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Special Issue July 2027: The Emerging University: Co-creating Learning Ecosystems for the Futures We Need

**Guest
Editors:**

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This special issue is linked to the [2026 HELTASA \(Un\)Conference](#), hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, taking place 1–4 December 2026. The theme of this special issue is related to the theme of the (un)conference.

Higher education globally is at a crossroads, buffeted by questions of relevance and responsiveness, disrupted by technological shifts and socio-political pressures, and tasked with preparing a place of learning for students who will be expected to navigate a profoundly unpredictable future. This special issue focuses on the ‘emerging university’ as a space requiring continuous reimagination and co-creation. For South African higher education, global uncertainty converges with an unequal society and its unique set of context-specific demands: the still-ongoing project of decolonisation, fiscal constraints, and the urgent need to provide a rich learning environment where students can prepare themselves for a complex and rapidly evolving labour market (CHE, 2021; Jansen, 2022; Mbembe, 2016). Simultaneously, the rise of generative AI (GenAI) has introduced a new layer of complexity, forcing university teachers to confront profound questions about academic integrity, the nature of knowledge, and the very purpose of higher education in an age of machine intelligence (Bearman et al., 2023; Kramm & McKenna, 2023; Swiecki et al., 2022). These pressures demand a fundamental renegotiation of the “what, how, and why” of university education.

It is against this backdrop that we envision an evolving institution: The Emerging University – a dynamic, responsive entity that is agile in its practice, deliberate in its values, and which is co-created by all who have a stake in its future. In a landscape shaped by disruption, the university must be a living ecosystem of knowledge engagement, generation, and production. This ecosystem is co-created by and for students, university staff, and communities, for the multiple alternative futures we can conceive of.

The theme consists of several related broad topics:

- i. Curriculum change: Epistemology, GenAI and what students learn
- ii. Assessing learning that matters
- iii. Relational learning and teaching: Care, power, co-creation and community
- iv. Future higher education ecosystems: What to preserve, expand or let go of?

Contributions should demonstrate clear implications for educational theory and/or practice and advance understanding for co-creating future learning and teaching ecosystems in South African higher education.

The special issue welcomes various types of manuscripts including:

- Original empirical research
- Conceptual and theoretical articles
- Scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) studies
- Action research and applied case studies
- Interdisciplinary perspectives
- Innovative practices from Southern African higher education environments

Important dates:

Submission of manuscripts: 1 December 2026–26 February 2027

Expected publication: July 2027

Note that submissions will close on **26 February 2027**.

No late or emailed submissions will be accepted.

Submission requirements:

Before submitting a manuscript, authors should read [The IJTL Specifications and Style Guide](#) and [The IJTL Editorial Policy](#).

- Manuscripts must:
 - be in MS Word format
 - be between 6000 and 8000 words (all inclusive)
 - be in UK English
 - be typed in 11pt Calibri, 1.15 line spacing
 - use APA 7th Edition for references and citations
 - be anonymised (no author details visible anywhere in the manuscript)
 - include a title, 150–250-word abstract and up to 5 keywords
 - disclose the use of Generative AI (if applicable) within the manuscript
 - be submitted via the [IJTL OJS platform](#)
- All submissions must also include:
 - a cover letter stating that the manuscript is submitted for this special issue
 - author biographies (approximately 50 words), detailed affiliation including department, ORCID, and contact information in a separate MS Word document
 - a signed [IJTL confirmation of submission form](#) per author
 - a proof of language editing letter
 - a fully marked-up text similarity report from software such as Turnitin, iThenticate, or SafeAssign
 - an ethical clearance certificate or waiver statement

Manuscripts must be aligned to the special issue's scope and purpose as well as The IJTL's technical specifications, and ethics guidelines must be adhered to. Further information is available in [The IJTL Specifications and Style Guide](#) or you can visit the [IJTL's website](#). A submission preparation checklist is available on the website. This call is open to all. The journal does not charge any author or page fees. All manuscripts are subject to the double-blind peer-review process and are only published once accepted. Please note that an author or co-author can only be published once as part of this special issue and cannot have been published in the journal within the last year.

About the journal

The [Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning \(The IJTL\)](#) is an education-focused journal, aimed at making a difference to educators at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Providing a scholarly forum for academics and education practitioners to share research on teaching and learning. It publishes original contributions of interest to researchers and practitioners in the field of education.

The IJTL is intended to be a resource for education practitioners and researchers as it aims to provide useful, research-based resources and provide a scholarly forum for academics and education practitioners to share research on educational practices and teaching and learning at various levels. The diamond open access journal appears on the list of journals accredited by the South African

[Department of Higher Education and Training \(DHET\)](#) (DHET-accredited since 2014), the [SciELO SA, Web of Science \(Clarivate\)](#) and [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) lists.

The IJTL is published by The Independent Institute of Education (IIE). The Editor-in-Chief (Prof Dolina Dowling), Associate Editor (Dr Bronwyn Batchelor), and Managing Editor (Beverley Wilcock) are responsible for all aspects of managing the journal.

Queries

Interested contributors are encouraged to submit any queries to the corresponding editors of this special issue: Dr Greig Krull greig.krull@uct.ac.za; Prof Tania Rauch van der Merwe tanja.vandermerwe@wits.ac.za; Dr Anthea Jacobs antjacobs@uwc.ac.za; Dominique Wooldridge dominique.wooldridge@wits.ac.za.

Queries relating to your submission, the journal and/or the double-blind peer review process should be directed to the Associate Editor or Managing Editor: bbatchelor@iie.ac.za or bwilcock@iie.ac.za

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