

Effectiveness and Participation of Support Services for ECP Health Sciences Students

Student learning; academic development

Poster presentation

In South Africa, many students enter university without the necessary skills required for success in higher education. Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECP) were developed in order to provide students who showed potential but were underprepared with the necessary foundations to achieve success in higher education (Council of Higher Education (CHE), 2013). Student support services, especially those offered at universities enrolling academically under-prepared students, are essential to student success (Bridges, 2008). This prospective study, conducted by the office of the Academic Advisor at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) at SU, aims to explore the effectiveness and participation of support services available to students in the ECP. The last cohort of ECP students were accepted into the faculty in 2018, for the MBChB, BScPhysiotherapy, or BScSpeech-Language and Hearing Therapy degrees, with current students considered to be senior students in their second year up to their sixth and final year of study. On successful completion of the ECP,

On successful completion of the ECP, students join the second year of their respective mainstream programme and are tracked throughout their academic career with dedicated support services offered to them. The services include university-wide student support services made available by the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) as well as a dedicated registered psychologist and counsellor for ECP students specifically. Services include various work sessions on themes such as stress- and time management skills, individual counselling, and therapy sessions and individual or group academic skills development sessions. As students transition out of the ECP, they now need to utilize their own agency in accessing the support services available to them. Students receive a support booklet advertising the available services at the CSCD as well as the process for engagement with a specific service. Apart from this, the FMHS provides a student support booklet which details the steps that need to be taken in order to address academic, psychological, emotional, social, health, administrative and security needs. Students are therefore provided with an abundance of information regarding the resources available to them.

Students however choose not to use the support services available to them or do not know how to use the services effectively. This study therefore seeks to explore and analyze students use of the support services provided by the CSCD. Specifically, this study explores whether students are aware of the services offered, have used any of the services or express interest in using any of the services available. It is important to investigate the support needs of ECP students as an increasing need for support services has been identified as a result of the pandemic. It is also important to understand students' perceptions and use of the support services in order to maximize the effectiveness of the services and enhance students' performance. Furthermore, little is known regarding the support needs of senior ECP students and in ECP students in health sciences and this study aims to gain a better understanding of these students' needs. The perceptions of students will be sampled through an online survey.

Keywords: student support services; student agency; health sciences students; extended curriculum programme

Further questions for engagement:

1. Do FMHS ECP students become resistant to support once they enter the senior stages of the programme and do these factors contribute to resilience?
2. Is the focused ECP CSCD support assisting the gap between academic knowledge and application in the clinical skills practice for FMHS students?