

ISTR/Wits PhD Seminar – University of Witswatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa – A Faculty Perspective

Ruth Phillips, ISTR President

It gave me great pleasure to be a member of faculty in the Johannesburg PhD seminar in May 2019. Through a decision by the ISTR Board we had decided that instead of having an Africa Regional conference, ISTR would invest its regional effort this year in a PhD seminar conducted just prior to the inaugural [Africa Centre for Philanthropy and Social Investment](#) conference entitled *The State of African Philanthropy: Setting the Agenda*, at the Wits Business School in Johannesburg. Through a collaboration with Bhekinkosi Moyo, the Centre Director (as well as being a member of the ISTR Board), students from across Africa and beyond had four days of stimulating engagement in issues related to the third sector. This formula proved to be a great success for the students who, because of their dispersion across the continent, do not often have the chance to meet with other researchers in their field.



It was also a great honour for the PhD Seminar faculty to be able to attend the Pan-African conference on philanthropy as it was the first of its kind, and enabled enormous insight into not only philanthropy in Africa but the wider third sector and its geopolitical context.

Reflecting ISTR's diversity, our faculty members came from across the world and South African institutions: Annette Zimmer (Germany) and Alan Fowler (South Africa) were co-chairs of the seminar, Imhotep Alagidede (South Africa), Ali Awni (Egypt), Una Osili (USA), Shauna Mottiar (South Africa) and myself (Australia). This group therefore included two past presidents, Alan and Annette, and the current president, myself.

The student group was equally diverse, with 20 students from universities in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe, USA, United Kingdom and Australia. They were divided into three groups according to their research inquiries that were of course all related to doing research in Africa, but reflected the usual interdisciplinary diversity of all ISTR events. The seminar ensured that all students got an ample opportunity to present about their project and gain valuable feedback from faculty and their fellow students. The scope of research topics about the third sector was impressive and augers well for the future of research across Africa. Faculty collaborated to do three professional development workshops on writing in the third sector, publishing third sector research, and research methodology. There was also a Three Minute Thesis competition that went very well – if you're not familiar, this is a competition between students that requires them to present their research in three minutes with the use of only one Power Point slide (no other props). Eleven students competed and the judges had a tough time deciding on an outright winner, so awarded two students equal first and a runner-up. They received modest cash prizes from ISTR. As I have been involved in

many of these competitions, I can say that this event was of a high standard and proved to be highly engaging for all involved.

All involved in the seminar felt it was valuable and rewarding. As the students all got to stay at the same hotel -- they could form solid friendships and wider networks (another consistent outcome of the ISTR PhD seminar model). The opportunity to attend the conference was also a highlight as many high-profile academics, CEOs of foundations and third sector organizations presented. It was a packed schedule over the four days so all of us were exhausted by the end, but in that very satisfied way after a wholly enriching experience. Of course, none of this could have happened without the extensive collaborative work between ISTR's Megan Haddock who coordinated the logistics for the PhD seminar and Margery Daniels, ISTR's Executive



Director, who negotiated the partnership with Bheki Moyo, Director of the Africa Centre for Philanthropy and Social Investment, and the people from the Centre including Katiana Ramsamy, Research Fundraiser and Belinda Keratiloe Mogotsi, Programme Manager. There was also an amazing team of students from Wits and a team of drivers who ensured that everyone was well catered for and transported from place to place on time! ISTR is also very grateful to the Mott Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York for grants that generously supported the seminar.