



First I would like to thank SAAIR for giving me the opportunity to be part of such an informative activity. I have been working as a Quality Assurance Coordinator from 2016 and I still need a lot of coaching in the field and the conference came at the right time to give me lots of opportunities to acquire knowledge both technical and analytical that will help me to respond appropriately to the requirements of my Institution.

This was the first conference I attended organized by this Association since I joined last year, from the theme, the pre-conference workshops to the conference itself there's all the evidence that Institutional Research/Quality Assurance is the key issue in Higher Education and most probably will be in the next decade.

The conference was worth attending as it was well organized around several interesting themes that were covered by the presentations. I have learned a lot especially from the presentations and the relevant key note addresses and feel confident to be one of the presenters during the next coming conference.

26th SAAIR Conference 2019



My name is **Thato Mnguni** and I am currently employed at the **University of Johannesburg** in the position of an Institutional Researcher. The theme of the conference resonated with me and hence why I decided to attend the conference. Attending the conference as one of the scholarship recipients who is new in the Institutional Research space, I must say that the conference has aided me to curve my path as an institutional researcher in a more focused manner. Through the various interactions and presentations, I now fully understand what the role of an Institutional Researcher is and what impact their research has for institutional strategic goals; especially in regards to making data-informed decisions.

I attended the pre-conference workshop titled *"The value, power and promise of data mining techniques"*. I thoroughly enjoyed this workshop; it was easy to follow the facilitator and I could easily digest the content. I mostly learnt about advanced data analytics, statistical concepts and visualization techniques. Most of all I like the fact that the knowledge I gained I will use in a practical manner in my current workspace because my work involves a lot of data processing and analysis.

I was impressed with most of the conference presentations. It was interesting to hear and engage with fellow members regarding the type of research taking place at different institutions. Topics I found most interesting were: *They don't trust the data, what makes an institutional research professional tick, challenges with online surveys, longitudinal tracking in institutional research and ranking hype.*

I would like to say thank you to the TUT staff members for hosting us with care and professionalism. Thank you to Carin Strydom (SAAIR Coordinator) for arranging my accommodation and travelling; your communication is above and beyond excellent ☺. Lastly, I would like to say thank you SAAIR for granting me this opportunity, the conference has contributed a great deal towards my institutional research development capacity. As such, I am confident that I will be able to contribute towards decision making in Higher Education.

Ngiya Thokoza, Dankie, Ke a leboga, Ngiyabonga, Ndza Nkhensa, Enkosi, Ke a leboha, Ndo Livhuwa, Thank you

26th Annual SAAIR Conference Experience

It gives me great pleasure to write this word of acknowledgement. First of all, I'd like to thank the Southern African Association of Institutional Research (SAAIR) for granting me the opportunity to attend the 26th annual SAAIR conference. Furthermore, thanks to the SAAIR administration team for the pivotal role they've played in making everything possible. From booking of flight tickets, shuttle services, accommodation and not forgetting the food and the hospitality that was ushered at Mbombela (Nelspruit), the traditional performances at the gala dinner event and not forgetting the serendipitous experience of a visit to the Sidwala caves. A heartfelt thank you to the SAAIR team as whole. Nonetheless, my duty in this regard to write about my experience during the 26th annual SAAIR conference.

Colleagues and dear friends the 26th annual SAAIR conference was a meticulous successful event that met my expectations more than I anticipated. My heartfelt gratitude goes out to the local organising committee for the sterling work they have done and for giving us a week preoccupied by the complexities of institutional research. It was an intellectually rewarding experience and a blessing to be part of such a prestigious event. Institutional research in the Southern African region is still trying to find its feet but with organisational bodies such as SAAIR, the practice can actually reach many milestones and improve institutional efficiency and effectiveness across the higher education sector in the region. The propensity and preponderance on institutional research practices at SAAIR conferences seeks to address and ventilate some of the lingering imperatives of IR, simultaneously enhancing the functionality of higher education institutions across board and indirectly contribute to the experience of the student population. Through the SAAIR conference, practitioners are able to share their experiences and lessons learned and in the process disseminate pivotal IR knowledge.

During the 26th annual SAAIR conference international IR practitioners with extensive experience in the field shared with us IR experiences emanating from within their respective countries. Through the three keynote addresses by Dr Naidoo, Prof Nair and Dr Kelly respectively, it was brought to the fore that the oversimplification of IR data make results lose purpose and substance that IR results were actually designed for. IR challenges are similar across countries and if we are to consider the status quo whereby, the public is questioning the value of higher education and the evolving students' demographics, the question that remains in our time is, how can IR practitioners utilise data and IR findings to inform institutional decision-making and strategic planning? How can IR add value to the institutional efficiency and effectiveness of the higher education sector? These were some of the take away points for me during my attendance of the 26th annual SAAIR conference and I will forever be indebted to the collaborative effort of the SAAIR team and that of the Tshwane University of Technology.

Sincerely

E Mashapa

Ashton Maherry : Durban University of Technology

The key take home messages from the SAAIR Conference 2019 was that at DUT we have our framework which is focussed on Knowing, Doing and Impacting, whilst at SAAIR 2019 Liz Archer spoke about "influencing". I feel as IR practitioners it is not enough to influence, but we should be impacting.

An promising practice from UNISA was that in their alumni survey, they included a section for them to put in the details of their employer and their contact details. At DUT we struggle with have a poor database of our alumni's and this could be a really useful way to build up a database of our alumnis so that we can contact them and survey them in 2020 in order to find out if our graduates are fulfilling the needs of their employers.

Being an SAAIR scholar was a great experience. I look forward to becomming more active in SAAIR and hopefully nominate myself for a SAAIR committee position in 2020

