



Executive Summary

We extend our sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of the Southern African Association for Counselling and Development (SAACDHE) Inaugural Conference held from 11 to 13 September 2023 at the Protea by Marriott Hotel Stellenbosch, Western Cape.

The conference was awarded 15 General CEU and 1 Ethics CEU for HPCSA, as well as 9 General CEU for SACSSP.

The Southern African Association for Counselling and Development (SAACDHE) hosted its Inaugural Conference from 11 to 13 September 2023 at the Protea by Marriott Hotel Stellenbosch, Western Cape. The theme for the SAACDHE conference was *Returning, Remembering, Reconnecting*. The conference was attended by 137 delegates from higher education institutions all over South Africa. The purpose of the conference was to promote, guide and advance best practices in Counselling, Career and Development Services at higher education institutions in Southern Africa.

The Regional Institutions: Western Cape:

1. Cape Peninsula University of Technology
2. Stellenbosch University
3. University of Cape Town
4. University of the Western Cape

Conference Organising Committee:

1. Laetitia Permall - University of the Western Cape
2. Megan Brink - University of the Western Cape
3. Charl Davids - Stellenbosch University
4. Lizzie Witbooi - Stellenbosch University
5. Anri Magerman - Stellenbosch University
6. Leanie Brits - Cape Peninsula University of Technology
7. Londiwe Madikizela - University of Cape Town
8. Amy-Lee Daniels - Cape Peninsula University of Technology
9. Padi Phala - Cape Peninsula University of Technology

CONTENTS:

1. Objectives
2. Overview of the conference
3. Registration and Attendance Tracking Software
4. Overall assessment of the conference
5. Recommendations
6. Appendix:
 - Conference programme
 - Financial overview
 - Award recipients
 - List of attendees

1. Objectives

The purpose of the conference was to promote, guide and advance best practices in Counselling, Career and Development Services at higher education institutions in Southern Africa.

2. Overview of the conference

The conference theme overview: Returning, Remembering, Reconnecting: Leading VUCA Change

1. ***From Volatility to Vision***
 - A reconceptualised discourse for student affairs
 - Student-centered success
2. ***From Uncertainty to Understanding***
 - Embracing Diversity
 - Amplifying the Student's Voice
3. ***From Complexity to Clarity***
 - Ecosystems that foster wellness
 - Evidence-based practitioner research
4. ***From Ambiguity to Agility***
 - Glocalization of services and practices
 - Collaboration and stakeholder engagement

The conference programme included keynote speeches, panel discussions, best practice workshop, and a plenary. Each sub-theme featured a variety of sessions, including paper/oral presentations, and workshop sessions.

Some of the highlights of the conference included:

Keynote speakers:

- Prof. Jason Bantjes - South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC)
- Dr. (Professor) Ramneek Ahluwalia - Chief Executive Officer, Higher Health
- Dr. Shahieda Jansen - Deputy Director: Academic and ITC Support - University of South Africa

Panel discussion:

Charting New Horizons: Women in Leadership Driving Change in Student Affairs

Dr Kelebogile Choice Makhetha Senior Director: Division of Student Affairs - Stellenbosch University

Prof Matete Madiba Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Development and Support - University of the Western Cape

Ms. Nonkosi Tyolwana Director: Centre for Diversity, Inclusivity & Social Change - Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Workshops:

- Best Practice - *Sharing Institutional Insights and Strategies*
- Wellness - Drummin, Movement and Art

Plenary: Department of Student Affairs Strategic Framework 2035

Mr Pura Mgolombane - Executive Director: Student Affairs - University of Cape Town

Social events:

- Cocktail evening (Networking session)
- Gala Awards evening

3. Registration and Attendance: Use of the Attrahent Software “Conftools”

The Attrahent software “Conftools” was used as a pilot during this conference to facilitate 1) conference registration bookings, 2) generating invoices and processing payments, 3) submit abstracts and review, 4) scan attendance and track delegates for CPD points.

The COC team had various engagements with the service provider to set-up the system and attend to any technical matters. The system was found to be very user friendly and enabled the COC to efficiently manage the registration, abstract submission and review process, and attendance tracking processes with ease. The system can be run by one or two people, thereby limiting the burden on conference organizing staff and optimizing the use of resources. This software and service is an all-in-one system that is a must-have to run any conference administrative process effectively.

There were minor challenges experienced relating to the use of the system. A few delegates registered twice or thrice, and some delegates struggled to download the invoice generated by the system (not a system error, I found delegates did not know how to download a pdf format). The separate registration links for individual and group registration also contributed toward some duplication. Some delegates struggled to track back to an incomplete registration and hence duplicate registrations came about. These challenges can easily be improved on with slight changes to the registration set-up and a pre-registration communique to potential delegates. Some delegates also did not receive the Conftools emails as it was blocked by their institution firewall or went to the junk folder. Knowing this now, delegates can request their institutions to add the Conftools site and email address to their approved mail list, or alternatively use another email address.

The abstract system was easy to use, and the abstract pack and information easily downloaded. Knowledge on how to view special characters in excel is needed to use Unicode (UTF-8) when downloading abstracts. The abstract review system made the reviewing process very easy. It was straightforward to set-up reviewers and assign abstracts. The review scores and comments appear on one screen and it was easy to stay up to date with the status of each abstract. The system permitted easy feedback to the author upon each paper status change. Minor changes to the Abstract system specifications can be made, such as uploading multiple CVs for the different authors, and selecting multiple authors to be presenters. With the abstract review system, improved viewing of the abstract reviewer scores, to see a completed list of reviews per name of reviewer.

The attendance tracking and CPD scanning process similarly was straightforward to use. The final programme sessions have to be created on the system and points assigned. The system generates the name tags with the QR codes for scanning that can be downloaded. Tracking during scanning is simplistic and downloading excel sheets for every session was easy.

Should this system, or a similar system be used by future COCs, the end user should be very comfortable using computers and have intermediate excel skills. The responsible person has to learn a new interface and completely manage the 'back office' of the functionality of the system, such as set-up of different invoice amounts, updating payment statuses, sending out bulk emails from the system etc. I would highly recommend the use of this system in future.

4. Overall assessment of the conference

Four themes were highlighted:

1. **Positive Highlights:** Attendees enjoyed the keynote addresses, sessions with past presidents, and the opportunity to share knowledge among Higher Education Institutions regarding mental health services. Delegates expressed appreciation for the integration of wellness activities and the manner in which the conference theme was woven into the conference experience.
2. **Organizational Excellence:** The conference was commended for its excellent organization, creating a welcoming and enjoyable atmosphere for all participants.
3. **Areas for Improvement:** Concerns were raised about the hotel facilities, including seating comfort, temperature control, and the availability of relaxing spaces. Issues with meal quality, variety, and service were also noted.
4. **Overall Satisfaction:** Despite these concerns, most attendees expressed gratitude for the conference and its positive impact on professional development and collaboration.

5. Recommendations

SAACDHE national should compile a conference information pack for the new conference organizing committee which includes all due dates for COC submissions, all templates for financial record keeping, all SAACDHE logos, letterheads, lists of membership etc.

SAACDHE national should compile clear directives on how to manage delegate deregistration a week/ day before the conference, and how to deal with delegate non-attendance when they registered. This has a tremendous cost burden on the conference expenditure as preparations are finalized by that time and expenses incurred to welcome guests, that cannot be recouped.

6. Appendices

- 1. Conference programme**
- 2. Financial overview**
- 3. Evaluations List of award recipients**
- 4. List of attendees**