Invitation for Participation and Concept Note

(Un)Conference 2024

Hosts:

University of Limpopo and University of Venda

Dates: 26-29 November 2024

Hybrid Mode:

In-person (Protea Hotel Ranch Resort, Polokwane) or Online

About

Hosted by the University of Limpopo and the University of Venda, the HELTASA 2024 (Un)conference aims to foster conversations, contributions, and insights around how higher education practitioners in Southern Africa can address both current challenges and opportunities to transform higher education learning and teaching contexts. Within Southern Africa, higher education is facing issues relating to funding, equity of access, decolonisation, language, student marginalisation, throughput, attrition, and graduate unemployment. On a global scale, climate change, war, staff burnout, mental health (staff and students), and generative artificial intelligence have led to questions about the relevance and responsiveness of higher education. Moreover, several questions remain on how higher education institutions can foster inclusiveness, equity, and diversity, and how our students can be empowered for a sustainable future.

Join us "under the baobab tree" as we connect, engage and exchange our experiences, insights, and reflections on ways to nurture holistic and innovative approaches in evolving learning and teaching contexts. The mighty baobab tree (a symbol of the province of Limpopo) has inspired countless African narratives and serves as a symbolic haven within a diverse ecosystem. It provides a place where stories are not only shared but also born. As HELTASA celebrates its 20th anniversary (2004-2024), let us collaboratively explore the practices that enable each of us and our collectives to make a difference in and with our higher education contexts. These dialogic relations can help us to shape the future of Southern African higher education. The (un)conference theme *Under the Baobab Tree: Nurturing holistic and innovative approaches in higher education learning and teaching contexts* emphasises the importance of holistic approaches in higher education that promote positive contributions to enhance learning, teaching, scholarship, and broader societal transformations.

The University of Limpopo and the University of Venda, as hosts, invite you to submit a proposal and join us for the HELTASA (Un)Conference 2024!

Theme

Under the Baobab Tree: Nurturing holistic and innovative approaches in higher education learning and teaching contexts.

This theme is supported by five sub-themes:

1.   Interdisciplinary approaches in learning and teaching in higher education

This sub-theme emphasises the importance of inter- or multi-disciplinary collaboration and integration in addressing complex challenges in higher education and in society. This sub-theme asks the question: How do higher education institutions address learning and teaching complexities and opportunities in collaborative ways? It encourages conversations that explore innovative ways to work across disciplines or across institutions to enhance learning, teaching and scholarship.

2.   Empowering higher education students for a sustainable future

This sub-theme focuses on the responsibility of higher education institutions to provide opportunities for students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values needed to contribute to sustainable development in Southern Africa and beyond. This sub-theme asks the question: How do higher education institutions empower students for sustainable futures? It invites discussions on how curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, and institutional policies and practices can promote sustainability, social responsibility and fostering of graduate attributes.

3.   Fostering inclusiveness, equity and diversity in higher education

This sub-theme highlights the importance of creating inclusive and diverse learning environments. This sub-theme asks the question: How do higher education institutions recognise and value the unique contributions of all stakeholders involved in higher education? It encourages dialogue on strategies to address systemic barriers and ongoing approaches to decolonise the curriculum, knowledge practices and the institution itself. This includes approaches to promote social justice and celebrate diversity in our higher education context.

4.   Digital transformation and innovation in higher education

This sub-theme explores the integration of digital technologies in learning, teaching, and scholarship in higher education. As an example, the advent of Generative Artificial Intelligence asks us to (re)consider the purpose of higher education. This sub-theme asks the question: How are higher education institutions approaching digital transformation? It invites discussions on innovative practices, emerging trends, and the challenges and opportunities the digital age presents.

5.   Health and well-being of students and higher education practitioners

This sub-theme focuses on promoting health and well-being among students, academic staff, and professional staff in higher education institutions. Mental and physical health as well as workloads affect learning and teaching. This sub-theme asks the question: How can higher education institutions foster guiding and healthy learning and teaching environments? It invites contributions on holistic initiatives for students/staff and stakeholders that go beyond a focus on traditional success measures (such as pass and throughput rates).

The (un)conference approach

HELTASA aims to bring together academic and professional staff as well as higher education practitioners in and around Southern African higher education to engage, discuss and debate around learning and teaching matters. This engagement is underpinned by HELTASA's core values, namely collegiality, professionalism, quality, equity, creativity, criticality, and innovation. Since 2021, HELTASA has embarked on a journey to rethink our annual conference experiences and adopted varied approaches that encourage equitable and socially inclusive participation. Using the decolonial gesture of 'un' to question the traditional and the norm, we aim to create more inclusive dialogic spaces that invite more interaction from all participants. Our focus this year is more about conversation rather than presentation. In this way we hope to foster the participation of diverse voices and perspectives to enable deeper transformative insights towards alternative approaches. Read more about how HELTASA embarked on a journey of methodological disruption of scholarly participation in a recent special issue of Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning.

These methodologies aim to create an open space to share, critically reflect, be creative and develop innovative approaches to learning and teaching through collaboration, scholarly conversations, challenging our taken for granted assumptions. A participant driven approach allows for engagement, teamwork, and an emphasis on contributions from every participant. An (un)conferencing approach encourages formal and informal conversations around a collective space (such as the baobab tree). We encourage participants to create or join conversations during the event.

The (un)conference will include a focus on:
- Workshops: These will be co-facilitated by teams of the hosting institutions on Day 1 (26 November): HELTASA, University of Limpopo and University of Venda.
- Provocation: We will start each day with a provocation by invited panel members or speakers. There will be time for small group discussions after the provocations.
- Mini harvesting: Mini harvesting entails collated feedback and responses that are captured by participants in a Padlet, in online chat or in other ways that reflect critical issues and ideas that have emerged.
- Parallel tracks: Each session will consist of a few presentations. Presenters are encouraged to think about ways of presenting without PowerPoint slides. Presenters of posters and lightning talks will also be included in the conversation for a parallel track. These parallel sessions will include critical dialogues and workshops.
- Artistic showcasing parallel tracks: Presenters will have the opportunity to showcase their creativity and storytelling in diverse ways.
- Open mic session: an interesting agentic space for participants to voice their thoughts. Participants can form small groups to engage in scholarly conversations in a relaxed and informal manner. Questions/topics will be sourced from participants or emerge from conversations during the (un)conference.
- The "closing the loop" session on the final day allows for a facilitated reflective and reflexive discussion.

(Un)Conference Formats

The HELTASA (Un)Conference 2024 seeks participants to share ideas, thoughts, research studies, and engage with each other in one of the following formats:

Oral Presentations	Presentation time: 15 minutes Rather than traditional research presentations, these presentations should be reflective, provocative, inspiring, and focus on findings but also, on questions that have emerged or still remain to feed into the facilitated conversation among presenters and participants in the space. We want to foster dialogue and discussion, rather than 'show and tell'. The common-themed proposals received from participants will be grouped together and after the individual presentations there will be a facilitated conversation among presenters and participants. All presenters will actively participate in a discussion and debate by asking questions and sharing their opinions on the themed topic from their presentation, while participants in the room also get an opportunity to offer input into the discussions.
Lightning talks	Presentation time: 6.5 minutes Pecha kucha style 20 slides (with minimal text) or images that display for 20 seconds each according to an automated timer to tell visual stories.
Posters	Presentation time: 5 minutes Shorter presentations that are ideal for presenters who want the opportunity for raising conversations and dialogue or share work-in-progress. The participant shares ideas to others using a combination of visuals and text. We encourage the use of digital posters and creative formats. Poster sessions facilitate a rich exchange of ideas and networking opportunities.
Creative presentations	Presentation time: 10 minutes These artistic demonstrations can be in poetry, song, dance and/or other creative presentations.
Critical Dialogues	Dialogue time: 45 minutes Critical dialogues begin with provocations by two or three co-facilitators followed by a collective engagement with participants. These can be in the form of critical dialogues or round table discussions. No PowerPoint presentations are allowed.

Please note:
All presenters in a session are to remain in the session allocated to ensure time for dialogue and conversation with other presenters and participants during the session.

Submission of Proposals

Proposals are to be submitted via Oxford Abstracts by 30 September:
https://app.oxfordabstracts.com/stages/75969/submitter

Please include the following information when you submit a proposal:

- **Proposal Title** (not more than 15 words)
- **Presenter and co-presenter information**
- **Relevant sub-theme:**
  1. Interdisciplinary approaches in learning and teaching in higher education
  2. Empowering higher education students for a sustainable future
  3. Fostering inclusiveness, equity and diversity in higher education
  4. Digital transformation and innovation in higher education
  5. Health and well-being of students and higher education practitioners
- **Format:** Oral presentation, lightning talk, poster, creative presentation, critical dialogue
- **Presentation mode:** In-person or online
- **Proposal** (Up to 500 words + up to 5 keywords)
- **Engagement questions:** 2 questions for engagement with participants
  (What questions have emerged or still remain? What do you want to discuss further?)

Guidelines for Proposals

Please write proposals using the following framework to help structure the proposal:

Where?	What is the background and context of your proposal? Where is it located in the literature i.e. what scholarship/discourses does it draw on? How does it fit into the broad aims of the un(conference)?
What?	What is your thesis statement? In other words, what is the critical issue that you are exploring/expanding/unpacking etc? It must provide a research problem / purpose that you are trying to grapple with.
Why?	What is the reason for your thesis statement above? Expand on what you mean in the row above. It should provide the rationale for the proposal.
How?	What are you drawing on to make sense of your thesis/main focus? Theory? Concepts? Analytical lenses? These are distinct layers that will enrich your proposal.
Which?	Which approach, design, method/s have you chosen?
Who?	Who/what is your unit of analysis? What data will be generated and how? What sample will you use (number/people/documents)?
What?	What are you leaving the reader with? What is the relevance of your proposal? How will it expand thinking, feeling, being, doing, etc. or what knowledge are you generating for others to engage with? What benefit to them? You can link to your title.

Technical considerations:

Check the spelling and grammar before submitting. The proposal can be up to 500 words. Do not include lengthy background information or explanations or definitions. Does not need citations and do not include any tables/figures.

Important Dates

- **Due date for submission of proposals:** 30 September 2024
- **Feedback on proposals:** 15 October 2024
- **Registrations close:** 31 October 2024
- **Due date for payment:** 15 November 2024
- **Upload of presentations:** 22 November 2024
- **(Un)Conference:** 26 – 29 November 2024

Registration Fees

Select your preferred mode to register:

In-person (Polokwane) R5000	Registration package includes an (un)conference bag, tea/coffee, lunch vouchers and the gala dinner. It also includes the HELTASA membership fee for 2025.
Online R2000	Registration package includes participation in the online platform as well as a social networking event for virtual participants. It also includes the HELTASA membership fee for 2025.

Registration will open soon

Queries and Further Information

If you have any inquiries about the HELTASA (Un)conference 2024 please email: heltasa.ul.univenconference@univen.ac.za.

If you would like to know more about HELTASA, please visit our website: https://heltasa.org.za/

Or contact Ms Nomfundo Siqwede info@heltasa.org.za