Stellenbosch Theological Journal 2024, Vol 10, No 2, 1–25
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2024.v10n2.8
Online ISSN 2226-2385 | Print ISSN 2413-9459
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Perspectives on theological training in times of crisis: A response by using the five Stellenbosch University values

Ian Nell
Stellenbosch University, South Africa
ianell@sun.ac.za

Abstract

When crises arise, like in the case of the #FeesMustFall-movement (FMF) during 2015–2017, we often tend to be reactive in our actions and immediate plans are made to address the crisis. In this contribution, however, I want to look at a longer-term solution by making use of Stellenbosch University's five core values. The values of excellence, respect, responsibility, equity, and compassion will be examined in this contribution to empower lecturers who prepare students for church ministry. The basic research question that will be investigated is: How can the five core values of Stellenbosch University help the lecturers with the preparation of students for ecclesiastical training in times of crisis? In response to this, each of the values will first be explained, after which their meaning and impact on theological training will be examined. Afterwards, some crises in the theological training will be investigated where some of the values conflict with each other. At the end, we will turn to the re-scripting of the narrative of higher education by looking at the extended curriculum program (ECP) at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University.

Keywords

Values; Code 2040; #FeesMustFall; theological training; extended curriculum program (ECP)

Introduction

In a lecture delivered on 3 November 1989, to celebrate the 130th anniversary of the Theological Faculty at the University of Stellenbosch, Rossouw (1993:124–138) gives an overview of what he considers to be

some of the most important crises, challenges, and opportunities of the modern University and relate them to theological education. He organises his thoughts based on a three-point distinction and discusses the following basic facets of theological education:

- Firstly, there is *intellectual formation*, by which he means schooling in theology as a discipline of thought with its methodology and problematics and with its developmental dynamics and logic. According to Rossouw theological education must teach people to think theologically, to be able to ask theological questions and to be able to search for theological answers in the right way.
- The second facet of theological education is what he calls *institutional preparation*. Theological education is an academic activity, but on the other hand, it cannot be separated from the institution within which the recipient of this education must live and work. According to Rossouw theological education must therefore also consider the demands made by the organizational structure and by the internal and external institutional relationships of the church and the University in which the theologically trained must find a home and give guidance.
- According to Rossouw the third facet of theological training is that it should offer *professional training*. By that, he means the training for the specific requirements that fulfil the minister's office. The theological candidate must learn certain skills, codes of conduct, values, and behaviour. Skills, values, and codes that are necessary to perform his ministry tasks in such a way that they meet the expectations that society cherishes of a functional practitioner.

Although this lecture was given 35 years ago and many other crises did appear on the horizon in the meantime, I think the three facets of theological education are still relevant and in all three of the different facets that Rossouw distinguishes, certain underlying values are at work. The focus of this contribution falls under his second facet, which deals with institutional preparation and then with specific reference to the role of the University. In other words, it is through the lenses of the University's values that we want to explore theological education in times of crisis. Therefore, the basic research question for this article can be formulated in the

following way: How can the five core values of Stellenbosch University help the lecturers with the preparation of students for ecclesiastical training in times of crisis?

Before discussing the core values that Stellenbosch University decided on, we must first turn to the crisis Universities faced during the past decade. Without fear of contradiction, I think the *#FeesMustFall* (FMF) movement (2015–2107) was probably the biggest single crisis that Universities in South Africa have faced in recent times. Becker (2022:33) concurs when she writes: "I argue that the student movements of 2015–2016 were the primary cause of robust conversations about epistemological and pedagogical issues that had previously not been raised in the post-apartheid South African society". Some thoughts about the movement will now be addressed.

#FeesMustFall movement in South Africa, 2015-2017

There are several different perspectives from which one can look at the crisis this movement introduced (Blackmur 2021). One can look at the development or evolution of the movement (Dlamini 2019; Booysen 2016), at the extraordinary violence by some participants in the movement (Chikane 2018), or at the grounds on which the FMF justified their attack on the South African University's system (Habib 2019), or at the financing of higher education qualifications (Blackmur 2019), or at the cost of higher education qualifications in brick-and-mortar institutions and other alternatives (Shizas et al 2020). The perspective from which I would like to look at the crisis is the challenges that the FMF posed to the established values of academic freedom, intellectual inquiry, and institutional autonomy. In this regard, it is the works of Jansen (2017), Linden (2017), Blackmur (2019), Stewart (2015) and Habib (2019) that address the subject.

As far as *academic freedom* is concerned, it is particularly the discussion about the future of liberal scholarship, with specific reference to the humanities at South African universities, that is of interest here (Stewart 2015). The FMF's questioning of and resistance to the historical values that underpin a liberal democracy joins similar conversations that are also found internationally. One example is the so-called "Maple Spring" in Canada. According to Jansen (2017:242), there is a potential contradiction

in the FMF's model for the reforms that universities must undergo. He writes that if the FMF were to succeed in ensuring all its management, curriculum and financial objectives, the wider South African society would then be left with many graduates who would probably be ill-equipped to respond adequately to the requirements of employers because they have not received sufficient professional training. If this were to be the case, it would make the future of the South African university uncertain.

A further consequence could be that professional academics and graduates who want to obtain positions internationally will most likely not be welcome as the reputation of South African higher education will be seriously in jeopardy. Jansen (2017:249-51) is further of the opinion that the violence and destruction that accompanied the FMF protests frightened many investors and made them unwilling to further engage and invest in the South African economy. The marginalized and the poor are of course the worst off when this starts to happen. At the same time, the FMF's actions also showed that major disruptions in higher education can have macroeconomic effects on the country. Jansen (2017:251) is therefore not without reason pessimistic when he writes about the possibility of "the end of the South African university" considering the pressure generated by and around the FMF.

Concerning *intellectual inquiry*, it is according to Habib (2019:107) general knowledge that the FMF has no place for Western scientific methods and knowledge in their understanding of the curriculum as well as in the reforms they have in mind for the curriculum. Therefore, it is particularly noteworthy that a leader of the FMF at one stage referred to "the physical sciences as a product of western modernity and should be scratched out. We would have to restart science from the way we experienced it". The student argued that there were places "where people believed that witchcraft could cause lightning to strike someone, and she wanted the science curriculum to explain and teach this" (Jansen 2017:155–56). Consequently, the practice of science born out of valid argumentation, genuine debate, the presentation of proper evidence and so on was alien to the FMF. The direct consequence of this was that the principles of academic freedom were rejected. We see a good example of this in the fact that the teaching of traditional economics was rejected and replaced with only Marxist economics. The curriculum had to be developed so that it corresponds to the student's specific political

and ideological presuppositions (Habib 2019:107–8). Jansen argues that the curriculum advocated by the FMF was driven by Pan-African impulses: "The call for Africanisation in the curriculum is a nationalist imperative that asserts African identity and rejects the imitation of Europe in the quest for African knowledge, culture, and aspirations" (Jansen 2017:159). Jansen suggests, moreover, that "at the heart of the protest movement's most popular understanding of decolonisation – namely, the 'hard version' of Africanisation – sits a dangerous nativism often expressed in racist terms' and that FMF has disfigured Africanisation into some form or racial essentialism" (Jansen 2017:167–168).

The last aspect to which I would like to draw attention here relates to the powers of university councils to set their tuition fees. In this act, a large part of *South African Universities' autonomy* is locked up. With the FMF wielding tremendous pressure that University fees may not be increased, it has jeopardized the autonomy of universities. The eventual result of this pressure was that the national government not only gave in to the pressure to keep the fees the same but also gave in to the FMF's demands that certain outsourced functions be carried out internally (Jansen 2017:232–33, 241). According to Linden (2017:32-33, 40), the attacks on the autonomy of universities went even further as was the case with the South African Students' Congress (SASCO). This organization maintained that "institutional autonomy and academic freedom continue to be used and abused as a defence mechanism by reactionary universities that refuse to transform" (SASCO 2015:4). According to Linden (2017:32–33), the direct consequences of this are that students have become strong, even militant, opponents of the traditional understanding of a universities' autonomy.

From the abovementioned, it is very clear that the FMF has not only challenged the South African higher education system but has also revealed a wide range of failures and shortcomings in the system of higher education. These failures can be observed in all the participants in the system, including the students. We observed how violence was an effective tool in the hands of students to change policies and how the crisis also exposed the unequal cost structure. We have a precedent here in the University of Paris riots in the 1960s. According to Blackmur (2019:29), this crisis also has relevance for the global world of higher education: "The FeesMustFall

crisis revealed various tensions and pressures in higher education that may be of considerable relevance globally."

SU Code 2040

The development of SU Code 2040 at Stellenbosch University involved collaborative efforts from various stakeholders within the university. This initiative was designed to promote organizational integrity and ethical culture, and it combined inputs from both staff and students. The Code was overseen by the university's management and strategic planning teams. It aimed to embed values such as excellence, respect, compassion, and accountability into the university's operations and interactions. The project also included a variety of workshops and training programs to support staff and students in aligning their behaviours with these values. For more detailed information, you can visit the official pages on Stellenbosch University's website: Code 2040 Overview and Values in Action.

On 28 November 2022, Code 2040 (Stellenbosch University's integrated ethics code) was approved and accepted by the Senate. In the context statement, we read under point 2:

Code 2040 was developed regarding the governance principles set out in SU's Statute and in recognition of the fact that good governance does not stem primarily from legal imperatives but from an ethical commitment (underpinned by SU's strong institutional values of excellence, respect, equity, compassion, and accountability). SU is a public tertiary institution that utilises public funds and is accountable for doing so in an ethical and accountable manner. Code 2040 gives expression to our unique institutional legacy as the unfinished and ongoing task of ethically advancing knowledge in service of society. SU Vision strategy review: [Online]. Available: https://www.sun.ac.za/english/management/SUvisionstrategyreview/Pages/Code-2040.aspx

Point 3 under context states:

> Code 2040 can best be described as an integrated ethics code, which seeks to translate SU's institutional values into a set of high-level regulative guidelines that govern conduct at SU. Code 2040 is thus aspirational and directional. However, its primary focus is

> on our values – rather than legalistic compliance – as the basis for behaviour that we aspire to.

Concerning the purpose of the Code 2040 we read:

The overall purpose of Code 2040 is to support the ethical realisation of Vision 2040 by promoting professional and responsible behaviour that, inter alia, contributes towards:

a) a systemically sustainable and flourishing institution.

b) adherence to legislation and regulations (including the Constitution, the Higher Education Act, the SU Statute, 'Guidelines for good governance practice and governance indicators for councils of South African public higher education institutions', and King IV).

c) an ethical organisational culture built on shared values.

d) consistent stakeholder trust and accountability.

e) responsiveness to stakeholder expectations; and

f) educating well-rounded, responsible, and ethical citizens.

Although it is not explicitly mentioned in the document, the crisis surrounding the FMF as well as the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the development of Code 2040. From the objectives of the document, it is especially point (c) an ethical organizational culture built on shared values, and point (f) educating well-rounded, responsible, and ethical citizens, which is important for this contribution. We will now look at the five institutional values.

Five core values

The *vision* of Stellenbosch University is: "Stellenbosch University will be Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognised as excellent, inclusive and innovative, where we advance knowledge in service of society." (https://www.sun.ac.za/english/about-us/strategic-documents#Vision). The mission statement is: "Stellenbosch University is a research-intensive university, where we attract outstanding students, employ talented staff and provide a world-class environment; a place

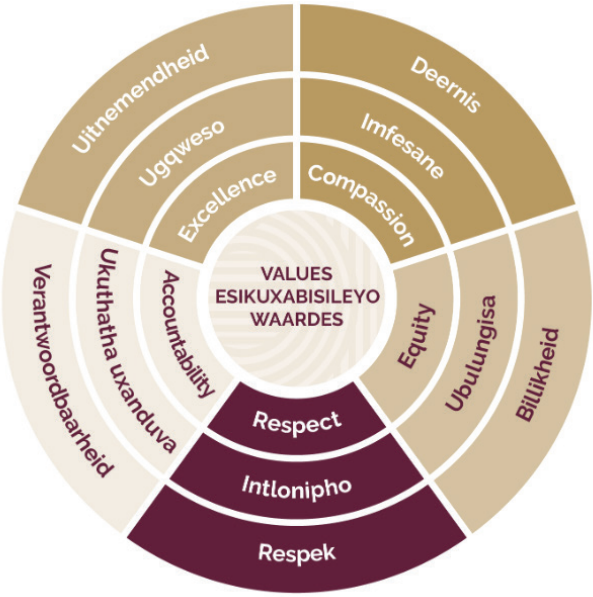
connected to the world while enriching and transforming local, continental and global communities." (https://www.sun.ac.za/english/about-us/strategic-documents#Mission) Concerning the *values*: "Our values relate to the beliefs and attitudes that guide our behaviour ('our action guides'). All the values are equally important, are interconnected and will inform Stellenbosch University's ethics code." (https://www.sun.ac.za/english/about-us/strategic-documents#Values).

The five values are: "*Excellence* (academic freedom to pursue knowledge that adheres to the highest standards of integrity, innovation and relevance); *Compassion* (recognition of, and care for, the well-being of all our students and staff); *Equity* (restitution in response to our past legacy and fairness in our aspirations); *Respect* (civility in our mutual and public discourse, due regard for the freedom, equality and dignity of all, and respect for the environment); *Accountability* (accepting the highest level of responsibility for our actions)" (SU Vision strategy review: [Online]. Available: https://www.sun.ac.za/english/management/SUvisionstrategyreview/Pages/Code-2040.aspx)

In recognition of the principles outlined in Code 2040, Stellenbosch University always pledges itself to ethical behaviour, specifically relating to excellence in our work, equity, respect, and compassion in our interaction with others, and accountability for our actions.

- We pledge to conduct our work in a manner that demonstrates excellence.
- We pledge to always treat our stakeholders equitably, and with respect and compassion.
- We pledge to be accountable for the execution and consequences of all our actions.

(https://www.sun.ac.za/english/management/SUvisionstrategyreview/Pages/Code-2040.aspx)



Critiquing Stellenbosch University's SU Code 2040 from an African perspective

The *#FeesMustFall* movement, which began in 2015, highlighted the urgent need for the decolonization of the South African educational system. This includes the curriculum, which many students and scholars argue remains rooted in Eurocentric perspectives (Langa 2017:611). SU Code 2040 at Stellenbosch University aims to address some of these issues by integrating African epistemologies and more relevant, localized content into the curriculum. However, critics argue that merely adding African content is insufficient. True decolonization requires a fundamental shift in power dynamics and pedagogical approaches, ensuring that African ways of knowing are not just included but are central to the educational experience (Costandius et al 2018:67).

The #FeesMustFall protests were driven by the unaffordability of higher education for many South Africans, particularly from historically

marginalized communities. Any initiative, including SU Code 2040, must consider financial accessibility as a core component. While Stellenbosch University's efforts to reform its curriculum are commendable, they must be accompanied by broader institutional changes that address financial barriers to education. This includes reconsidering fee structures and providing more comprehensive financial support to students in need (Langa 2017:10).

The legacy of apartheid continues to influence South African universities, including Stellenbosch. Critics argue that SU Code 2040 must go beyond curricular changes to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for all students, regardless of their background. This includes addressing institutional cultures that may still marginalize non-white students and staff. Ensuring that the university environment is welcoming and supportive is essential for the success of any decolonization effort (Costandius 2018:76)

One of the strengths of the #FeesMustFall movement was its grassroots nature and the way it engaged a broad spectrum of students and community members (Langa 2017:9). For SU Code 2040 to be successful, it should involve continuous dialogue with students and the wider community. This ensures that reforms are not only top-down but also reflect the needs and aspirations of those they are meant to serve. Ongoing engagement and feedback can help the university to make necessary adjustments and improvements to its policies and practices.

In conclusion, while SU Code 2040 is a step in the right direction towards decolonizing Stellenbosch University, it must be part of a broader effort to make higher education in South Africa more inclusive, accessible, and representative of African knowledge systems. The lessons from the #FeesMustFall movement underscore the importance of addressing financial barriers, institutional culture, and continuous community engagement in the pursuit of truly transformative educational reform.

Meaning and impact of the values for theological training

From a theological perspective some of these values, in the sense in which they appear in contemporary discourses, are distinctly modern. For example, excellence and equity are not to be found in early church writings

or in the Bible, whereas respect, compassion and accountability do have deep biblical roots.

Concerning *excellence*, Christian believers are of two minds. As ordinary believers we long for excellence in our lives and as lecturers we also want to train students who are excellent in their ministry. But this excellence differs from what is understood as excellent in the world because in the world excellence is measured by achievement and competition. For someone like Paul, the excellence of the believer's life exists as an invitation to a journey, to a way of life with God and other people that is shaped by love. That is why excellence for Paul is not focused on what "I" can do over against others, thereby creating "winners" and "losers", but instead Paul calls us to an excellent life by embodying the love we find in Jesus Christ (Jones & Armstrong 2006:1).

Pohl (2001:1) poignantly describes Christian excellence:

> Within faithful Christian communities … understandings of excellence and practices of excellent ministry will often be complex and somewhat ambiguous given at least the following factors: First, at the centre of proclamation and our hope is a crucified Saviour … Second, the Kingdom of God privileges "the poor, crippled, lame, and blind," and faithful followers of Christ have a distinctive call to welcome "the least" to our tables and into our congregations … Third, while pursuing holiness (or excellence), Christians recognise the persistent reality of human sinfulness. We all depend on God's forgiveness and healing as our struggles with sin, or its consequences are part of daily congregational life. And finally, our motives and efforts in ministry are often a strange mixture of sin and grace, skill, and frailty.

Equity, which we usually find within the fields of politics and economics, could indeed be grounded in the Being of God as Trinity and from that we could also derive a model for human society. Historically and theologically, the Trinity functioned as a model for persons-in-relationship. The first thing one notices is that within this social model of Father, Son, and Spirit, they are co-equal in status and that there is a dialogic relationship of reciprocity and self-giving love. Boff (1988:127) makes it clear that the three persons of the Godhead do not exist as independent persons for themselves, but

for the others: "The essential characteristic of each person is to be *for* the others, *through* the others, *with* the others and *in* the others."

Theological reflection on equity must therefore go further than is the case with secular theories since it is positively grounded in the divine purpose for humanity. That purpose consists in sharing in the life of the Triune God and thereby helping to create a community of mutual love and compassion. The latter is not dependent on equality of access or opportunity but based on equal access to the grace of God revealed in Christ (Bridger 1995:353).

Respect, from a theological ethical perspective, is a very important value in a society characterized by technological progress. Men and women are created in the image of God. This fundamental theological perspective implies an inherent dignity and worth for every human being, regardless of race, culture, or socioeconomic status. The recognition of God's image in everyone evokes a call to respect. To guarantee the dignity and integrity of humanity and nature, respect therefore plays a central role. Spaeman (2011:38) spells it out as follows:

> Only if humankind transcends the anthropocentric perspective now and learns to respect the richness of all life as a value in its own right, only in a religious relationship towards nature of whatever rationale will humankind be in a position to secure in the long term the basis for the existence of humanity in conditions that are fit for human habitation.

Several biblical texts encourage respect for one's fellow human beings. In Matthew 7:12 Jesus says, "Do for others what you want them to do for you." This principle of mutual respect reflects basic Christian ethics. Christian theology emphasizes the commandment of love as the highest law. In Matthew 22:39 Jesus says, "The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.'" This love requires not only positive feelings but also an active and sincere respect for fellow human beings.

Humans and nature are both objects of respect for Christian believers. Respect can take many forms. Hudson (1986:15) distinguishes between four forms of respect according to the basis of the objects. *Evaluative respect* is earned (or not) depending on the degree to which a person meets certain

standards, such as the respect one has for a scholar, colleague or student; *obstacle respect*, is respect that one has for an object in the sense that if you do not take it into account in your decision how to act, it can hinder you in the execution; *directive respect* are guidelines such as rules, laws, rights or advice that are used to guide your actions; *institutional respect* is related to social practices and institutions where people occupy certain roles or positions in representing the institution. Behaviour that conforms to the rules prescribed is considered respectful. All four forms of respect are of importance for this contribution. One of the problems that universities encountered with the FMF movement was the disrespectful way in which they dealt with people and structures of institutions as well as with the laws and rules.

A theological perspective on *compassion* underlines its divine origin. Jesus Christ is considered the embodiment of compassion and believers see compassion as a gift from God. Jesus' life on earth was a demonstration of compassion towards the helpless, the sick, and the marginalized. In Matthew 9:36 we read, "When He saw the multitudes, He felt compassion for them because they were tired and helpless like sheep without a shepherd." Compassion is not only a feeling but a calling to participate in the work of God's love in the world. Paul encourages believers … "Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ" (Eph 4:32).

According to Parkyn (1995:244), compassion consists of both the emotion one experiences when a person is moved by the suffering of another as well as the act of doing something about the suffering of another by acting. The first is related to the *desire* to alleviate the suffering of another while the second has to do with the *act of doing* something about the suffering. Put another way, compassion has more to do with "action" than simply "talking" about it.

> The person who shows and lives compassion, therefore, accepts responsibility to heal, bring hope and minister justice. Compassion is the avenue by which God's grace and Spirit – spiritually, emotionally, and physically – come to those in need…. Compassion, further, must not be limited to personal relationships. It must also be directed to social problems. Where there is hunger, compassion

> requires feeding the hungry. Where there is poverty, compassion requires economic justice. Where there is oppression, compassion requires social and political reform (Parkyn 1995:244).

Accountability, from a theological perspective, starts with accountability towards God. The Christian faith emphasizes that people are part of God's creation and that we are created in God's image. From this follows the divine call to obedience and responsibility towards the Creator. The Bible encourages believers to devote their whole lives to God and his will. In Proverbs 3:6 we read, "Remember the Lord in everything you do, and he will show you the right way." accountability also includes the care for the creation and promotion of justice. The Christian Scriptures also call believers to stewardship of the earth and active participation in the establishment of justice in society. Isaiah 1:17 says, "And learn to do right. See that justice is done – help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows.'

In a thought-provoking article on "Theological education and character formation: perceptions of theological leaders and students", Magezi & Madimutsa (2023:6) discuss the nature and process of character formation. They did empirical research and gave an account of the views of some of the theological educators. They quote one of the deans who highlighted: "… that character formation denoted 'fruits of the spirit' in which honesty, integrity, transformation, and accountability is categorised as essential qualities.'" (Academic Dean 2, college B, male). Writing on the role of theological educators in character formation, accountability is recognisable in the following comments:

> They argued that they had a critical role in the delivery of the academic and co-curricular programs of the college. They perceived themselves as mentors and conduits through which character formation can take place. This perception is important because it places the responsibility of character formation on the previous generation of leaders who were deemed as representing moral figures in society. Exposing students to study the lifestyles of such revered people in society helps to shape their character. Furthermore, the character of the theological educator is primary as it is the mirror image of that of their students. The emphasis that the

> participants in this study placed on the character of the theological educator suggests that the role modelling of theological educators is important for the character formation of students (Magezi & Madimutsa 2023:7).

Accountability towards the students and accountability towards the institution (University or Church) form a key component of the work of theological educators. Together the five values function in synchrony.

Crises and conflicting values

Crises such as the behaviour of the FMF movement often result in conflict. Conflict is usually experienced on different levels: On an *individual level,* it manifests as an internal struggle within an individual. Psychological theories such as Freud's structure of the personality (id, ego, and superego) contributed to the understanding of inner conflicts (Yorke 1994:375). On an *interpersonal level*, one finds conflict between individuals as part of human interaction. Social identity theory explains how people identify themselves with specific groups and how these identifications can cause interpersonal conflict (Haslam et al 2020:56). At the community level, one finds conflict in interactions within the community. Social conflict theory looks at the role of the struggle for power, class, race, and other social structures (Jackson 1993:395). At the *societal level*, conflict occurs within the structural and social dynamics of societies. The theory of systemic violence gives insight into the occurrence of large-scale conflicts (Keeble 2021:276).

Although one can observe each of the levels of conflict in the FMF movement's activities, it is especially on the community level that I want to concentrate in this contribution. Already since the beginning of democracy, the South African higher education system has struggled with unequal student access to universities because of our apartheid history. To try to correct this and due to the pressure of the FMF movement, higher education institutions often grant access just to increase participation figures. However, mere physical access without students also receiving a reasonable chance of success (epistemological access) exacerbates the unfairness in the system (Van Niekerk 2024:1).

According to Mzangwa (2019:5), higher education institutions expand access in two main ways, namely by providing financial assistance to students from low-income families, and by modifying admissions policies and selection criteria to be sensitive to students' socio-economic circumstances. Access is divided into physical and epistemological access (Cele and Brandt 2005:3) According to Sehoole and Adeyemo (2016:4), physical access is access (from outside) to the space and resources of higher education institutions by ensuring that those who enter these institutions be eligible for it; in contrast, epistemological access refers to access (from within) to the curriculum content and the required knowledge to study successfully. Physical access is supported by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and epistemological access through foundation programmes and teaching development grants. More about epistemological access is discussed further down.

Efforts to expand higher education access (equity) and to improve students' chances of success (excellence) are often at odds, in other words, we have a conflict of values. Higher education success is usually measured by graduation and progress rates for different socio-economic student groups and by the quality of their performance (Allais 2017:150). However, institutions struggle to increase their pass rates due to students' lack of readiness for tertiary study (Wilson-Strydom 2011:407). Improving the quality of high school education as a component in the drive for readiness to access higher education, should be a priority. The emphasis should therefore be on meaningful and regulated access rather than access for the sake of higher participation rates. When granting access to higher education institutions, success should be a priority. This involves the efficient and effective use of scarce resources and the establishment of admission criteria that are directly related to the requirements for higher education success. Success is not only linked to the fact that students come from challenging circumstances. Sometimes students with a high admission rate don't pass either (Coughlan 2006:210).

Most students approach university study with enormous expectations. They believe they will excel academically, have a busy social life, make lifelong friends, and start a rewarding career shortly after graduation. These students often assume that their high school study habits and achievements can be transferred to the university environment in the

same way. Nevertheless, they soon realize that university is completely different from any other learning environment they have encountered. Even if they gain access, students from underrepresented and historically marginalized groups often show lower graduation rates. They often end up at less prestigious higher education institutions and therefore have limited and inferior labour market prospects (Salmi 2023).

Therefore, institutions should guard against admitting students simply for the sake of expanding access and correcting the injustice of the past, without providing the students with enough support so that they also have a reasonable chance of successful study. The mere expansion of access is insufficient if a fair chance of success is not also part of the plan (Coughlan 2006:216). Providing access to those who demonstrate that they can and will make the best use of the scarce and expensive higher education resources does not imply that students from disadvantaged circumstances will be disadvantaged. The assumption that such students will not succeed is inherently discriminatory because it assumes that they will fall short on all measures of achievement and excellence, even measures that are not based on matric scores (Greenbaum 2014:474).

Morrow (1994:40) used the term *epistemological access* for the first time thirty years ago, in the same year that our country became a democracy, to point out that formal access to higher education enrolments is not enough. According to him, epistemological access involves learning how to participate in an academic practice and this kind of access to knowledge cannot be granted in the same way as physical access. Brenner (2015:315) agrees with this and believes that although students may gain formal access to a university, many, especially those from disadvantaged communities, find it difficult to gain epistemological access. Epistemological access involves an understanding of the unwritten and unspoken rules and values of the institutional culture.

Coughlan (2006:213-215) writes that epistemological access requires higher education institutions to think about what they teach, how they teach it, and how they involve students in their learning. Students also have a responsibility regarding epistemological access. Students must think about what they are accessing and must learn how to participate in the higher education enrolments to which they have been admitted. Students

must be motivated to participate in the academic process which includes curriculum development, because epistemological access requires effort and without this, success is unlikely. Access is as much a responsibility as a right.

The extended curriculum programme as rescripting

There are several initiatives to ensure that the state improves access to higher education. One can call these initiatives efforts to rescript the narrative of higher education in South Africa. As part of the rescripting, we do have to take the warning of Naidoo (2024:8) seriously when she writes: "It begins with the ontology of the educator focusing on reflective 'modes of being' in response to modernity's violence. For educators, it will entail recognising and accepting one's privilege, engaging in personal growth, and practising self-reflection to abandon outdated knowledge".

In this regard, Wepener and I (2021:1-5) did some reflection in the article "White males teaching Theology at (South) African universities? Reflections on epistemological and ontological hospitality". We wrote:

> "We are theologians, we are males, we are also white, middle-aged, and privileged. In theology, as in many other disciplines, there are amongst others, African-, Black-, Latin, Womanist-, and Feminist approaches. There was however until fairly recently no Male- or White Theology. The answer to why this is the case is simple – white and male has been, and to an extent still is, the dominant (heteronormative) perspective in many academic disciplines and tertiary institutions. Realising that this is the case, is important, as we cannot divorce who we are from how and what we teach. The students that we teach reflect the full diversity of South African society (race, gender, sexual orientation etc), so in all our lectures, also in our departmental staff room, we represent a minority."

We concluded the article by asking the question: When may white privileged academics teach at African universities? We answered:

> Maybe it is not up to us to answer this question, however, we believe it is important for us to continuously reflect on the question as long as we are teaching at a tertiary institution on the continent. We are

> however convinced that it is important that we regularly surface our existing teaching philosophies so that they can be critiqued in an ongoing academic conversation.

Returning to the process of rescripting, one finds in the context of higher education that it includes recognition of prior learning, academic development programmes, foundation courses and extended curriculum programs (ECP). The extended bachelor's in theology programme (BTh) at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University is an example of this rescripting. Mouton (2024:166) writes with regards to the ECP at our faculty:

> The implementation of the ECP at the Stellenbosch Faculty of Theology needs to nurture a social justice ethic, work towards the transformation of students, lecturers, and the community, and remain rooted in a pedagogy of hope that resists narrow and marginalizing outlooks, expectations, and the pitfalls of a deficit approach to student academic development.

Since the beginning of this year (2024), we "have implemented a fully accredited ECP following the guidelines from the DHET (SA) and will include foundational courses up to the third year of studies. The ECP implies that students take an additional year to complete their degree program" (Mouton 2024:155).

The ECP at our faculty is driven by the five core values of the University to give guidance to the needs of nurturing social justice, transformation and a pedagogy of hope as explained by Mouton. The first value that we find at work in the ECP is *excellence* as part of our pledge to conduct our work in a manner that demonstrates this quality. In our commitment to excellence, the lecturers revised the content of the foundation modules to decolonize the curriculum and to provide an inclusive curriculum and pedagogy. In this way, various inequalities were challenged. The focus of decolonizing the curriculum is not intended to completely exclude Western knowledge, but the purpose is "decentring it or perhaps deterritorializing it" (Le Grange 2016:6).

In my article "Decolonising an introductory course in practical theology and missiology: Some tentative reflections on shifting identities" I tried to

describe the shifting identity of a first-year class over a decade in terms of demography and representation that inevitably led me to reflect on what I teach the students and how I facilitate the learning practice. In the process, I paid close attention to decolonisation and contextualisation and proposed a new curriculum making use of a Theo-dramatic approach to teaching practical theology to first-year students (Nell 2021:1).

Equity is the second value in which we pledge to treat the students (our stakeholders) equitably. In this regard Van Niekerk (2024:2) writes:

> Equity of success or outcome is as important as equity of access and redress. Equity considers the effects of discrimination and aims for an equal outcome. Equity … will be regarded as providing students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, ability, socio-economic status, or intersectional background, an equal opportunity to succeed. While equality means offering every student the same opportunities, equity means offering opportunities that acknowledge and address some students' disadvantages. Equality means everyone gets the same treatment, while equity means giving people what they need based on their "starting" point.

When we are serious about equity, we must, according to Jacobs, Moolman and De Beer (2019:4), take the students' social circumstances into account as this has a much greater influence on student success than the teaching method used by lecturers. Access to higher education is understood within the relevant historical, political, and economic context. Access and subsequent success cannot be analysed without also considering the relevant political and social justice issues. Access is often measured by increased participation by particularly previously disadvantaged students but is rarely viewed through the lens of social justice, where fair access is closely related to a fair chance of success (Boughey 2012:133).

The third and fourth values that come into play are *respect* and *compassion*. According to Wilson-Strydom (2011:416), the main purpose of providing foundation programmes is to provide compassionate assistance to students who are educationally disadvantaged and may not be ready for higher education, even if they meet the minimum admission requirements. These programs aim to provide academic support (or a foundation) to help these students not only to complete their studies but also to be transformed into

community leaders. The foundation program concentrates on students studying at a university for the first time. Although they are formally eligible for admission, a significant proportion of the mainstream intake is also often at risk of dropping out because they have not been adequately prepared for the requirements of the program. All these efforts are witnessing the respect and compassion with which we want to treat our students.

The last value one finds in our pledge to be *accountable* for the execution of our actions. We tried to be accountable in the development of the program by realizing that we must bear in mind that fair access is closely related to a fair chance of success, and we must therefore reconsider the students' admission requirements. We tried to concentrate less on formal access and more on epistemological access and found that we automatically no longer bear the sole responsibility for student success because epistemological access requires students to also accept responsibility for their success. Once students have gained formal entry, they must therefore reflect for themselves on the privileges and opportunities that formal entry offers them, and then equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills to actively contribute to, and excel at, the Faculty of Theology to which they have been admitted. After all, access is as much a responsibility as a right (cf. Coughlan 2006:215).

Conclusion

I started this article by asking the following research question: How can the five core values of Stellenbosch University help the lecturers with the preparation of students for ecclesiastical training in times of crisis? I tried to answer this by first referring to Rossouw's (1989) three-point distinction of the different facets of theological training and then pointing out that the article wants to focus on the second facet, namely the institutional preparation of the student with a focus on values. Secondly, the #FeesMustFall movement was pointed out as the single biggest crisis that challenged the values of the University and our faculty. Thirdly, the five core values of the University of Stellenbosch were considered to indicate that these values can offer longer-term solutions for a crisis such as that which the FMF movement has placed before the doors of universities. The

meaning and impact of these values for theological training were discussed in the fourth place. Fifthly, a conflict in values that arose as a result of the FMF movement was examined. Finally, as part of a process of rescripting, I discussed the BTh extended curriculum program at the Faculty of Theology and tried to show how the University's five values informed the development of the programme.

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