

BUILDING GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES FOR TRANSFORMATION

Working with Students in the Intersect of Violence, Poverty and Health at the University of Cape Town

Authors: Sianne Abrahams; Cal Volks and Lucina Reddy



BACKGROUND

The Safety and Violence Initiative (SAVI) is one of the 4 strategic initiatives of the Vice Chancellor at the University of Cape Town. The HIV/AIDS, Inclusivity & Change Unit (HAICU), based in the Transformation Office and Office of the Vice Chancellor, works in collaboration with SAVI by:

- creating platforms for dialogue;
- facilitating academic literacies (critical thinking);
- conducting research;
- developing workplace competencies;
- contributing to global citizenship attributes (social responsiveness);
- developing appreciation for diversity and
- understanding the lens of African problems and solutions, both in out of class.

During lectures and out of class gatherings, students can critically engage and reflect on contexts which give rise to gender based violence (GBV), the link between Health, HIV and GBV; and the interconnectedness of Intergenerational trauma, Inclusivity, GBV and HIV/AIDS. Jewkes (2012) and Cluver (2013), amongst others, have shown links between HIV/AIDS, violence, poverty and intergenerational trauma from apartheid. These, intersecting theories of violence, poverty, vulnerability to disease and intergenerational trauma provide the theoretical bases for HAICU's engagement with the student population. Further motivation for this work at HEI's is supported by the Higher Education HIV/ AIDS Programme Study (HEAIDS 2010) where in a randomised sample from 23 Higher Education Institutions (HEI's); it was identified that only 61% of students felt safe from violence and 38% of female students felt safe from sexual harassment on campus.

METHOD

SAVI and HAICU's response in Higher Education Institutions has been to provide and evaluate the outcome of delivering in class curricula teaching (e.g. in Engineering and Fine Art) as well as out-of-class dialogues in University residences led by the AIDS Community (Peer) Educators (ACES-UCT). Further opportunities for critical discourse were established through a conference in 2013 which allowed academics and professional staff at UCT to consider their role in shaping notions of masculinity. Students are also referred for Counselling on campus. Evaluations of programmes have been conducted following Ethical approval.

RESULTS

Students, academics and professionals in and out of class have found this contribution to building graduate attributes and awareness of UCT's major strategic themes useful. Students demonstrate that they understand the intersectionality of the key themes.

1. "When you get to industry you become oblivious to it [HIV/AIDS] and so its needs to be implemented into curriculum and relating it to the discipline." Engineering Student
2. Engagement through curriculum on issues of violence, sexuality and HIV/AIDS is critical if we are going to influence how youth think and engage in South Africa' (Professor Jane Bennett: Conference on Masculinity and HIV/AIDS in South African Higher Education Institutions 2013).

RECOMMENDATIONS

UCT should continue these programmes to provide opportunities for further engagement. HEI's are key sites for critical discourse and engagement on these issues. Through implementing this programme HAICU is bridging theory and the outcome on students' own lives while building the competency and citizenship of UCT graduates in preventing HIV and responding to different forms of violence.