

Title:

From First Click to Graduation: Unlocking the Application and Registration Journey to Promote Student Success

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Abstract:

SUCCESS – ACCESS - LEARNING

The tumultuous higher education landscape is not only a case of concern but could be seen as an opportunity to bring about much needed change in terms of student success. Current narratives focus on exposing students to a critically conscious and socially responsive higher education experience. However, at historically disadvantaged higher education institutions before change agents can start thinking about responsive curricula and pedagogies, they realistically need to first know the context and associated challenges faced by students. Other internal and external factors within the environment may also impact on bringing about change through employing a social justice lens. Brock

(2010) points out that student's access has increased, but student success unfortunately not. It is therefore essential that HEIs explore the level and success of student support services provided to students in their institutions. Clarence and colleagues (2021) inspire university educators to understand, reimagine and create socially just teaching and learning practices by turning access into success! "Education still primarily follows an outdated "one-size-fits- all" approach, ignoring vast differences, abilities, and interests. In the highly specialised world of the information society, educators must get to know their "target audience" and how to accommodate students' varying abilities to optimise receptivity and potential. Only through this recognition will educators be able to develop students whose skills match employers' demands (Eng, 2013, p. 273)".

As part of the national Siyaphumelela Network 2.0 project, the aim of this study is "to improve institutional capacity to collect and use student data to improve student success across the higher education sector". The culmination of two Teaching Advancement at University 3 projects will be reported, where existing student application and registration data were used to inform and streamline university support initiatives and strategies in order to enhance student success.

The project is transformative and offers, through an understanding of the student profile data to provide appropriate and tailor-made support to students of diverse backgrounds and educational experiences. This will ensure appropriate engagement and subsequent scaffolding to enhance learning after enrolment. This approach also intends to be proactive as opposed to the conventional reactive measures put in place during the first year, evaluating students at risk after 1st term or 1st semester through university formative assessments. Using this conventional approach, it might be too late for some students at the point when the lapses are detected.

The researchers in this study use Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a lens to look at the different student support structures that enable or disable student success. CHAT provides a theoretical lens to describe the interaction between HEIs and students in terms of an activity system, which is comprised of tools, rules, multiple participants, and division of labour (Engeström 2015). Segmentation and cluster statistical analyses will be employed to provide a graphical representation of the application and registration information from three faculties of four academic years: 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021. This strategy will inform the development of student-centric curricular and extra-curricular programmes, career counselling and training materials, and ultimately university application and registration criteria.

Two questions:

1. How can HEIs be responsive to students needs during each step of the application and registration processes?
2. How can we bridge the gap between HEIs preparedness and prospective students' readiness?

Keywords: Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, Student Access, Student Journey