The creation of a single Department of Higher Education in 1994 has been a blessing for student affairs in South Africa. Unlike with the dilemma faced by the world-renowned South African liberation theologian Albert Nolan (1989) who was not sure whether the book he sat down to write was for one or two nations in one country; or president Thabo Mbeki (1999) who ten years later, found himself having to confront the problem of ‘two nations’ in one country, separated by economic statuses, many student affairs practitioners would attest to being one family occupying different rooms of the same home. They meet regularly at national bodies such as the South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals (SAASSAP), the National Association of Student Development (NASDEV) or the offshoots of these structures such as the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International South Africa Chapter (ACUHO-I SAC), Financial Aid Practitioners of South Africa (FAPSA), Student Health, Sports, Women and Justice structures, etc.

In line with the ideals of a democratic country, these structures and sub-structures are not separated by affiliation to one or another racial group. Nor are they separated by ideological preferences but by their functions. If there are any discrepancies in practice, they are based on the bouquets different institutions can afford for their student support and development programmes. This is not said naively as we are all too conscious of the historical imbalances which have given some institutions a financial and material edge over others. However, we recognise the free access policies for all students who meet the requirements of various institutions.

It is therefore with a sense of pride that we present this volume to student affairs departments, our institutions of higher learning and local and international partners. We are confident that each of these, wherever they are located, will identify with an aspect or two of the lot that is presented in this volume. Although issues might be more pronounced in some institutions than in others, they are
generally experienced across the board. We could go further to say that they all have an international dimension as well. Hence the utilisation of resources and solutions from international contexts.

We have consistently referred to this publication as a ‘volume’. This is not arbitrary. It is indeed not a book in the sense of it having a storyline running through like a thread or chapters that are intended to hang together. It is a collection of papers from various authors with student affairs experience who express their views on various topics, from different perspectives. Hence Perspectives on Student Affairs in South Africa.

There are many student affairs topics to explore. Each is like a green-field as it presents new challenges and dynamics that have not previously existed. Yesterday’s answers and approaches may therefore not necessarily be the most appropriate for today. Contemporary tactics and solutions have to be found. This obviously cannot be achieved through a volume or two of papers. It will take a lot more, including applying research protocols, evaluating and assessing, even using trial and error over time. Volumes of this nature can only introduce possibilities and pointers in particular directions.

This volume is therefore about these possibilities. At least nine active and former student affairs practitioners have expressed their views on selected topics. The advantage is that they are all South Africans although they have drawn a lot from the insights and best practice of other contexts. It is hoped that their contributions will inspire others to commit to a third, fourth and many more volumes to come. Boldness in taking the first step will demonstrate to others that this is doable.

It must be mentioned that this volume was primarily inspired by the sad realisation that since the creation of a single department of higher education, there has been little to no student affairs literature coming from South Africa. In 2002 Roger Ludeman, then Fulbright scholar in South Africa, was guest editor along with Cecil Bodibe the editor of the first and only issue of Thuso, the student affairs journal. The 2003 volume which was edited by Martin Mandew and a few uncoordinated papers published by individuals in non-student affairs journals since then, are the only literature currently available from South Africa. There may be a lot more in the pipeline as some practitioners have recently acquired qualifications in student affairs-related programmes while others are in the process of researching. Hopefully, the new Journal of Student Affairs in Africa which has a more continental outlook and contribution will create another platform for a sharing of ideas and for building the body of knowledge in the discipline on the African continent.
At a secondary level, the idea of putting together a publication of this nature was born out of a negative situation, namely, a failure to get enough papers to publish from the 2011 SAASSAP Conference under the theme of ‘caring institutions’ as envisaged by the 2010 Ministerial Summit on Transformation in Higher Education. Contributors to this volume were hand-picked around the middle of 2012 and they all cooperated. As editors we are grateful for the opportunity to lead this project. However, it is individual contributors who take accountability for the academic integrity of their papers. A sincere word of gratitude therefore goes to them, not only for their willingness to contribute but also for their patience in waiting for a volume that has been in the making for the past eighteen months. This is not unusual. However, this time around it is the fast-changing higher education environment that has made some topics slightly irrelevant, forcing an updating in both content and approach. Thanks to the publisher, African Minds, as well for their patience and understanding.

The Department of Higher Education and Training has enacted several policies and produced a number of guidelines on various issues affecting higher education recently. However, it is not the Department that is active on the ground but the student affairs practitioner. Equally, it is the student, guided by the practitioner, who will give effect to the policies and guidelines. The platform created by a Resources Series as we hope this project will become, should enable many to reflect on their praxis, share best practice and interpret policy for implementation.

A word of gratitude also goes to the individuals who at various stages have read parts of this volume or the entire draft. We are grateful to them for their insights and the critical questions they have raised. Those outside the SAASSAP family include Dr Roger Ludeman, a longtime friend of SAASSAP and President Emeritus of the International Association of Student Affairs, Prof Rob Midgley of the University of Zululand, Dr David Levy of the University of South Africa, Dr John Boughey of the University of Zululand and Mr Edwin Smith of the University of Pretoria. We would also like to thank SAASSAP for financial assistance.

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