

30 June 2016

The Inception of a National Conversation about the First-Year Experience (FYE) through the SANRC

**SOUTH AFRICAN
NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE**



FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION

'The First-Year Experience'

What is a 'first-year experience programme'?

Many of our definitions are derived from work being done by our international counterparts, usually in the US and Western Europe

"The first-year experience is not a single programme or initiative, but rather an intentional combination of academic and co-curricular efforts within and across post-secondary institutions"

Koch and Gardener, 2006

"A first year experience programme represents an intentional and comprehensive programme that consists of different components working together to increase academic performance, provide a cohesive learning experience, increase student persistence, assist in the transition to college, facilitate a sense of commitment and community to the university and increase personal development"

Barefoot, Fidler, Gardener, Moore and Roberts,
1999



Characteristics of a Typical First-Year Experience Programme

In the “*What Works? Student retention and success change programme*” report based on a national research project in the United Kingdom (UK), Thomas (2012) stated that interventions and approaches to improving student success should have the following characteristics:

- **Mainstream**-efforts at improving student success should be aimed at ALL students. This will ensure that some students are helped to barely pass while others will be helped to reach even greater heights
- **Proactive and developmental**-Students should be encouraged to engage before they are in trouble so that they are confident enough to ask for help before it becomes essential
- **Relevant**-The potential benefits to the student of participating in a developmental activity should be made explicit
- **Well-timed and using appropriate media**-early engagement is vital to student success and as a result the timing of messages and the media used to deliver them have to be carefully thought through
- **Collaborative**-Activities should encourage and facilitate collaboration with staff and students
- **Monitored**-Student engagement in the academic endeavor should be monitored and corrective action taken if students don't engage



The SANRC

Who and What is the SANRC

- The SANRC is an independent centre hosted at the University of Johannesburg (UJ).
- We have been established with a Teaching Development Grant (TDG) from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).
- The SANRC was set up to develop and strengthen scholarship and practice with regard to first year transitions and success.
- As a dedicated national resource centre, the SANRC brings different universities together into a national space and helps promote collaboration and coherence amongst this group of diverse institutions



What the SANRC Does

1) PROGRAMME OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION EVENTS

- 1.1. The annual SANRC FYE Conference
- 1.2. SANRC *FYE Brainstorm*
- 1.3. SANRC *FYE Brain Trust*

2) RESEARCH

- 2.1. National research on student transitions, learning, development and success
- 2.2. Data to help inform and support strategies for student success

3) PROVISION OF RESOURCES FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S FYE KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY

- 3.1. Online Resources
- 3.2. Publications



The SANRC's Core Commitments

- Student Learning, Development Transitions and Success
- Connection between Research and Practice
- Inclusion
- Collaboration
- Lifelong Learning
- National and Wider Continental and International Focus

Catalytic Priorities for the SANRC

- Setting a Scholarly Agenda for South Africa's FYE Knowledge Community
- Providing Resources for South Africa's FYE Knowledge Community
- Creating and Developing South Africa's FYE Knowledge Community through Collaboration and Networking



Understanding the First-Year Experience in South Africa

The SANRC's core mandate is to support student transitions and success. There is a knowledge gap about the range and scope of programmes, projects and activities supporting South Africa's first-year student population.

A SANRC research project '**SANRC Inventory of Support toward First-Year Students at South Africa's Universities**' looks to uncover important baseline information about the state of FYE programmes in South Africa.

- How is the FYE defined and understood by institutions implementing FYE programmes?
- What are the characteristic components of an FYE initiative or programme at South Africa's universities?
- How is the FYE staffed and funded?
- How is the FYE evaluated?
- To what extent is the FYE informed by data and research?
- How much of the FYE is discipline-specific versus generalist?
- Is there intentionality to the FYE and a sense of measurable, specific outcomes for the FYE?



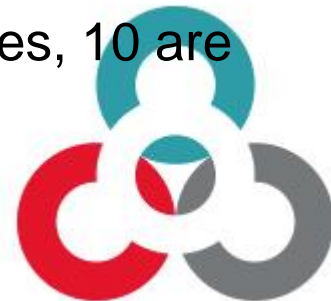
Understanding the First-Year Experience in South Africa

Preliminary findings from the **'SANRC Inventory of Support toward First-Year Students at South Africa's Universities'** **'SANRC Inventory of Support toward First-Year Students at South Africa's Universities'**:

Results have come back from 19 institutions out of a total of 26 who were surveyed....

- Multi-campus nature of South Africa's universities and their often vast geographical spread
- Methodological complexity of obtaining data within institutions (information often locked away in 'siloes')

Of the 19 institutions, 9 have dedicated first-year support offices, 10 are working without dedicated first-year support offices



Some Preliminary Findings from the SANRC Inventory of Support toward First-Year Students at South Africa's Universities

Of those 9 institutions with a dedicated first-year support office:

- Funding for such offices is not certain and sustainability is an issue.
- Support to first-year students differs according to different campuses; evenness of support is required
- Staffing becomes an issue when a single office must service several campuses

Of those 10 institutions without dedicated first-year support offices:

- Support to first-year students is offered in different ways (through lecturers, tutors/mentors, departments of faculties, student development offices etc.)
- There are no plans to set up a dedicated first-year support office



The SANRC's work in terms of collecting, managing and sharing our Collective Knowledge Capital

- Knowledge is the most valuable asset of the FYE community
- 'Knowledge management': gathering, managing and sharing the knowledge capital of South Africa's FYE community
- Knowledge collection and sharing is a complex challenge which requires cooperation and partnership.



Challenges for Knowledge Sharing and Collection

- Frontline faculty and staff are often not consulted (enough or at all)
- Institutions tend to operate in 'silo-es' and knowledge becomes locked into certain places
- Institutions can be territorial
- Staff don't have enough time to write or to acquire the skills to write
- Information resources are often not stored accessibly or they are stored in different repositories that are challenging to navigate
- Cost implications for journal articles and subscriptions.



What resources can be shared?

Internal Documents

- Strategy Documents
- Reports
- Evaluations/assessments
- FYE Guides for Students

Research

- Work in progress
- Research Reports
- Published work
- Survey Data

Media material

- Orientation videos
- Lectures
- Podcasts



SANRC FYE Resources and Knowledge Initiatives

The SANRC Website

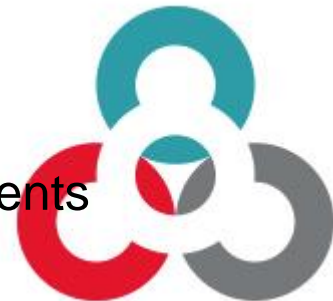
<http://www.sanrc.co.za>

- Information about the work of the SANRC as well as SANRC events
- Announcements from the FYE Community
- Media material such as videos and podcasts

The SANRC Repository

A searchable repository of FYE materials

- Dissertations
- Articles
- Books
- Research Reports
- Lists of FYE topics for prospective Masters and Doctoral students



Opportunities for Collaboration on and Partnership with the SANRC

- How can you and your institution assist with resources for the repository?
- How can you generally help us with access to your institution's resources?
- Are there relevant contact details for work on student transitions and success that you can share with us?

