



Stellenbosch

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**Association for Academic
Administration (AAA)
6th Annual Conference 2025**

**Keynote Address:
“What’s love got to do with it?
Culture, connection and
compassion in university
administration”**

**7 May 2025
Jonathan Jansen**

How would you know that an academic administrator at a South African university is good at their job?

When a student leaves with a “no” answer and still feels that they were well served

Question: What are the three or more factors that could make this statement true?

Or, the problem with the lady at “admin”

Seven observations from a long career in universities

1. Too many (not all) staff who work in academic administration actually do not like their job

In other words, a distinct lack of *passion* for their work

Seven observations from a long career in universities

2. Too few staff in academic administration think about the “big picture” consequences for how they do their jobs

Fun Fact:

A student’s image of a university is first formed through their contact with academic administration

Seven observations from a long career in universities

3. Whether we recognize it or not, there are academic administrators who treat students (and staff) on the basis of who they are or what they look like

Seven observations from a long career in universities

4. There are few academic administrators who understand that the single most important task when working with students is connection

Seven observations from a long career in universities

5. One immediate and visible characteristic of a university that respects its students and staff is one marked by **efficiency** in the services provided

The truth is that when you are so used to inefficiency in a country or on a campus, you take dysfunction to be the normative condition

“I’m sorry, we cannot help you because Ms Koekemoer is on leave”

Seven observations from a long career in universities

Why is this statement offensive?

Seven observations from a long career in universities

6. Where academic administration is weak (operationally and ethically) it immediately becomes vulnerable to corruption from both the inside and the outside of the university

Seven observations from a long career in universities

7. Academic administration can never achieve optimal functionality without the full support and adequate resourcing from the senior leadership of a university

Thank you

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