



UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE



UMSAEP REPORT

ASTRID VILLAMIL
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA

2024
JULY

INCLUSION, SOLIDARITY AND ADVOCACY IN A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

This research collaboration explored equity and inclusion processes at UWC. Specifically our team investigated how advocacy and solidarity emerges in institutional spaces.

THE TEAM



We partnered with the members of UWC's Gender Equity Unit. The GEU is the oldest gender equity office in the continent. Its mission is to promote Women and Gender equity and social justice at UWC and beyond.

Pictured in the photo (L-R): Astrid Villamil, Maria Van Staden, Liphoko Makapela, Fikile Vilakazi, Scotti Branton, and Maria Claassen. There are other members of the GEU team not pictured in the photo.

SUMMARY

My collaborator Dr. Scott Branton and I arrived in Cape Town on July 5th, 2024. The rainy season was one of the heaviest Cape Town has seen in years. UWC closed for a week so we spent our first week in Cape Town at our apartment. During that time, we met with the GEU team via zoom and ultimated details of our visit. It was also a time for us to get acclimated to the city, its food, trasportation, and other living details.



PROJECT GOALS

1. To investigate the challenges, tensions, and opportunities that UWC community members face when materializing equity and inclusion efforts.
2. To describe alternative ways to think about equity and inclusion that don't follow dominant practices increasingly favoring economic and new market logics.
3. To build and maintain reciprocal and longstanding relationships between UWC and Missouri.

METHODOLOGY

In adopting a decolonial approach, we engaged in convivial ethnography where fieldwork is a “thick co-construction” of knowledge that disrupts categorical differences embedded in traditional observational configurations that tend to reinforce epistemological power imbalances (researcher → research subjects).



PICTURED: Fikile, Scotti, Limpho, and Astrid talking about the history and past leadership of the GEU



PICTURED: Scotti helping with set up for a educational training given by GEU members.



PICTURED: Educational training given by GEU members



PICTURED: Fikile, Scotti, Dr. Ivette, and Astrid after talking about the queer feminist efforts involved in overturning apartheid.



PICTURED: Meeting with Deputy Vice Chancellor for Student Development and Support Prof. Matete Madiba



PICTURED: Meeting with Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research & innovation Prof. José Franz



PICTURED: Braai evening



PICTURED: Student volunteers at the GEU

OUTCOMES

Our return from Cape Town in August did not mean the end of our partnership with the GEU. Instead, it signified the beginning of other chapters in our collaboration. Since then we have been able to yield the following outcomes:

1. Supported our GEU collaborators in submitting an application for the UMSAEP Program in 2025. The application was successful and they will be visiting Columbia, MO in September 2025. The name of their research project is: **“A comparative analysis of how diversity and inclusion looks like in an institution of higher learning in the United States and South Africa: A case study of the University of Missouri and the University of the Western Cape”**
2. Analyzed and wrote up data collected from our visit. Submitted a manuscript for publication to the Journal of International and Intercultural Communication. The name of the manuscript is **“Solidarity and Advocacy at a South African Institution: Tracing Convivial Efforts for Institutional Equity.”**
3. Plan next stages of research project that will require future visits.