



# College Access in South Africa

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## Western Cape, South Africa

- Southwestern-most province on the coast of the Atlantic and Indian oceans
- Racial demographics
  - 48.8% Coloured
  - 32.8% Black African
  - 15.7% White
  - 1.0% Indian or Asian
- Afrikaans is primary home language, followed by Xhosa and then English
- 43% of residents have completed high school
- 4.8% of adults have a postsecondary credential, highest in SA
- Average household income of R143,460 (~\$10,465), which is the second-highest in the country
- Home to three universities, one technical university, and one military academy

## South African Education

- R (early childhood) → primary school → high school (through grade 12) → academic universities and universities of technology
- Under apartheid, Black schools were subject to minimal funding & “Bantu Education” labor-focused curriculum
- Minister of Ed: “Higher education has a critical and central role to play in contributing to the development of society in South Africa both in terms of skills development and research”

## Project Information

- Short-term research project focused on the accessibility of higher education to non-White students in post-apartheid South Africa
- Consisted primarily of interviews with higher education researchers and practitioners at three South African universities:
  - University of Cape Town, an elite public research university
  - University of the Western Cape, a historically Coloured institution (“Historically Disadvantaged”)
  - Stellenbosch University, a highly-ranked public research institution

## Skills Utilized/Developed

- Experience and skills needed for conducting research interviews
- Skills in facilitating cross-cultural idea sharing in an effort to learn ways the USA can look to SA as a model, as well as to share good work being done in the USA and how it may be translated into SA context
- A greater understanding of the ways in which “diversity and difference” play out differently in non-Western contexts

## Lessons Learned

- While the contexts are very different, the USA and SA face similar challenges in increasing access to higher education for non-White students. Cross-country dialogue could be very useful in the development of new programming/strategies.
- In research, your best way to find an expert on a topic is to talk to another expert. People want to connect others in order to solve problems they are passionate about!

## Connections

### To Classroom

- **SW512 Macro Practice Skills Laboratory** focused on the interplay of community organizing, management, and policy in macro social work. Through my research in SA, I was able to frame the work being done there using skills I learned in 512, as I learned about the impact of those three forms of macro practice on the SA college access movement.
- **SW647 Policies and Services for Social Participation and Community Well-Being** focused on policy analysis from a social justice perspective and assisted me when considering the ways in which the new SA Constitution has impacted higher education and access for non-White citizens.

### To Career

- Helped me to frame the issues I face in my college access work in a comparative perspective.
- Provided me with insight into the challenges others face in increasing access to college for students
- Offered me new ideas of how access could be increased more successfully both in SA & USA

## Interviewees

- Bill Moses, The Kresge Foundation
- Dr. Marybeth Gasman, University of Pennsylvania
- Dr. Nicola Branson, University of Cape Town
- Dr. Vimal Ranchod, University of Cape Town
- Dr. Ariane De Lannoy, University of Cape Town
- Patricia Lawrence, University of the Western Cape
- Dr. Ronel Retief, Stellenbosch University

## Conclusions

- South Africa’s new Constitution requires redress for the wrongs done during apartheid, making affirmative action much less legally controversial than in USA
- Affirmative action has improved access for non-White students overall but primarily for those fortunate enough to have attended high-quality secondary schools and thus be prepared academically to perform well on matric
- Matric, SA’s high school exit exam, is the gateway to higher education for SA students and therefore the biggest barrier. With students making decisions relating to matric in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, SA students could benefit from enhanced counseling and career advising

## Advice

- Leave time free in your schedule toward the end of your trip, because the people you meet will likely connect you with their friends and colleagues, and you do not want to run out of time to meet them!
- Prior to your trip, read about current events happening in the country you’ll be visiting so that you will be able to have informed discussions.



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