-OF-CLASS EXPERIENCES

The notion of learning communities originated with Alexander Meiklejohn's (1932) experiment when he tested the concept of the learning community in the Experimental College programme at the University of Wisconsin from 1927 to 1932 (Soldner & Szelényi 2008). However, learning communities only gained prominence in the late 1980s (Shapiro & Levine 1999; Zhao & Kuh 2004), whereas the influence of learning communities on student learning and success has been acknowledged since the early 1990s (Kuh 2008). The aim of learning communities is to improve undergraduate student success in higher education by encouraging participation with peers in both curricular and co-curricular spaces (Inkelas et al. 2007; Rocconi 2011). Many authors agree that learning communities are an essential contributor to student success (Hill & Woodward 2013; Pike, Kuh & McCormick 2011; Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling 1999; Tinto 2003). Learning communities also help students with the transition from school to university and have been linked to positive learning outcomes (Zhao & Kuh 2004), openness to diversity and less binge drinking behaviours (Pike et al. 2011).

The notion that learning communities play an important role in student success is also supported by Love and Goodsell-Love (1996) who propose that, for holistic learning to happen in learning communities, the intellectual, social and emotional aspects of learning need to be taken into account. In addition, the link between the in-class and out-of-class experiences (Kuh 1995) needs to be maintained; faculty, student affairs and students cannot be segregated; and living and learning environments cannot be isolated from one another (Parameswaran & Bowers 2014:58). Allen and Haniff (1991), Astin (1993) and Trowler (2010) posit that students need to integrate into learning communities, because in those communities they learn from and interact with diverse peer groups, with ensuing positive educational outcomes (Pike et al. 2011).

To enable these interactions, the structures and practices that are so deeply embedded in traditional higher education pedagogies and extra-curricular activities need to be reimagined and reframed. In South Africa, forms of injustice – economic, political and social – as well as disparities related to race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, language, nationality and religion need to be addressed by higher education (Bozalek, Hölscher & Zembylas 2020). Adopting a social justice perspective gives us the opportunity to rethink how we do things differently in higher education. Learning communities provide an opportunity for equal participation, where everyone's contribution is respected and considered on an equal footing, and where all participate fully as partners (Bozalek, Hölscher & Zembylas 2020).

The question that this chapter seeks to address is: how can parity of participation be created for commuter students? In seeking answers to this question, I consider the case of residential education, the cluster system and hub at Stellenbosch University.

COMMUTER STUDENT SUCCESS AND ENGAGEMENT

Internationally, research has shown that student engagement can contribute to lower dropout rates as students who are more engaged with their studies are less likely to drop out (Kuh 2016; Quaye & Harper 2014). Whereas the South African higher education system has made huge strides in terms of widening access, as pointed out above, student success and retention remain a challenge. Cohort studies indicate that around 42% of students enrolled for three-year degrees at contact institutions drop out and do not complete their studies (CHE 2020:79). Factors contributing to high dropout rates include students experiencing financial constraints, being first-generation students, and coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (NPC 2012; Spaul 2013). At Stellenbosch University, discrepancies between residential and commuter students were also found in terms of student success with residential students performing better overall than commuter students.

Jacoby (2014) highlights that most institutions treat students as homogenous and do not cater for commuter students in their programmes and activities to promote student engagement. Whereas commuter students are just as likely to seek to be involved, their lives consist of balancing many competing commitments and responsibilities, because they are more likely to have jobs, to work more hours, and to work off-campus than residential students (Jacoby 2014). It is therefore the responsibility of universities to design mechanisms specifically and intentionally to involve commuter students (Van Zyl & Fourie-Malherbe 2021), so that they have equal opportunities and quality experiences that enhance their engagement and sense of belonging.

A number of studies highlight the practices that institutions can employ to enhance student engagement (Schreiber & Yu 2016). The following strategies to improve commuter students' participation and engagement are proposed by various researchers in the field (Dryden & Goldstein 2013; Jacoby 1989, 1990, 2000, 2015; Jacoby & Garland 2004; Kuh, Gonyea & Palmer 2001):

- making available a living and learning space that can be used between classes or while waiting for transport;
- establishing dining halls for booking and buying meals;
- supplying laundry facilities;
- granting access to computer laboratories and books for academic commitments;

PART THREE • OUT-OF-CLASS EXPERIENCES

- providing integrated commuter and residential spaces to meet with staff and peers to enhance out-of-class learning and development;
- creating physical spaces where educational activities can enhance conversations between diverse groups of students;
- providing lockers to store away valuables during the day;
- offering backpackers' rooms in which to sleep if required;
- providing transport and making parking areas available after class, and
- letting students feel that they matter and that the university is interested in them.

How some of these strategies were implemented at Stellenbosch University is discussed in the institutional case study.

INSTITUTIONAL CASE

Stellenbosch University has traditionally been known as a residential university where student life largely revolves around student residences. However, student numbers reveal that the minority of students are actually residential students. In 2000, 70% of students were commuter students, compared to 67% in 1996. This trend of commuter students becoming a larger proportion of the total student population is continuing. At the beginning of 2020, a total of 31 511 students were enrolled at Stellenbosch University. Of this total, 75.44% (23 771) were commuter students and 24.56% (7 740) were residential students who lived in university-owned accommodation (Kroon 2020). These figures endorse the notion of supporting commuter students in a way that they want to engage and feel that they matter and are cared for.

The idea of organising both residential and non-residential students into 'clusters' to promote 'residential education' amongst all students was proposed as far back as 2006 (Kloppers 2006). This proposal originated from 'The Collegiate Way' (originally started in Great Britain at Oxford, Cambridge and Durham Universities) that seeks to improve campus life by creating small, faculty-led residential colleges¹ and house systems within universities, to improve the university experience of residential and commuter students. The residential education (ResEd) initiative for Stellenbosch University was accepted early in 2007 by the university management team (SU 2007).

Due to ongoing concerns of Stellenbosch University staff and students about the university experience of commuter students, a Task Team for the Advancement of the

¹ Residential colleges are small, permanent, cross-sectional societies of students and faculty within Oxford, Cambridge and Durham Universities (<http://www.collegiateway.org>).

Integration of PSO² Students in Learning and Living Communities was appointed in 2008 to investigate and address the needs of the increasing number of commuter students at Stellenbosch University and to improve their educational experience (SU 2009). The survey of PSO students by the Task Team (SU 2009) led to some recommendations, amongst others that special attention should be given to the needs of commuter students and provision made for these students to experience the university in the same way as residential students. It was further observed that the out-of-class experience plays a crucial role in the development and enhancement of students, and therefore significantly impacts their academic performance. The Task Team (SU 2009) believed that the integration of PSO students in learning and living communities would require a systemic-holistic approach. In order to assist commuter students optimally, appropriate physical spaces needed to be identified or created for specific use by commuter students. Proposals were also made to change the timetable so that these students could have more time to participate in tutor and mentor groups in the out-of-class environment during the day, and to move evening tests earlier to prevent commuter students from having to travel late at night with sometimes unreliable and unsafe public transport (Guzman 2019; SU 2009).

The Task Team believed that the implementation of the recommendations could lead to the university being seen as more accessible, more adaptable and willing to create space for all kinds of students in an environment where students and staff can flourish and have a sense of belonging, knowing that everybody is accepted, included and connected (Ahn & Davis 2020; SU 2009). The Task Team report led to a better understanding of the importance of the effective utilisation of physical spaces at Stellenbosch University and how these spaces could benefit not only residential but also commuting students.

A second, related study, *Survey of the out-of-class experiences of Stellenbosch University students*, was done by the Stellenbosch University Centre for Research on Science and Technology in 2009 (Boshoff, James, Mouton & Treptow 2010). The purpose of the survey was to assist the Stellenbosch University management in gaining a better understanding of the out-of-class experiences of students and to guide the development of better services offered in the co-curricular space. Almost 29% of the participants in the survey indicated that they needed a day house or lounge area to rest, play games, watch movies, shower between classes or directly after class, as well as additional study spaces during examinations, and a place to buy snacks in close proximity to study areas (Boshoff et al. 2010:iii).

2 PSO is the initialism for Private Student Organisation, denoting students who are not in university residences, i.e. commuter students.

PART THREE • OUT-OF-CLASS EXPERIENCES

The survey results also indicated that one fifth of the participants felt “alone” (Boshoff et al. 2010:vi), with black African and coloured students feeling the most alienated. Creating spaces where they could come together in the out-of-class environment could give all students, across all forms of divide such as residential/commuter, gender, language, race and socio-economic background, the opportunity to integrate in learning communities where everyone could participate on par with their peers, and where respect for the autonomy of all human beings could be maintained (Bozalek, Hölscher & Zembylas 2020). Importantly, when designing learning spaces in campus communities, it should be kept in mind that those spaces can either have a positive impact on learning and advance social justice, or they can cause disconnection and alienation.

A third study in this respect was that of a task team appointed in 2015 to investigate the future use and organisation of private student communities to promote student success within the context of the cluster system.

The Task Team for the Advancement of the Integration of PSO Students in Learning and Living Communities (SU 2009) took cognisance of the big differences between the university experience of commuter and residential students and made recommendations to deliberately address these differences. To improve the student experience and success of commuter students, it was decided to arrange the campus organisational structure around student housing in such a way that commuter students could also benefit from the factors that made students in residences successful. This was done through the integration of commuter students with students in residences in seven larger living and learning communities called clusters. These communities or clusters achieved the integration of residential and commuter students through a new organisational structure and through the building of a dedicated on-campus facility. This on-campus facility, known as the amaMaties hub, was strategically placed within the geographical environment of the existing residences that form part of the amaMaties ‘cluster village’, giving the PSO students in the cluster a sense of belonging and the feeling that Stellenbosch University cares. This relates to Tronto’s ethics of care, positing that “the best forms of institutional care will be those which are highly deliberate and explicit about how to best meet the needs of the people who they serve” (Tronto 2010:169).

The ResEd and cluster³ system and the hubs⁴ at Stellenbosch University aim to address the needs of commuter students by providing a physical on-campus space

3 A cluster consists of a number of residences and commuter student wards that are organisationally grouped together.

4 A hub is a centre for residential and commuter student activities at Stellenbosch University.

for commuter students and by granting them access to common areas in residence dining halls and study areas, providing lockers to lock up their books and equipment and offering them backpackers' rooms to overnight, should that be required. The hub and cluster system aims to promote commuter student success and to enhance the social interaction amongst residential and commuter students in the co-curricular environment. It further seeks to create integrated learning communities that are commuter friendly and to promote active and collaborative academic and social activities outside the classroom (Jacoby & Garland 2004).

The first step was to organise residences and commuter student communities into seven ResEd groups or clusters. The residences in clusters were geographically grouped together and each commuter student community was assigned to a cluster to integrate into the residence student communities. The cluster system subsequently became the organising principle for academic and social affairs to enhance student success at Stellenbosch University (Kloppers 2006).

THE STUDY

Against the background discussed above, the challenge addressed in this study was to evaluate to what extent and how the amaMaties hub and cluster have actually contributed to an environment where the needs of commuter students are met, and whether a healthy student learning community in which commuter students could participate has indeed been developed.

The study was conducted in a pragmatic paradigm (Shannon-Baker 2016) as it tried to find practical solutions to actual human problems. It reports on only the evaluation of the proposed outcomes of the study. It was still too early to do an impact evaluation, thus the study took the form of a formative evaluative study, as the purpose was to improve the relevant initiative and to address any weaknesses and gaps that might be identified.

The study received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee for the Humanities, and institutional permission for the study was granted by the Division for Institutional Research and Planning.

A self-generated questionnaire was sent electronically to both residential and commuter students in the amaMaties cluster, as the cluster system at Stellenbosch University is aimed at integrating residential and non-residential students in learning communities within every cluster. A total number of 331 students validly responded to the questionnaire of whom 72.81% were females and 27.19% males. In total, 38.07% (126) commuter students and 61.93% (205) residential students responded

PART THREE • OUT-OF-CLASS EXPERIENCES

to the questionnaire. Some of the findings of the study, particularly those related to learning communities and a sense of belonging, are discussed below.

Participation in learning communities (study, tutor and mentor groups) in the hub

The commuter respondents engaged with their learning in several different ways. First-year respondents were mainly guided by their mentors in the hub. The facility was mostly visited to study alone, but a number of the respondents worked together in groups, which made it easier for them to connect with students that were studying the same courses. One respondent's reaction to the hub was as follows:

It is a brilliant space to study after hours that allows one to sit in an open manner and discuss academic problems if need be. I made engineering friends by studying in the hub and being forced to walk up to them to ask if they could solve the engineering problems that I struggled with. Since then we have often studied in close proximity to each other and helped each other through our degree. It was LITERALLY as a result of the environment that the hub provided – the open tables – that I was able to meet fellow students and engage on an academic level to [help] each other. Since then we have become social friends as well. I believe these people will be friends for life.

The more the students visited the hub, the more familiar the other faces became and as a result they did not find it awkward to pose questions to someone who was studying the same course. A commuter respondent commented:

I use the hub mostly for dining and socialising with old and new friends. It provides us with a place to meet, eat and study which no other cluster does. It provides us with a common room where everyone can meet regardless of whether you're in a res or PSO that belongs to amaMaties.

Commuter respondents met with their mentors in the hub more frequently than the residential respondents and they indicated that academic, social and emotional support in the space was valuable to them. By engaging in mentor or study groups in the cluster, commuter respondents indicated that they had been given the opportunity to acquire new skills such as time management as well as new study methods (by working on their own and by working with others).

I usually use the hub when Equité⁵ meets, because I am a mentor and I also usually use it to meet my mentees (first-years) here. They all know where it is and it's accessible to them.

5 One of the PSO wards.

The respondents reported that the cluster helped them academically, as it provided a variety of academic support platforms. It can be concluded that using the hub and being in the amaMaties cluster made interaction with other people (both commuter and residential students) more convenient and also more fun for commuter students, and that being part of the cluster motivated them to become more engaged in terms of academic endeavours, social interaction and participation in cluster activities. This was explained as follows by one of the respondents:

The hub is always available when I need somewhere to be, or to get food, or to meet up with people. The hub is multi-functional. I use at least two facilities at the hub every day. It is extremely useful for meetings and houses a lot of our PSO activities.

Another respondent echoed the previous respondent's views:

The hub has a study area where students can study quietly. It has conference [areas] to allow for group discussions. In addition, there is a deli with freshly made food and a huge dining hall to accommodate the hungry students during meal times. The hub is also a constructive arena where meaningful work and conversation can take place.

The support given by mentors to first-years also contributed positively in facilitating their transition from school to university.

Many of the commuter respondents indicated that they used the hub to work in study groups, because the atmosphere was conducive to studying and provided opportunities for students to learn from one another. It also provided the commuter respondents with a place for mentors and mentees to meet.

The respondents recognised other ways in which the hub addressed their needs, because they emphasised that the hub provided a safe space and that it gave them a sense of belonging, because they could eat, study in a safe place, meet with peers in the PSOs and in the residences and they could ask friends questions if they were struggling. One of the respondents commented:

It has been a great experience socially and academically. The sports day during 1st year was a highlight of my orientation period and a day I will never forget. I sincerely do believe the cluster initiative is a great one that has multiple benefits both socially and academically. The hub seemed to be an extension of the sports day where I was further able to meet the people and build networks and friendships to further support my studies and welfare. The amaMaties cluster provides a kind of home-ground that I could always fall back on. I belong to the cluster and the hub. It was a safe space for food, socialising, relaxing and academics.

PART THREE • OUT-OF-CLASS EXPERIENCES

Another respondent said:

I think they put a lot of effort into making everyone feel welcome, especially in the Welcoming Week ['Verwelkomingsweek']. It really made me, as a first-year, feel like I know what's going on & welcome somewhere.

Many of the comments, and particularly the last two quoted above, are indicative of the development of a sense of belonging (Ahn & Davis 2020; Gopalan & Brady 2020) amongst cluster members, including commuter students. This feeling was further strengthened by the social interaction amongst commuter and residential students.

Promotion of social interaction amongst commuter and residential students

Research on student engagement has highlighted that involvement has an important effect on student success and retention, and that it matters the most during the first and second year of study (Astin 1984; Kahu 2013; Newbold, Mehta & Forbus 2011; Tinto 2006). Kahu (2013:759) importantly points out that student engagement does not only result from appropriate teaching practices and student behaviours, but also from the time that students invest in learning and from their social and academic integration. To socialise and interact with friends is important for students to feel that they belong and are cared for. One respondent emphasised this point:

Participating in cluster events and socialising with fellow cluster members has been a joy and it is nice to know it is there if you need it.

Another respondent referred to the fact that the hub had led to the establishment of a support system:

The hub has helped to provide a space for those in the cluster to interact. Once you know others in the cluster and relationships are formed, it becomes easier to find others who study what you study and who will help you with work. Ultimately, it has provided a good support system for me at Stellenbosch.

This respondent referred particularly to the strengthening of relationships between residential and commuter students:

It's been great, lots of activities and a good bond between all the res's and PSOs in it.

Respondents also found it easy to interact with fellow students in the cluster across faculties and year groups. A respondent commented:

It creates a platform for individuals to not only concentrate on academic workload, but also to form study groups and interact with fellow students. So many times, just seeing someone in the hub and talking about a certain subject, it created the opportunity to share thoughts, guidelines

as well as notes and tips on some subjects or upcoming test, not only from students in the same faculty, but across years of study (first year, second year and third year).

More than 60% of commuter respondents were using the space to socialise, whereas less than 40% of residential respondents used it to socialise. This clearly indicates that commuter students need a space on campus during the day to socialise, while residential students mostly use their residences for this purpose.

However, when meetings and events were organised at inconvenient times during the day or when no parking was available, commuter respondents did not participate. Poor communication, according to some of the respondents, was another reason for not visiting the hub or for not participating in activities and events in the cluster. The respondents argued that they would have been more involved if the communication was more informative and timeous:

I was ill informed as to what happens at this hub, I did not know that they offered these services.

To be honest, I didn't know the hub offered these things as I was not told. And no, I did not partake in most of the events during the orientation. I would appreciate it though if I was told what I could do there, hence I was left in the dark.

Tinto (2006), Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Whitt (2011), Berger and Milem (1999) and Thomas and Jones (2017) recognised student engagement as an important positive factor in the individual learning process and student success, and also how teaching, socio-cultural aspects and a holistic perspective work together in order for students to be successful. Trowler and Trowler (2010:7-9) argue that student engagement improves performance, persistence and satisfaction. Thomas and Jones (2017) suggest that higher education institutions should develop commuter student communities for practical and emotional support. All of these international studies support the steps taken by Stellenbosch University to become more commuter-friendly and to promote engagement amongst both commuter and residential students.

CONCLUSION

Globally, higher education institutions are faced with challenges of growing numbers of enrolments and fiscal constraints, resulting in smaller proportions of the student population being accommodated in student residences. Yet, residential students are generally more engaged and perform better academically than commuter students (Van Zyl & Fourie-Malherbe 2021). Thus, ways must be found to approximate the residential experience for commuter students and to create parity of participation for

PART THREE • OUT-OF-CLASS EXPERIENCES

all within higher education institutions. One such initiative is the amaMaties hub and cluster at Stellenbosch University. I found that the hub had a significantly positive effect on the experience and sense of belonging of commuter students. They not only felt welcome in the space, but also found it a very useful facility in a number of ways.

In addition, it was found that the cluster village and hub also largely contributed to spontaneous interaction across race and gender differences of commuter and residential students in the amaMaties cluster. The respondents did not feel marginalised, which encouraged engagement and created a sense of belonging. Amongst those students who frequented the facilities, numerous relationships were built with 'the other' and in some cases lifelong friendships were formed. The general sense of 'not being judged' or marginalised and of acceptance promoted relationships across different races, cultures, language groups and genders.

Unexpectedly, the research also revealed the changes that had occurred in the traditionally insular residential communities, particularly regarding their views of and openness to change and to inviting commuter students into their study areas and dining halls, which had not happened previously. At Stellenbosch University, as a residential university (Botman 2010), residential students largely operated in silos, keeping 'other' students out of their residences, traditions and activities, because that was how it had been for many years. This study shows an 'opening up' of these boundaries by the residential students in the cluster to invite commuter students into their spaces.

Whereas the hub and cluster system certainly benefitted commuter students in terms of addressing their basic needs, promoting their academic involvement in the out-of-class environment and enhancing their sense of belonging, the benefits of regular interaction with a wider variety of people stretched further than just the commuter students of the amaMaties cluster.

According to Blankenberger and Williams (2020), catastrophic events, like Covid-19, are catalysts for change and when such catalysts are introduced into an ecological system – in this case, higher education institutions – the system will react to achieve a new equilibrium. They continue to say that those in higher education institutions therefore will need to be aware of the impact and plan how to react, by understanding that this is a potential catalyst for change of traditional policies and views.

During this pandemic, higher education institutions have learnt that they had to employ multiple measures to respond to the crisis. It furthermore seems likely that some higher education offerings will always remain face-to-face, such as laboratory work and experiential learning, or simply because of students' learning preferences

(Blankenberger & Williams 2020), which means that the institutions will have students on campus. The study most importantly revealed that both commuter and residential students benefitted from the cluster system and hub, because they experienced the space as a learning community, an equal space for all. It also means that students learnt from ‘the other’, across boundaries, hence enhancing their transformative student experience (Lange 2020). This contributed to creating parity of participation and a sense of belonging amongst commuter students. The responsibility of South African higher education institutions to promote and safeguard social equity has to start at home by creating equitable learning opportunities for all their students.

REFERENCES

- Ahn MY & Davis HH. 2020. Four domains of students’ sense of belonging to university. *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(3):622-634. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1564902>
- Allen WR & Haniff NZ. 1991. Race, gender, and academic performance in US higher education. In: WR Allen, EG Epps & NZ Haniff (eds). *College in black and white: African American students in predominantly white and in historically black public universities*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 95-109.
- Ashwin P & Case JM. 2018. *Higher education pathways. South African undergraduate education and the public good*. Cape Town: African Minds. <https://doi.org/10.47622/9781928331902>
- Astin AW. 1984. Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(4):297-308.
- Astin AW. 1993. *What works in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Berger JB & Milem JF. 1999. The role of student involvement and perceptions of integration in a causal model of student persistence. *Research in Higher Education*, 40(6):641-664. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018708813711>
- Blankenberger B & Williams AM. 2020. COVID and the impact on higher education: The essential role of integrity and accountability. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 42(3):404-423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2020.1771907>
- Boshoff N, James M, Mouton J & Treptow R. 2010. Survey of the out-of-class experiences of Stellenbosch University students. Centre for Research on Science and Technology (CREST). Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- Botman HR. 2010. Afrikaberaad oor studentehuisvesting, 30 Mei–3 Junie 2010. ACUHO-I SAC, Openingsrede: Stellenbosch Universiteit. <https://bit.ly/3hpl3> [Accessed 22 August 2018].
- Boughey C. 2003. From equity to efficiency: Access to higher education in South Africa. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 2(1):65-71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022203002001006>
- Bozalek V, Hölscher D & Zembylas M. 2020. *Nancy Fraser and participatory parity: Reframing social justice in South African higher education*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429055355>

PART THREE • OUT-OF-CLASS EXPERIENCES

- Bundy C. 2004. Global patterns, local options? Changes in higher education internationally and some implications for South Africa. In: CHE (Council on Higher Education). *Kagisano: Ten years of higher education under democracy*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education. 1-21.
- Case JM & Marshall D. 2015. Bringing together knowledge and capabilities: A case study of engineering graduates. *Higher Education*, 71:819-833. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9932-4>
- Case JM, Marshall D, McKenna S & Mogashana D. 2018. *Going to university. The influence of higher education on the lives of young South Africans*. Cape Town: African Minds. <https://doi.org/10.47622/9781928331698>
- Chang H & Lebdioui A. 2020. From fiscal stabilization to economic diversification: A developmental approach to managing resource revenues. WIDER Working Paper, No. 2020/108. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER. <https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2020/865-8>
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). 2020. *Vitalstats: Public higher education, 2018*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- DHET (Department of Higher Education and Training). 2011. *Report on the ministerial committee for the review of the provision of student housing at South African universities*. <https://bit.ly/3lejMHG> [Accessed 15 March 2015].
- Dryden NH & Goldstein S. 2013. Regional campus learning commons: Assessing to meet student needs. *Journal of Library Administration*, 53(5-6):293-322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2013.876822>
- Fataar A. 2018. *The educational practices and pathways of South African students across power-marginalised spaces*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Press. <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357896>
- Fraser N. 2000. Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3(107). <https://bit.ly/3lc5ast> [Accessed 28 June 2020].
- Fraser N. 2013. *Fortunes of feminism: From state-managed capitalism to neoliberal crisis*. New York, NY: Verso Books.
- Gopalan M & Brady ST. 2020. College students' sense of belonging: A national perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 49(2):134-137. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19897622>
- Guzman JJ. 2019. Student involvement and student unions: A case study of commuter students at a California State University. Master's dissertation, Fresno, CA: California State University.
- Hill W & Woodward LS. 2013. Examining the impact learning communities have on college of education students on an urban campus. *Journal of College Student Development*, 54(6):643-648. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2013.0085>
- Ike N, Baldwin C & Lathouras A. 2016. Student accommodation: Who cares? *Planning for Higher Education*, 44(3):46.
- Inkelas KK, Drechsler M, Szelényi K, Kim YC, McCarron GP, Soldner M & Mainieri T. 2007. National study of living-learning programs: Report of findings. *UW-Madison Customized Report*, 222.
- Jacoby B. 1989. *The student as commuter: Developing a comprehensive institutional response*. ASHE-ERIC Report No. 7. Washington, DC: The George Washington University.

- Jacoby B. 1990. Adapting the institution to meet the needs of commuter students. *Metropolitan Universities*, 1(2):61-72.
- Jacoby B. 2000. Why involve commuter students in learning? *New directions for higher education*, 2000(109):3-12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/he.10901>
- Jacoby B. 2014. Engaging commuter, part-time students and returning adult students. In: SJ Quaye, SR Harper & SL Pendakur (eds). *Student engagement in higher education*. New York, NY: Routledge. 305-322.
- Jacoby B. 2015. Engaging first-year commuter students in learning. *Metropolitan Universities*, 15(2):12-30.
- Jacoby B & Garland J. 2004. Strategies for enhancing commuter student success. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 6(1):61-79. <https://doi.org/10.2190/567C-5TME-Q8F4-8FRG>
- Kahu ER. 2013. Framing student engagement in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(5):758-773. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.598505>
- Kloppers PW. 2006. Akademiese gemeenskapsgroepe: Die ResEd-inisiatief. Centre for Student Communities. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- Kroon C. 2020. Student numbers: Residential vs commuter students. Centre for Business Intelligence: Tracking and Development. Email to B van Zyl, 19 May. Email address: benitavz@sun.ac.za.
- Kuh GD. 1995. The other curriculum: Out-of-class experiences associated with student learning and personal development. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 66(2):123-155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.1995.11774770>
- Kuh GD. 2008. Excerpt from high-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. *Association of American Colleges and Universities*, 14(3):28-29.
- Kuh GD. 2016. Making learning meaningful: Engaging students in ways that matter to them. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 145:49-56. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.20174>
- Kuh GD, Gonyea RM & Palmer M. 2001. The disengaged commuter: Fact or fiction? *National Survey of Student Engagement*. <https://bit.ly/3twEcZr> [Accessed 21 February 2018].
- Kuh GD, Kinzie J, Schuh JH & Whitt EJ. 2011. *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Lange L. 2020. Transformation revisited: Twenty years of higher education policy in South Africa. In: I Rensburg, S Motala & M Cross. *Transforming universities in South Africa: Pathways to higher education reform*. Leiden: Brill Sense. 39-59. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004437043_003
- Lipka S. 2007. Commuters get their own place at Mansfield U. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54(8).
- Love PG & Goodsell-Love A. 1996. *Enhancing student learning: Intellectual, social, and emotional integration*. Washington, DC: ERIC digest.
- Meiklejohn A. 1932. *The experimental college*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

PART THREE • OUT-OF-CLASS EXPERIENCES

- Newbold JJ, Mehta SS & Forbus P. 2011. Commuter students: Involvement and identification with an institution of higher education. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 15(2):141-153.
- NPC (National Planning Commission). 2012. *National development plan 2030: Our future – make it work*. <https://bit.ly/3z2BRxe> [Accessed 9 August 2017].
- Parameswaran A & Bowers J. 2014. Student residences: From housing to education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 38(1):57-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2012.699515>
- Pascarella ET. 1984. Reassessing the effects of living on-campus versus commuting to college: A causal modeling approach. *The Review of Higher Education*, 7(3):247-260. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.1984.0016>
- Pascarella ET. 2006. How college affects students: Ten directions for future research. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(5):508-520. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0060>
- Pike GR, Kuh GD & McCormick AC. 2011. An investigation of the contingent relationships between learning community participation and student engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, 52(3):300-322. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-010-9192-1>
- Quaye SJ & Harper SR. 2014. Making engagement equitable for students in US higher education. In: SJ Quaye, SR Harper & SL Pendakur (eds). *Student engagement in higher education*. New York, NY: Routledge. 17-30. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203810163>
- Rocconi LM. 2011. The impact of learning communities on first year students' growth and development in college. *Research in Higher Education*, 52(2):178-193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-010-9190-3>
- Schreiber B & Yu D. 2016. Exploring student engagement practices at a South African university: Student engagement as reliable predictor of academic performance. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(5):19. <https://doi.org/10.20853/30-5-593>
- Shannon-Baker P. 2016. Making paradigms meaningful in mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 10(4):319-334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815575861>
- Shapiro N & Levine JH. 1999. *Creating learning communities: A practical guide to winning support, organizing for change, and implementing programs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sideling RJ, Frisby BN & Heisler J. 2016. Students' out of the classroom communication with instructors and campus services: Exploring social integration and academic involvement. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 47:167-171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2016.02.011>
- Soldner M & Szelényi K. 2008. A national portrait of today's living-learning programs. *Journal of College & University Student Housing*, 35(1):14-31.
- Spaull N. 2013. *South Africa's education crisis: The quality of education in South Africa 1994-2011*. Johannesburg: Centre for Development and Enterprise.
- SU (Stellenbosch University). 2007. Bestuursbesluit: ResEd klusterinisiatief: Stellenbosch Universiteit. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- SU (Stellenbosch University). 2009. Report of the task team for the advancement of the integration of PSO students in learning and living communities. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

- SU (Stellenbosch University). 2018. SU Vision 2040 and Strategic Framework 2019-2040. <https://bit.ly/2X8cfC2> [Accessed January-April 2021]
- Terenzini PT & Pascarella ET. 1994. Living with myths: Undergraduate education in America. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 26(1):28-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.1994.9938488>
- Terenzini PT, Pascarella ET & Blimling GS. 1999. Students' out-of-class experiences and their influence on learning and cognitive development: A literature review. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5):610-623.
- Thomas L & Jones R. 2017. Student engagement in the context of commuter students. *The Student Engagement Partnership*. <https://bit.ly/3z3zPNB> [Accessed 14 June 2020].
- Tinto V. 2003. Learning better together: The impact of learning communities on student success. *Higher Education Monograph Series*, 1(8).
- Tinto V. 2006. Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 8(1):1-19. <https://doi.org/10.2190/4YNU-4TMB-22DJ-AN4W>
- Tinto V. 2012. *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226804545.001.0001>
- Tronto JC. 2010. Creating caring institutions: Politics, plurality, and purpose. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 4(2):158-171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2010.484259>
- Trowler V. 2010. *Student engagement literature review*. York, UK: University of Lancaster. <https://bit.ly/3hpZ3jc> [Accessed 15 March 2016].
- Trowler P & Trowler V. 2010. *Student engagement evidence summary*. York: University of Lancaster. <https://bit.ly/3tznEqH> [Accessed 3 June 2017].
- Van Zyl B. 2018. Addressing the needs of commuter students: An evaluation of the amaMaties hub at Stellenbosch University. MEd thesis, Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch University.
- Van Zyl B & Fourie-Malherbe M. 2021. Promoting student engagement among commuter students: A South African case study. *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal*, 3(2):119-140. <http://195.201.33.159/raise/article/view/1019>
- Zhao CM & Kuh GD. 2004. Adding value: Learning communities and student engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, 45(2):115-138. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:RIHE.000015692.88534.de>