

(How)/Has the First-Year Experience (FYE) Shifted During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Scholarly areas: student learning & curriculum development

COVID-19 completely disrupted the world: countries-wide lockdowns, the imperative for social distancing, and the need to live safely for ourselves and for others has forced humanity to relook at how we engage with each other. Higher education has certainly not been spared. With a rapid pivot to online teaching (or, emergency remote teaching (ERT)) higher education has been forced to do things differently – at speed! While the effects of the shift to online teaching, learning, and engagement are experienced by everyone (staff and students), the effects are particularly acute for first-year students: that cohort of students who are trying to transition into and find themselves in their respective spaces and places of higher education. Important questions to ponder and debate at this juncture (after almost two years of living under lockdown and engaging with students online) are:

What does the first-year experience (FYE) look like in this COVID moment?

How should we be thinking about the FYE within our current lived realities?

Should we continue to talk about *the* FYE when currently incoming first-year students are truly experiencing their transition into higher education so differently to previous cohorts (cohorts pre-2020)?

What could a re-imaged FYE look like – both in terms of ethos and action?

These, and undoubtedly, many other questions will form the context for a 90-minute interactive workshop. Members of the Siyaphumelela FYE workstream will facilitate active listening and engagement among participants using a variety of techniques such as breakout rooms, Jamboard, and plenary discussions. The goal is to create a safe space for individuals to share their authentic feelings, concerns, and selves in ways that will add to the collective thinking, understanding, and action to improve the FYE for all students in the South African space of higher education.

Interactions and conversations will begin on Jamboard in the two weeks leading up to the (Un)Conference. The link is:

<https://jamboard.google.com/d/1N950gfRNspTkzOSGHHFz6n2PxDnUP3QyAEGRYIZ8ooo/edit?usp=sharing> (we will make the link open access nearer the time).

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