The First Year Experience in Higher Education in South Africa: A Good Practices Guide
Acknowledgements

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Introduction

André van Zyl

It is now an established fact that student success rates in South Africa are much lower than might be expected in such a low participation higher education system. The stark picture is that in South Africa, only approximately 18% of people in the 20-24 year old age group participate in higher education and a mere 35% of the 2006 cohort graduated in the 5 year period to 2010 (CHE, 2013). In addition, this problem has persisted over years, and systemic investigations during the past decade (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007; CHE, 2013) have shown that despite massive efforts and expenditure focussed on effectively addressing the problem, very little positive impact has been made.

The transition that students have to make between school and higher education seems to be particularly problematic. When the data are more closely analysed, it becomes clear that the first year of study is a time of exceptionally high drop-out rates. The table below reports the findings of the CHE research when tracking the 2006 entering group, which clearly illustrates the scale of the problem:

<table>
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<th>First year student drop-out</th>
<th>Estimated 5-year attrition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Contact 3-year degrees</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact 4-year degrees</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact 3-year diplomas</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 3- and 4-year qualifications (including UNISA)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>51%</td>
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Source: CHE, 2013

The figures above clearly show that the level of first year attrition is particularly high, with between one fifth and one third of newly entering students leaving the system during their first year of study. When first year drop-out rates are expressed as a percentage of the overall 5 year dropout rate, it can be seen that between 50% (3-year diplomas) and 64.7% (all national
institutions) of all 5 year drop out, takes place during the first year of study. The CHE report goes on to point out that this translates to nearly 42 000 of the 127 000 students entering three and four year programmes during 2006 having left the system during their first year of study.

In other words, the top 18% of matriculants enter the South African HE system and thousands of them leave before the end of their first year. Research released since 2014 has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the issues discussed above. For example, the documents produced by the Department for Higher Education and Training (DHET) for the 2015 HE summit entitled: “Are we making progress with systemic structural transformation of resourcing, access, success, staffing and researching in higher education: What do the data say?” (DHET, 2015), as well as the 2016 “2000 to 2008 First time entering undergraduate cohort studies for public higher education institutions” (DHET, 2016) show that although gains have been made in regard to student drop-out, the place of the largest attrition remains the first to second year transition. The former document indicates that national first year to second year drop-out (including UNISA) has gone down from 31.5% in 2000 to 19.1% in 2012. This is very encouraging, but could hide the continued existence of serious issues. The improved figure still implies that 1 out of 5 students entering higher education nationally will drop out during their first year. Even more importantly, the proportion of the five year drop-out nationally (According to DHET, 2016: 18) accounted for by the proportion of first year drop-out currently varies between a staggering 61 and 71% actually emphasising the importance of the first year even more than any previously available data.

Poor levels of student success generally, and the difficulties arising in the first year in particular, are extremely complex systemic phenomena. All the relevant stakeholders (students, schools, universities, government, communities, the business world, etc.) have important contributions to make in resolving the problem. A viable option for the effective closure of the so called ‘articulation gap’ (CHE, 2013) between school and university will have to be a requisite part of any long-term solution. It can be argued that many students who clearly have potential are under-prepared for the “traditional forms of education at present offered in South Africa” (CHE, 2013). This would, however, imply that many institutions are at least equally as underprepared for the students they are accepting as the students are underprepared for higher education. The poor levels of student success (especially at first year level) clearly illustrates that “... the system has not yet come to terms with the learning needs of the majority of the student body” (CHE, 2013).
As Tinto (2013) stated during his visit to South Africa: “Improvement in rates of student success requires intentional structured and proactive action, that is systematic in nature and coordinated in application”. Over the past decades various forms of effective and innovative practices have emerged, all aimed at more effectively facilitating the various first year transitions. The current publication is a collaborative effort between the South African National Resource Centre for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition (SANRC) and the Cape Peninsular University of Technology (CPUT) collaborative-grant team, with both entities generously funded by Department of Higher Education and Training Collaborative Grant funding.

The publication is aimed at making a number of examples of innovative and good practice available in print to the broader sector and beyond to facilitate further discussion and the sharing of good practice and ideas. The content of this guide clearly illustrates the rich diversity of creative initiatives that have been implemented in South Africa to improve first year student transitions in systematic and scholarly informed ways. Contributions in this volume include an example of a systemic extended curricula (UWC); institutional approaches broadly framed as First Year Experience (FYE) initiatives (UJ, UCT and NMMU); and the University 101 (First year seminar) model from the UFS. These rich and diverse exemplars provide relatively detailed descriptions, historical developments and theoretical influences, and crystallise for others in the field some of the lessons learnt. Student success practitioners are invited to contact the institutional representatives directly (details at the end of each exemplar) for more detailed information.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the contributors to this guide for their interesting and thorough work. The hope is that this guide will contribute to the systemic improvement in the management of first year transitions.

**References**


2 The Physics Extended Curriculum Programme at the University of the Western Cape

Honjiswa Conana

2.1 Introduction

Internationally, there have been concerns since the early 1990s about declining enrolments and student interest in pursuing physics studies at university level, as well as concerns about student attrition and the quality of undergraduate physics education (American Association of Physics Teachers [AAPT], 1996; Institute of Physics [IOP], 2011; Sharma, Mills, Mendez & Pollard, 2005). Furthermore, Johannsen, Rump and Linder (2013) note that attrition rates in science and technology disciplines are among the highest in tertiary education in European countries, as well as in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. These concerns about student participation and attrition are often linked to arguments about the importance of physics-based activities in contributing to economic growth (see, for example, IOP, 2012) but also to the broader benefits of a scientifically informed citizenry (South African Institute of Physics [SAIP], 2004).

In South Africa, studies on student throughput and retention in higher education (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2013; Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007) show a high attrition rate at first year level within the science and technology fields, as well as a low overall completion rate, and also a very small group who complete their degrees within the regulation time. With regard to the BSc degree, the CHE study (2013) indicated that only 23% of students actually completed their degrees. Within the physical science fields, specifically, only 21% of students complete their degrees in the minimum time (three years). A recent review of undergraduate physics education in South Africa (Council on Higher Education – South African Institute of Physics [CHE-SAIP], 2013) highlighted concerns about the under-preparedness of students entering first year physics and for the level of graduate competence upon completing their first degree. The report concluded that more research-based initiatives were required to support student success by developing “more effective ways of teaching under-prepared students” (CHE-SAIP, 2013: p. 34). In conceptualizing such initiatives aimed at supporting student success in higher education in South Africa, the concept of “epistemological access” (Morrow, 1993) remains key.
In considering student access and success in higher education, Morrow (1993) introduced the concept of ‘epistemological access’. He distinguished ‘epistemological access’ from ‘formal access’: formal access entails admitting students to the university and allowing them to study there, while epistemological access entails accessing disciplinary knowledge and norms. As Boughey (2005) noted, epistemological access involves “bridging the gaps between the respective worlds students and lecturers draw on... [and] making overt the “rules and conventions” that determine what can count as knowledge” (p. 240). Epistemological access is discipline-specific, requiring engagement with both the content knowledge and the ways of knowledge development in that particular discipline (Boughey, 2005), in addition to dealing with students’ identities (Boughey, 2008; McKenna, 2004).

2.2 A brief history of the programme/initiative

The broader context of this physics programme is the concern of widening access to higher education in the context of a very unequal and racially divided South African educational system. Within South African universities, initiatives to widen access to science studies have their origins in the early 1980s at some of the historically white universities.

These early academic support programmes were often entirely separate, consisting of non-credit bearing courses, which left the mainstream programmes largely unchanged. As criticism of these ‘add-on’ academic support programmes grew, the approach at many universities shifted from academic support to academic development (see Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004, for a more detailed analysis of this shift). Here, academic development signalled the need for developing the institution’s capacity to meet students’ needs; this led to the integration and extension of academic development initiatives into the mainstream programmes. From this arose a variety of credit-bearing ‘extended curriculum programmes’ or ‘foundation programmes’ (for a comprehensive overview of science programmes, see Pinto, 2001, and Rollnick, 2010).

From the mid-2000s, government funding was made available for so-called access or foundation programmes in South African higher education institutions. In 2007, increased funding was designated for extended curriculum programmes (ECPs), but these programmes had to meet strict criteria to be counted as foundation programmes (Department of Education [DoE], 2001). These programmes were intended to provide ‘underprepared’ students (students with marginal educational backgrounds in relation to the curriculum-related requirements) with the means to access and succeed in university courses (Boughey, 2005, 2007, 2010a; DoE, 2001; Garraway,
2010). In other words, enhancing and improving students’ retention, access, success and throughput is the underpinning motive behind the ECPs.

At the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the Science Faculty ECP was introduced in 2007, to cater for students who arrived at university underprepared to succeed in a mainstream first year programme (Holtman & Marshall, 2008). In the Physics Department, in particular, the programme centres on the foundation physics and mathematics offerings, which are full credit courses over two years (Lesia, Marshall & Schroeder, 2007). This model can best be described as a ‘slow-intensive’ programme with additional innovative content, whose purpose is to address student under-preparedness (Boughey, 2010a).

2.3 Context and the detailed account of the programme

The design of the ECP Physics course drew on previous educational development work done in the UWC Physics Department, which has a long history of innovation and commitment to undergraduate teaching and learning. The university as a whole has had a strong emphasis since the early 1990s on academic development initiatives infused into the mainstream (Walker & Badsha, 1993). In the Physics Department, this earlier academic development work included a focus on students’ conceptual understanding (Linder & Hillhouse, 1996), the nature of physics knowledge (Holtman, Marshall & Linder, 2004; Linder & Marshall, 1998) and physics tutor development (Linder, Leonard-McIntyre, Marshall & Nchodu, 1997).

The design of the ECP Physics course was also influenced by other international physics curriculum initiatives, in particular, a similar initiative being undertaken at Rutgers University in the United States of America, which is framed with the educational goal of helping students to ‘think like physicists’ (Etkina & Van Heuvelen, 2007). The UWC ECP Physics course specifically focuses on the nature of physics knowledge, and how this knowledge is developed and structured. There is also an emphasis on making explicit the ways in which disciplinary knowledge is represented in various forms – spoken, written, mathematical or image-based forms (including pictures, graphs and diagrams) – as well as the ways of solving problems and reading scientific texts. This was framed by a perspective of helping students to access the disciplinary discourse of physics (Herbert, Conana, Volkwyn & Marshall, 2010; Marshall & Case, 2010). In this way, a foundation is laid for the sorts of capabilities that physics graduates would be expected to have (IOP, 2010; Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA], 2002; SAIP, 2004; CHE-SAIP, 2013).
From 2010, the UWC Physics Department appointed an academic literacy practitioner for the ECP Physics course. The role of an academic literacy practitioner was to work alongside the physics lecturers in helping them to infuse academic literacy into the discipline and to make explicit to students the aspects of the disciplinary discourse described above (see Marshall, Conana, Maclons, Herbert & Volkwyn, 2011 for details). This is the collaborative model, which Jacobs (2007) writes about. In such collaborations, the role of the academic literacy practitioner would be to help lecturers in a specific discipline to identify the literacy practices of that discipline more explicitly, and to assist them in developing classroom activities to make these practices explicit to students.

The following section provides more detail on the curriculum structure, the classroom setting and the use of course materials in this course – based on extensive classroom observations and analysis of course documentation.

2.4 The curriculum structure

The ECP Physics course at UWC differs from a traditional mainstream course in several aspects. Although the content is almost identical to a mainstream course, the order of the topics in the UWC ECP Physics course is different. Usually, a mainstream physics curriculum structure starts with mechanics, followed by vibrations and waves, before moving on to electricity and magnetism. The UWC ECP curriculum starts with a section on the nature of science, followed by a broad, conceptual introduction to modern physics, which includes atomic structure, and nuclear physics (using the classic textbook, Paul Hewitt’s *Conceptual Physics* [Hewitt, 1998]). Only then, three months into the course, does the focus turn to mechanics (which is the traditional starting point for the first year Physics courses). The second year of the ECP programme, then, deals with the remaining sections on vibrations and waves, and electricity and magnetism.

The intention for starting with the nature of science and modern physics is to focus initially on topics not dealt with at school, in order to shift students away from a view of learning physics as merely substituting numbers into equations. In other words, by exposing them to an unfamiliar topic, they are not able to use the learning approaches that had worked at school. Atomic and nuclear physics is also considered as an ideal vehicle to discuss the nature of scientific knowledge and how it builds and develops (for example, the progression of knowledge, as illustrated in the development of various models of the atom). The focus here is on making
explicit the hierarchical knowledge structure of physics, as well as the interconnectedness of physics concepts.

The students are supplied with a course reader which details the topics to be dealt with in the course. Also, the curriculum structure is additionally presented by means of a concept map for the course, devised to show the links between the different sections/topics and concepts of the course; this is referred to frequently in classes during the year, and is used as a sort of ‘roadmap’ for the course – showing students how later topics/concepts are built upon the earlier ones. This is also an attempt to make the hierarchical knowledge structure of physics more apparent to students.

The ECP course is different from a traditional mainstream course in that students do first year physics over two years. In the ECP course, moreover, the pacing is slower in the first semester but picks up in the second semester, especially for the last term of the year. The purpose of doing things in this way is to prepare the students for the increased pacing and the greater complexity of topics in the second year of the ECP course and the following two years of their BSc degree.

The ECP course also differs from a traditional mainstream course in terms of control over pacing: usually in a traditional mainstream course, the lecturer strongly controls the pacing of the content, whereas in the UWC ECP course, the ‘extended first year’ model gives the lecturer more time to set up in-class activities for students, and to respond to students’ questions and difficulties. In other words, there is more student control of pacing in the ECP course.

2.5 The classroom setting

Physics Education research (PER) has suggested that teaching Physics using non-traditional instruction methods, specifically those where students are actively involved and engaged, promotes their learning (see, for example, Etkina & Van Heuvelen, 2007; Wieman & Perkins, 2005). The ECP course designers thus concluded that the traditional lecture format and, consequently, the large lecture theatre setting, would not be optimal. Therefore, a flat-space venue was found and converted to look like a low-technology version of the SCALE-UP classroom, as adopted in the USA (Beichner, 2008; Beichner, Bernold, Burmiston, Dail, Felder, Gastineau, Gjertsen & Risley, 1999). This SCALE-UP (Student-Centered Active Learning Environment for Undergraduate Programs) approach promotes interactive engagement in large classes, in a flat-space venue equipped with educational technology. The UWC ECP course venue
is occupied by 10 large workbenches, which are permanently fixed to the floor. The room is used for all class activities, including practical experimental work. Students work in groups of three, with three groups seated around each table. The seating arrangement also allows for short presentations to be made at either end of the venue by means of a screen for a data projector at one end and a multimedia monitor with audio-visual equipment at the other. Class discussions are facilitated with the aid of a portable microphone. This arrangement is intended to facilitate one-on-one engagement and interaction, as well as to use the benefits of peer interaction in learning – aligning with co-operative learning principles developed by Johnson and Johnson (1984). Twelve large whiteboards are arranged against the walls between the windows and the back wall to facilitate group interaction and student-lecturer engagement.

In terms of the number of students, the first year of the ECP course has 150 students, approximately 75 in each of the two classes. In order to facilitate students’ engagement, normally the 2 lecturers (one from each class), the teaching assistant and the academic literacy practitioner collaborate and attend each lecture.

2.6 Use of course materials

The ECP course uses two textbooks, Paul Hewitt’s Conceptual Physics (Hewitt, 1998), and another for Mechanics, viz. Physics for Scientists and Engineers: A strategic approach by Randall Knight (2007). The textbook for Mechanics is based on PER, and emphasises the importance of conceptual understanding and the use of multiple representations. The aim of the textbook is to help students to understand concepts and communicate their understanding of these concepts in words, diagrams, graphs, and then finally, mathematically. These mathematical aspects are introduced as tools in forming, presenting and communicating physics concepts and principles in a concise way and in modelling natural phenomena.

The ECP course students are given a course reader at the outset, which provides extensive information about the course philosophy, learning outcomes and assessment modes to be used in the course. It emphasises the use of modelling processes and multiple representations in problem-solving, as well as the importance of understanding physics concepts. At the start of the course, students are given reading tasks that require them to read and engage with the philosophy and expectations of the course, as laid out in the course reader. This is done in the form of an academic literacy exercise, where students are guided in class in how to read a text, summarise it and write coherent responses. For each task throughout the year, learning
outcomes are written at the top of the exercise, so that students know what they need to achieve, or what is expected in that particular task.

The use of class notes and handouts is also different from a traditional mainstream course. In the ECP course, students are given summary class notes before starting with each chapter. They are required to complete pre-reading (‘warm-up’ tasks) prior to the following class, and are also expected to read the chapter in the textbook and submit a chapter summary. The intention of this is to spend more time in class on applying physics principles and addressing students’ questions, or difficulties arising from the pre-reading tasks.

2.7 Achievements and impacts of the programme

As mentioned above, in the context of this physics programme, the ECP course was designed to help students access the disciplinary discourse of physics; in other words, to enable epistemological access to the discipline. The ECP course’s pedagogy does not just provide ‘extra time’ to cover the curriculum, but also ‘extra time’ to be explicit about the use of representations in physics. That is, the extended curriculum structure allows more time for the sort of physics teaching advocated by the PER literature (for example, Etkina & Van Heuvelen, 2007; Mazur, 2009; Van Heuvelen, 1991) and the sorts of capabilities physics graduates would be expected to have (CHE-SAIP, 2013; IOP, 2010; QAA, 2002).

Kloot, Case and Marshall (2008) note that extra time alone is not sufficient: rather, it is how the time is used. They note that the most basic feature of foundation or extended programmes is ‘more time, more tuition’, but that the extra time should not merely be spent doing the mainstream curriculum more slowly. As Allie (1987) notes, “simply going more slowly certainly benefits some students, but it does not necessarily lead to students becoming independent learners” (p. 135). The extra time in the ECP course, with less pressure to cover content, allowed for teaching that could be more responsive to the students’ perceived needs.

In terms of the impact of the programme, the pedagogical approach of the ECP course – with its explicit focus on how representations are used in physics – has a bearing on how the ECP students tackle physics problem tasks in relation to their mainstream student counterparts. Research conducted (Conana, 2016) indicates that the ECP students tend to adopt a greater ‘modelling’ approach to their tasks, and use qualitative physics representations in more sophisticated ways. There is also a nascent sense of taking on a new identity as they talk about
developing their capacity to ‘think more like a physicist’ (Marshall & Case, 2010).

In terms of retention and throughput of students on this programme, different entry requirements and progression rules for ECP and mainstream students make simple comparisons difficult. However, ECP students successfully complete their degrees and excel in Masters and Doctoral programmes.

2.8 Challenges and learning points for the programme

One of the concerns raised with regard to extended programmes is that staff capacity is needed in order to approach teaching and learning differently. Staff need to be able to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning in their discipline, and to engage with the discipline-based science education research literature (for example, Singer, Nielsen & Schweingruber, 2012). With regard to the implementation of extended programmes, Boughey (2010b) notes that the academic staff need to take on identities as professional educators. In this physics programme, it was notable that the coordinator (i.e. one lecturer) of the ECP course had completed a Masters in Science Education and had thus been exposed to curriculum initiatives in the PER literature. This exposure enabled a ‘crafting’ of teaching practice (Linder & Fraser, 2009), “aimed at enhancing the possibility of learning” (p. 39) and enabling epistemological access.

As numerous studies have shown, cultural conditions at universities – which tend to privilege research over teaching – may limit the emphasis placed on developing the teaching capacity of staff (for example, Boughey, 2010b; Kloot et al., 2008; Kotta, 2011). This is exacerbated for ECP staff, often employed on short-term contracts, as is the case at UWC. This hinders a sense of career stability and may undermine the incentive to engage in professional development and scholarship of teaching and learning.

2.9 Recommendations for others wishing to implement such programmes

The ECP Physics course is only one part of the physics undergraduate programme. One question that this physics programme raises is how well the ECP course prepares students for the transition to second year physics. Future research needs to be conducted into the transition to second year physics, when the students in most of the South African universities, both the mainstream and the ECP course, are in the same class. Traditional second year Physics often places a much greater emphasis on mathematical representations, with the other qualitative representations taken for granted and not explicitly emphasised in either teaching or
assessment. Students from a programme such as the UWC ECP course may experience a mismatch between what was valued in first year and what is valued in the second year assessment. Other studies have also analysed this transition from an extended programme into a mainstream second year course. Smith, Case and Walbeek (2014), in their assessment of the effectiveness of academic development programmes, show that these programmes significantly influenced students’ performance in the first year but did not improve the overall graduation rate of students. They question “the efficacy of a model that focuses largely on first year academic interventions” (p. 636). Others have suggested that changes to the curricula and pedagogies beyond the first year are what are needed (for example, Rollnick, 2010). Lubben (2007) similarly noted that physics students struggled with the discontinuity in teaching approaches between the extended courses and the mainstream physics courses.

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3 The University of Johannesburg (UJ) First Year Experience (FYE) Initiative

Soraya Motsabi and André van Zyl

3.1 Introduction

Student attrition, retention and success have been, and still are, a major concern to the various role players in higher education (Nunez, 2005; Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 1975, 2003, 2006; Yorke & Longden, 2004). The South African Green Paper for post-school education & training (2012: p.41) communicates its concern as follows:

*South African universities are characterised by relatively low success rates: 74% in 2010, compared to a desired national norm of 80%. This results in a graduation rate of 15% – well below the national norm of 25% for students in three-year degree programmes in contact education. In contact universities, well under a third of students complete their courses in regulation time and one in three graduates within four years. Improvement of throughput rates must be the top strategic priority of university education.*

The major role player in this regard are students, who are concerned about their own success as this would enhance their opportunities to a better life; it would also contribute to a high self-esteem and lead to a better standard of living.

There have been increasing student numbers in the higher education system in the last fifteen years. The greatest increase has been among African students, who have more than doubled in number between 2000 and 2015. This increase has not been concomitant to the throughput rates, particularly comparing with other race groups (Letseka, Cosser, Breier & Visser, 2010; CHE, 2013). Higher education institutions do not only have to contend with poor throughput, but also with the high attrition rates among first year students. According to the CHE (2013), the dropout rate among first year students was at 33% of all entering students; this was supported by Broekhuizen, Van der Berg and Hofmeyer (2016), who found that the dropout rate of the 2008 entering cohort varied between 17 and 33 percent amongst the various race groups in the country.
Numerous reasons have been cited for the persistently high attrition rates in the sector (Letseka et al., 2010) these include, but are not limited, to poor choice of field of study, financial difficulties, complicated academic curricula and an inability to adapt to the institutions of choice. In an internal study at the University of Johannesburg, reasons cited by students included financial difficulties, poor preparation for higher education, academic difficulties and personal reasons (Dampier, 2015). In addition, students who leave higher education during their first year are not very likely to return or remain in the system. The majority of them leave without a qualification, leading to massive financial, personal and national loss. The challenges mentioned above are some of the reasons why the University of Johannesburg (UJ) launched its institutional First Year Experience (FYE) initiative.

### 3.2 A brief history of the programmes

UJ has been an active participant in the field of student success for a long time. The need for a more coordinated institutional effort was recognised and, as a result, the UJ First Year Experience (FYE) was initiated in 2010 after a series of meetings and detailed planning which began in 2008. The UJ FYE was launched with an internal position document that served at the institutional Senate Teaching and Learning Committee. This document described the motivation for the UJ FYE and laid out the main founding principles and initial focus areas. In this document, the UJ FYE was defined as:

> ... a holistic initiative which encompasses all aspects of first year student experience in the context of an invitational and equitable institution. It comprises both curricular and extra-curricular initiatives, and is far more than a single event, programme or course. It attempts to establish an ethos and a way of life, through which all first year students will experience the transition into university life.

The ten principles guiding the initial implementation of the UJ FYE were:

- A holistic approach to the total student experience, and is an initiative of the university;
- Embedded within the preferred UJ student experience, which begins prior to an application to UJ and ends with alumni status;
- Creating enabling learning environments for all students;
- Not simply assisting students to pass, but enabling as many as possible to achieve their full potential;
• The contribution and support of all sectors of the UJ, of both Faculties and Support Divisions;
• An equitable First Year Experience will be based on the participation of all Faculties in terms of common principles; a common core combines with specific Faculty ethos and needs;
• Informed by and grounded in ongoing developmental and evaluative research;
• Commitment from students and support and development by staff;
• The challenge of first year teaching requires special expertise from the academic staff, who must in turn be assisted in meeting these challenges;
• All components of the FYE strive, as far as possible, to be fully integrated.

3.3 Committee structure

The UJ accepted the FYE as an integral part of the Teaching and Learning Strategy of the university after approval by STLC (van Zyl & De Kadt, 2009). This led to the establishment of two central institutional committees that were tasked with creating strategy (FYE Strategic Committee) and to ensure that strategies were operationalised (FYE Operations Committee). Both these committees are chaired by the FYE Coordinator and report to the UJ STLC. These central committees included senior representatives from the various stakeholder groups. Faculties were also asked to establish some sort of FYE forum. In some instances, this meant a fully-fledged FYE committee and in others, existing structures were asked to include FYE discussions. In all instances, Faculties were requested to make the FYE Coordinator a member of their meeting. This strategy adopted by the institution has enabled the acceptance and incorporation of the FYE throughout the university community committee structures.

3.4 Theoretical influences

A number of theoretical and practical perspectives were investigated during the implementation of the UJ FYE. Tinto’s longitudinal interactionist approach was central to the FYE planning. It was particularly useful as a broad perspective on the complex issue of student retention. Both the longitudinal nature of the student departure/ experiences and decisions, as well as the strong links to the social nature of student decision making have been specifically relevant in the UJ context. The work of Astin (on the role of pre-entry attributes); Siegel (invitational education) and a number of perspectives using the ideas of Bourdieu (cultural capital and habitus) were
used as additional sources. In the South African context, the work done at the University of Stellenbosch (US) had the strongest influence on the work at UJ. During the later developments, the ideas surrounding epistemological access as articulated by Wally Morrow have also influenced the UJ FYE.

3.5 Context

The University of Johannesburg is one of the largest comprehensive contact universities in South Africa and came into being as a result of the merger of a technikon and two universities. UJ has nine faculties and offers technical, academic and career oriented degrees. It has an enrolment of more than 50,000 students and sprawls over four campuses. This institution has a unique identity and character, which serves to bridge the chasms that previously divided South Africa.

Since its inception, the UJ FYE initiative has been grounded in research. Two main sources of information have been the Student Profile Questionnaire (SPQ), completed upon arrival, and the Initial Student Experience Survey (ISES) completed in the 6th week of class. The SPQ has been in use since 2007 and has enabled the institution to create a more complete profile of its newly entering students and the changing trends over time, including a database of over 40,000 records. The ISES on the other hand gives a snapshot picture of the student experience at the institution during the first six weeks of class. Both of these instruments have provided invaluable insights into who UJ students are and what they experience upon arriving at the institution.

The composition of the first year student body compiled from SPQ data indicated that the majority of newly entering students at UJ can be classified as first generation university entrants. This figure has consistently been higher than 50% over the decade of measurement and, during 2016, stood at 65%. When a more graded lens is used to analyse this statistic, it becomes apparent that 45% of new entrants are the very first members of their family to enter higher education. In addition, two thirds of students reported that English was not their first language, and more than half of students reported very poorly developed reading habits. Importantly, these figures have informed the UJ FYE by illuminating the students the institution has actually accepted and what they might need.

3.6 Initial implementation

During the first phase of implementation (2010 and beyond) the guiding structures of the UJ FYE decided to limit the initial implementation to 7 focus areas. This was done to ensure a focussed
and effective start to the UJ FYE. Over time, some of these initiatives have been successful and are still maintained, while others have been readapted and changed. New initiatives have also been introduced, which form what could be known as “High Impact Practices” (HIPs) (Keup, 2013) within the context of an African university. Below, some of the initial UJ FYE interventions are described:

*Recruitment stage*

The first year experience begins with the first contact prospective students have with the institution, which is during their recruitment. In order to reach these students, an online orientation programme (http://findyourway.uj.mobi/index.php) has been developed which focuses on the needs of students who still want to apply and know more about the university. The programme consists of four online modules, and themes include information about Johannesburg as a city and UJ as an institution.

*First year seminar*

The first year seminar, which was originally termed the UJ orientation, takes place at the beginning of the academic year and has been completely re-conceptualised. It is held over a period ranging between 2 and 9 days, depending on the Faculty. Although the first year seminar is centrally coordinated, each faculty customises their own according to the needs of their students.

The FYS aims at orienting students to studying at UJ and in building an initial awareness of the academic expectations, activities and values associated with UJ. At the same time, the institution presents itself to incoming students as an invitational university assisting the students with making new and cross-cultural social bonds. Orientation is marketed as compulsory for all new first-year students.

*Extended orientation*

An ‘extended orientation’ approach was adopted to help students develop a better understanding of the university over an extended period of time. Because UJ’s timetable and facilities are very full, it was decided to capacitate academic staff to assist with the extended orientation by providing them with bite-sized PowerPoint slides they could easily add to their presentations on a variety of topics. Initially academic staff were provided with a CD containing extensive support information that they could use as “just in time” interventions. With the improvement
of technology, this has been made into online “Teaching and Learning Resources” for academic staff. They now have to use these online resources which have been greatly improved to help the students to seek assistance at critical periods.

The use of senior students to support first year students

Senior students are seen as key allies and resources for improving the experience of first year students. UJ has various initiatives which employ senior students in assisting with facilitating the adaptation, adjustment and academic enhancement of first year students. In the Academic sphere, tutors are very widely used to facilitate learning and support for first year students. Three Faculties have employed a more pastoral mentoring approach to helping students adapt. This is a planned intervention where, for the first semester, the mentor and mentee have to meet at least fortnightly for discussions and for mentees to get guidance from their mentors. The Residence Academic Advisors (RAA) act as both academic and non-academic mentors that are situated in the residences. This aims to improve the academic culture and support in the UJ residences. The programme is well structured, with ten sessions for the first term and planned supervision from the Counselling Centre for the RAA. The results of the programme have become apparent through the competitiveness that the residences adopt to be selected the best performing residence. In addition, the Centre for Psychological Services and Career Development (PsyCaD) at UJ also makes use of Peer Buddies as their representatives across the institution’s four campuses.

Placement testing

This initiative was aimed at assisting faculties to be able to place students in the most appropriate qualifications and modules. This has been done through the compulsory writing of the National Benchmark Tests (NBT). This has been effectively used by some faculties such as the Faculty of Science in placing students either in the extended degree, diploma or degree programmes. Other faculties have not been able to fully utilise the placement test. Discussions and research studies are ongoing in this area.
**On-going student tracking**

When the FYE was introduced, one of the ideals was to initiate ongoing *tracking* of student performance and immediate identification of students who seemed not to be ‘engaging’ and therefore might be, or were ‘at risk’. Such students would be referred to appropriate interventions and support (including psycho-social interventions), during the first semester and before end-of-semester examinations. While this has not been fully achieved, the appropriate technology that would enable the university to identify students who are at risk and provide in and on time interventions is currently being investigated.

**Co-curricular activities**

Co-curricular activities, such as organised sport, clubs and societies, and cultural activities were identified as a means of providing a wide variety of learning, and opportunities for building friendships and a ready acceptance of the diversity in the UJ community. This has been particularly challenging at an institution with a large proportion of commuting students.

### 3.7 Further FYE developments

After a period of five years, most of the initiatives had been put in place and had become part of the first year experience. There was again a need to evaluate the efforts and to propel this initiative forward. In order to do this, new strategies were adopted.

**Online engagement**

University teaching and learning has adopted a blended learning approach, where some of the lessons and support is given online. A number of online initiatives have been instituted:

- The Faculty of Law has initiated an online tutoring system, where first year students can continuously contact their tutors and discuss problems and issues with them;
- Online Teaching and Learning resources have been developed, which lecturers can use to encourage students to seek help, and also to remind students of the services available. These are part of the extended orientation, and they include topics such as: Time Management, Preparing for Exams, Note taking, Stress Management, etc.;
- A new online module was introduced in 2016 named “UJ Success101”. This module has numerous topics and resources available for students to use.
3.8 Other practical strategies that have been introduced

Further UJ FYE developments have also been guided by the data that the institution had been collecting using the SPQ and the ISES. Specific areas of concern that emerged from this research included poor study habits (specifically time on task); a variety of logistical problems such as food provision, accommodation and transport issues; and poor career guidance. The following basic responses by the institution have been initiated through the UJ FYE to address the newly identified issues mentioned above:

- Meal/food assistance for students: UJ has initiated a process of providing food to students with food problems on a large scale. This includes work with two Non-Governmental Organisations on providing dehydrated food to students as need arises and to provide two hot meals per day to 2500 students;
- Student accommodation on campus: According to the ISES, only a few students stay in campus accommodation, and 35% of students reported not being happy where they stayed. This has made it necessary to investigate the accommodation issue. UJ Student Affairs has made substantial progress in accrediting off-campus accommodation to ensure the quality of provision to UJ students;
- First year students have difficulty with English, which is the institution’s teaching and learning language; they also have difficulty with Academic Literacies. The Committee is investigating strategies that would improve this situation. A reading programme which aims at improving reading comprehension, reading speed and vocabulary has been purchased;
- Another challenge facing students is Computer Literacy. The poorest 20% of students are being issued a tablet free of charge at the beginning of the year. There are also “bring your own device” support and services available, and computer literacy training is provided at the beginning of the year;
- Learning Spaces have to be created for students who want to study either individually or in groups. This is known as the “nooks and crannies” project, of which the first phase has been the installation of appropriate facilities in unused spaces across all four UJ campuses.
3.9 Challenges and learning points for the programmes

Establishing an FYE programme has been a creative and messy process with a variety of different views and inputs being made into the process. One of the major difficulties has been creating a structured approach by establishing functioning Faculty FYE committees. In some faculties, one staff member who is enthusiastic about the FYE is responsible, and provides momentum, but when that person leaves or is changed, then there is a dip in the FYE. The two institutional FYE committees work well together and create higher levels of buy-in. An institutional FYE initiative cannot be effectively implemented without top management support and buy-in.

Lessons learnt for the success of an FYE initiative

UJ has learnt a lot of lessons during the 7 years of its FYE implementation, and some of these lessons are summarised in the bullet points below:

- In the end, the FYE is not an institutional initiative or programme; it, in fact, consists of a massive range of actual experiences being had by the newly entering first year students at your institutions;
- Intentionally inviting experiences does not happen by accident;
- FYE initiatives must be at least 50% institution facing;
- Knowledge of the institutional student profile and experiences are a key prerequisite for an FYE initiative;
- Knowledge of the institution and how its people, places, policies, programmes and processes influence the student experience is key;
- Using data to make the case for specific interventions;
- Theoretical grounding and practical usefulness are both very important;
- Making cultural assumptions and practices which are often implicit much more explicit is useful;
- Changing core and surface elements of institutional practice is often required;
- Developmental time and incremental improvement should be expected as the FYE evolves;
- Patience and consistency are required to see the real fruit of FYE initiatives.
Institutional support

- Top management support is an essential requirement for success;
- Staff and student responsibility are both important to see real change;
- The FYE requires a central coordinator/champion to pull the strings together;
- Faculties and support divisions all have important roles to play to create an FYE.

Embedding the FYE institutionally

- Committee structures create institutional structure;
- Creating a shared language about the FYE and student success helps create an FYE friendly culture in the institution;
- Celebrating successes and acknowledging failure.

3.10 Achievements and impacts of the programmes

Since its inception, the UJ FYE has been open to evaluation and has actively sought signs of its impact and influence. This included a comprehensive evaluation process that was completed after the 3rd year of implementation. The results of this evaluation indicated very positive initial results. This has been followed up in a variety of ways, and although it is close to impossible to investigate the direct impact of an initiative such as the UJ FYE, the following positive signs have emerged at the institution:

- The Undergraduate success rate has improved gradually since 2010, and was 10% better by 2016;
- Secondly, the FYE has become embedded in the UJ structures and forms part of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC) discussions;
- Both the ISES questionnaire and data from the institutional Undergraduate Experience Survey have shown that first year students are having an increasingly positive experience at UJ;
- Epistemological access at the institution seems to be increasing. This is seen in the fact that performance differences between the various racial groups have become a lot smaller since 2010, and that students qualifying for NSFAS loans have emerged as an academically top-performing group at UJ. This shows that the societal divisions are playing a less prominent role in student academic performance than was the case in the past.
3.11 Recommendations for others wishing to implement such programmes

In conclusion, it is worth noting that it has taken UJ seven years to have a functioning, generally accepted and well known FYE programme. The UJ FYE serves as a benchmark for other South African institutions, and the Coordinator is invited to train and or inform other stakeholders in other higher education institutions. UJ has not walked this journey on its own; it has drawn from the National Resource Centre for first year students and Students in Transition (NRC) in the USA. The Director of the NRC USA has visited the UJ a number of times, and this has led to the establishment of the South African National Resource Centre (SANRC), with offices at the University of Johannesburg.

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4 Reflecting on the University of Cape Town’s First Year Experience (FYE) Project

Sean Samson

4.1 Introduction

At its core, the First Year Experience (FYE) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) aims to draw on partners across the institution to eradicate the division between the academic and social aspects of the student experience in order to foster success in the first year. However, there have been both structural and conceptual limits to the successful implementation of a coherent, “whole-of-institution”, “whole-of-student” approach (Kift, 2015: p. 57). Not only does it call on changes to traditional ideas of the first-year curriculum, inculcating a broader conception of teaching and learning, and positioning students as social beings; it also calls on partners across the institution to recognise their joint responsibility in facilitating student success, prompting changes in, and a willingness to critique, traditional practice. This is a broader view of student success. Simply because a student progresses beyond their first year does not mean that they are unaffected by the effects of dominant institutional discourses and the broader socio-political context in which these discourses exist (Burke, 2011).

The focus on the “whole student” by all university units and stakeholders is key to the first-year transition but is particularly necessary in contexts of social inequality where students are marked by their orientation to institutional culture and disciplinary discourses (Kift, 2015: p. 57). In these cases, different groups experience the impact of initiatives and policies quite differently, and well-intentioned programmes are not always experienced as inclusive. The diverse and varying nature of FYE initiatives – the fact that they traditionally occur in silos – poses challenges to making these differential impacts apparent. However, in the history of FYE at UCT, much has been gained from efforts at partnership, efforts at student-centred approaches, and steps towards reflexive practice.

In recent times, ‘institutional’ conversations have been forced to take more seriously the student voice, making clear the existence of first year experiences. This moment highlights the need of a structurally embedded and aligned, cross-institutional, response that takes multiplicity, and the social and political context into account. This account of initiatives shows that the FYE Project at
UCT is itself in a space of transition, and that this evolution is necessary. Not only in terms of responding to student need and institutional context, but also the position of the FYE Project within this space.

4.2 History

The FYE Project at UCT dates back to 2010, when an FYE Advisory Board was established following a UCT colloquium on the First Year Experience. It was recognised that all students needed support in negotiating the school to university transition, a transition complicated by various academic, linguistic and psychosocial hurdles, in addition to varying material needs. Furthermore, in the local context, social inequality sees students encountering new discourses (ways of thinking, acting, doing), which are markedly different to their home discourses, potentially characterising their new context as an alienating space (Kapp & Bangeni, 2011). Despite these difficulties, it was acknowledged that students exhibit a great degree of agency in achieving success, often with extremely limited resources (Pym & Kapp, 2013).

An approach that offered support but did not threaten this agency, encouraging students to be proactive and creating enabling spaces for them to do so, was necessary. This would not only be a holistic response to first-year support (consistent, accessible, and visible support), but would re-frame the discourse of success as one in which making use of support (quite simply, asking for help) was seen as an essential part of the academic journey. In 2012, an interim director was seconded to establish the FYE Project over a two year period. In 2014, a permanent director was appointed. Over this period, a number of initiatives were piloted and valuable lessons learnt, particularly regarding the difficulties of an institutional approach in a context where there was little structural alignment.

In terms of its structure at the time of writing, the UCT FYE Project is based in the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED). The office services the FYE Advisory Board, the chief institutional structure utilised in attempts at cross-institutional partnership. The Board meets four times a year, bringing together faculties, residences, admissions, student affairs and various other support units to discuss issues pertaining to the experiences and success of first-year students. Until recently, there had been no direct reporting line for this Board. A 2016 proposal will potentially result in the Advisory Board becoming the FYE Committee, with a direct reporting line to the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee. In addition, the formation of the FYE Task Team will bring together faculty-based student support and academic staff on a more
regular basis to enable the sharing of best practice, and allow for more responsive actions on the part of FYE. By and large, these faculty representatives are also members of various faculty structures that prioritise issues of first-year success. These structural changes will go far in ensuring the institutional ‘embeddedness’ for a successful FYE programme.

4.3 Theoretical framework

The FYE Report and Plan 2014-2018 defines the objectives of the UCT FYE Project as follows:

1) Strengthening of pre-admissions support and first-year careers’ advice;
2) A welcoming and supportive university-environment for prospective and new students in all faculties;
3) A renewed focus on first-year teaching;
4) An integrated approach to student development, linking initiatives that respond to students’ academic, affective, social, material, technological and information needs.

The framework above is motivated by approaches or interventions prioritising activities that facilitate a sense of connectedness, increase student involvement, link classroom and out of classroom experiences, develop academic literacies, and facilitate increased student and faculty engagement. These are offered as key mechanisms to achieving successful learning in the first year, supporting students to become members of the university community (Barefoot, 2000; Tinto, 2006/2007; Tinto, 1997). Perhaps these theories underplay the position of the institution. Institutions have histories, symbols, and values, and privileged ways of doing, thinking and believing (Tierney, 1992). This is particularly important for a historically white institution such as UCT, in a national context that continues to be stratified by race and class, grapples with the legacies of apartheid, and in which subjects continue to be marginalised on the basis of gender and sexual orientation. The framework pays little focus to the diversity of the student body, where students are multiply-located and experience this new space in different ways. Ideas of involvement, engagement and community are thus complicated when students and institutions are positioned in particular ways.

Student activism in 2015 and 2016 forces us to examine the underlying structures in which the transition to higher education takes place; not only the sense that students are moving into a different ‘world’ of higher education, and the characteristics of this ‘world’, but the very social structure that constructs the university as a different ‘world’ in the first place. This stark contrast
between home and university potentially frames the transition as an experience of loss, and the omission of ways of knowing and being that students possess. This is not unique to the UCT context. Early transition initiatives largely ignored institutional identity and “were appended to, rather than integrated within, the mainstream of institutional academic life”, ignoring the resources students bring with them (Tinto, 2006/2007: p. 3). These initiatives ignored the importance of students retaining links to their communities, their backgrounds – in short, the importance of student positionality (Tinto, 2006/2007).

Tinto (2006/2007: p. 5) makes an additional contribution to research on transition and retention, highlighting that it is “everyone’s business”. This statement brings to the fore the idea that the work of first-year experience programmes must not only be embedded in the practices of various university units, but must be core in the values and strategies of the institution in a broad sense, prompting the investment of material and human resources, and recognising the efforts of staff involved in this work. It must be an element of staff training and recruitment, and the ‘language’ the institution speaks. Students form part of this construction of the institution. It is in this context that dialogue and interaction between students, students and teachers, and these bodies and the greater leadership of the institution, is important. Not only in the sense of responding to needs in a programmatic sense, but also in recognising and evaluating the differences in the impact of these efforts.

4.4 Context

Data on first-time entering (FU) students from the UCT Teaching and Learning Report 2015 provides some motivation for current FYE initiatives, and links to the areas for development discussed later. Data based on the 2011 FU cohort shows that 71 percent of students had completed their studies within the first five years of their initial registration, while 7 percent were in the process of completing their undergraduate degrees. The potential completion rate was therefore 79 percent. While the results are promising when compared to the low 2009 completion rate (71 percent) and the 2010 completion rate (73 percent), the attrition rates remain high. These rates include students who were academically excluded and those who dropped out in good academic standing. The attrition rate for the 2011 FU cohort is 21 percent, compared to a 2007 attrition rate of 24 percent. When these rates are unpacked further in terms of race, the large majority are black students (33 percent among black entrants, 20 percent among coloured entrants, 20 percent among Indian entrants and 12 percent among white
entrants). National data on participation rates compound these inequalities. There are persisting racial inequalities, with participation rates for black and coloured students being particularly low (CHE, 2014; CHE, 2013)

The number of FU students at UCT who receive financial aid is also notable. For the 2013 to 2015 period, these numbers were 591, 581, and 591 respectively. Evidence suggests that many students experience stigma because of these markers (class and race) and other means by which they are marked as different to institutional ‘norms’. In 2012, UCT partnered with the University of California, Berkeley to customise a version of the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) International Survey. In 2013, UCT launched The Student Experience Survey, which aimed to gauge the experiences of students, ranging from their first to their fifth year at UCT. According to the survey results, when asked about the levels of tolerance on campus, the overall responses are interesting in terms of students’ sense of being able to safely articulate and perform their identities. In response to statements on being respected regardless of their sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity and class, the percentage of responses clustered as somewhat disagreeing, disagreeing, or strongly disagreeing are as follows: 9.7 percent in response to the item on gender, 17.6 percent in response to the item on sexual orientation, 19.5 percent in response to the item on race and ethnicity and finally, 25.1 percent in response to the item on class. Surely, feelings of exclusion along these lines would have serious emotional and psychological effects. These figures show the necessity of approaches that centralise an academic-social relationship in the provision of student support, serving all students. At the same time, we should be cognizant of the differing impact of programmes, and the diverse student experience, and embed reflexive practices that seek to critically assess programmes and strategies. It is in light of this context that the following initiatives should be read.

4.5 Account of initiatives

Inadequate pre-admissions advice and bad curriculum choices negatively affect the student experience. The UCT Careers Service has historically provided pre-admissions counselling, albeit on a small scale. External funding allowed for a partnership between FYE and the Careers Service, where senior UCT students and Orientation Leaders were trained to deliver career-planning resources at under-resourced schools in particular as part of the Beyond School

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1 Data obtained from the Institutional Planning Department (IPD) at UCT.
2 Data obtained from the Department of Student Affairs at UCT.
initiative. Work with high school guidance counsellors has also proved successful in increasing the breadth of pre-admissions provision. Not only has this initiative had a positive impact on the beneficiaries of the support, but senior students have indicated how being of service has contributed to their own development. However, much can be done to provide further pre-admissions advice, increasing reach through the use of online resources. In addition, there are opportunities to mediate the application process for incoming students. This could involve demystifying some of the jargon which characterises this process through a specific first-year student online platform, but also making this information available in a variety of languages, in order to make the resources more accessible.

Partnership between faculties, the Department of Student Affairs and FYE sought to balance the academic and social components of Orientation. Initiatives have included increased small group activities, increased contact with academic staff, and the piloting of Orientation help desks. The latter initiative saw Orientation Leaders staff help desks across campus during orientation and the first few weeks of term in order to bridge the support offered during Orientation into the start of term. A full Orientation programme has also made us cognizant of the need to determine those activities that could either be delivered prior to arrival on campus via a dedicated first-year online portal and those resources which could be delivered at other key points during the first year in order to provide just-in-time assistance.

Communicating support information and resources to first-year students after their arrival has largely been done through the online learning platform, VULA. Six, faculty-specific FYE VULA sites were created in 2013, offering information on academic and psychosocial support, campus maps, workshops, etc. While the sites are popular in the first semester, their use dwindles as the year proceeds. Students have often complained about being inundated with university emails. In addition, the degree to which the online medium is conveniently accessible by all students (given limited internet access) is questionable. Student feedback has also highlighted gaps in the information provided, problematising the links to the specific courses they are doing. In 2016, FYE piloted first-year timelines to offer first-year students an overview of key deadlines during their first year. These include academic and administrative deadlines. Many students miss key deadlines related to curriculum choice or academic record, resulting in an avoidable financial and emotional burden. The resource also provides students with a list of the key support services available, and links them to these services via maps. The resource centralises information that is often housed in a variety of different handbooks and sources. The timelines
were distributed online via the VULA sites. This resource is currently being updated, with a focus on simplifying the layout, and increasing availability across platforms. 3

By 2013, all faculties had an Early Assessment system in place. Initially referred to as the Early Warning System, the change in terminology reflects a broadening of the system as student- and faculty-facing. It is both a report based on mid-term grades, offering students an early indication of their academic performance, and a tool that would allow faculties to reflect on their curricula, particularly assessment practices. This includes whether ‘meaningful’ means of assessment would constitute the mid-term grades used for the Early Assessment report. We are also seeing a variety of uses for Early Assessment. In some faculties, students in need of support meet with staff, and the appropriate interventions and support services are discussed. In other cases, Early Assessment is used as a tool to identify such students, who are then offered the opportunity to finish their degrees over an extended period, where support is embedded in the curriculum. Significant gaps include the level of cross institutional confidence in the system, the degree to which the deadlines for the uploading of marks are adhered to, and the extent to which the assessment used can be characterised as ‘meaningful’. In some cases, class attendance forms part of the grade. In courses where a formative approach is used, it is also questionable whether the assessment should be used as an indicator for progress and performance at such an early stage.

Developing the tutoring system has been a key focus area for FYE at UCT. In 2013, collaboration between FYE and the Centre for Innovation for Teaching and Learning (CILT) produced a report on the experiences of tutors. Reports of insufficient training, inconsistent conditions of service, and a lack of contact time with course conveners pointed to the need for firm strategies to support the work and development of UCT tutors. In 2016, the FYE Director developed a proposal for the professional development of tutors. Importantly, the more inclusive title of ‘teaching assistants’ was used to account for the range of activities these students perform and, perhaps most importantly, indicated seeing teaching assistants as members of staff, and their development as a means of growing the next generation of academics at UCT. A key element of the proposal is the central provision of training (through FYE in partnership with various university units), in addition to departmental and faculty specific training. Central training would focus on issues such as pedagogy, appropriate feedback and assessment, teaching for diversity, integrating support information, students with disabilities, amongst other themes. In

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3 Student feedback on these initiatives gathered through small-scale surveys conducted in 2015 and 2016.
addition, the proposal highlights that teaching assistants should be clear on their responsibilities, have regular contact with the appointing lecturer, and have teaching and research opportunities.

In 2012, computer literacy provision at the university was changed to focus on digital literacy. This reformulation provides students with training in the digital skills they require for their course of study, in addition to orienting students to UCT systems such as VULA and the online administration system, PeopleSoft. Students are required to complete a self-assessment tool in order to help them determine the digital literacy training they would require. Senior students are trained to facilitate digital literacy workshops with students. In some cases, digital literacy provision is embedded in first-year courses. These routes seemed more feasible than the initial lunchtime digital literacy training sessions, which were often badly attended. Despite these efforts, there is still a concern that some students are ‘falling through the cracks’, unable to navigate the online platforms required for learning and administrative purposes. External funding enabled faculties to supplement the provision of digital literacy training, using these funds to increase the number of tutors and length of training. In light of the funding cycle coming to an end, creative solutions to both the provision of training and appropriate means of identifying those students in need of support will have to be found. Planned discussions around further tailoring the self-assessment to faculty needs, and the content of the digital literacy tutor-training programme, are bound to be useful.

UCT Library has produced invaluable resources for first year students – including guides and information to offset the brief library tours during the Orientation period. A key development has been the formation of 24-hour study spaces to increase accessibility. In addition, the development of informal lounge areas allows students to work and collaborate in a relaxed environment. This will potentially have a profound impact on the experiences of day students. There are also examples of where information literacy has been integrated into specific first year courses, although this has not taken place on a broad scale.

Initial attempts at an Extended Orientation – in the main, workshops focusing on developing various academic literacies – took the form of ‘add on’, lunchtime sessions, which were often badly attended because they were disconnected from the student’s course of study, the traditional conception of the curriculum. In some areas, shared vacation activities and just-in-time academic support – relevant to the student's course of study – have been adopted.
Initiatives that positioned students as observers, and addressed them in large groups, in large lecture theatres, have had limited success. Changes to the academic calendar in the future could provide space for common first year activities, delivered in a small group context (This will be discussed further in the next section). This will potentially be carried throughout the first-year in the form of learning communities, where small groups of first-year students engage in common learning activities (Tinto, 1997). It is important that these learning communities are embedded in the initial Orientation programme and have faculty support to be continued throughout the year.

The theory which underpins the residences is that of a ‘living and learning’ environment, making clear the collapse of strict boundaries between academic and social experience. A key development as a result of FYE conversations is that all first time entering undergraduate students, who receive financial aid and are made an academic offer, also receive a housing offer. Partnership between the Residence Academic Development Committee and various university stakeholders has resulted in the delivery of workshops that focus on academic literacies, such as the writing and study skills workshops delivered by the Language Development Group, events which are more psychosocial in nature, workshops born out of partnerships with specific courses and a network of residence tutors offering academic support. Members of the university are invited to submit proposals for these activities on an annual basis. These strategies and initiatives will only grow further in the future.

There are mentoring programmes at work across the institution. However, there are differences in capacity (influencing whether provision is made to particular groups of first years versus the entire faculty cohort), there are differences in function (whether mentors assist with orienting students to their faculty versus the work of residence mentors who assist with situating students in the residence), and there are differences in training (whether mentors are trained centrally under the Student Advocacy Service or by faculty counsellors). In addition to these issues of variance, there is no central means of tracking provision – this is particularly important, given that students can potentially be assigned more than one mentor. There is also no central unit for evaluating the impact of mentoring programmes through the use of mentor and student feedback. A current project lead by the Department of Student Affairs, with input from FYE, Student Housing, and various mentoring stakeholders, is attempting to map a cross institutional picture of mentoring programmes. Thereafter, this project will seek to re-evaluate the broad aims of mentoring at UCT, and move to create structures in line with these aims.
Challenges and learning

Challenges to these activities are not novel or unique to our particular setting. These include the status of transition work within the institution, issues such as resourcing, and linking these activities to the core first-year curriculum. It is apparent is that there is space for a coherent set of activities for all first-year students, linking the initiatives described in the previous section. This is an approach that sees success as being broader than academic performance and caters to the student as a whole being, even before their arrival on campus. This broad view of curriculum is in line with the transition pedagogy approach. The notion of transition pedagogy sees the drawing together of relevant but often quite independent and disparate elements, initiatives, units and spaces in order to create a coherent and integrated curriculum for first-year students in order to support their learning (Kift & Field, 2009; Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010). The notion of learning communities highlighted earlier could be an element of such an approach. This is when students enrol in common courses, or participate in learning activities that are linked thematically. Work by Tinto (1997: p. 613) shows that “participation in a collaborative or shared learning group enables students to develop a network of support – a small supportive community of peers” aiding social bonding and academic engagement. In addition, the use of “collaborative pedagogy”, where students are exposed to the views of more than one faculty member, potentially introduces diverse epistemologies, broader perspectives and voices into the classroom setting (Tinto 1997: 613). Importantly, this approach also takes the diverse student body into account, and it is in dialogue with students, asking them to interact with learning material, their peers and staff, explicitly involving their identities and histories in their learning. This view of diversity and, importantly, inequality, means that there is a critical edge to transition work.

This is not to mean that the initiatives highlighted in the previous section do not form part of transition pedagogy – they very well could. Yet they have not been conceptualized as such, and currently there is no shared, student and faculty space to anchor these different initiatives. The broader view of the curriculum offered by transition pedagogy offers such as an opportunity. This approach calls for us to take a step back and design a first-year curriculum motivated by specific aims, outcomes, and means of assessment and evaluation so that the initiatives themselves have these goals as their connecting thread. The focus in these activities is not asking students to be sensitive to ‘subordinated’ identities or positions, but raising a critical awareness of our particular stratified context, prompting students to reflect on the constructions of their
own identities, asking them to trouble those actions and practices they have come to accept as truth, and facilitate learning from, and with, their peers. This is not an undoing or omission of the students’ experience, because it asks them to reflect on precisely how and why it is they know what they know, prompting an identification and articulation of their knowledge. Thus, the activities do not negate the discomfort of the first year – this is an essential part of the transition – but seeks to speak to the silent ways in which this discomfort is experienced differently and to different degrees.

4.7 Achievements

In the main, the achievements of the FYE Centre lie in the creation of platforms allowing for dialogue on supporting the first-year transition experience. This has resulted in conversations in different settings bringing together members of staff involved in the support and classroom locales. Despite the small-scale nature of the exchanges, they have gone far in creating a language in which the affective, the psychosocial, are part of the language of teaching. To use Early Assessment as one example, conversations on this topic have resulted in a focus on assessment practices and interventions across faculties. They have also resulted in the continuous development of tools and technology by which we can not only capture student performance data, but also place them in context, to have a broader picture of the first-year cohort. In addition, it has led to a consideration of the student perspective – the effect of these reports, and the strategies in place to support students.

The residence system has had great success with creating a living and learning environment. These have become contexts in which students can access academic and psychosocial support. These initiatives have drawn in teaching staff, and resulted in students motivating for resources to support their needs. Conversations on mentoring have moved beyond provision, taking into account the quality, mechanisms of tracking, reach and monitoring of these activities. This has been an important move in terms of enabling students to be agents in the support they access, and when they feel the need to access this support.

Research into the experiences of tutors has prompted a focus on establishing guidelines for conditions of service, but also in seeing tutors as part of the university teaching community. This means that the training of tutors must set a foundation for approaches informed by teaching and learning theory and our diverse context. This is particularly important since tutors are often the first port of call for first-year students in need. The development of a proposal is the first step in
creating a coherent policy on tutoring as professional development, once again linking various units that have traditionally worked in isolation or partnered in an *ad hoc* manner.

This focus on dialogue should not be undervalued. It is also not to say that the activities are unimportant, or wholly unsuccessful. Dialogue ensures that there is a common base system of values that underpins our efforts. It also ensures that there is support for structural alignment and centring. This alignment and monitoring, in order to integrate the student voice more strongly, form key advisory inputs.

### 4.8 Recommendations for others wishing to implement such programmes

Aligning FYE work within the structures of institution works to place first-year issues firmly on the institutional agenda so that initiatives eventually become programmes, pillars of common provision that are tailored to student needs, and are spaces in which student experiences are not only pre-empted but also articulated by students themselves. This makes room for student positionality – their past and present experiences. This systematic, yet responsive strategy motivates efforts to secure FYE within a larger teaching and learning, and student affairs committee structure through the creation of the FYE Committee – a change from the FYE Advisory Board. To cater to student needs in any effective way we also need to incorporate the student voice, dedicated means of gauging the student experience of university life and FYE initiatives through surveys, interviews, and other interactions. The curriculum is what our students share, but to date there have been no firm efforts to enter this terrain. The classroom is the space where first-year support is to be actualised. This is not conceived as a lecture room or theatre but the residence, the vacation camp, the campus tour, the tutorial room, as a space of learning, and therefore a space of academic and social being and engagement, and community.

This also means that there must be firm data to support FYE work, to motivate for further resources, or to indicate that certain activities have reached their end phase. It means that our work will be responsive, in dialogue with our changing institutional and national contexts. Opportunities such as those offered by the South African National Resource Centre for the First Year Experience are useful for knowledge sharing across institutional boundaries. These networks work towards creating an African perspective on transition work, one that is influenced by global lessons and theories, but does not see these as dogma, recognising that their sites of origin influence the theories that are formed. It is also an opportunity for unmaking, an opportunity to “explore approaches to teaching and learning ... with the aim of collaboratively
deconstructing those ontologies and epistemologies that have been historically privileged in higher education” (Burke, 2011: p. 22). For UCT and elsewhere, it means critical reflexivity as part of practice.

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**References**


Improving First-Year Transitions and Success at the Nelson Mandela University

Jennifer Winstead and Shereene Knipp

5.1 Introduction

Spanning five campuses in Port Elizabeth and one campus in George, the Nelson Mandela University is a comprehensive university located in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. As an institution dedicated to a high access to university model, the focus on first-year student transition and success support is critical to overall success of students. Well established initiatives through the orientation programme lay the ground work for the recent institutional shift into a formalised and comprehensive first-year experience (FYE) programme. This resource will address a brief institutional history of initiatives related to first-year student transition and success, the context of the Nelson Mandela University, and the design of the current FYE programme. Additionally, the resource will provide institutional challenges and achievements, as well as recommendations for other institutions related to the FYE programme design.

5.2 A brief history of the programmes/initiatives

Starting up in 2005 and moving forward

When the Port Elizabeth Technikon, the University of Port Elizabeth (UPE) and the PE campus of Vista University merged in 2005 to form the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), only UPE had a university-wide peer-led Orientation programme for new students. From 2006 onwards, this peer-led Orientation programme was expanded to all NMMU’s campuses and faculties.

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4 Recently, NMMU has been renamed the Nelson Mandela University, but for much of the history reported in this paper "NMMU" will be used.
By 2006, Senate had approved that the main purpose of Orientation is to integrate new students successfully into the academic and social culture of the NMMU with some of the main objectives being to:

- Create a climate that is welcoming, promoting positive adjustment to the faculty and to the institution, and minimising anxiety;
- Orientate students to all student support services and resources;
- Develop skills that promote academic success;
- Enhance the understanding of diversity and respect for all;
- Assist students to set clear career goals.

A range of activities has been organised in an attempt to fulfil these objectives, progressing along a continuum from the general to the specific. These include:

- The **Welcome Ceremony** for parents and students during which the Vice-Chancellor welcomes first-time enrolling students and their parents to the university;
- The **Faculty Welcome** (referred to as “Faculty Fair” initially and now “Dean's Welcome”) connects students with their chosen faculty;
- There are also **Subject Meetings** where a closer alliance is forged with specific subject lecturers, and where there is further clarification around expectations, which increases students’ confidence and tempers anxiety;
- To facilitate adjustment to academic life, there is a more intense two-day, peer-led Academic Orientation programme, called **How2@nmmu**, which connects first years with senior students in their chosen programme of study. The components of the programme, based on student development theory, include:
  - Getting to know you (which provides a friendly interface, opportunities to develop a sense of belonging, and support);
  - Bridging the gap (using a strengths-based approach, understanding the main challenges and requirements, developing a well-rounded student, graduate qualities);
  - Thriving in the first-year;
  - Jargon and Resources/Support Services (using the 30 seconds game);
  - My Group@nmmu (team building).
Good quality Buddies can make a significant difference to the quality of the delivery of the How2 Programme, thereby adding significantly to the retention and perseverance of first-year students in their respective courses or academic programmes, as well as to the first-year experience. Senior students either apply, or are nominated by their academic departments and are then interviewed and selected by the Orientation team as well as by other Student Counselling staff. Training consists of four workshops: Presentation Skills, Problem-Solving Skills, Communication Skills and Diversity Appreciation. Thereafter, training is provided in the actual programme to be delivered to the first-years, which includes training in facilitation skills, and being a ‘buddy’ for the first term. A Buddy Pledge is taken by each buddy before they start their How2 group and, towards the end of the semester, all buddies that have carried out their duties and responsibilities receive a certificate at a formal event.

To connect with lecturers, the academic orientation programme further includes:

- Meet your Lecturer including the Student-Staff Fun Event;
- Academic Sessions which are run by lecturers in lecture slots once classes start (*How to get the most out of Lectures, Lecture and E-mail Etiquette, Note-taking and Introduction to Plagiarism and Referencing*);
- Maths Refresher for BSc students (including Mechatronics).

**Wellness Orientation entails:**

- Receiving a booklet containing information on achieving optimum wellness for university living;
- Sessions on *Bursaries and Budgets, Rock ‘n Roll and Bulges*, and *AccessAbility*;
- Given its manageable size, the George campus could include a more action-packed wellness menu including a boat ride on the open sea and a forest hike.

**Social Orientation Programme:** aims to foster social integration and for students to develop a sense of belonging, which in turn add value to student and academic success. Activities include:

- The lively Campus Life Festival (entailing social and sports activities) and
The Byways to Highways event where students are introduced to the whole gamut of societies and clubs, the latter providing a valuable breeding ground for personal, social and leadership development;

- The First-Year Concert and other fun events such as a city bus tour.

On average, 60% to 65% of first-time entering students attend the Orientation programme, and about 150 to 250 How2 Buddies facilitate the How2@nmmu groups annually.

2015 onwards

In 2015, the NMU embarked on a process by which all initiatives related to first-year transition and success were repackaged into a formalised comprehensive FYE programme. The current pre-entry and orientation initiatives described above, together with intentionally-focused student development and success initiatives in- and out-of-class are forming part of this comprehensive FYE programme, called the First-Year Success (FYS) programme.

5.3 Context

Nelson Mandela University is predominantly a non-residential university in that only 3000 (i.e., 12%) of its students live in university residences and the majority of our students commute to university. Eighty percent of its students come from the largely rural Eastern Cape, which is the poorest province in South Africa, with the lowest matric pass rate, and more than a third of our students are first generation university entrants.

Nelson Mandela University is deeply committed to equity and redress in terms of access to university studies and equity of outcomes. To this end, it has adopted an “access for success” approach and has a number of mechanisms in place in this regard. Nelson Mandela University's approach to student success can best be conceptualised as being embedded in a ‘lifecycle approach’. Consequently, student support and development is linked to the main stages of the student lifecycle, namely:

a. Pre-entry advice and career/programme guidance;
b. Admissions, registration and orientation;
c. Negotiating the first year of studies;
d. Progressing through the study programme;
e. Preparing for the world of work and life in the 21st century.
Looking at some of the data analytics available at that stage, what could one conclude about whether Nelson Mandela University was making inroads into enhancing student success? In terms of the total success rates\(^5\) in academic programmes, this improved from 77.6% in 2012 to 78.1%, 79.1%, and 81.4% in 2013, 2014 and 2015 respectively. As the majority of Nelson Mandela University students are enrolled in undergraduate programmes, UG graduation and success rates are tracked annually. From 2011 to 2015, UG success rates grew from 75% to 81.2%, and UG graduation rates grew from 20% to 22.3%.

Another important metric involves the success rates of first-time entering UG students when comparing first years to other undergraduates. At Nelson Mandela University in 2014, the success rate of first-time entering students was 76.3%, which is two percentage points lower than the overall UG success rate of 78.2%. By 2015, the FY success rate was 80%, which is 1.2 percentage points lower than the overall 2015 UG success rate. The retention rate of first-time entering students was above 80%, but was lower for diploma students and higher for students in extended and degree programmes.

Nelson Mandela University adopts a holistic understanding of student success and development. Consequently, it aims to educate students for work and life in the 21\(^{st}\) century. This entails intentionally structuring learning activities and opportunities both inside (formal learning) and outside (co-curricular learning) of the classroom so that students develop academically, personally, socially, as responsible citizens, and so on. As a result of this holistic approach, co-curricular involvement grew from 30% (2010) to 43% (2013), and 77.5% of students indicated that they thought that this had enhanced their employability.

### 5.4 Nelson Mandela University’s First-Year Success (FYS) Programme

**Purpose**

The main purpose of the multidimensional FYS programme is to facilitate the holistic development of first-time entering students that enables their successful transition and integration into the university.

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\(^5\) Success rates = ratio of number of students passing a module to the number of students enrolled for a module, which is then aggregated to the level of a programme.
**Principles**

To achieve the purpose of the FYS programme, all activities and initiatives that form part of the programme are underpinned by a set of principles. These principles apply to Nelson Mandela University students as well as to academic, professional and administrative staff engaged in the FYS programme. The underpinning FYS principles to enable individual development and that of others are:

a. Taking responsibility and being accountable;
b. Attaining a sense of belonging to the university community/communities.
c. Being open to personal growth and purpose development;
d. Contributing to dynamic learning opportunities;
e. Navigating my learning.

**Outcomes**

1. All new first years access the learning and development opportunities linked to FYS, with specific attention given to the special needs of sub-groups (e.g., students with disabilities, international students, rural students, adult learners, and high achieving students);

2. New students develop an understanding of the purpose of higher education and Nelson Mandela University’s vision, mission and values;

3. Successful transition of new first-year students into the university;

4. Integration of new students into the intellectual, cultural and social fabric of the university;

5. New students develop an understanding of what is expected of them, that they need to take co-responsibility for their learning and holistic development, and of the literacies that are needed to be successful in their studies and life;

6. New students are familiarised with the programmes, services and facilities available to support and enhance their learning and development;

7. Academics, professional and administrative staff, and peer learning facilitators understand their roles and co-responsibilities in facilitating the transition, integration and holistic development of first-year students;
8. Through participating in capacity development opportunities, academic, professional and administrative staff develop their teaching and facilitation practices to enhance the learning experiences of first-year students.

**Approaches**

Underpinned by the above principles, to achieve the desired outcomes, FYS activities and initiatives for all first-time entering UG students and staff involved in FYS should be facilitated using approaches to learning that are:

- Equitable, individualised, and flexible;
- Responsive to change;
- Scaffolded, layered and supportive;
- Mindful of the demographic and developmental profiles on first-year students and the teaching and facilitation experience and development needs of staff;
- Based on theories of learning, student development and effective teaching and learning facilitation.

Furthermore, the approaches followed should harness small-group, peer-facilitated learning wherever possible.

The following diagram fleshes out each of the key aspects of the FYS programme that are sequentially arranged in relation to the academic year. The diagram is meant to merely give examples of activities, etc. that can be undertaken in each aspect, and is not to be taken as a comprehensive list of activities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 PRE-UNI</th>
<th>2 WELCOME</th>
<th>3 REGISTRATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Application and admissions offer  
• Connecting - written information, emails, sms’s, f2f meetings, Facebook, First-Year Guide  
• Preparatory learning – access to interactive online modules & videos to prepare for university entry, etc – on the How2@nmu website | • Create warm, invitational welcoming environment  
• VC's Institutional Welcome  
• Dean's Welcome  
• Faculty Meet and Greet | • Preparation of students for registration  
• Registration  
• Receive specific how2@nmu schedule |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 HOW2@NMU</th>
<th>5 TERM 1</th>
<th>6 TERM 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Mainly small-group peer-led by How2 Buddies but also have materials and activities online  
• For all students but also specific orientation for sub-groups (e.g. residence students, international students, mature students, students with disabilities)  
• Staff-student fun/social activities | • Focus on expectations, how to get the most out of lectures, note-taking, academic integrity, digital literacy – accessing and using the Moodle-based LMS, etc – both in lectures & through programmes/activities offered by HEADS, Student Affairs and LIS  
• 1st years are buddied and Peer facilitated learning - f2f and online  
• Assessment preparation and support after first assessments  
• Expand social integration into the university | • Focus on learning styles and study approaches - in and out of class, f2f and online  
• Tracking student progress after first assessments  
• Peer facilitated learning - f2f and online  
• Scaffolded learning/tutorials to prepare for re-exams  
• Exposure to unique experiences and different opinions through out of the classroom learning opportunities |
### TERM 3

- Reflections on first-year journey strengths and challenges – in and out of class
- "Bounce back" support for students that have failed or performed poorly in a module
- Identify resources/assistance to enhance success (f2f and online)
- Orientation to 2nd semester modules in class
- Peer facilitated learning - f2f and online

### TERM 4

- Tracking student progress and interventions to enhance success
- Exam preparation
- Peer facilitated learning – f2f and online
- Scaffolded learning/tutorials to prepare for re-exams
- Looking ahead to the second year of studies
- Determining way forward for future growth and development through co-curricular activities

### 5.5 Challenges and learning points for the programmes, achievements and impacts

A primary challenge at the Nelson Mandela University remains that there is neither a dedicated budget, nor a staff solely dedicated to FYS initiatives. Academic and Professional and support service staff members are recruited to work on FYS initiatives through the capacity of their primary employment. While thus far the support for FYS initiatives has been strong, continued involvement relies heavily on a personal commitment from such campus stakeholders. Additionally, as there is no dedicated budget for FYS initiatives, as ideas are proposed, how such ideas will be financed is always a consideration in implementation. A model such as this can work, but the effectiveness and the long-term integration of an FYS programme into the university structure is compromised without a dedicated budget and professional staff component.

As one way to build capacity in spite of the staffing and budget constraints, the Nelson Mandela University has focused many efforts on developing capacity through student leaders. Specifically within the orientation structure, the role of the How2 Buddy has been expanded for those Buddies with potential to include co-facilitation and full-facilitation of the buddy training programme which was previously conducted only by professional support staff members. This shift has not only empowered deserving Buddies to expand their own skills base, it has also
provided scheduling relief for staff members to focus on other areas of FYS work. Annually, How2 Buddies are recognised for their work on the institutional Co-Curricular Record. As a focus for 2017, Nelson Mandela University has undertaken an initiative to streamline the training conducted for mentors and tutors as a way to reframe those opportunities into campus leadership positions also recognised on the institutional Co-Curricular Record. It is the goal to attract more students into these critical positions, which often support first-year students in a way that requires little institutional investment and staff capacity.

For a variety of reasons, and beginning with admissions, proving the relevance of Orientation and FYS initiatives to first-years students continues to be a challenge. Operating out of the poorest province in the nation, many of our first-year students cannot afford the transport to attend orientation and other FYS activities. As in many other areas at the university, there has also been a student push to move FYS opportunities from a face-to-face format to include a blended or online approach. In 2016, as a way to address these challenges, the Orientation Team worked collaboratively with Integrated Media Services to create eight How2 videos covering critical transitional topics and that are posted online for those students who were unable or unwilling to attend How2, or who only realise after How2 the need for such guidance. These videos have also been useful in addressing the needs of those students who, due to the challenges of new student admissions (especially in terms of obtaining financial aid), are notified that they have been admitted to the university or that they have received funding only after the How2 programme has been presented. Students can watch one, some or all of the videos at their leisure. They are available online throughout the year, so regardless of when the students realises they need the support, they are available. During the 2017 intake, late arriving first-years were also connected with a Buddy to assist them to catch up on key How2 aspects and resources, and to be integrated into a How2 group where possible.

For the 2017 intake, the Nelson Mandela University Marketing and Stakeholder Liaison team worked to funnel first-year students to a dedicated webpage prior to arrival on campus. Such efforts resulted in over a 30% increase in traffic on the How2 webpage. As a result of such marketing attention, the First-Year Guide has already been downloaded 10,240 times, up from 1,354 for the 2016 intake. These efforts exemplify the multi-faceted approach to connecting students to important information that is needed with today’s university student.
Despite such advances in connecting students with orientation-related information and materials, Nelson Mandela University continues to explore and identify the best mechanism by which to disseminate all institutional FYS support and transitional resources to first-year students. This challenge is exacerbated by the lack of a central coordinating office of dedicated FYS staff, as discussed previously. For such large scale information dissemination to effectively occur, it is anticipated that there will have to be more wide-spread buy-in of the FYS programme as well as the continued breaking of institutional silos.

One example of such institutional buy-in is a creative partnership with Student Housing and multiple campus stakeholders. Through this partnership, extensive work was done to reimagine the first-year residence support programme, PASSAGES, to align with, and support the FYS efforts. The redesigned PASSAGES programme now more formally works to enhance the first-year residence student’s sense of academic, social and cultural belonging. PASSAGES serves as a wonderful example of creative partnering for FYE initiatives and how such partnerships can produce multidisciplinary and intentional learning opportunities towards university belonging for first-year students.

Institutional initiatives, like FYE programmes, are never completely done and require a constant and committed process of refinement.

5.6 Recommendations for others wishing to implement such programmes

Especially in such uncertain times in higher education, there is not ever going to be the perfect time to start an FYE programme. One may be waiting for positions to be approved for new staff hires, and budget increases to get started. These things do not have to be completed before an institution can begin. The critical piece is to just get started on something.

Institutions can begin by identifying a small multi-disciplinary team of interested and committed individuals for the initial design phase of what might be needed to establish an FYE programme. Institutions must rely on existing literature around FYE programmes and best practices from other institutions, but also be open to adjusting institutions’ objectives to meet their students’ unique needs. This multi-disciplinary team can collaboratively create a short, easy to explain concept document, including intentional language and branding on what FYE means at the institution. The team can then utilise this concept document and intentional language as they approach their everyday work and interactions, as well as at institutional committees on which
they serve to create the branding of their FYE programme. Key stakeholders can be approached directly to discuss the need for their role and to encourage buy-in for FYE initiatives.

Additionally, most institutions already have significant activities that can be linked to and support an FYE programme. It is therefore important to know what is already taking place on campus to support the institution's FYE programme, by conducting an institutional audit of such activities. The call to identify such programmes would need to span all aspects of the institution. Once initiatives that are found to provide first-year student support get identified, they can easily just fold into the greater FYE initiative. The results of this audit can also be used to identify areas that are not being addressed appropriately and may require future institutional attention and improvement.

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6 The Evolution of the University of the Free State (UFS) 101 Module

Lauren Oosthuizen, Zanete Malan and Michael Combrink

6.1 Introduction

In 2012, the first full roll-out of UFS101 took place at the University of the Free State. Since 2012, UFS101 has been in a constant state of evolution in order to meet the needs of the students and to improve their experience of the module. Thus, each year brought with it its own challenges and learning points, from which recommendations for the next academic year could be taken for implementation. In addition, the purpose, content and mode of delivery of the programme have changed over the years. The purpose of this report is to provide a detailed account of each roll-out of UFS101, with special focus on the challenges, learning points, achievements and impacts, and recommendations from the UFS101 programme for each implementation of the module. The reflections are based on independent evaluation reports that are conducted every year, which illustrates the importance of an evidence-based approach to the development of first year experience initiatives.

There are more than 33 000 students registered at UFS, across three campuses and seven faculties. The majority of this cohort attends classes on Bloemfontein campus. South campus caters for students in access (bridging and extended) programmes, who then move over to the Bloemfontein campus once they have successfully completed their bridging programmes. QwaQwa campus, located in the Eastern Free State, serves approximately 4000 students from the surrounding areas.

The main purpose of UFS101, since its pilot in 2011, has been to teach students how to engage with complex problems from multiple perspectives; as well as to develop graduates that will be competent citizens and compassionate human beings. The programme is accredited (16 credits) and is compulsory for all first-year students (excluding bridging and extended degree programme in the first year of study). In order to successfully complete the module, students have to adhere to both the assessment (average of 50% or higher) and attendance (rate of 70% or higher) requirements.
UFS101 was piloted in 2011 (with 200 students) on the Bloemfontein campus, and a full roll-out of the programme was implemented in 2012 (with 2000 students) on the Bloemfontein campus. Additionally, in 2012, a pilot (with 150 students) was conducted on the QwaQwa campus, and a full roll-out (with 400 students) of the programme was implemented there in 2013. The programme was presented as a core curriculum module in 2012 and 2013, similar to programmes of the same nature presented at the London School of Economics as well as at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

In 2014 (with 4500 students), the UFS101 teaching and learning methodology went through a major overhaul, moving from blended learning to the flipped classroom approach. This new teaching and learning methodology was tested with a cohort of 4500 students in 2014.

In 2015 (with 5000 students), the programme went through re-curriculum, with the focus shifting from a core curriculum module to also include academic success skills. This process also allowed the team to better align the module with the aims of a first year seminar. This change in curriculum followed conference presentations at the Annual US First Year Experience Conference, as well as the annual module evaluations conducted from 2011-2014. In 2016 (with 5300 students), minor changes were implemented to expand on the aspects in the module that proved successful, with minor improvements where necessary.

The staff complement of UFS101 consists of a core team that coordinates assessment, attendance, logistics, and research; as well as teaching assistants, lecturers and guest presenters. Face-to-face teaching on UFS101 follows two streams; firstly, lecturers and guest presenters are utilised for large class teaching, while teaching assistants are used to facilitate smaller tutorials or discussion classes. Teaching assistant responsibilities included the attendance of all contact sessions and the facilitation of tutorial sessions. Each teaching assistant was assigned to a group of approximately 30 students (teaching assistants were later assigned to a group of approximately 150 students each) and was responsible for the marking of all the assignments of the group and for e-mail communication with these students. The teaching assistant also played a vital role during large gatherings as they controlled the flow of students entering the hall, biometric scanners used to monitor attendance and for taking microphones to students during interactive sessions. In addition, the teaching assistant assisted with the management of disruptive student behaviour, such as text messaging on cellular phones during lectures.
Even though the teaching and learning methodology has changed over the years, certain aspects of delivery have remained constant, such as: lectures, learning experiences, tutorials, and vodcasts. Vodcasts refer to video recordings of contact sessions, placed on Blackboard, to accommodate students who were unable to attend the lectures – due to timetable clashes, illness, etc. In 2012 and 2013, lectures took place in a large class (or mega-class) environment, with approximately 1000 students attending each lecture (lectures were repeated to accommodate the total number of students, and the differences in their timetables). From 2014 onwards, lectures were recorded and placed on Blackboard, in accordance with the flipped classroom approach. Learning experiences are presented in the large class environment and include presentations by guest speakers, student panel discussions and, in some cases, exhibitions of campus services. Tutorials (in 2015 these became discussion classes) are presented by trained teaching assistants with a ratio of one teaching assistant to a range of 30-45 students. These tutorials took place once a week and were 50 minutes in duration. The aim of the tutorials is to facilitate debates, discussions and practical application of content.

6.2 Description of UFS 101, achievements, challenges and recommendations: Full roll-out of UFS101 at the Bloemfontein campus

Module outcomes and syllabus

In 2012, UFS101 aimed to create an innovative, 21st century learning space where students learned through solving problems from multi-disciplinary perspectives. The module outcomes were as follows:

After completion of this module students should be able to:

- Explain the value of different disciplinary perspectives;
- Apply different disciplinary perspectives as part of their critical thinking;
- Demonstrate basic reflective academic skills - reading, writing and argumentation skills; and
- Reflect on how higher education empowers citizens to engage with the challenges facing the 21st century world (locally and globally).

During 2012, the module consisted of seven units presented by subject experts. The first two units were presented in the first semester, and the other five during the second semester. The following units were presented:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do we deal with our violent past?</td>
<td>History and Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Screening of the War Museum Documentary and discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial: Evaluation of medical degree admission policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does it mean to be fair?</td>
<td>Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience 1: Don’t talk to me, talk to my lawyer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience 2: Ask the Judge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are we alone?</td>
<td>Astronomy and Astrobiology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Astronomy Fair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial: Discussion about the Square Kilometre Array</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did God really say?</td>
<td>Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience 1: Screening of Joan of Arc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience 2: Free talk on the use and misuse of God</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial: Analysis of God says discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How green is green?</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Chem-Magic Show</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the financial crisis described as global?</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Talk with the Governor of the South African Reserve Bank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do we become South Africans?</td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial: What in South Africa would illustrate an imagined community?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessment and attendance requirements**

Students were evaluated through continuous assessment. These assessment tasks included participation in discussion forums, the writing of reflective journals, and digital storytelling. Detailed instructions for each assessment were provided in the module guide and on Blackboard. Each assessment was submitted on Blackboard. Seven assessments were completed during the course of the year; each assessment linked to a particular unit. The purpose of these assessments, in terms of Bloom's taxonomy, was to assess whether the students would be able to apply the principles that they had been taught.
Table 6.2: UFS101 ASSESSMENT BREAKDOWN IN 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Essay: answer the three questions about medical school admission policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discussion forum: addressing violence against women and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Discussion forum: impact of the SKA and parameters of life on your discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reflection journal: analyse the transcript using &quot;God says discourse&quot; to do so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reflection journal: reflect on questions regarding Fukushima Nuclear Crisis OR Fracking for Shale Gas OR Johannesburg Acid Water Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Discussion forum: Investigate whether globalisation benefits economic growth in emerging market economies in general, and in South Africa in particular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Digital Storytelling: Choose a historical event and create an imagined South African future based on that event.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Re-assessment Integrated assessment on all topics (essay)  
This assessment was made available to students when they passed the module on their attendance, but failed on their assessments.

The teaching assistants were the assessors, each of whom took responsibility for a group of approximately 30 students. Instructions for the marking of assignments and detailed rubrics were provided for each of the assessments and the UFS101 team monitored the assessment process.

Approximately 2000 students were registered for UFS101 during 2012, and attendance was monitored through the use of a biometric scanning system. The online system used fingerprints to clock students in for a specific session. The online monitoring system records overall group attendance, as well as individual student reports. Students were also able to log in to the system and check their attendance online.

**Achievements and impacts of UFS101**

An evaluation of the programme found that the blended learning approach, as well as the quality learning materials, led to high levels of active learning. It also found that the lecturers and teaching assistants acted as role models of good teaching and learning and, lastly, that student engagement happened at a deep level. The largest proportion of students (72.79%) successfully completed the module based on the criteria set out for them, with only six students (0.31%) not achieving the subminimum of 45% to pass their assessment.
In this evaluation, students were asked to report on their experiences in UFS101. Various respondents expressed their preference for different units presented in this module, indicating that UFS101 had catered for a diversity of interests. Furthermore, both the discussion sessions during tutorials and the learning experiences were very well received. Students also enjoyed the interactive nature of the learning experiences and were excited at the opportunity of meeting special guest presenters.

After reviewing the students’ recommendations, it was found important for the teaching assistants to receive more specific training with regard to facilitation, in order to enhance the quality of discussion sessions. Great appreciation was expressed towards the lecturers, teaching assistants and the UFS101 team for their friendly and efficient service. The lecturers were specifically commended for the thorough preparation of their presentations. The logistical arrangements and processes were found to be of an excellent standard. Students appreciated the blended learning approach, specifically because they did not have to write examinations, and could submit their assignments online.

**Challenges experienced and recommendations**

The high academic success rate and self-reporting by small numbers of students, indicates that the level of academic challenge of the module content, as well as that of the assessments, may not have been adequately high for first-year university students. Thus, a focus on a finer balance between challenge and support was included in curriculum planning in the following year.

There was sufficient evidence that the unit outcomes had been reached, but the contentious nature of certain topics caused several students to disengage on an emotional level, rendering the module as unsatisfactory in their opinion. The teaching assistants, lecturers and students offered two main recommendations relating to the module. Firstly, that the diversity of interests in different topics; the variety of home languages, learning preferences and other factors impacting on learning in large classes necessitate that lectures be made more interactive to keep students engaged. Secondly, that, for continuity purposes, lecturers should indicate more clearly how the unit they are presenting links with the other units. Lecturers also expressed the need for better liaison amongst themselves to further enhance a sense of continuity.

Integrated assessment was introduced to reduce the number of assessments. This aligned the number of assessments in the module more closely to other modules at the UFS. Positive feedback was received with regard to the integrated assessment, which was implemented during
the second semester, as well as the innovative ways in which students could present their work. Higher levels of application and varied assessment methods were considered for future developments.

The module guides (first and second semester) were found to be of a high standard but, unfortunately, students did not make optimal use of this learning material. It was therefore decided to assess class preparation by requiring students to complete multiple choice questions relating to preparation material on Blackboard prior to the presentations.

For tutorials, and inclusion in the training of teaching assistants, the following were recommended:

- A code of conduct for discussion sessions should preferably be compiled by the students themselves during the first small group gatherings;
- Various discussion techniques could be employed and can be specifically chosen according to the topics and purposes of the sessions;
- Constant gauging and improvement of discussions by means of the completion of anonymous session evaluations would be ideal. The Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) was to assess student engagement and learning during democratic discussion and, in addition, has proven to be a very useful qualitative evaluation tool.

Further recommendations included:

- In future, each unit should have both a tutorial and a learning experience;
- In order to make full use of such unique learning opportunities such as the talk with the Governor of the Reserve Bank, more time should be allocated for students to interact and engage in discussion with the special guests;
- A new topic, that of social change, should be included, and the sequence of topics restructured to allow for a more scaffolded approach to the discussion of controversial topics;
- More opportunities should be created for students to connect with the UFS101 team, their teaching assistants and the lecturers. It was recommended, for example, that a blog be opened on Blackboard following every unit, to facilitate discussion of the unit content with the presenters.
2013 Full roll-out of the programme at Bloemfontein and QwaQwa campus

Module outcomes and syllabus

In 2013, a few changes were made to the curriculum: a) Theology was replaced with Social Psychology; b) the sequence of the units was changed to align with a scaffolded approach to introducing discussions on controversial topics; c) learning experiences were updated and in some cases completely changed; and d) each unit included two lectures, a face-to-face tutorial and a learning experience.

The module outcomes were as follows: after completion of the module students should be able to:

- Explain the value of different disciplinary perspectives;
- Apply different disciplinary perspectives as part of their critical thinking;
- Demonstrate basic reflective academic skills - reading, writing and argumentation skills; and
- Reflect on how higher education empowers citizens to engage with the challenges facing the 21st century world (locally and globally).

The following content was presented:

| Table 6.3: DESCRIPTION OF UNITS PRESENTED IN 2013 |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Topic                                         | Discipline        |
| 1 How do we become South Africans?             | Anthropology      |
| Learning experience: Sculpture walk           |                   |
| 2 What is the role of Law in society?         | Law               |
| Learning experience 1: State your case        |                   |
| 3 Are we alone?                               | Astronomy and Astrobiology |
| Learning experience: Astronomy Fair           |                   |
| Tutorial: Discussion about the Square Kilometre Array |     |
| 4 How should we deal with our violent past?   | History and Pedagogy |
| Learning experience: Dealing with battle scars |                   |
| 5 Why is the financial crisis described as global? | Economics    |
| Learning experience: Talk with the Deputy Governor of the South African Reserve Bank | |
Assessment and attendance requirements

Each student was required to complete all three assessments (obtaining a subminimum of 45% to get a re-assessment and 50% average to pass the module) in order to successfully complete the module. All assessments were moderated by an external moderator, after which adjustments to mark allocations were made where necessary. Students were required to complete a multiple choice question test each week, before attending the contact session for that week – this weighed 25% of the final mark. The rest of the assessments consisted of an essay, a reflective journal and a digital story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.4: UFS101 ASSESSMENT BREAKDOWN IN 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Unit 1, 2 and 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection journal – Students could choose between 4 options for Assessment 1:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fracking and the SKA Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Global Recession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unemployment as a key objective of the National Planning Commission of South Africa (NPCSA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Education as a key objective of the NPCSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Unit 4 and 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection journal – Students could choose between 4 options for Assessment 2:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fracking and the SKA Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Global Recession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unemployment as a key objective of NPCSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Education as a key objective of the NPCSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Unit 6 and 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection journal – Students could choose between 4 options for Assessment 3:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fracking and the SKA Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Global Recession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unemployment as a key objective of NPCSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Education as a key objective of the NPCSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Unit 1 – 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Briefly discuss one main theme for each of the seven units of UFS101.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.2. Do research and discuss the water crisis in South Africa. Apply what you have learnt from Unit 2, 5 and 6 and suggest solutions for the water crisis in South Africa from each of the three units’ perspective.

| MCQ’s (Unit 1 – 7) | MCQ’s were set up based on the unit content that was dealt with at particular times throughout the year. MCQ’s are made up of questions on the first 2 levels of Bloom’s taxonomy: Remembering and Understanding. |

Students still had to have a 70% attendance record, with attendance being monitored with the biometric scanner system.

All teaching assistants received three days of training at the beginning of 2013, which included an orientation to UFS101, Blackboard training and New Academic Tutorial Training (NATP), and where they had an opportunity to discuss the content of the lectures for the first semester. Additional training was held prior to the start of the second semester for two days to cover the content to be presented in the second semester. Meetings with the external moderator were arranged prior to the marking of each assessment to prepare the teaching assistants adequately for marking the assessments.

**Achievements and impacts of UFS101**

The majority of the students on both campuses (Bloemfontein >70%; QwaQwa > 60%) met the assessment and attendance criteria to successfully complete the module.

Most students on both campuses agreed that the content level of difficulty, the level of lecture presentations and the time allocated to each unit in UFS101 were appropriate for first-year students. With regards to the module outcomes, proportionally more students on the QwaQwa campus were challenged to think about difficult issues from different perspectives, although the majority of Bloemfontein campus students also agreed this was the case to some extent. There was also stronger agreement on the QwaQwa campus that the module encouraged students to think in new ways about 21st century local and global issues.

The learning experiences were experienced positively by students, who enjoyed their practical and engaging nature. The learning experiences helped students relate their knowledge to real-life, relevant situations and provided a platform for them to voice their opinions. Very few logistical concerns were raised, and learning experiences typically ran smoothly.

Overall, students were more positive about the module guide than negative, with most students agreeing that the module guide was user-friendly and provided them with all the information
they needed. Students also experienced Blackboard positively (with only a limited number of technical difficulties reported), and reported that the sites were well-managed, up-to-date and useful. Students were positive about the teaching assistants and the UFS101 tutorials. Teaching assistants were mostly described as helpful, well-prepared for sessions, and respectful. Overall, more students agreed that they had learned transferrable skills rather than academic skills through UFS101. A greater proportion of students on the QwaQwa campus reported acquiring both transferable and academic skills than students on the Bloemfontein campus. Qualitative feedback in various sections of the online surveys confirmed that students learned greater respect for the views of others, developed stronger social cohesion within diversity and continued developing the skill of seeing both sides of an argument. The module content and delivery, particularly the exposure to topics outside of their discipline, were aspects of UFS101 that students liked most. The opportunity for interaction with other students – both formally through discussion in the classroom and informally – was appreciated by the students.

Confirming the positive student experiences in tutorials, teaching assistants reported the tutorials to be effective and engaging. Teaching assistants engaged students in their sessions through: creating an atmosphere and environment conducive to developing their capacity to pay attention to personal relationships, use small group activities and discussions, and deliberately elicit individual student input. Also, UFS101 successfully exposed teaching assistants to new ways of teaching and learning. UFS101 is a learning experience for the teaching assistants, with most teaching assistants acquiring or improving both their transferable and academic skills. All facilitators on the QwaQwa campus reported that they improved all of their academic and transferable skills.

**Challenges experienced and recommendations**

Though the content was written to be relevant and applicable to students, they often were not able to see the link between this content and the content covered in the rest of their programmes. Efforts were made to ensure that more relevant practical examples were used in the tutorials. Additionally, the purpose of solving problems from multi-disciplinary perspectives would be emphasised during the orientation to the module.

Despite the generally positive sentiment with regards to the module guide, many students indicated they were unable to locate the necessary information in the module guide to complete their MCQ tests. This was because the written material was available in the printed module
guide, but videos and vodcasts were also available on Blackboard, and students were unsure of how to access all the content needed to prepare for each MCQ. Many students would make use of only the written material or only the videos and vodcasts to prepare for the MCQ’s, and this had consequences for their scores on these tests. In this case, the recommendation was to make use of only one medium for preparation material – either the printed guide or Blackboard, so as not to confuse students.

When taking all feedback across all sections of the evaluations into account, assessment was the one aspect of UFS101 that students were least positive about. Students found the MCQ tests time-consuming to complete and struggled to find the necessary information in their module guides. Some students experienced difficulties managing UFS101 in addition to their other academic responsibilities. Despite this, the majority of students agreed that the assessments challenged them to apply the skills and knowledge they learned, and that they continued to learn through completing the assessments.

Assessment was a time-consuming component of UFS101 for both students and teaching assistants. The timing of when facilitators were required to mark (e.g. during tests or exams) added additional pressures to their own academic responsibilities. As teaching assistants became more acquainted with the rubric, the marking process became both easier and less time-consuming; however, some facilitators still struggled with interpreting and applying the generic rubric. Additional assessment training, particularly for new teaching assistants, was instituted.
Module outcomes and syllabus

In 2014, the aim to create an innovative, 21st century students remained as is, with a shift in focus of the module outcomes. The redefined module outcomes were as follows:

After completion of this module students should be able to:

- Improve their interaction with diverse groups of students;
- Change their ways of thinking about problems by being aware of multiple viewpoints;
- Demonstrate basic reflective academic skills - reading, writing and argumentation skills;
- Reason above emotion by applying facts or ideas to solve problems; and
- Learn to express own ideas in a group setting.

The UFS101 module also entered into new pedagogical territory in 2014 by implementing a flipped classroom approach to the large class teaching environment referred to as the Flipped-Discussion-Teaching (FDT) model. The FDT model includes a blended learning design with a flipped classroom approach where students are required to watch a series of 5-15 minute “lecturettes” online for each unit, and complete a set of readings linked to multiple choice questions prior to attending a small group face-to-face discussion class. After these requirements were met, further discussions were continued online. Thus, this approach ensured students came prepared so that they were able to discuss what they had learned.

The content presented were restructured and adapted based on recommendations made from 2013. This included the addition of an information literacy module for self-study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.5: DESCRIPTION OF UNITS PRESENTED IN 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 How to become democratic and cultivated citizens? Learning experience: Sculpture walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 My rights vs. your rights?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment and attendance requirements

Students were required to attend 70% of the contact sessions (learning experiences and discussion classes) in order to pass the module. In addition to this, all students were required to complete two integrated assessments during the course of the year, two reflection journals, as well as online multiple choice question (MCQ) tests prior to each discussion class. Each student was required to complete all five assessments (obtaining a subminimum of 45% to get a re-assessment and 50% average to pass the module). All teaching assistants received extensive training prior to each assessment, to ensure standardisation of the marking. The integrated assessments were moderated by three external moderators, after which adjustments to mark allocations were made where necessary. The inclusion of two additional moderators was justified by a need to ensure that the marking of assessments was of high quality, and standardised for all students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment and attendance requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students were required to attend 70% of the contact sessions (learning experiences and discussion classes) in order to pass the module. In addition to this, all students were required to complete two integrated assessments during the course of the year, two reflection journals, as well as online multiple choice question (MCQ) tests prior to each discussion class. Each student was required to complete all five assessments (obtaining a subminimum of 45% to get a re-assessment and 50% average to pass the module). All teaching assistants received extensive training prior to each assessment, to ensure standardisation of the marking. The integrated assessments were moderated by three external moderators, after which adjustments to mark allocations were made where necessary. The inclusion of two additional moderators was justified by a need to ensure that the marking of assessments was of high quality, and standardised for all students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment 1 (Unit 1 – 4)</th>
<th>Reflection journal – Skills shortages among the youth of South Africa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 2 (Unit 5, 6 and 7)</td>
<td>Reflection journal – reflections and demonstrations of solutions to posed problems relating to specific units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Re-assessment (Unit 1 – 7)  | Reflection journal – unit specific questions that required definitions, descriptions, discussions, formulations and statements
---|---
MCQ’s (Unit 1 – 7)  | MCQ’s were set up based on the unit content that was dealt with at particular times throughout the year. MCQ’s are made up of questions on the first 2 levels of Bloom’s taxonomy.
“Special Re-assessment” (Unit 1 – 7)  | Reflection journal – unit specific questions that required definitions, descriptions, discussions, examinations, formulations, statements and summaries.

**Achievements and impacts of UFS101**

The majority of the students on both campuses (Bloemfontein >70%; QwaQwa > 70%) met the assessment and attendance criteria to successfully complete the module.

Most students on both campuses agreed that they had learned to respect the views of others, even if they did not agree with them. In addition to this, students from both campuses agreed that they had improved their interaction with diverse people from different ethnicities, backgrounds, disciplines and religions. The majority of students on the QwaQwa campus (>70%) indicated that the learning outcomes were sufficiently met for the module. Some students (> 30%) from both campuses agreed that their academic reading and writing skills had improved as a result of UFS101. Students from both campuses (Bloemfontein >80%; QwaQwa > 80%) agreed that they were able to effectively discuss the content during the discussion classes.

An even higher positive response was observed from students from the QwaQwa campus, as opposed to students from the Bloemfontein campus. What students found most conducive to their learning were the e-guides, the discussion classes and the way in which UFS101 was delivered. Students reported that the instructors facilitated discussions well, and established a safe environment in which they could discuss their knowledge, added points of view, and learn from the situations.

**Challenges experienced and recommendations**

The greatest challenge experienced in 2014, was the lack of student engagement experienced within discussion classes. This problem decreased as the academic year progressed. This could be because students required time to adapt to the new learning environment required within UFS101. Notably, there were only a few (<5%) students who disliked the learning experiences. Their specific dislikes were being within large groups of people, and being uncomfortable in
open spaces. When asked what students disliked most about UFS101 during the year, students (<30%) reported that the time weekly assessments took were too time-consuming, and the class commitment per week felt too long. This was the most salient negative experience of students, but shared by less than a third of the cohort.

With regard to the online learning platform that was initiated in 2014 (online discussion classes), the demand to correctly facilitate and manage turned out to be an extensive logistical and operational task. In spite of more online platforms existing for 2014 in UFS101, students still preferred face-to-face classes over online, and agreed that face-to-face learning is more conducive for class discussions.

Lastly, certain teaching assistants expressed frustration regarding the marking of assessments. Some teaching assistants felt that the assessment marking was too strict toward first-year students. As was the case for 2013, students were also less positive about assessments throughout the year. To ensure that assessments were fair and correctly monitored during the marking process, additional moderators were included to meet this demand. Stringent guidelines toward marking were provided, and the assessment preparation classes, as well as the assessment preparation and marking training provided were more comprehensive than before.
2015 Move from core curriculum module to first-year seminar

Module outcomes and syllabus

For 2015, UFS101 was re-curriculated. The re-curriculated module was structured to divide the semesters into two main focus areas. The first focus, running alongside the first-year seminar in the first semester, concentrated on skills to aid students’ transition into university. These skills and support structures included computer literacy, understanding the expectations of higher education through academic advising, and the types of critical thinking required within higher education. The second focus, running alongside the common intellectual experience in the second semester, motivated the students to apply critical thinking skills that were explicitly taught within the first-year seminar. The application of these skills enabled discussions on local and global problems from multi-disciplinary perspectives. This shift was intended to increase the retention and success rates in the first year of study. Moreover, students had an opportunity to choose one of three combinations of units presented in the second semester. The redefined module outcomes were as follows:

For the first semester, after successful completion of this semester, a student should be able to:

- Demonstrate practical knowledge in the use of technological resources at a university;
- Apply knowledge of self, goal setting and the undergraduate experience to actual situations; and
- Demonstrate academic reading, creative thinking, decision-making and memory skills.

For the second semester, after completion of this module a student should be able to:

- Explain the value of different disciplinary perspectives;
- Apply different disciplinary perspectives as part of critical thinking;
- Demonstrate basic reflective academic skills – reading, writing and argumentation skills; and
- Reflect on how higher education empowers citizens to engage with the challenges facing the 21st century world.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology at the university</td>
<td>• The content of the first unit focuses on basic computer literacy skills that students need in order to transition into university, acquaint students with the university learning management system, introducing students to the Microsoft Office package, and to teach students how to search for academic resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will I have a job after graduating?</td>
<td>• Teach students how to set goals, analyse priorities, what the characteristics of a successful student are, how to navigate the undergraduate experience, and to teach students about their own interests and temperament.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I a critical thinker? Putting the ME in metacognition</td>
<td>• Teach students how to identify main points in an academic article, demonstrate creative thinking by thinking in new ways about problem-solving, demonstrate decision-making skills, and demonstrate memory skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.8: Units presented in the second semester – Combo A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do people change?</td>
<td>Social Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Love media and relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My rights vs. Your rights</td>
<td>Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Mrs E. Sadler and Mr. W. Ellis videos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How should we deal with our violent past?</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Panel discussion between Ms C. Mama and Prof. G Pumla</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Units presented in the second semester – Combo B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are we alone here?</td>
<td>Astronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Astronomy Fair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How green is green?</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Chem-Magic Show</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the financial crisis global?</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Multiculturalism in business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Units presented in the second semester – Combo C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to create cultivate</td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Presenter: Setlogane Manchidi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do people change?</td>
<td>Social Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Love media and relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the financial crisis global</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Multiculturalism in business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment and attendance requirements

For 2015, students were required to complete multiple choice questionnaires before each discussion class, starting from unit 2, and a written assessment at the end of each semester. The focus of the first assessment was rooted in academic writing, and the second assessment in reflective writing to accommodate for the type of content presented in both semesters. Teaching assistants were trained in marking assessments before each assessment deadline. Additionally, external moderators were consulted during the marking process to ensure good quality feedback and fair mark allocation.
### Table 6.9: UFS101 ASSESSMENT BREAKDOWN IN 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment 1</th>
<th>Reflective writing – reflection journal – reflective questions were set up based on the newly added skills development modules in the first semester (Unit 1, Unit 2 and Unit 3). Reflections opened on Bb as the content was being taught.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Skills development units: 1, 2 and 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 2</td>
<td>Three Combo-specific assessments were set up, including questions on the specific units that fell within each Combo. This assessment required application, definitions, discussions and identifications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Combo-specific, 3 units per Combo)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-assessment</td>
<td>The Re-assessment integrated semester 1 and semester 2 content and required creation, demonstration, description, illustration, naming and use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCQ’s</td>
<td>MCQ’s were set up based on the unit content that was dealt with at particular times throughout the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFS101 Ad Hoc Examination</td>
<td>The UFS101 Ad Hoc Examination integrated semester 1 and semester 2 content and required creation, demonstration, description, illustration, naming and use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Achievements and impacts of UFS101**

For unit 1, one of the positive points was that the unit provided students with valuable information. The students were not familiar with the content of the unit, thus they better engaged with the new content, and the teaching assistants reported instances of student engagement during the discussion classes. For unit 2, the most salient positive themes were that student engagement was increasing, students shared their opinions more freely, and students also related to the Finish Line game and found the assessment preparation helpful. For unit 3, the most established positive themes were that student engagement was increasing and students were more prepared for discussion classes. For the first semester, the majority of students from the QwaQwa campus reported that they learned skills in all three units presented that they did not know before. For the Bloemfontein campus, approximately half of the group reported that they learned information that they did not know before.

There was an overall trend, observed from previous years, that student engagement increased as each semester progressed. This could be attributed to students becoming more accustomed to the way in which UFS101 is presented. During the second semester, teaching assistants were assigned to present classes within one of the three combinations of classes. Throughout the second semester, students reported that the content presented was much more enjoyable to

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6 The Finish line game is a board game that the students play during the class. This game aims to simulate the student walk and familiarize the students with the undergraduate experience.
discuss. More than 80% of students reported that the content presented within the second semester broadened their perspective on new topics encountered in the module.

According to the students, they faced seven major challenges during the first six months of university, namely: academic pressure, language barriers, difficulty adjusting, social pressure, feeling homesick, financial constraints and time management. Students agreed that UFS101 addressed these issues (Bloemfontein = 65%, QwaQwa = 97%). When asked to provide a reason why UFS101 helped address these issues, five major themes were identified, namely: broaden perspectives, information available assisted, academic reading was informative and helpful, prioritising and time management were valuable classes (Bloemfontein = 40%, QwaQwa = 57%). When asked if the content second semester expanded their knowledge, most students said yes. When asked to provide a reason, four themes were extracted, namely: broaden perspective, exposure to different fields, learning experiences, and relevant topics (Bloemfontein = 65%, QwaQwa = 73%).

Overall, there was sufficient evidence supporting that group discussions, teaching assistant preparedness, the content presented and the restructuring of the UFS101 module made more sense in terms of the timing and position of the content presented. Themes from students in evaluations included: they enjoyed the freedom to choose their respective combos, the content in the first semester helped them navigate the university system, content presented within the second semester broadened their perspectives, learning experiences were very informative, and teaching assistants were well prepared to facilitate discussion classes.

**Challenges experienced and recommendations**

The e-guides used in the module were constructed in Articulate, which made it difficult for students to access it freely. This resulted in students experiencing technical difficulties in opening, navigating or closing these documents offline. This problem did not extend to a large percentage of students, but was considered unfavourable, since it created additional challenges for some students. From 2015, it was evident that some students struggled to correctly interpret the requirements of the written assessments at the end of each semester. As a result of this, assessment preparation classes were included in which students had the opportunity to ask technical questions regarding the submission of assessment and the assessment itself.

Another challenge experienced in 2015 was the increase in student numbers for UFS101. This meant that more time and attention needed to be spent on the logistical, operational and
assessment criteria of the module. This led to the expansion of the UFS101 team, in order to accommodate the increasing needs and to ensure that the module is properly implemented

2016 Focus on the First Year Seminar: Detailed account of UFS101

Module outcomes and syllabus

In 2016, the content presented in the first semester was revised and improved with the aid of experts from different fields, and the UFS101 team. This was driven by a need to more clearly cater for student needs. During 2016, an additional learning experience on sign language was introduced during the first semester. The decision to introduce sign language learning experiences to first year students was motivated by a need to create social cohesion between hearing and hearing-impaired students at the University of the Free State. The learning experiences were presented by the sign language lecturers and were aimed at teaching the students basic sign language vocabulary. In the second semester, Agriculture replaced Chemistry.

Table 6.10: DESCRIPTION OF UNITS PRESENTED IN 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units presented in the first semester</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technology at the university</strong></td>
<td>• The content of the first unit focuses on basic computer literacy skills that students need in order to transition into university, acquaint students with the university learning management system, introducing students to the Microsoft Office package, and to teach students how to search for academic resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Will I have a job after graduating?</strong></td>
<td>• Teach students how to set goals, analyse priorities, what the characteristics of a successful student are, how to navigate the undergraduate experience, and to teach students about their own interests and temperament.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Am I a critical thinker? Putting the ME in metacognition</strong></td>
<td>• Teach students how to identify main points in an academic article, demonstrate creative thinking about problem-solving, demonstrate decision-making skills, and demonstrate memory skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.11: Units presented in the second semester – Combo A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do people change?</td>
<td>Social Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Love media and relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culture of protest</td>
<td>Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: panel discussion on the legal and social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implications of protests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How should we deal with our violent past?</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Panel discussion between Ms C. Mama and Prof G.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pumla</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Units presented in the second semester – Combo B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission to mars</td>
<td>Astronomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Astronomy Fair and Astrobiology discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do we produce food for the next generation?</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: History of Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the financial crisis global?</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Multiculturalism in business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Units presented in the second semester – Combo C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to become cultivated and democratic citizens.</td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Panel discussion on the relation between social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cohesion, democracy and solidarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do people change?</td>
<td>Social Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Love media and relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is the financial crisis global?</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience: Multiculturalism in business</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment and attendance requirements

For 2016, students still needed to obtain a 50% mark on their assessments and 70% attendance of classes in order to pass the module. Two assessment preparation classes, one each semester, were included throughout the year to ensure that the technical and assessment related questions were answered. Since UFS101 does not formally have an examination for students, a large portion of the students’ marks is dependent on these assessments. Teaching assistants were
trained in marking assessments before each assessment deadline. Additionally, external moderators were consulted during the marking process to ensure good quality feedback and fair mark allocation.

Table 6.12: UFS101 ASSESSMENT BREAKDOWN IN 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment 1</th>
<th>Reflective writing – reflection journal – reflective questions were set up based on the newly added skills development modules in the first semester (Unit 1, Unit 2 and Unit 3). Reflections opened on Blackboard as the content was being carried over to the students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment 2</td>
<td>Three Combo-specific assessments were set-up, including questions on the specific units that fell within each Combo. This assessment required application, definitions, discussions and identifications.</td>
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<td>The Re-assessment integrated semester 1 and semester 2 content and required creation, demonstration, description, illustration, naming and use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCQ’s</td>
<td>MCQ’s were set up based on the unit content that was dealt with at particular times throughout the year. MCQ’s are made up of questions on the first 2 levels of Bloom’s taxonomy: Remembering and Understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFS101 Ad Hoc Examination</td>
<td>The UFS101 Ad Hoc Examination integrated semester 1 and semester 2 content and required creation, demonstration, description, illustration, naming and use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Achievements and impacts of UFS101**

Sign language was taught in three segments and positioned as large-class learning experiences. Students were taught about deaf culture, sign language theory, and how to sign their names, exchange small talk, and have a basic conversation with a deaf person. These sessions were interactive, which led to an increase in participation and student engagement, as compared to other learning experiences presented for the first semester in previous years. Students reported that these sessions were interactive, of great value and helped their understanding of deaf culture. Students were also assessed on this content and their experience of it at the end of the second semester, and the same themes as in the first semester were shared.
In 2016, more than 80% of the respondents reported that UFS101 broadened their perspective in the second semester, compared to the first. Similar reasons were provided in both 2015 and 2016. Some of these reasons included: being exposed to new material, broadening of perspectives outside their own field of study, group discussions helped catalyse communication between different groups of people, and that learning experiences were informative. In addition, students confirmed that the common intellectual experience did broaden their perspectives.

UFS101 teaching assistants are professionally trained in difficult dialogues, and adherence to a very clear code of conduct. The majority of the respondents reported positivity and commended the teaching assistants on professionalism, friendliness, punctuality, and willingness to support; additionally, the respondents indicated that they were satisfied by the way in which the UFS101 discussion classes were presented.

The e-guides and electronic resources were extensively peer reviewed before they were published online. In subsequent evaluations students reported that they could read all the articles (Bloemfontein = 80%, QwaQwa = 91%), that they were user friendly (Bloemfontein = 78%, QwaQwa = 87%), could view the content on the e-guides (Bloemfontein = 67%, QwaQwa = 72%), made use of the glossary provided within the e-guides (Bloemfontein = 67%, QwaQwa = 80%), and that they could download all the e-guides (Bloemfontein = 65%, QwaQwa = 71%). Lastly, students were satisfied with the online learning material of UFS101.

One of the major points of interest was that students preferred an e-guide/interactive PDF document over paper-based material. Approximately 67% of respondents preferred using the e-guide over paper-based material. Some of the reasons given for this included the points that electronic material cannot get lost, saves paper, and that videos may be imbedded in these guides as an added advantage over paper-based material. Overall, the module received more positive feedback than in previous years, especially based on the content presented within the second semester.

**Challenges experienced and recommendations**

A major platform change was the move from e-guides to interactive PDF documents. This change was motivated by students (<10%) reporting that they could not open the e-guides, or struggled to download the e-guides. The interactive PDF documents had automatic links to the video content and a hyperlinked interface that was intentionally designed to assist the user in finding the appropriate content within the document.
During the student protests within the second semester, students were still required to view content online in the unit on Astronomy and Social Psychology. Once students were required to continue with their academic cycle online, preparation material continued to be placed online to prepare for the MCQ tests.

The development of UFS101 has created a unique space in which the UFS was able to use monitoring and evaluation data to develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning and to take them to scale. The emphasis on monitoring and evaluation continues to drive its development as a module that provides appropriate transitional support for first year students.

**Contact details**

For further information, please contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Email address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof Francois Strydom</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Michael Combrink</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:combrinkhm@ufs.ac.za">combrinkhm@ufs.ac.za</a></td>
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</table>