



**28th Annual Conference of the
Southern African Association for Institutional Research**

**ADAPTABLE, RESILIENT, AND
FUTURE-CENTRIC HIGHER
EDUCATION**

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

Tuesday, 2 to Friday, 5 November 2021

Hosted by the University of the Free State, South Africa

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

High-quality papers will be published as peer-reviewed conference proceedings!

IMPORTANT DATES

Monday, 31 May 2021	Submission deadline for proposal outlines and abstracts
Monday, 28 June 2021	Notification of outcome of proposal evaluation
Monday, 4 October 2021	Submission deadline for electronic copy of presentation

WELCOME AND OVERVIEW

The University of the Free State (UFS) is hosting the 28th annual Southern African Association for Institutional Research (SAAIR) conference. The Conference will be virtual and will take place from 2 to 5 November 2021. The 2021 conference will focus on the *adaptability, resilience, and future-centricity of higher education*.

The SAAIR annually convenes scholars, academics, higher education practitioners, and researchers with an interest in institutional research, planning, and quality assurance in higher education. The SAAIR encourages proposals from, and attendance of, all those interested in institutional research, learning analytics, quality assurance, strategic and academic planning, as well as related areas such as teaching and learning and all its associated sub-disciplines and fields of study.

Publication of proceedings

The UFS and SAAIR are excited to invite high-quality papers for publication. Special arrangements have been made to publish peer-reviewed conference proceedings. Authors are urged to indicate if they intend to use this opportunity to publish their work. Please indicate your interest on the link provided below under *proposal submission*.



The SAAIR is excited to invite you to submit a proposal to present a paper, panel, or pre-conference workshop at the SAAIR Conference 2021.

ADAPTABLE, RESILIENT, AND FUTURE-CENTRIC HIGHER EDUCATION

The unprecedented disruptions in 2020 caused by the Covid-19 pandemic compelled us to change our strategies and conventional approaches. While taking up this challenge, higher education institutions (HEIs) have been adjusting their operations to a new and uncertain reality. Universities have had to rethink and embrace digital technologies while realising that the future is now. The pandemic prompted us to reimagine the business models of higher education, including teaching and learning, student support, and human resources (HR), just to name a few. The resilience of HEIs has been severely tested; student and staff fatigue and subsequent compromised wellbeing have been widely reported.

As we begin to understand the impact of Covid-19 there is an appreciation of the role of data in informing decision making to adapt to this new reality. The work of institutional research (IR) offices has been at the core in this regard. The agility of institutional researchers and related professionals continue to be tested in 2021. What is clear now is that the digitalisation of higher education has become the norm. There are debates about artificial intelligence (AI) becoming a reality. The need for data and learning analytics has been amplified. Also, questions have emerged about how universities can assure quality in blended programmes.

To this end, institutional researchers and planners are being asked to do more for universities to fully adapt to these changes. However, as we look back at some of the challenges of the past, questions are being asked about the role of IR. Can IR predict HEIs future needs concerning transformation, student recruitment, enrolment, success, and skillsets needed in the future world of work? Whatever the future of higher education is, what is apparent is that the work of IR will be central to the changes.

Papers, panels and pre-conference workshops that relate to the following sub-themes are invited:

Institutional researchers as agents of change and transformation in higher education

This sub-theme acknowledges that HEIs have been resilient in responding to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. What is the contribution of institutional researchers and planners in building this resilience and evaluating persisting challenges? Has the institutional researcher become an agent of change and transformation in higher education? Have we fully recovered from the unprecedented turmoil of 2020? What does this recovery mean for HEIs resilience after Covid-19? How have institutional researchers contributed towards a transition in higher education from planning for efficiency to designing for resilience? How have institutional researchers contributed to the new normal in higher education through creativity, collaboration, and communication?

Borderless Higher Education in the making: Impact on the levers of transformation planning, quality, and funding.

This sub-theme highlights a shift to classrooms without walls and what this means for the quality of our programmes. Digitalisation of higher education has taken on a new life in these times of blended learning. What are the implications of digitalisation for cybersecurity and student data? What opportunities and challenges have been experienced in the process of adopting blended teaching and learning? How have universities contributed towards equipping students for blended learning? What do free online lectures by HEIs mean for the future value of formal qualifications? How are universities ensuring quality in teaching and learning in blended programmes? How have data and analytical demands in the new normal impacted skills needs? Will AI finally become a reality?

Normalising ‘flexible work arrangement’: What are the pros and cons for staff, students, and institutions?

This sub-theme reflects on the swift shift to working from home during and post-national shutdown. The changes driven by the Covid-19 pandemic provide a glimpse of the future higher education world of work, where innovation rules, institutions care, and humans come first. How has this shift impacted staff productivity? Is flexible or remote work a sustainable human capital strategy in the higher education sector? How has human resource policy responded to new forms of work? How can teams maintain collegiality while isolated at home? What is the future of a standard employment relationship in higher education? How is worklife balance affected by working from home?

Students and staff well-being in the rapidly changing higher education landscape

This sub-theme highlights the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the wellbeing of students and staff. What are the stressors that increase anxiety and depressive thoughts in the context of Covid-19? What can institutional research do to improve student and staff wellbeing in the new normal? How have institutions responded to the amplified need for wellbeing support during a time when students and staff have lost loved ones while facing the pressures of completing the academic calendar? How are HEIs equipping lecturers to take care of their students' mental health? How does remote teaching and learning impact wellbeing, and how can this be mitigated? How do HEIs identify students and staff at risk for mental health problems?

Understanding transformation through the lenses of student success and access

This sub-theme reflects on the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic for the successful completion of the academic year and the enrolment of new students. How has the pandemic changed the concept of access to higher education? How have institutional researchers contributed towards resolving challenges to student success and access?

What are the evolving student data needs in the new normal? What opportunities have the pandemic presented in terms of social justice in student recruitment, enrolment, and success? How does remote teaching and learning affect student equity and inclusion? How have institutions responded to the needs of their most vulnerable students?

The predictive power of institutional research

This sub-theme focuses on the ability of institutional researchers to predict institutional trends that can inform decisions and help universities to prepare for the future. How do HEIs use predictive analytics to improve institutional performance in the three core functions? How can institutional researchers empower previously underserved decision-makers to utilise data effectively in their planning processes? What is the state of the art of predictive tools and techniques in higher education? What skills and competencies will graduates require to be successful in the future world of work? What is the value of environmental scanning in predicting the future? Will the role and functions of IR change in the future?

TYPES OF CONTRIBUTIONS

The SAAIR Conference 2021 aims to attract quality contributions from scholars, academics, higher education practitioners, and institutional researchers. To this end, we invite the following types of contributions for presentation at the Conference:

Contributed paper (CP)

This is a scholarly paper in which the author or authors share research results. Such a paper may draw from a research report, a case study, or the use and application of a particular research methodology, or may address particular theoretical and conceptual issues relevant to the theme of the conference. The proposed paper can be based on original data collection or secondary data analysis and can be based on quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methodology. Contributed papers will be scheduled in 30-minute slots of which at least 10 minutes should be dedicated to discussion.

Panel discussion (PD)

This is a collegial discussion of a single topic relevant to the theme of the conference by several discussants. The outline for such a presentation should describe the topic and the central issues that will be explored. It should also describe how the differing perspectives of each participant will contribute to the development of the topic. The total time allowed for a discussion panel will be 60 minutes.

Pre-conference workshop (CW)

A workshop should be aimed at facilitating active involvement by participants in deliberations around a topic relevant to the theme of the conference. It should generally consist of a brief introduction followed by planned activities/processes of engagement. The outline for a proposed workshop should describe the topic, the participant activities, the audience that will be targeted through the workshop, and its intended outcomes. The outline should also specify any special requirements that may be needed for the workshop (e.g., individual laptops for participation, venue specification, etc.). Please note that such specifications will need to fit in with the overall logistical arrangements for the conference. The total time allowed for a conference workshop will be 90 minutes

PROPOSAL EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation of proposals is an important activity to ensure the quality of submissions. The SAAIR Executive Committee is committed to coordinating the evaluation process in a fair, objective, and rigorous manner whilst also considering issues such as the representation of all types of higher education institutions across Southern Africa.

In facilitating this, the following should be noted:

- A panel of experts will be constituted to assess proposals against a predetermined list of quality criteria (see below).
- All evaluations are undertaken through a double-blind review process.
- Where proposals are rated at roughly the same level of quality, the evaluation committee will consider the number of proposals by an individual researcher, and the type of institution to which the individual researcher(s) are affiliated in order to ensure reasonable diversity without neglecting the quality requirements as evaluated by the peer review panel.
- Contributions that seek to make a scholarly contribution to addressing the theme of the conference will be given first priority of acceptance. However, submissions that do not directly address the theme of the conference will also be considered, provided that they have a clear focus on one or more of the objectives of the SAAIR, namely “to benefit, assist and advance institutional research leading to improved understanding, planning and operation of institutions of higher education”.

General criteria applicable to all proposals

1. Whether the proposal links to one or more of the SAAIR’s, objectives *namely “to benefit, assist and advance institutional research leading to improved understanding, planning and operation of institutions of higher education”*.
2. The degree to which the proposal links to the Conference theme (*Submissions that do not directly address the theme or sub-themes of the conference will also be considered, provided that they have a clear focus on one or more of the objectives of SAAIR*).
3. The overall clarity of the proposal (e.g., quality of writing, organisation of ideas, clarity of assumptions, the logic of arguments).
4. The importance, significance, and relevance of the topic and major issue(s) addressed for institutional research.
5. The potential significance of the contribution.

Specific criteria applicable to contributed papers

1. Appropriateness of theoretical or conceptual framework.
2. Soundness of research design.
3. Appropriateness of data sources or evidence used.
4. Clarity of exposition of ideas, analyses, arguments, and conclusions.
5. Evidence that the research is near completion and that the paper will be completed by the time of the conference (e.g., preliminary results).

Specific criteria applicable to panel discussions

1. Overall focus of the panel discussion and major issues/viewpoints addressed.
2. How the collective issues/viewpoints fit together to create a coherent whole.
3. How the proposed panel will provide a learning experience of value to delegates.
4. Clarity of exposition of ideas, analyses, arguments, and conclusions.

Specific criteria applicable to pre-conference workshops

1. Overall focus of the workshop and major issues addressed.
2. Soundness of design.
3. Appropriateness of data sources or evidence used.
4. Clarity of exposition of ideas, analyses, arguments, and conclusions to be shared with participants.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Members of the SAAIR and other interested colleagues are invited to respond to this call for contributions to the 2021 Conference.

To assist the organisers in selecting contributions, interested persons are requested to complete the proposal template provided as an annexure with this call. The template collects information about the proposed paper, panel or workshop; and presenter(s).

Presenters/authors are requested to submit **an outline or abstract** of their proposed contribution to <https://forms.gle/gzydChcs5evrpd637>. Outlines and abstracts should be submitted in the following formats:

Format for contributed papers, panel discussion and workshop outlines (required for peer evaluation)

1. No identifying information about the author(s). This should be provided on the template.
2. English language only
3. Not exceeding **500 words** in length, but providing enough detail to evaluate the proposal
4. Illustrations, graphs, or references may be included if these will assist with the evaluation process.
5. It should be evident from the outline how the proposal will meet the general criteria as well as the specific criteria applicable to the type of contribution.

Please submit your proposal to <https://forms.gle/gzydChcs5evrpd637> by

Monday, 31 May 2021