

EDITOR'S NOTES:

This article is the final installment in *IE*'s feature series on international education and peace resolution in divided regions of the world faced with conflict. Articles in the series are published occasionally in the magazine since the series began in 2006. Previous articles were about Cyprus, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Basque region in Spain. The series received an Apex Grand Award for feature writing in 2007.

The University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg South Africa held a School of Arts Carnegie Photographic Competition with the theme of "transformation on campus." The photos used in this story are from that competition.

Photo of students on road crossing by Gareth John Dunn





Bridging the Divide

In South Africa, much has changed in terms of equal access to higher education for all students regardless of race since apartheid ended in 1994. Despite the past conflict over race relations, progress has been made and a brighter future is on the horizon.

BY DANA WILKIE

WHEN TEBOHO MOJA WANTED TO STUDY at the historically white University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa in the early 1980s, the school admitted her conditionally, but insisted she get an exemption from the country's Minister of Education so the Pretoria native could pursue a master's degree in education.

Moja won the exemption, and she moved from the all-black University of the North to her new school. Once settled at Witwatersrand, however, she found herself marginalized and isolated. She was not allowed to live on campus in a whites-only residence. She could not remain on campus too late each day because she had no transportation back home. And because it was never clear whether blacks could join school societies, they often decided against it.

"Right from the beginning, those students' opportunities for advancement in South Africa, as well as internationally, were limited," said Moja, who today is a clinical professor of higher education at New York University.

But that was more than two decades ago, when segregated universities were the law in South Africa and only a tiny percentage of young people in the country's hometowns ever went to college at all. It was a time when apartheid policies created a racially divided system of higher education that was controlled by ethnically divided government departments and fraught with legal constraints, and a time when institutions designated for one race could not admit students from another race, except under the sorts of extraordinary exceptions granted Moja.

Certainly, things have changed since then. But how much?

After Apartheid

Thirteen years after the South African government ended apartheid and changed the higher education landscape—by merging institutions and introducing laws requiring diversity of gender, race, and class in higher education—statistics do reveal a seemingly transformed education system. Now that colleges and universities are open to all races—with education budgets restructured to prioritize equity, new curricula, and stronger teacher unions—black student enrollment at South African institutions has achieved remarkable highs, making the nation's schools one of the most visible manifestations of the post-apartheid era.

At the same time, questions remain whether there is a disconnect between the nation's new policies and actual practice. While higher education is theoretically available to all South Africans, skeptics say those who really benefit are a new generation of middle-class black students and white students. Critics ask why—if black South Africans have such access to higher education—the economic divide between whites and blacks remains so wide a decade after apartheid ended. And they note that even if apartheid is dead in name, some institutions still struggle with inequalities and segrega-

tion that can lead to cultural and intellectual alienation for black students, as well as lower success rates.

"There remains the difficulty of race and even racism," said Crain Soudien, professor of humanities at South Africa's University of Cape Town. "Many students of color continue to complain that the cultural experience is framed around a decontextualized universal code, which is largely white."

Apartheid officially ended in 1994 in this nation of 44.8 million people—79 percent of whom are black or colored (the local term for "mixed race") and 9.6 percent are white. With that, the nation's colleges and universities were no longer segregated based primarily on race, with blacks and people of color forced into universities designed to "cater" to their race or ethnicity. No longer would the schools be governed differently, with white universities accountable to a national system and other schools answerable to local governance structures.

Desegregation was not immediate, of course.

"It wasn't as if new government comes in and suddenly, blacks walk into colleges and universities that were predominately white," said Ted Fiske, a Duke University professor of public policy and economics who helped to write *Elusive Equity: Education Reform in Post-apartheid South Africa*.

But after 1996, when the post-apartheid government introduced a new schooling system—in some cases merging existing universities into one institution—black and colored enrollment in higher education began to blossom.

And then it exploded.

In 1993, 52 percent of students in the public higher education institutions were black. By 2000 the numbers had increased to 73 percent, according to "Transformation in Higher Education," a book Moja helped to edit. The proportion of black students in the historically white Afrikaans-medium universities skyrocketed from 10 percent in 1994 to 55 percent in 1999 and to 60 percent in 2004.

The proportion of black students in the historically white technikons went from 25 percent in 1994 to 74 percent in 1999, then to 86 percent in 2004.



PHOTO BY DIMITRI SELIBAS

Student gathering in concourse (campus newspaper shown.)

“These demographic changes must be some of the most remarkable in the world in the 1990s,” Moja says. “There are more opportunities for black students to pursue their studies in higher education institutions than before.”

Challenges of Surging Enrollments

But soaring enrollments have brought challenges. As student enrollment across the region increased by 20 percent in just the three years from 2001 to 2004, university administrators found they were ill equipped to handle the growth.

The South African government calculates it will have more than 900,000 university students by 2009, but the government’s education department says it can afford to pay for only 740,000 students that year. To some, this revelation represents a backtracking of the ruling African National Congress’ commitment to open the doors of learning to all in the post-apartheid era.

Moreover, the influx of new students into some education programs has led to a devaluing of degrees. For example, South Africa had a long tradition of business education that revolved around seven business schools attached to leading universities. But once foreign business schools saw the formerly isolated South African market as a prime target for expansion, they flooded the nation with M.B.A. distance-learning degree programs from abroad, mostly from the United Kingdom. In recent years, aspiring and mid-career

executives have seized on these opportunities in hopes they can become more competitive in the global marketplace.

Today South Africa has some 50 M.B.A. degree programs, according to the Council on Higher Education. The explosion of programs, combined with a slack job market, so devalued the reputation of the degree that the Council on Higher Education has decided to weed out the substandard ones through an accreditation exercise that focuses on program faculties, curricula, admission processes, and ties with parent institutions, among other factors.

Finally, while the physical desegregation of the nation’s campuses has in some cases translated into the sort of cultural and social integration that helps foster academic success, this is not always the case.

On the one hand, the changes in student composition on the region’s campuses have had far-reaching impacts on student life and student culture.

“You see more black students on formerly white campuses, and there are buses waiting to transport them home compared with the past when there was no transport heading off to black townships,” said Moja, the Pretoria-raised daughter of a nurse and a postmaster-turned-businessman. “(More varied) food choices in student cafeteria are just some of the examples. Integration in sports (and) student leadership (are others). Funding allocations have changed and are no longer race based, as in the past.”



Change Takes Time

In a region so long accustomed to segregation not only in schools—but on buses, in housing, and elsewhere—racial tensions have persisted on campuses thanks to cultural differences and a legacy of living apart in one country. As a result, it's not always easy for black or colored students to assimilate to academic life.

Marion Edmunds, a white South African, recalls that as chairwoman of the University of Cape Town's University Arts Student Council in 1990, she tried to engage black students, some of whom were "finding themselves overwhelmed socially and educationally." Edmunds and other student leaders discussed the prospect of mentoring such students, although her own efforts bore little fruit.

"It was clear from classroom discussion and participation (at the University of Cape Town) that many black students did not feel inclined to participate (academically) in the same way as white students—they had none of their confidence," said Edmunds, who was born in Stellenbosch and who also attended Stellenbosch University.

Reflecting now on the changes the nation's universities have undergone, Edmunds notes that Stellenbosch is wrestling with its position as the foremost Afrikaans-language university in the country. Many black students do not want to be taught in the language

that was imposed upon blacks by the apartheid government, and this can present a recruitment problem for the school.

"Nowadays, Stellenbosch University has a much greater percentage of English-speaking students, but it has not yet resolved its linguistic, cultural, and racial identity in South Africa," she said.

At the University of the Free State, some tried to ease the transition for blacks by asking for a student body vote on whether there should be racially separate residences.

"The outcome was, of course, an endorsement of racially segregated dormitories," Moja says. "This went against the grain of the new South Africa."

Black students from certain township schools are required to take remedial English classes when they first get to college, even though some have an excellent command of English. Some believe this is because educators at formerly whites-only universities tend to believe those from black schools will take longer to grasp academic writing.

This lack of belief in black students can erode confidence levels, which may already be low thanks to the challenges faced by black students during the apartheid era. Blacks new to previously white schools often move in circles of mostly middle-class young adults, even though



In what has become an annual tradition, University of the Witwatersrand students participate in a pillow fight on the library lawns. About 560 students participated in September 2007.

they themselves struggle to buy the most essential of things. This can lead to a sense of resignation and devaluing of one's self.

"The fascinating thing about this long experience...is that there hasn't ever been, in the university sector at least, anything formal to engage with the experience of apartheid or its lingering issues," Soudien said. "What effectively happened is that the universities simply ended formal apartheid on one day and then began the next as if little of moment was about to happen."

"In some ways it has been easy for the university, where elements of everyday life during apartheid were normal," Soudien continued. "But the point to make is that this seamless-ness has obscured the real work that has had to be done. There have been administrators at the university who have been acutely aware of the need to address these issues and repeated dip-stick tests of the university climate have been done with the administrative view that the issues need to be surfaced and addressed."

College Cost Issues Emerge

As a result of these realities, student life and student activities have taken a new turn since the end of apartheid. While the kind of student radicalism that was present during the 1980s has all but disappeared, student demonstrations have taken place on some campuses around issues such as fee increases or financial exclusions.

Indeed, although the post-apartheid government banned racial considerations as a criteria for anything—school admissions, jobs, promotions, salaries—financial aid in some cases remains less accessible to black and colored students seeking college degrees, critics say.

As early as three years ago, the South African government launched a legal challenge against a 1920 trust that grants scholarships only to white male Christian students of the University of Cape Town. In 1920 Edmund Scarbrow ordered that on his death his estate should be placed in trust and used to fund scholarships for males "of

European descent, Gentile, and with limited or no means."

The government argued that the conditions attached to the Scarbrow Bursary Fund

Testamentary Trust were discriminatory, and therefore unconstitutional. The university supported the state lawsuit, which observers viewed as an important test of what should happen with other financial awards that come with conditions. It was the first time South Africa's post-apartheid constitution was employed to challenge a will or a case involving a trust. The outcome is pending.

"The whole question of financial aid is huge," Fiske says. "This is a huge obstacle for blacks. It's the same issue as here in the United States—they aren't coming out of schools that have strong college prep curricula, and even though the cost of college is pretty low by American standards, it's still prohibitive if you're coming out of a homeland or township."

Beverly Thaver studies the transformation of South African higher education at the University of the Western Cape's Centre for the Study of Higher Education. She says the financial demands of a college education—and the inability of many blacks to meet them—are just one example of how class and social advantage have replaced race as the organizing principles at the nation's universities and colleges.

While some might argue that's the case in any nation, others insist it is

particularly so in South Africa, where blacks still face markedly worse access to higher education, and ultimately to decent jobs.

"Given the legacy which is so deeply embedded, the restructuring (of the education system) tends to inadvertently reproduce the old stereotypes," said Thaver, whose program, "Deracialising the Academic Heartland: Case Studies of Five Higher Education Institutions," probes how reforms have shaped academic exchanges at the faculty level and how equity is integrated into the faculty selection process. "There is coincidence between those students whose parents (or) guardians can afford their tuition fees and color (or) race factors."

Resources

ORGANIZATIONS

Human Sciences Research Council

www.hsrc.ac.za

Research agency designed to investigate all aspects of development including education; provides information on current research programs and initiatives in South Africa

South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education

<http://www.saardhe.ac.za>

South African Council for Educators

<http://www.sace.org.za/Sace/default.jsp>

PUBLICATIONS

Human Science Research Council Press

<http://www.hsrcpress.ac.za/>

HSRC Press is South Africa's open access publisher committed to the dissemination of high quality social science research based publications, in print and electronic form. These publications are available online in PDF format from HSRC Press:

The Business of Higher Education: A Study of Public-Private Partnerships in the Provision of Higher Education in South Africa

By Mahlubi Mabizela, 2005

Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-apartheid South Africa

By Linda Chisholm (editor), 2004

Human Resources Development Review 2008: Education, Employment and Skills in South Africa

By Andre Kraak and Karen Press (editors), 2007

Overcoming Apartheid: Can Truth Reconcile a Divided Nation?

By James L. Gibson, 2004

Finding a Balance

For instance, the University of Cape Town is now far more integrated than it was prior to the ending of apartheid, with black students comprising more than 50 percent of the student body. Student life is now more varied, and many young people of color are now featured in the honors ranks of the university, topping their classes.

But while the university's profile might be more racially mixed, it has also become much more homogeneous in terms of economic class.

"The attraction that (the University of Cape Town) has on the elite in the country is evidenced in the profile of the students who apply to it," said Soudien, whose research—a partnership project between the University of Michigan and the University of Cape Town—has compared the experience of affirmative action in South Africa and the United States. "The university is able to attract, without a great deal of difficulty, the best students in the southern African region. This is now the university of choice for the elite, not only in South Africa, but also from Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, and the other countries of the region."

Having an influence on integration means having influence on the social, academic, and cultural experiences at the university—an experience largely driven by administrators and academic instructors whose racial and cultural composition has not kept pace with changes in the student body.

Prior to the ending of apartheid, race-based policies were reflected in the academic staff profile across racial clusters, with a preponderance of white academics in all universities across the ethnic divide and at all levels of the academic hierarchy. Where black academics were appointed, it was mainly at the lower junior lecturer levels.

In her own experience as an education administrator in South Africa, Moja saw that for black faculty members, there were few teaching opportunities at the black institutions. Even then, she said, they had to compete with white instructors—many of them poorly qualified—for those spots. There was little hope of teaching in a whites-only institution.

Today, faculty members remain largely male and white. In terms of faculty recruitment, institutional commitment is slowly taking off, Thaver said. Transformation of faculty was not seen as a significant aspect for several years, although it has been in the policy documents. It is finally beginning to gather momentum.

"A recurrent theme continues to be that when black academics are appointed, there is a silent discourse around the lowering of standards," Thaver says. "A recent inaugural lecture (by a white professor) looked at affirmative action in the academy and drew on the American experience. He received a standing ovation from a largely white audience. This generated heated debate."

There have, on occasion, been discussions about the Africanization of the curriculum, but "these attempts have been half-hearted and perfunctory," Soudien said.

Soudien argues that while the intent of South Africa's post-apartheid policies have to some degree been contradicted by practical outcomes, there has nonetheless been some administrative and

faculty-level transformations in post-apartheid education. He says the class structure in South Africa has, and is, changing, and that the education landscape reflects this.

The most significant affirmative action-related policy, he said, has been that of special admissions into the university.

"A number of different measures have been undertaken to facilitate the entry of people of color, such as giving students without the necessary grades but with the aptitude—determined by a special test—admission into certain programs," said Soudien, who was an editorial contributor to *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. "Some of these same administrators have been proactive in pushing the kind of policies for building more inclusive environments on the campus."

Yet, according to a census released last year, vast disparities remain between South African whites and blacks in terms of higher education access. While 40.9 percent of whites completed secondary education and 29.8 percent went on to get a higher education, only 16.8 percent of blacks completed secondary education and 5.2 percent went on to higher education.

As for jobs, 28 percent of blacks were unemployed, the survey found, compared to 10 percent for mixed-race people and 4.1 percent for whites.



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University of Witwatersrand students in 2007.

Surveys that reveal the mindset of South African young blacks are perhaps just as troubling: A poll conducted two years ago found that a large proportion of young black South Africans perceive the goal of economic liberation as being just as elusive under democratic rule as it was during apartheid. Very few of the students surveyed believed they would complete a tertiary education and, if they did, these were heavily qualified by statements that university would be out of their reach financially.

Even when blacks do receive a higher education, it doesn't always pay off: While overall living conditions have improved since a similar survey conducted in 1996, the largest group of unemployed science graduates in the nation remains the black South African. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate of black graduates in health sciences and social services is 11.5 percent, and 2.2 percent in agriculture and nature conservation.

Meanwhile, the participation rate of black Africans at the postgraduate level is very low. There remains a critical need to train black postgraduate black students—especially Africans—to enter and complete honors- and master's-level degree programs in different disciplines so as to ensure a cohort for doctoral degrees.

Race Relations

Still, the open discussion of race in South Africa's higher education institutions remains an awkward topic in a country where racial tensions produced such violence just before the end of apartheid.

"The aspect of 'race' does not sit very well in South African society," Thaver said. "In other words, the discourse of 'race' is somewhat silent. It is very difficult to discuss how social engineering has impacted on...the academy, as people become nervous about it. It generates much fear and anxiety, and a harking back to the ugly past. When one discusses 'race,' then people invoke 'class' or 'gender.' Yet, when class and or gender are discussed, then race is not invoked. It is thus a difficult topic. However, it is slowly starting to be openly discussed. There are small-scale interventions that seek to bring people together (such as diversity training)."

Nico Jooste, director of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Office for International Education, said "pre-conceived ideas and prejudice were the biggest stumbling blocks" that whites faced after integration.

"This came from years of segregation, both physically and culturally," said Jooste, who worked at historically black and white universities before integration. "We did not know each other as human beings—only as objects. From both sides, mistrust was probably the biggest stumbling block. "All relationships of a multi-cultural nature are difficult. It will remain a challenge for years to come."

Some government agencies and student organizations have stepped up to address these challenges.

The Council on Higher Education has raised the issue of cultural integration at universities and colleges. So has the National Research Foundation, which has made educational change a focus and aims to include "institutional cultures" as one area to be studied. The South African Commission on Human Rights has also launched a review, producing reports on racial integration in schools.

Moja notes that successful student efforts toward integration include the nonracial student unions that are politically aligned, such as South African Students Congress (SASCO), as well as those that aren't politically affiliated, such as the relatively new South African Union of Students (SAUS), established in April 2006. Federal support for these efforts is evidenced by the attention of high-level government officials, such as the South African Minister of Education, who recently delivered the keynote address at the SAUS' first national conference this past summer.

A number of universities across the country have developed surveys designed to assess the campus climate, and they have come to be "extremely important instruments," Soudien said.

At the University of Cape Town, administrators introduced a much-hailed initiative to abolish some of the long-standing criteria, such as grades, for determining admission into residences, which had come over the years to develop decidedly racial characters.

"The abolition of this has made a major difference to residence life, which is much healthier, if edgier," Soudien said.

"I myself have some anxiety about (efforts) such as these, but we need to be exploring their possibility in the country, even if we might arrive at the point, in the end, where we would say, that this or that is not attainable, is not practical, is not meaningful, is not a really radical way to go, or whatever," Soudien said.

Global Exchange Can Facilitate Understanding at Home

Meanwhile, there are a multitude of student-abroad and joint-university programs designed to engage students in the process of global exchange.

South African students are among the world's top ten participants in student-abroad programs. Soudien, who has been involved in several such programs, says they have become instrumental in providing

students with experiences in South Africa, as well as insight into the culture that can translate into public awareness about the realities of higher education in the nation.

Among those that have long-standing presence in South Africa are programs operated by the University of Washington in Seattle and the University of Chicago. Another is run by the School for International Training, an agency that facilitates student-abroad experiences where students stay with families in South African townships for as long as a month.

Officials at Kent State University say partnerships with African institutions have helped American students to appreciate the history of the continent and the resiliency of its people.

Thomas Edison State College and the University of South Africa (UNISA), one of the largest distance-learning universities in the world, are partnering to develop two joint-degree programs as well as online courses and other college-level learning opportunities for adult students throughout the world.

The Summer Academy at Cape Town (SACT) offers an international experience that challenges students to become global citizens through community service, cultural exchange, and academic engagement with global issues.

The Summer Academy at Cape Town draws students from around the world for three weeks of historic excursions, community service, and seminars on African history, culture, and politics. The aim is to compel students to work together across racial, religious, and cultural differences. Participants discuss issues such as the future of post-apartheid South Africa with notable guest speakers, such as Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

In 2005, 70 students from 12 countries and 13 states participated in the program. Students came from distinguished schools such as Andover, Exeter, and the National Cathedral School, as well as from other top schools worldwide.

South African Statistics

POPULATION

79.5%	African
8.9%	Coloured*
2.0%	Indian
8.9%	White

*The South African term "coloured" refers to an ethnic group of people who possess some degree of sub-Saharan ancestry, but not enough to be considered black under South African law.

SOURCE: Stats South Africa 2006 as cited in *Human Resources Development Review 2008*

POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT

727,664 (2005)

SOURCE: *Human Resources Development Review 2008*

UNIVERSITY ATTRITION RATES 2000-2004

First-time undergraduates in 2000
38,407
Dropped out by 2004
38%
Graduated by 2004
50%
Not completed by 2004
12%

SOURCE: *Human Resources Development Review 2008*

Understanding South Africa as a nation is best learned within its borders and with its universities opening their doors to students around the world through education abroad and exchange programs, many more people will gain knowledge about the apartheid era and how it has changed post-apartheid. And South African students going away themselves and encountering other societies can also have a positive affect at home as they discover how other parts of the world are dealing with race and diversity issues. For both South Africans and students from other nations, a lesson in race relations from a country that is a living exercise in intercultural understanding can help all students bridge a divide and overcome conflict—between both past and present and black and white. **IE**

DANA WILKIE is a freelance writer in Washington, D.C. Her last article for *IE* was "Developing Opportunity in the Middle East" in the March/April 2007 issue. She also wrote "Security Walls and Suicide Bombers" published in the July/August 2006 issue, which

covered educational peace and conflict resolution initiatives among Israelis and Palestinians.



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