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Pia Lamberti (WITS)

EX OFFICIO MEMBER

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MESSAGE FROM THE VICE-CHAIRPERSON



The Postgraduate Forum for Southern Africa (PGFSA) was born from an audacious idea: its founders (Henriette van Den Berg, together with several colleagues) set out to create a forum that would cater to the needs of postgraduate students, supervisors, and their universities, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary, inter-university, country-wide postgraduate and research activities. At a time when postgraduate education was (and still is) under pressure to expand, having previously being available only to a privileged few, the PGFSA intentionally sought to provide avenues for ambitious young people from across the country to contribute effectively and meaningfully to the world of academia and ultimately to society. The PGFSA is meant to be a school of opportunity, to the benefit of our country and Africa as a whole. What distinguishes the PGFSA is our focus on the future of postgraduate education and our willingness to shape that future for a wide academic community.

Despite Covid, the PGFSA has continued to be successful in creating opportunities in pursuit of academic excellence albeit at a slower pace than before. It has

used its collegially-minded advantage of encouraging postgraduate students and supervisors to come together in our search for new knowledge, relevant research, and contributions to society. So, we are heirs to an organisation that is forward-looking and has achieved much. The question today is: how do we maintain enthusiasm and improve all we have built while sustaining that amazing spirit of academic and community collegiality? The search for the solution must begin with hard questioning and self-knowledge, to raise the issues, signal priorities, and initiate the path forward. So here I pose only two of the many questions that we must confront directly and candidly: what are the academic areas that have not received sufficient attention, and what must we do to move the Forum forward?

Having put forward a position challenge, I turn to us all on a lighter note. Congratulations to those of us who survived COVID! Those who were infected and recovered did not become flesh eating zombies. We did not become recluses and lose all our social skills. We did not become raving alcoholics. We grew closer to our families, including in-laws, nagging children cats and dogs. Some of us used the 'break' effectively to fix our homes as DIY 'experts'. We did not have to fight traffic in the mornings

and evenings. Wasn't it nice to have our make-up on, hair combed and only dress from the waist up! Smart blouses, shirts, jackets, and ties go well with pyjama pants we discovered. Going back to the 'old' normal may not be such fun as we think! What a pleasure it was for some, if not most of us, to work from home? We may have felt the restricted socialising somewhat difficult to accept but the commitment to 'homework' has really borne fruit for many!

But seriously folks: our deep-felt sympathies and condolences go out to those who have lost family members and our empathy goes to you if you or your family members were struck by the virus. Reports suggest that even though many survived, the struggle to wellness has been very difficult.

We wish the incoming committee well in the hopes that the way forward will be easier and fruitful.

INVITATION TO NOMINATE NEW PGFSA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

According to the constitution of the Postgraduate Forum for Southern Africa (PGFSA), executive committee members are elected every two years. Due to COVID-related restrictions of the activities of the Forum, the current EXCO members have served since April 2018. Therefore, we invite our members to nominate candidates to serve on the EXCO from April 2022 until

March 2024. All positions on the EXCO are open for nominations: Chairperson, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and four additional members. Members of the Forum who are passionate about enhancing postgraduate education in Southern Africa, and are willing to commit to advancing the work of the Forum, are eligible for nomination and election.

We are committed to expanding the work of the Forum. Therefore, we ask all PGFSA members to distribute this invitation to colleagues and to nominate suitable individuals who are involved with postgraduate management or capacity development, or postgraduate supervision.

A description of the responsibilities of the different EXCO positions and the nomination forms are available at the following link: <http://www.postgrad.co.za>.

The deadline for nominations is 15 January 2022. The election of the committee members will take place in February 2022. For more information and clarification, please contact Dr Henriette van den Berg at postgraduateforumsa@gmail.com.

PGFSA WORKSHOP ON THE HOLISTIC SUPPORT OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

After a hiatus during the Covid-19 pandemic, the PGFSA relaunched their activities with a virtual workshop on the 9th of

July 2021. The topics for the day centred on the holistic support of postgraduate students. This timely workshop was aimed primarily at supervisors and researcher developers who have been working under challenging research and supervision conditions during the lockdown, offering tips and tools to support their students.

We were joined by 54 participants from nine universities in South Africa. The participants included postgraduate supervisors and directors of postgraduate programmes, as well as staff responsible for postgraduate support and development. Fifteen postgraduate students also participated in the workshop. HPCSA Continuing Development Points (CPD) were awarded to attendees who attended both sessions.



The first session was presented by Professor Jason Bantjes from the Institute for

Life Course Health Research at the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences at Stellenbosch University.

His presentation centred on strategies that can be used to build resilience and well-being - both from a student and a supervisor perspective. He specifically touched on the mental health of postgraduate students, academic burnout, and how to deal with stress and anxiety.



Professor Sebastian Kernbach, from the University of St Gallen, Switzerland,

presented a dynamic second session entitled: 'Designing a fulfilling research life: How to build creative confidence, self-efficacy, and resilience for your research journey'. In his research and teaching, he uses design thinking principles to help students and academics increase well-being and find ways to be more productive and resilient in their work. In the presentation he looked at 'chronotypes' and how to manage energy throughout the day.

If you are interested in knowing more about Kernbach's work, he will be presenting his popular workshop, 'The Productive PhD: Creating structure, gaining clarity and overcoming blocks', at the African Doctoral Academy's virtual Summer Doctoral School, which takes place online from 24 to 28 January (you can find more information [here](#)).

INVITATION TO JOIN THE AFRICAN DIGITAL UNIVERSITY NETWORK



The African Digital University Network (ADUN) was established to promote digital scholarship, innovation, and networking in the African higher educational context <https://adunetwork.net/>.

Although the network is 'housed' in the Centre for Learning Technologies at Stellenbosch University, it espouses a dissolved model of agency and participation, where members are encouraged to share news, new ideas and opportunities for networking. Members are encouraged to set up working groups dedicated to targeted projects, such as developing seminars, workshop series or open educational resources, or establishing research groups.

Examples of collaborative projects that have been shared in the network include: the University of Cape Town's [Digital Open Textbooks for Development \(DOT4D\) project](#). The network's members have also participated in the creation of a number of open educational resources (OERs) such as a [Guide to Student Digital Wellbeing](#), a manual assisting the [Evolving Digital Scholar](#), and a Stellenbosch University-based e-book that focuses on [responding to the necessity for change](#) during and after the COVID-19 period.

Membership is free and open to anyone in the digital and higher education sector: if you are interested in joining the network, please do so [here](#). For more information, you are welcome to contact Dr Sonja Strydom at sonja@sun.ac.za.

LAUNCH OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ACADEMIC LITERACY PRACTITIONERS

For those of you who are interested in the role of writing in knowledge-making, it is

worth noting that the South African Association for Academic Literacy Practitioners (SAAALP) was launched in October. The announcement was made at the end of a free online conference, jointly organised by the Unit for Academic Language and Literacy Development at the University of the Free State and the Unit for Academic Literacy at the University of Pretoria. The focus of the conference was on academic literacy and writing centre practitioners' responses to Covid-19 and the move to online/blended teaching and learning. According to the conference programme, the aims of SAAALP are 'to provide like-minded South African academic literacy practitioners with a space to discuss key issues ...; share ideas and insights into AL best practice; and form a supportive community of practice'.

Membership is free and you can join by completing a membership form, which is available on their website: www.saaalp.com. If postgraduate writing is your interest, please also join the new SIG dedicated to postgraduate writing so that you can join in the conversation about developing the SIG: <https://www.saaalp.com//group/postgraduate-writing-sig>.

THE RESEARCHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT SCHOLARSHIP CONFERENCE

One of the benefits of Covid-19 has been the opportunities to access and learn from international conferences that

most of us would not have been able to participate in previously. Some conferences have gone fully online and have been free, making them much more accessible. One such conference that is relevant to postgraduate matters is the Researcher Education and Development Scholarship (REDS) Conference, which took place on 14 October this year. The theme was developing inclusive research cultures. The keynote address by Dr Jessica Gagnon from the University of Strathclyde is really worth watching. The presentation titled 'Innovation without limits: Imagining a possible inclusive future for researchers', was recorded and is available on the conference website. Go to:

<https://mymedia.leeds.ac.uk/MediaSite/Play/70c3d6e5392a435ca815da9f464cd0ab1d>.

The 2020 conference, which focused on postgraduate supervision, also took place online. The keynote address was based on the book, *The hidden curriculum in doctoral education* (Elliot, Bengtson, Guccione & Kobayashi 2020). According to the website, the presentations, some of which also touched on postgraduate well-being, were responses to two questions: 'What is supervision now?', and 'What development or institutional structures are needed to enable supervisors?'. Videos of a number of the presentations are available and are worth checking out at <https://conferences.leeds.ac.uk/reds/previously/reds-conference-2020/reds-2020-on-video/>.

The next REDS conference is set to take place online on 12th October 2022. More details will be made available early in 2022, so if you are interested, keep a watch on the website: <https://conferences.leeds.ac.uk/reds/>.

8th BIENNIAL POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION CONFERENCE

The well-known Postgraduate Supervision Conference, which takes place every two years, will also be online in 2022. The conference, which is organised by Stellenbosch University's Centre for Higher and Adult Education, will take place from 15 to 18 March. The main theme of the 2022 conference is 'Transitions, trajectories and transformations in postgraduate supervision: The times they are a-changing'. The organisers promise four pre-conference workshops, four experienced keynote speakers, a number of round table discussions and more than seventy national and international paper presentations. The call for presentations closed some time ago, but it should still be possible to attend. Please visit <http://www0.sun.ac.za/chae/conference/index.html> for more information and conference registration. You may also be pleased to know that three of the peer-reviewed book publications from previous conferences are available free of charge at the conference site.

FIND OPEN ACCESS ONLINE RESOURCES ON OUR WEBSITE

Remember, we add useful open access online resources to



our [PGFSA website](#) at regular intervals – here are a few:

Berkeley Writing Centre:
[berkeleyduwritingworksheets](#)
Cecile Badenhorst's resources:
<https://cecilebadenhorst.wordpress.com/cecilebadenhorstyoutubechannel>
Centre for Innovation in Research and Teaching (CIRT):
[researchdevelopmentresources/mixedmethods](#)
elearning:
<https://elearning.trree.org>
Enhancing Postgraduate Environments (EPE) website:
[postgradenvironments.com](#)
Future Learn:
<https://www.futurelearn.com>
Oasis for Learning:
[oasis-for-learning.net](#)
Purdue Online Writing Lab:
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
The Good Supervisor:
<https://goodsupervisor.co.uk>
(password: brighton)
The International Doctoral Education Research Network (IDERN):
<https://www.mun.ca/educ/research/idern.php>
The Thesis Whisperer:
<https://thesiswhisperer.com/about/>
The Yebo! project:
<http://yebo.edu.umontpellier.fr/>