



OSARIA

Office of Student Affairs
Research, Innovation & Analytics

Where Inquiry Rekindles Purpose,
Restores Wholeness, and Radiates Change

POWERED BY  Department of Student Affairs

Message from the Executive Director: Division of Student Affairs

The launch of the Office of Student Affairs Research, Innovation, and Analytics (OSARIA) marks a defining moment in the life of the Department of Student Affairs (DSA) and the broader University of Cape Town (UCT) community. It stands as a powerful affirmation of our shared resolve to advance the humanising project of UCT, one that listens deeply, learns critically, and acts purposefully in pursuit of student flourishing.

OSARIA is a philosophical and an ethical statement, a declaration that our practice must be guided by scholarship, our innovation by insight, and our leadership by compassion. It reminds us that transformation is sustained not only by conviction but by evidence; not only by policy, but by purpose.

Locating OSARIA within the DSA Strategic Framework 2035

The DSA Framework 2035 envisions a Student Affairs ecosystem that is integrated, innovative, and transformative *in pursuit of the Agenda of the Soul*. A DSA that contributes to UCT's Vision 2030 by enabling students to “*unleash human potential for a fair and just society*.”

Within this vision, OSARIA serves as a strategic nerve centre for evidence-based decision-making, policy alignment, and reflective practice. It will generate insights that inform programme design, institutional responsiveness, and student development strategies across all clusters, namely, Student Wellness Services, Housing & Residence Life, Sport & Recreation, Student Financial Aid, and Student Life & Governance.

By foregrounding data, research, and innovation, OSARIA strengthens our capacity to measure impact, evaluate wellbeing interventions, and forecast emerging student trends. It enables the DSA to move confidently from intuition to insight, from anecdote to analysis, and from activity to accountability.

In this way, OSARIA becomes the scholarly engine that propels the DSA Framework 2035, ensuring that every initiative, every intervention, and every policy is anchored in evidence, guided by ethics, and aligned with the humanising principles that define our work.

The 3Ps: The Pedagogies That Shape Our Inquiry

OSARIA is also an embodiment of the 3Ps, the philosophical anchors of our DSA practice:

- The Humanising Pedagogy reminds us that research is, above all, a human act. OSARIA approaches data not as an abstraction, but as a narrative of human experience, listening for the heartbeat behind every number, the story behind every statistic, and the student behind every system.
- The Pedagogy of Discomfort challenges us to confront what our data reveals, to sit with the discomfort of inequity, exclusion, or systemic failure. Through critical inquiry, OSARIA invites the DSA community to transform that discomfort into growth, learning, and change.
- The Pneumatological Pedagogy calls us to animate our work with the Soul, to recognise that innovation and insight must be infused with purpose, compassion, and ethical imagination. OSARIA thus becomes not only a site of data production, but a space of intellectual and ethical renewal.

The 3Rs: Rekindle, Rehabilitate, Radiate

In giving life to the 3Rs, OSARIA will:

- Rekindle the scholarly spirit within Student Affairs by nurturing a culture of research-led practice and evidence-informed leadership.
- Rehabilitate our institutional systems and approaches by grounding them in rigorous analysis and student-centred design.
- Radiate transformation through the dissemination of knowledge that uplifts, empowers, and enlightens, both within UCT and across the national higher education sector.

Through this triad, OSARIA will serve as a transformative bridge between research and practice, linking the heart of student experience to the mind of institutional planning.

Advancing Scholarship and Building Knowledge

OSARIA will play a pivotal role in advancing the scholarship of Student Affairs, not only at UCT but within the African and global higher education landscape. It will curate an ecosystem of inquiry where postgraduate researchers, practitioners, and academic partners collaborate to deepen understanding of student wellbeing, transformation, leadership, and success.

Through research colloquia, symposia, publications, and data-driven policy recommendations, OSARIA will contribute to the emerging body of African scholarship on Student Affairs, contextual, decolonial,

and humanising. It will affirm that universities are not only spaces of instruction, but laboratories of ethical imagination and social renewal.

Evidence-Based Practice and Humanised Data

To “*humanise data*” is one of OSARIA’s core commitments. Numbers without narratives risk dehumanising the very people we seek to serve. Therefore, OSARIA will translate evidence into empathy, making visible the lived experiences that underlie our institutional metrics.

It will enable the DSA to:

- Identify systemic gaps in access, inclusion, and wellbeing.
- Inform policy decisions with real-time data analytics.
- Track progress in student success and retention.
- Develop predictive models for risk mitigation and support intervention.

In doing so, OSARIA transforms data into dialogue, and dialogue into direction, ensuring that our Student Affairs work is accountable, responsive, and deeply humane.

A Shared Journey of Learning and Transformation

The establishment of OSARIA is the fruit of collective reflection and commitment, from our DSA staff, postgraduate researchers, and academic partners, to the many colleagues who have long believed that Student Affairs must stand not only as a service, but as a scholarly field of transformative practice.

As we inaugurate this new chapter, may we remember that transformation begins not in structures, but in hearts and minds, in those who believe that compassion and evidence can coexist, that analysis can be an act of care, and that learning can indeed be a form of liberation.

Flourishing Ad Infinitum

In the spirit of the Agenda of the Soul, OSARIA calls us to a deeper way of seeing, one where research becomes a form of service, and data a language of dignity. It invites us to reimagine Student Affairs as a community of scholar-practitioners and professionals who are committed to the flourishing of every student, staff member, and the institution itself.

May OSARIA **rekindle purpose, rehabilitate systems**, and radiate transformation. May it remind us that the future of Student Affairs lies not only in what we do, but in how we know, how we care, and how we grow. May we **Flourish Ad Infinitum**.

Pura Mgolombane

Executive Director: Division of Student Affairs
University of Cape Town

"unleash human potential for a fair and just society"

Message from the Senior Manager: Projects and Administration

The journey toward the establishment of **OSARIA** has been both humbling and transformative. It has called upon us, as practitioners, scholars, and leaders, to pause, reflect, and reimagine how we understand and serve the lived experiences of our students.

OSARIA was conceived not as a project, but as a **movement of collective inquiry**. It emerged from the heart of the Division of Student Affairs Strategic Framework 2035, inspired by our enduring belief that the university must be a space of both **rigour and restoration**, where evidence informs empathy and where innovation honours humanity.

Our process has been deeply collaborative, from the early offsite workshops that allowed a small team to dream beyond existing paradigms, to the broader institutional dialogues that shaped our strategic direction. Under the guidance of **Professor Pedro Tabensky** and the partnership of colleagues across DSA and Rhodes University, we cultivated a research ecosystem grounded in care, curiosity, and ethical courage.

OSARIA now stands as a testament to what can happen when **research becomes relational**, when inquiry is not confined to papers and metrics, but extends into communities, student spaces, and the everyday rhythms of campus life. It is here that the 3Ps: **Humanising Pedagogy, Pedagogy of Discomfort, and Pneumatological Pedagogy**, take on life, guiding us to lead with both heart and intellect.

As a person who has an oversight of OSARIA, I am deeply grateful to every colleague, partner, and student who believed in this vision and contributed to its becoming. OSARIA is our collective offering to the future, a space where reflection becomes action, and where knowledge becomes light.

May OSARIA continue to **rekindle**, **rehabilitate**, and **radiate**, not only through research outputs, but through the relationships and insights that remind us what it truly means to serve the student experience at the University of Cape Town.

Nadia Wilson

*Senior Manager: Projects and Administration
University of Cape Town*

Introduction

The launch of **OSARIA** marks a defining moment in the ongoing evolution of the **UCT DSA**. It represents a bold and intentional step toward embedding a culture of critical reflection, evidence-based practice, and transformative innovation at the heart of our Student Affairs ecosystem.

OSARIA is a living space of inquiry where compassion meets intellect, and where innovation is guided by ethical reflection and humanising values. By integrating **research, innovation, and analytics**, OSARIA seeks to illuminate new pathways for enhancing student success, strengthening institutional responsiveness, and amplifying the authentic voices of our students.

Guided by UCT's **Vision 2030**, which calls us *to unleash human potential for a fair and just society*, OSARIA serves as both an incubator and a catalyst. It brings together practitioners, scholars, professionals, and students to co-create knowledge that not only measures outcomes but also transforms experiences. In doing so, it honours the DSA's foundational pedagogies, the **Humanising Pedagogy**, the **Pedagogy of Discomfort**, and the **Pneumatological Pedagogy**, which invite us to think deeply, feel courageously, and act compassionately.

This booklet chronicles the **journey of OSARIA's becoming**, from its initial conception to its launch. It captures the milestones, collaborations, and aspirations that have shaped this initiative, while also articulating the guiding framework that will guide its work in the years ahead.

At its essence, OSARIA is an invitation to **rekindle purpose** through inquiry, to **rehabilitate systems** through reflective practice, and to **radiate change** through knowledge that heals, transforms, and sustains.

The Journey

The journey began with a dedicated team comprising three master's students (who are also UCT staff members), a librarian, a research assistant, the ED: DSA, and the Senior Manager: Projects and Administration. Together, they embarked on a shared process of learning, exploration, and co-creation. The first milestone took place between **22 and 25 April 2025**, during a three-day off-site workshop facilitated by **Professor Pedro Tabensky**, Director of the Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics at Rhodes University. This engagement allowed the team to deepen their understanding of research methodologies, explore diverse academic resources, and develop initial outlines for individual research papers to be presented at the **OSARIA Launch and Colloquium**.

Building on this foundation, the team recognised the importance of aligning research with emerging technologies and ethical considerations. Consequently, a second three-day workshop was held in **June 2025**, focusing on the **ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in research**. This phase expanded participants' competencies in digital scholarship, research ethics, and AI-assisted methodologies, ensuring that OSARIA's work remains at the forefront of innovation, integrity, and institutional relevance.

Collectively, these formative experiences represent the genesis of OSARIA as a dynamic space for scholarly inquiry and transformation, where Student Affairs practitioners, scholars, professionals, and students converge to generate knowledge that **rekindles purpose, rehabilitates systems, and radiates change** across the university landscape.

This journey has been one of curiosity, courage, and collective discovery. Today, OSARIA stands as the embodiment of that journey: *a space where curiosity becomes courage, data becomes dialogue, and research becomes relationship.*

Motto

"Where Inquiry Rekindles Purpose, Restores Wholeness, and Radiates Change."

*unleashed the human potential for
a fair and just society through
excellence, transformation, social
and financial sustainability*



**Department of
Student Affairs**

Liberating the Soul for Well-being & Flourishing