

## Building Enduring Partnerships with Students from Low Socio-Economic Backgrounds

Thursday 5 August 2021 - Parallel Session 5 – 12.45pm to 1.45pm (GMT+1)

**SINCLAIR - Building Enduring Partnerships**

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Undergraduate Health Science students who benefit from the University of the Witwatersrand's efforts to widen access and participation to rural and other less privileged communities have a difficult first year experience. At least a third of these students are first in their family to be in university. Being away from familiar environment and relationships, the students feel alienated from the culture of the university. In addition, they face the pressure of keeping up with heightened academic demands. Research suggests that students facing multiple disadvantage are more likely to leave university in their first year than their privileged peers (Cunningham & Lambert, 2020; Leibowitz, Van der Merwe, & Van Schalkwyk, 2009; Mudhovozi, 2012). Building enduring partnerships between the university and its students is dependent on how well the students will feel supported to negotiate their new environment. This paper examines the benefits that students have drawn from a targeted first-year intervention that seeks to strengthen learning skills, facilitate engagement with peers, and strengthen awareness of university resources and facilities that support student success. Drawing from this South African experience, the paper proposes that achieving the goals of students' success and the university's retention and throughout targets be approached from the perspective of building enduring partnerships between students and the university. The strength of such partnerships depend on universities going beyond widening access to enabling meaningful participation for students from less privileged communities.