

The UKZN Griot

Internationals are vital for UKZN's good health



Remember the dark days of apartheid when terms like 'international hotel', or more idiotically, 'international toilet', were vogue?

WORDS: KEYAN G TOMASELLI

'International' in the apartheid lexicon meant multiracial. That is, anyone could use 'international' facilities and not get arrested. Weird times, those. After apartheid 'international' came to be associated with *makwerekere*, who were chased and sometimes killed by those who were previously granted access to the international toilets and hotels.

What does 'international' mean for UKZN? Historically, Durban is an international city: it's an Indian city in Africa, a Zulu city in India, and possibly a European city Africanised. So, why is UKZN so reluctant to internationalise? Anyone with – or without – an ID can use the toilets and the *makwerekere* were actively recruited in the 1990s by an efficient International Relations office.

Glocalisation is the new buzz word. Being local means that UKZN needs to go global. UKZN is now operating in an internationally competitive market. Inter-cultural citizenship of both academics and students is the basis of the new international academic enterprise. UKZN is very parochial. UKZN students are very parochial. KZN is very parochial. South Africa remains very parochial even after the World Cup. How else would one

account for the xenophobia that periodically breaks into violence?

If UKZN is indeed the premier university for African scholarship as it claims, then we must understand that Africa is not just KZN, South Africa or even Africa. The African Diaspora is everywhere and that's the identity that we need to embrace. But more, our institutional and employment policies must reflect an international remit. It is internationalisation at every level that vests excellence in the world's top universities because the top universities attract the best students and scholars from everywhere.

Anti-social behaviour in the residences dissuades some international students from coming to Durban. But what attracts students who do want to study here? Having discussed this with my own African graduate students over the past 20 years, they explain that:

- "South Africa is a Europe next door for SADC countries", with regard to access to top quality technology, libraries etc.
- "UKZN is a First World University in a Third World Environment". That is, UKZN promises quality education that deals with the African issues they need to know about with regard to their jobs in their home countries.

- With the opening up of SA since 1994, international candidates find South African universities cheaper and, as good as, even better than, UK or US universities.

What benefits do international students bring to UKZN?

- International students bring wider understandings of their respective conditions to South Africans who tend to be ignorant of Africa: they don't know whether Burundi is a country or a province of the DRC; whether white people live in Malawi, or whether ATMs are found in Zimbabwe. An African American Fulbrighter observed that South Africans need to understand that blacks and Africans live across the world, not just in KZN!
- African students bring a wider knowledge of their countries to bear on their essays, theses and course work at UKZN, keeping lecturers abreast of current developments across the continent.
- Graduate students return home and often establish similar programmes in their own universities. They then draw on UKZN staff as external examiners, collaborate with them on pan-African research projects, and send on their own students to do graduate work at UKZN.
- International students are more politically mature than are South Africans, having gone through the euphoria of libera-

tion decades before. They bring a political stability to class discussions, and a maturity of purpose to their studies.

International students work much more consistently; tend to work much harder, longer hours, than do local students; internationals show high initiative, take responsibility for their own learning, and use the Library; write much better than do SA students (no matter their home language); and most importantly, they are self-motivated. They become the teachers. They add significant value to the classroom.

Internationalisation is a curriculum issue. There's no point in US students coming to UKZN if they are going to be taught American cinema, or UK students being taught British cultural studies unless these subjects are critically re-contextualised and engaged in terms of African, and comparative frames of reference.

International collaboration is best driven by academics themselves. Not every collaboration requires a memorandum of understanding (MOU) but every MOU requires due collaboration. UKZN International Relations is the facilitator, the co-operating academics are the drivers, and the benefit is institutional.

Every academic is a potential ambassador for International Relations. Universities bring out the red carpets even for the poor orphans of the academy, the academics, who are doing official business on behalf of the

institution. Go figure ...

The International Relations office is part of UKZN's PR, recruitment campaigns and research activities.

Synergy is the operative process. International Relations is not just another administrative venture gobbling up scarce resources. It was originally constituted as an income-generator, as the global recruitment arm of the University, developing a growth sector within research and education.

Questions always to be borne in mind are: What is the wider benefit that can be derived from any inter-personal relationship? How can these be amortised across the University as a whole? International Relations business plans should indicate how return on investment will occur over specific periods.

An international university needs more than international hotels and toilets. It needs international students and staff, international visitors and international research collaborations.

Keyan G Tomaselli is Director, The Centre for Communication, Media and Society. He is astonished at how well he is treated by host universities when he wears his administration hat in comparison to the neglect experienced when an academic hat is worn. He now knows where the money is.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this column are the author's own.

Sudoku

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