Siyaphumelela
we succeed

Siyaphumelela Conference 2024

25 - 28 June 2024
The Wanderers Club
Johannesburg

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Introduction

Welcome to the Siyaphumelela Network Conference 2024

This year we have much to celebrate:

- The Kresge Foundation marks its 100th anniversary
- Siyaphumelela celebrates its 10th year
- We welcome 20 Higher Education Institutions, our valued Siyaphumelela Partners.

Important information

The venue: The Wanderers Club is situated at 21 North Street, Illovo, Johannesburg 2196 (GPS Co-ordinates: S26.135951 – E28.053209). Secure parking is available.

Getting to the venue: The Wanderers Club is conveniently located in Illovo, and accessible via the Gautrain bus route (RB3 Rosebank-Illovo). The RB3-11 Gautrain bus stop is situated outside the Protea Hotel Wanderers entrance. For details on the route and timetable, visit the Gautrain website and the RB3 Rosebank-Illovo bus route and timetable or use the Gautrain mobile app. Alternatively, you can use Uber or Bolt for taxi services.

Registration: This will take place in the foyer of The Wanderers Club from 09h00-17h00 on Tuesday 25 June, and 07h30-17h00 on the remaining days. Please register at the desk to receive your name tag, conference programme and delegate folder.

Programme: A printable version of the conference programme is available for your convenience. You can also access the digital Programme and Abstracts document and the conference website.

The conference includes:

- **Plenary sessions:** Keynotes, invited papers, partner presentations, and panel discussions.
- **Concurrent sessions:** Workshops and paper presentations. We received almost 80 paper presentations, carefully reviewed and selected for the conference.

Parking: Delegates can park for free at The Wanderers Club using the code *4*5406. If you do not use this code, you must pay the daily parking rate of R20.

Connectivity: Free Wi-Fi will be available for all delegates at The Wanderers Club. The password for "MarriotBonvoy Conference" is SIYA2024. Limited extension cords and multi-plugs will be available for charging laptops.

Online participation: You can engage online during the conference via LinkedIn.

We look forward to an exciting conference filled with stimulating ideas and discussions.

Best wishes

Alan

Programme

25 June

Registration 09:00 - 18:00

Venue: Foyer

Lunch 12:30 - 13:30

Venue: Foyer

Plenary Session 13:30 - 17:30

Venue: The Ballroom

13:30 - 14:00

Welcome and Introduction

Jenny Glennie
Saide

Bill Moses
The Kresge Foundation

14:00 - 15:00

Keynote 1
Chair: Bill Moses

Uniting Tradition and Technology: Empowering Educators to Shape Our AI Journey
Susan Adams
Achieving the Dream
Silver Spring
United States of America

15:00 - 15:15

South African Dream Scholar 2024
Chair: Francois Strydom

I Am Poem
Simphiwe Kunene
University of the Free State
Bloemfontein
South Africa

Partner Presentations

Chair: Ephraim Mhlanga

15:15 - 15:30
Knowing, Doing and Transforming: Lessons Learned
Mzwandile Khumalo and Vanessa Mathuli
Durban University of Technology

15:30 - 15:45
NMU Siyaphumelela Journey
Liesl Smith and Lelonathemba Ndaleni
Nelson Mandela University

15:45 - 16:00
Reflections and Insights: Key Achievements and Lessons from Siyaphumelela 2.0 at the University of Cape Town
Riashna Sithaldeen and Mbuso Lukhanyo Mafuya
University of Cape Town

16:00 - 16:30
Networking and Refreshments

16:30 - 16:45
Sustaining Seriti: Innovation, Care and Success
Francois Strydom and Sihle Mpolokeng Maxegwana
University of the Free State

16:45 - 17:00
The Dynamics of Student Success: Discovering, Knowing, Doing and Becoming.
Fayth Ruffin and Senzosenkosi Nkosi
University of KwaZulu-Natal

17:00 - 17:15
Integrated Data-Driven Interventions for Enhancing Student Success
Subethra Pather and Chante Johannes
University of the Western Cape

17:15 - 17:30
Reflections on Siyaphumelela 2.0
Kevin Mcloughlin, Francis Phiri and James Zungunde
University of the Witwatersrand

26 June

Registration 07:30 - 18:00

Venue: Foyer

Plenary Session 08:30 - 10:30

Venue: The Ballroom

08:30 - 09:30

Keynote 2
Chair: Jenny Glennie

The Sandwich Axiom for Holistic Success: Pre-in-Post-University Success
Thandwa Mthembu
Durban University of Technology
Durban
South Africa

09:30 - 10:30

Panel Discussion - Strategic Perspectives

Matete Madiba
University of the Western Cape

Muki Moeng
Nelson Mandela University

Thabo Msibi
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Azwitevhelwi Nevhutalu
Durban University of Technology

Daya Reddy
University of Cape Town

Anthea Rhoda
University of the Free State

Garth Stevens
University of the Witwatersrand

10:30 - 11:00

Networking and Refreshments

Workshops 11:00 - 13:00

11:00 - 13:00

Venue: The Ballroom
Support: Loyiso Maciko

Charting the Course: Safeguarding Academic Integrity in AI-Assisted Learning

Susan Adams
Achieving the Dream

11:00 - 13:00

Venue: Centenary

Use of an Online Course to Explore Learning Design

Alan Amory
Saide

Maryla Bialobrzeska
Saide

11:00 - 13:00

Venue: Gala A

Open Education for Student Success Symposium

Ashton Maherry
Saide

Lucky Maluleke
Nelson Mandela University

Tony Lelliott
Saide

Susan Adams
Achieving the Dream

Rassie Louw
North-West University

Annari Muller
University of the Free State

11:00 - 13:00

Venue: Gala B

Towards a National First-Year Experience Framework for South African Higher Education Institutions

Jani Kuhn
North-West University

Subethra Pather
University of the Western Cape

Ruth Hoskins
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Nosisana Mkonto
Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Zena Richards
University of the Witwatersrand

Sharmla Rama
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Mzwandile Khumalo
Durban University of Technology

Lunch 13:00 - 14:00

Venue: Dining Room

Institutional Change: Systemic Interventions 14:00 - 17:00

Concurrent Session 1: The Ballroom
Chair: Bala Pillay

14:00-14:30

Enhancing Student Services through Technology: The Case of Vaal University of Technology's Success Portal

Mohloai, T., Tabane, M., Malope, A., Mamvura, I. and Chili, M.
Vaal University of Technology

14:30-15:00

Harnessing the University Structures to Design a Systemic and Integrated Approach to Student Success

Cupido, X., Mkonto, N., Farrar, T. and Nakhooda, M.
Cape Peninsula University of Technology

15:00-15:30

The Successful Implementation of a Credit Bearing Readiness Activity Used to Enhance Personal Learning Environments

Branch, R., Lee, H., Morris, A. and De Beer, C.
North-West University

15:30-16:00

Networking and Refreshments

16:00-16:30

The Possible Delayed Impact of COVID-19 and Other Exogenous Factors on DUT Students' Performance.

Nevhutalu, A.P., Rathilal, S. and Khumalo, M.
Durban University of Technology

16:30-17:00

The Strategic Value of a Student Mental Health Framework

Kirkcaldy, H.
University of Pretoria

Teaching and Learning for Student Success 14:00 - 17:00

Concurrent Session 2: Centenary
Chair: Maryla Bialobrzeska

14:00-14:30

AI Companions for Learning: A Friend or Foe? A Reflective Perspective on Ethical and Legal Considerations

Majozi, B.
University of Pretoria

14:30-15:00

Enhancing Asynchronous Engagement for Student Success in Online Learning: Reflections from Free On-Demand Short-Learning Programmes at the University of Johannesburg

Van Rooyen, C. and Kondo, V.
University of Johannesburg

15:00-15:30

Improving the Teaching of Evidence Law through Scenario-Based Learning: An Intervention Using Cyber Fraud Cases

Bellengère, A.H., Donnelly, D. and Mulaudzi, M.C.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

15:30-16:00

Networking and Refreshments

16:00-16:30

Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation Approaches for Data-Informed Course Design Strategies

Badru, A.E. and Mulaudzi, M.C.
University KwaZulu-Natal

16:30-17:00

The Battle Between Generative AI Large Language Models (LLM) and Natural Language Programmes (NLP) - Can the Unethical Use of AI Large Language Models be Detected and Conquered by Natural Language Programmes?

Hambrock, H.B. and Ikedinobi, T.
Sefako Makgatho Health Science University

Student Support Interventions: General 14:00 - 17:00

Concurrent Session 3: Gala A
Chair: Elizabeth Booi

14:00-14:30

Annual Academic Development Officer Report on the Impact of the Academic Monitoring Support (AMS) Programme "Perception of an Academic Mentor"

Maseko, M. and Gumede, B.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

14:30-15:00

Are Students Ready for the Workplace? Exploring Student Voices to Understand Career Preparedness at the University of the Free State

Meintjes, A. and Posthumus, H.
University of the Free State

15:00-15:30

Enhancing University Experience and Cultivating Student Success through the Adapt@DUT First Year Students Orientation

Masuku, A.S. and Twala, R.
Durban University of Technology

15:30-16:00

Networking and Refreshments

16:00-16:30

Maximising Academic Support Resources: Harnessing the Potential of a Thrift Shop for Student Success.

Jonker, T.
University of Pretoria

16:30-17:00

Transformative Impact for Students from Low-Income Households: A Scalable Wraparound Support Programme

Thindisa, K. and Mathabathe, K.
Edukat (Presenting on Sikelela Scholars Programme - A University of Pretoria programme)

High Impact Modules: Research Case Studies 14:00 - 15:30

Concurrent Session 4: Gala B
Chair: Ermien van Pletzen

14:00-14:30

An Exploration of the Challenges to Student Success in a Nursing Programme at a University of Technology in South Africa

Rathilal, S., Mavela, N., Zikalala, N., Ntombela, B., Kalanga, P., Makondo, L. and Nxumalo, C.
Durban University of Technology

14:30-15:00

Leveraging Student Feedback for Enhanced Learning Experiences in Business and Information Management Education

Rambharos, S., Govender, R., Ncube, T., Razack, F., Kalanga, P. and Mthalane, P.P.
Durban University of Technology

15:00-15:30

Retrospective Study on Academic Outcomes of MBBCh Students by Admission Categories at Wits University (2016-2021)

Mabizela, S., Ndfirepi, E. and Khupe, C.
University of the Witwatersrand

15:30-16:00

Networking and Refreshments

Student Support Interventions: Peer Tutors 16:00 - 17:00

Concurrent Session 4: Gala B
Chair: Ermien van Pletzen

16:00-16:30

Evaluating the Effectiveness and Implementation of Skills, Principles and Strategies in Tutor Training

Makhoba, B., Mokati, L., Seapi, K., Dicks, T., Mbonani, T. and Ngidi, S.
University of the Free State

16:30-17:00

Peer Assisted Learning: A Social Justice Issue for a Transforming University

Mathabathe, K., Kanyane, R. and Versveld, J.
University of Pretoria

Plenary Session 17:00 - 17:30

Venue: The Ballroom

17:00 - 17:30

Invited Paper
Chair: Jenny Glennie

Ways in which DHET Promotes Student Success: Reflections on the Ecosystem Beyond the UCDG.
Marcia Socikwa
Department of Higher Education and Training
Pretoria
South Africa

Dinner for Invited Guests 18:00 for 18:30

Venue: Gala A

27 June

Registration 07:30 - 18:00

Venue: Foyer

Plenary Session 08:30 - 10:30

Venue: The Ballroom

08:30 - 09:30

Keynote 3
Chair: Nthabiseng Ogude

Siyaphumelela's Journey Towards Equity in South African Universities: Moving from Access to Success

Alan Amory
Saide

Jenny Glennie
Saide

09:30 - 10:30

Panel Discussion: The Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT)

Alan Amory
Saide

Rassie Louw
North-West University

Subethra Pather
University of the Western Cape

Ermien van Pletzen
Rhodes University; University of the Western Cape

10:30 - 11:00

Networking and Refreshments

High Impact Modules: Research 11:00 - 12:30

Concurrent Session 1: The Ballroom
Chair: Nthabiseng Ogude

11:00-11:30

Leveraging on the Enabling Factors for Student Success in Support Programmes at a South African University

Gore, O.T. and Louw, R.
North-West University

11:30-12:00

Refinement of the Student Success Reflection (SSR) Module: Enhancing Academic Resilience through Informed Interventions

Versfeld, J., Mackenzie, M., Mawelele, M., Vinson, C. and Kanyane, R.
University of Pretoria

12:00-12:30

Student's Lived Experience of University Life Related to Academic Success and Failure in a Problem-Based Learning Programme

Zikalala-Mabope, L.A., Wium, A.M., Summers, B. and Meyer, J.C.
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

Present, Report and Analyse Data: Equity Gaps 11:00 - 13:00

Concurrent Session 2: Centenary
Chair: Jenny Glennie

11:00-11:30

Addressing Equity Gaps in Student Success Measures: Interventions at Walter Sisulu University

Nongauza, N.
Walter Sisulu University

11:30-12:00

Exploring the Relationship between Staff Composition and Student Success in Economics

Branson, N. and Whitelaw, E.
University of Cape Town

12:00-12:30

Gender Performance Gaps in Siyaphumelela 2.0 Network Institutions: A Deep Dive into the Data

Maherry, A.
Saide

12:30-13:00

Where are the Guys? Understanding Male Engagement in Higher Education

Strydom, F., Meintjes, A. and Posthumus, H.
University of the Free State

Student Support Interventions: General 11:00 - 13:00

Concurrent Session 3: Gala A
Chair: Alan Amory

11:00-11:30

Access for Success and Success for Access: Towards Explicating a Theory of Change for the Pre-University Academy

Leshota, M.
University of Pretoria: Pre-University Academy

11:30-12:00

Performance of Rural-Origin Health Science Students Compared to National Statistics

MacGregor, R.G. and Ross, A.J.
Umthombo Youth Development Foundation

12:00-12:30

The Effect of a Pre-University Academy on Access and Success

Mthethwa, N.
University of Pretoria

12:30-13:00

The Impact of Support Strategies: A Pathway to Students' Academic Success and Personal Well-being

Stokes, S., Mtshali, Z., Thaver, W. and Pillay, S.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Student Support Interventions: Peer Tutors 11:00 - 13:00

Concurrent Session 4: Gala B
Chair: Wendy Kilfoil

11:00-11:30

Enhancing Engineering Education in the Global South: The Impact of Peer-Led Tutoring Systems on Student Learning and Resilience

Kanyane, R.M. and Versfeld, J.
University of Pretoria

11:30-12:00

Leveraging Technology for Systematic Attendance Tracking and Capturing Student Feedback to Enhance Teaching Quality and Manage Resources

Nsibande, R., Majozi, B., Mathabathe, K. and Mphanda, E.
University of Pretoria

12:00-12:30

Peer Advising Support for Student Leaders in a Residential Setting

January, C., Dyer, D. and Phethlu, O.
University of Cape Town

12:30-13:00

Reflecting on my Role as a Peer Advisor Supporting Students on a Chatbot Platform at the University of Cape Town

Mafuya, M.
University of Cape Town

Lunch 13:00 - 14:00

Venue: Dining Room

Student Voice or Journey 14:00 - 17:00

Concurrent Session 1: The Ballroom
Chair: Loyiso Maciko

14:00-14:30
Analysis of Correlation between Students Engagement and Student Success
Molokwane, S., Sishi, K., Kamwendo, A., Mtshali, C. and Mthabela, K.
Durban University of Technology

14:30-15:00
Leveraging Student Activism: Inculcating Student Agency for Enhanced Academic Performance and Success
Nhlenyama, N. and Khumalo, M.
Durban University of Technology

15:00-15:30
Reimagining Student Success in Teacher Education: Adopting Multiple Voices and Perspectives
Sunder, R., Chitanand, N., Thamae, M. and Thaba-Nkadimene, K.
Durban University of Technology

15:30-16:00
Networking and Refreshments

16:00-16:30
The Role of Students' Voices in Shaping Student Success at one South African Higher Education Institution
Mohloai, T., Chili, M., Samosamo, M. and Madzimure, J.
Vaal University of Technology

16:30-17:00
The Role of the Student Voice in Shaping Student Success: A Student Leader's Perspective
Gawie, B. and Nunes, C.
Central University of Technology, Free State

17:00-17:30
Understanding the Multifaceted Journey of Student Success: Insights from a Programme at the Durban University of Technology
Govender, R., Ncube, T., Rambharos, S., Mthalane, P., Razack, F. and Kalanga, P.
Durban University of Technology

Student Support Interventions: Academic Advising 14:00 - 17:30

Concurrent Session 2: Centenary
Chair: Maryla Bialobrzeska

14:00-14:30
Academic Advising and Student Voices: Insights into Student Help-Seeking Behaviour
De Klerk, D.
University of the Witwatersrand

14:30-15:00
Enhancing Student Success through Support@UP: Reaching Every Student at Every Stage
Byles, H. and Lemmens, J.C.
University of Pretoria

15:00-15:30
Exploring the Need for Student Academic Advising to Attain Students' Academic Success in Rural Based Higher Education Institutions
Manyage, T. and Tisetso, N.
University of Venda

15:30-16:00
Networking and Refreshments

16:00-16:30
Fostering Collaborative Learning and Critical Thinking among Undergraduate Students through Writing Centre Group Tutorials
Govender, N. and Khumalo, N
Durban University of Technology

16:30-17:00
Lessons Learned in Designing Improvements for Advising Support in the Faculty of Commerce
Charitar, D., Sithaldeen, R. and Rivett, U.
University of Cape Town

17:00-17:30
The Best of Both Worlds? – Exploring the Use of Qualitative Analysis and Machine Learning Techniques on Academic Advising Data
Mafaesa, T. and Bock, L.
University of the Free State

Teaching and Learning for Student Success: Mathematics 14:00 - 15:30

Concurrent Session 3: Gala A
Chair: Elizabeth Booi

14:00-14:30

Bridging the Gap: Exploring Mathematics Transition from Basic to Higher Education

Khunoana, S., Motjoadi, V., Setilo, T. and Ramaila, S.
University of Johannesburg

14:30-15:00

Providing Opportunities for Mathematics Preservice Teachers' Voices to Come Out in their Learning Process

Zulu, S., Mthiyane, N. and Thamae, M.
Durban University of Technology

15:00-15:30

The use of Learner Explanations in Fostering a Deeper Understanding of Mathematical Ideas in a Pre-University Academy

Moodley, V.
University of Pretoria

15:30-16:00

Networking and Refreshments

Present, Report and Analyse Data: Student Tracking 16:00 - 17:30

Concurrent Session 3: Gala A
Chair: Elizabeth Booi

16:00-16:30

Design and Evaluation of UKZN AMS Data Management Portal for Student Success at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Badru, A.E. and Bengesai, A.V.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

16:30-17:00

(Re)Imagining Holistic Support: An Institutional Model for Scaled Student Success

Khanye, G.W. and Thindisa, K.J.
University of the Free State

17:00-17:30

From Enrolment to Graduation: The Impact of Student Tracking on Academic Journeys

Mamvura, I.
University of the Witwatersrand

Student Support Interventions: Academic Writing 14:00 - 15:30

Concurrent Session 4: Gala B
Chair: Bala Pillay

14:00-14:30

Enhancing Academic Writing Instruction University-Wide: Empowering Lecturers and Students

Maluleke, L. and Shilowe, T.
Nelson Mandela University

14:30-15:00

Navigating Change: Addressing Student Learning Literacies at Rhodes University

Ellery, K. and Vorster, K.
Rhodes University

15:00-15:30

The Impact of Failing English/Academic Literacy: A Market Basket Analysis Algorithms and Applications to Modules Data.

Lekata, S., and Venter, E.
Sefako Mokgatho Health Science University (SMU)

15:30-16:00

Networking and Refreshments

Student Support Interventions: Mentoring Programmes 16:00 - 17:30

Concurrent Session 4: Gala B
Chair: Bala Pillay

16:00-16:30

Annual Academic Development Officer Report on the Impact of the Academic Monitoring Support (AMS) Programme "Perception of an Academic Mentor"

Maseko, M. and Gumede, B.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

16:30-17:00

Exploring Student Perspectives on the Expected Advantages of a Mentoring Programme in the School of Accounting, Economics, and Finance at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Hatch, M.D and Nhari S.R.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

17:00-17:30

Conceptualisations of Mentorability: A Qualitative Exploration of Mentee Perspectives in a University Mentorship Programme

Richards, Z., Sesheba, L., Wagner, F. and Meyers, C.
University of the Witwatesrand

Cocktail Event 18:00 Onwards

Venue: Foyer

28 June

Plenary Session 09:00 - 12:00

Venue: The Ballroom

09:00 - 10:00

Keynote 4
Chair: Alan Amory

World Access to Higher Education Initiative: International Examples of Student Success
Graeme Atherton
University of West London
London
United Kingdom

10:00 - 10:30

Invited Paper
Chair: Ephraim Mhlanga

Deepening Scholarship and Practice on the First-Year Experience with the SANRC
Annsilla Nyar-Ndlovu
University of Johannesburg
Johannesburg
South Africa

10:30 - 11:00

Networking and Refreshments

Best Paper 11:00 - 11:30

Venue: The Ballroom
Chair: Ashton Maherry

11:00-11:30

How are we the Problem: Exploring the Student Voice for Student Success

Bernard, E.
University of the Free State

11:30 - 11:45

Reflection
Chair: Bill Moses

Meeting the Moment
Innocent Nkata
Saide
Johannesburg South Africa

11:45 - 12:00

Closing remarks

Alan Amory
Saide

Jenny Glennie
Saide

Lunch 12:00 - 13:00

Venue: Foyer

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Central University of Technology, Free State

DUT
DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
INYUVESI YASETHEKWINI YEZOBUCHWEPHESHE

NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

NWU

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

SEFAKO MAKGATHO HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

Light from Africa - for Humanity - Lesedi la Afrika - go Batho - Lig uit Afrika - vir die Mensdom
SOL PLAATJE UNIVERSITY

Stellenbosch UNIVERSITY
IYUNIVESITHI
UNIVERSITEIT

University of Cape Town • iYunivesithi yaseKapa • Universiteit van Kaapstad

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

UNISA university of south africa

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
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Abstracts

Badru, A.E. and Bengesai, A.V.

Design and Evaluation of UKZN AMS Data Management Portal for Student Success at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Data is an essential component in monitoring and improving student success. Academic monitoring and support (AMS) programmes collect large amounts of data that can be used to generate insights into the impact of these programmes. Unfortunately, AMS programmes at UKZN suffer from data quality issues characterised by documentation inconsistencies, data entry errors, and incomplete and outdated information. Moreover, most of this data exists in silos, located within the different support initiatives or with individual academic support staff, most of whom are on short-term contracts. These issues have impacted real-time monitoring and coherent reporting of the programmes, hindered longitudinal research on students attending the programme, and the potential adoption of cutting-edge technologies such as prescriptive analytics and machine learning in improving student success. To solve the data management challenges, an AMS data management project was conceptualised. An agile system development and design science approach were adopted in developing the data management intervention, which is now in the pilot phase in one of the Colleges at UKZN. This presentation will focus on the solution development approach, the solution design, the outcomes from milestone iterations and some of the functionalities of the solution. This presentation will further share the value of the solution, the user experience outcome, and the future plan going forward.

Badru, A.E. and Mulaudzi, M.C.

Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation Approaches for Data-Informed Course Design Strategies

In higher education, effective course design and delivery is crucial for student experience, success and institutional excellence. Traditionally, instructional design has relied on established pedagogical theories and best practices in course design and delivery. However, in today's technology-driven learning environment, the continuous generation of student learning data is essential in understanding student experience and factors contributing to their success. Consequently, there is a growing recognition of the need to integrate data-driven decision-making processes into course design practices. This study explores the integration of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) approaches with traditional course design methods towards data-informed course design strategies that leverage learner analytics to assess the effectiveness of course delivery approaches, identify areas for improvement, and enhance student learning outcomes. By systematically collecting and analysing data on student engagement, performance, and satisfaction, academics can gain valuable insights into the efficacy of instructional approaches, measure learning outcomes, and make informed decisions to optimise course delivery. Based on the evidence-based practices from the design, development, and continuous improvement of the UKZN Understanding Plagiarism and Teaching Assistance courses, data-informed course design strategies were developed. This presentation will unpack the strategy by highlighting the M&E approaches adopted and their application for data-informed course design towards enhanced pedagogical effectiveness, increased student engagement, and improved learning outcomes.

Bellengère, A.H., Donnelly, D. and Mulaudzi, M.C.

Improving the Teaching of Evidence Law through Scenario-Based Learning: An Intervention Using Cyber Fraud Cases

This paper presents an ongoing project using scenario-based learning as a formative assessment intervention in a third-year law of evidence course. The project aims to address the challenges of teaching practical, courtroom-based skills to law students in the context of rapidly evolving cyber fraud cases, where traditional rules of evidence struggle to adapt to cyber evidence. The intervention utilises a blended learning approach and applies the principles of Universal Design for Learning. A simulation was developed that takes students through a real-life scenario involving cyber fraud and requires them to make strategic decisions that affect the admissibility of evidence and the outcome of the case. The design methodology of scenario-based learning will be presented and the development of a storyboard with assigned consequences for each decision will be discussed. The presentation will present results based on an analysis of student performance using data from the learning management system correlated with student perceptions of their learning experience collected through an anonymous assessment. The presentation provides a clear framework for the effective use of scenario-based learning that enables students to apply theoretical knowledge and develop practical, real-world skills. The presentation emphasises the benefits of scenario-based learning across a wide range of disciplines to bridge the gap between taught knowledge and practical application. By focusing on the emerging field of cyber fraud, this project contributes to the development of innovative teaching methods that prepare law students for the challenges of today's legal practice.

Bernard, E.

How are we the Problem: Exploring the Student Voice for Student Success

The South African Survey of Student Engagement is conducted annually across various institutions, using both quantitative and qualitative questions to explore student perceptions of engagement in behaviour and activities. Its aim is to provide insights into national trends in student engagement while employing a holistic framework that considers factors such as institutional responsiveness and student agency. In 2022, students from seven South African institutions were asked a single open-ended question: "What one change would most improve the educational experience at this institution?" Through coding and thematic analysis of 5,967 respondents, several main themes emerged. In terms of academic support, students highlighted ongoing issues with registration processes and ineffective communication from lecturers. Mental health support was also a significant concern, with students expressing a need for greater recognition and assistance regarding mental health issues. Many students emphasised the value of tutorials and requested increased interaction with tutors or access to free tutorials. Opinions on lecture delivery varied, with some preferring more online sessions while others favored increased face-to-face contact. Hybrid teaching models combining online and in-person instruction were also suggested. A recurring theme was the perceived lack of practical classes and real-world experience opportunities, which students felt left them unprepared for the workforce. Financial challenges were prominently mentioned, including the high cost of materials and textbooks, the need for food assistance, essential academic supplies, and concerns over inadequate NSFAS allowances. A recurring and notable comment centered on the importance of the student voice and the call for institutions and lecturers to integrate it more effectively. This raises the question: how can institutions improve their listening practices, and why do students feel their voices are crucial? These insights should inform institutional strategies to enhance the overall educational experience and promote student success.

Branch, R., Lee, H., Morris, A. and De Beer, C.

The Successful Implementation of a Credit Bearing Readiness Activity Used to Enhance Personal Learning Environments

This presentation explores an innovative teaching and learning strategy called the Readiness Activity, which enhances both students' learning environment and lecturers' teaching experience. Lecturers often unnecessarily spend valuable time explaining rules, expectations, and the course structure. To address this, Dr. Branch and his team from the University of Georgia have been implementing and observing the effects of this robust readiness activity on student learning [1], which has since been expanded upon. The Readiness Activity is a self-regulated pre-engagement strategy designed to reduce the need for students to ask questions about information already provided by the instructor. This strategy aligns with successful research on the scholarship of teaching and learning (Boyer, 1990) [4], Felton (2013) [5], and Hutchings and Shulman (1999) [6]. While previous studies claimed to measure learners' preparedness to start an academic unit, they did not report a correlation between a student's readiness score and their final grade. The Readiness Activity helped students determine the amount of time they needed to devote to various components of the course, thereby enhancing their learning environments. Preliminary findings indicated that this self-regulated study activity positively influenced learner achievement. Therefore, a follow-up study was guided by the question: "What is the relationship between a student's pre-engagement study score and their final grade?" Participants were postgraduate students in a tertiary education course at a university in the Southeastern United States. A pre-engagement assignment was administered asynchronously as an online quiz via a learning management system. The highest score was used in calculating the student's final course grade. The data collection period spanned five years, ending in December 2023, with 111 participants. Preliminary findings indicate that this self-regulated study activity had a positive influence on learner achievement. Students' Readiness Activity scores were found to have moderate positive correlations with their final grades ($r=.58$, $p<.001$). Students generally provided positive feedback about the Readiness Activity, indicating it worked as intended. Thus, the recommendation is to implement this intervention in South African institutions to harness the benefits of effective learning design. Instead of postgraduate students, the suggestion is to focus on undergraduate students, especially first-year students. The aim is to determine whether the Readiness Activity will act as a way of student orientation for students to benefit from this unique and innovative strategy to foster student success.

Branson, N. and Whitelaw, E.

Exploring the Relationship between Staff Composition and Student Success in Economics

Our presentation will leverage routinely collected administrative data to explore the association between staff composition and student success within the economics discipline at public universities in South Africa. Economics plays an outsized role in shaping public narratives about the role of governments, business, and public policy. Enabling and expanding a pipeline of economists that are both demographically diverse and well-qualified could contribute to an improved understanding of public problems and their solutions. In our presentation, we will descriptively explore the relationship between the gender and racial composition of staff and students within the discipline of economics, across all 26 public universities in South Africa. In particular, we analyse how compositional differences, as well as staff capacity and rank intersect with students' timely progress and graduation (N, N+1, N+2). We will also consider differences by institution and institution type. Our data source is the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS), and we identify economics students and staff via their CESM (Classification of Subject Educational Matter) specialisation and programme involvement, presenting both head counts and full-time equivalents (FTEs) for staff members. By leveraging existing data via HEMIS, we establish a framework for ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and comparisons with other STEM and social science disciplines. The results will highlight potential equity gaps in student success in Economics and prompt strategies for fostering institutional environments that work towards correcting these. In this vein, we hope the findings of this study will generate both informed criticism and positive reflection.

Byles, H. and Lemmens, J.C.

Enhancing Student Success through Support@UP: Reaching Every Student at Every Stage

The University of Pretoria (UP) acknowledges the pivotal role of academic advising in fostering student success and enhancing the overall educational experience. Since 2010, the demand for advising services has surged, leading to strategic expansions in advisor positions. Recognising the impact of quality advising on student outcomes, UP initiated robust academic advising programmes tailored to diverse student cohorts. The evolution of advising technologies witnessed a transition from Pyramid Analytics to Tableau, facilitating data-driven decision-making for Academic Success Coaches (ASCs). However, challenges persisted, including limited real-time data access and navigational complexities within the dashboard. In 2023, UP embarked on a transformative journey by adopting Anthology Reach as its comprehensive student success platform, branded as Support@UP. Leveraging AI and diverse data sources, Anthology Reach optimises student support and retention by streamlining workflows and enhancing communication channels. Support@UP serves as a centralised hub for student queries, offering personalised nudges and facilitating effective case management. ASCs can monitor student interventions, track progress, and collaborate efficiently across faculties. The platform's advantages include real-time student information access, streamlined communication, and centralised record-keeping. Despite initial implementation challenges and student adoption hurdles, Support@UP demonstrates immense potential in revolutionising student support services. Ongoing collaboration between ASCs and technical support teams ensures continuous refinement and improvement of the platform. Training initiatives empower ASCs to maximise the platform's functionalities, ensuring proactive and efficient student support. In conclusion, Support@UP represents a paradigm shift in student advising, epitomising UP's commitment to excellence in academic support and fostering holistic student development. As the platform evolves, it promises to redefine the landscape of student success initiatives, propelling UP towards its vision of academic excellence and inclusivity.

Charitar, D., Sithaldeen, R. and Rivett, U.

Lessons Learned in Designing Improvements for Advising Support in the Faculty of Commerce

At the university of Cape Town, curriculum advice is provided largely by full time academics for whom advising responsibilities sit atop their existing workloads. As such, students complain of advising sessions being rushed with limited time for consultation and that mistakes made by the advisor or student themselves are often discovered too late, impacting time to completion. Students also wished for more informative advising sessions and that there was a greater culture of care. As part of the UCDG project on Academic Advising for student success, the Academic Advising Initiative, in collaboration with the Faculty of Commerce, developed a suite of tools and interventions to improve the quality of advising in the Faculty. To create space for advising sessions to focus on curriculum issues, we designed a number of tools and workshops to deal with recurring non-academic issues such as financial advising. To help reduce mistakes made by the advisor, we created a website for advisors, designed workshops for capacity building and held focus groups on registration with Commerce staff to help improve the process. So that advising sessions could be more informative and empowering, we designed an easy to use Online Curriculum Planner to help students prepare in advance for an advising session. To develop a greater culture of care at UCT, we designed a Commerce helpdesk, a mental health workshop for advisors, and conducted focus groups and surveys to better understand the student experience. In terms of reach, 195 (non unique) students participated in focus groups and surveys and 96 (non-unique) staff participated in workshops and focus groups. There were 6955 users of the tools and services (Commerce helpdesk and the Online Curriculum Planner). The advising site was accessed by 57 unique staff members. Despite the intensive approach to design and implementation, there was relatively low uptake of services, tools and capacity building opportunities. In this reflection, we critically assess this outcome. As a project team, we look at each development, analysing final reports to understand the strengths and weaknesses of our approach and make recommendations for the way forward.

Cupido, X., Mkonto, N., Farrar, T. and Nakhooda, M.

Harnessing the University Structures to Design a Systemic and Integrated Approach to Student Success

The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) remains committed to supporting student success in smart, innovative, and data-driven ways, as enshrined in its Vision 2030. The institution has historically promoted student success in various ways and through several projects. However, these were seen as disparate, siloed, and addressing specific student needs. Whilst these often-unrelated projects returned varying degrees of impact, a more deliberate and integrated approach was needed to respond to changing student needs more meaningfully. CPUT thus adopted a slow scholarship approach towards holistically understanding what student success means within the historical and current context of the institution. By engaging with regional universities (UWC and UCT) and, importantly, by drawing on student voices and reflections, CPUT worked towards the creation of a 'picture' of student success, anchored on several themes: Defining student success, Factors affecting student success; Measuring student success; and Supporting students along their academic journeys. These engagements and perspectives coalesced in forming an Institutional Committee designed to infuse and integrate student success across the entirety of the university's academic and social projects. This STARS (Student Transition, Access, Retention and Success) Committee sets out to provide strategic leadership and oversight of student success in an integrated manner by engaging students, academic, support and administrative staff, and university leadership in designing and developing interventions aimed at swiftly responding and supporting student success. The message of "student success is everyone's business" rings clear through such a structure, as the institution recognises and supports students throughout their academic journeys, from first click (application) to graduation. Drawing on recent research in this space (Wise, 2019; Naujokaitienė, Tamoliūnė, Volungevičienė, & Duart,2020), STARS will leverage a range of data sources to understand who CPUT students are and what they had access to, identify students' risk factors, and employ an early warning system to initiate timeous intervention. This data-driven approach will further empower academic staff to tailor learning, teaching, assessment and support strategies, and respond to changing student cohorts and needs. A very novel approach at CPUT has been to include students in the analysis of data sources and in the development of analytics dashboards. These have created a very telling picture of student demographics per Faculty and Department, offering insights into the potential of a given cohort of students to succeed. With this information, and under the auspices of the integrated STARS Committee approach, the necessary support structures can be activated in a concerted and timeous manner. Crucially, STARS will emphasise the establishment of impact indicators to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of student success interventions, with a view to remain appropriate and relevant with regard to evolving parameters of student success.

De Klerk, D.

Academic Advising and Student Voices: Insights into Student Help-Seeking Behaviour

It has been argued that inadequate help-seeking behaviour in South African higher education contexts poses serious risks to student belonging, retention, and success. This paper builds on that premise by drawing on student voices to gain insight into the ways in which students from one faculty at the University of the Witwatersrand perceive, practice, and experience help-seeking. The intimate relationship that exists between help-seeking and academic advising serves as the conceptual anchor for the study. Advising as a practice and profession has shown encouraging growth in the South African context since it was formalised in 2017. Signs that it is maturing include the adoption of advising at several South African universities, the founding of a professional body (ELETSA, which means advising in Sesotho), the development of a code of conduct for advising in South Africa, and the steady increase of peer-reviewed literature about advising in the country. Yet there are limited qualitative studies from the South African context that engage students about their experiences of advising, and none that investigate student help-seeking behaviour in relation to advising by drawing on student voices. This study aims to make such a contribution. Social realism serves as the theoretical framing for the study, with Archer's (1995) analytical dualism used to guide the analysis of data and the discussion. Analytical dualism allows researchers to explore social reality by separating "the parts from the people" (Archer, 1995, p. 167). Thus, one can at once explore these constituent parts (i.e., agency, culture, and structure) independently, while also observing how they interconnect. Data was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Students from the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management (CLM) who had consulted with an academic advisor at least once between January and September 2021 were invited to participate in a FGD. Of the 411 students invited, 13 voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. Four FGDs were conducted, one of which took place virtually via Microsoft Teams, with the remainder taking place in person. Preliminary findings show that while some students evidence strong agency when it comes to seeking help, for others factors like shyness, an inability to identify the need for help, and pride may prevent them from seeking help timeously (or at all). This is likely also influenced by stigmatisation based on the misperception that advising services in CLM are only for students that are failing, and the absence of a culture among students that promotes asking for help and consulting. Structurally, the way in which advising is positioned in CLM may be affecting how it is perceived, which in turn could (unintentionally) be dissuading students from seeking help. Positively, though, there appears to be some evidence that having advising structures in place serves to support student help-seeking for those with the agency to ask for help. The paper concludes by sharing some meta-commentary based on the findings, before providing a brief overview of limitations and sharing ideas for further research.

Ellery, K. and Vorster, K.

Navigating Change: Addressing Student Learning Literacies at Rhodes University

Rhodes University (RU), a small university in rural Eastern Cape, has traditionally enjoyed the distinction of having some of the best undergraduate success and graduation rates in South Africa. However, the institution has undergone significant changes over the past 10 years, with a concerning decline in overall undergraduate student success rates and persisting racial disparities in such achievements. Recent surveys conducted amongst student and staff surveys shed light on the challenges encountered during the transition from school to university, highlighting the pressing need for enhanced support across all facets of academic life. In this regard, RU embarked on a university-wide literacies initiative in 2023 to address the needs of students. Literacies are social practices that embrace ways of knowing, doing, being and valuing in a certain social context, and the literacies of concern are: • Academic literacies: Rooted in disciplinary practices, encompassing skills such as reading, writing, and numeracy, shaped by distinct disciplinary discourses. • Learning literacies: Fostering effective university students who are independent, self-reflective, and agential. • Digital literacies: Empowering students to navigate, comprehend, evaluate, and communicate information proficiently through digital technologies. • Life literacies: Encompassing social, cultural, and physical well-being, crucial for holistic student development. Research underscores the necessity of explicitly articulating expectations and supporting students regarding their learning, as failure to do so hampers their access to the powerful knowledge of the academy and inhibits their path to success (Ellery 2021). To address this, RU implemented in 2024 four university-wide learning literacy initiatives. • RULearning Toolkit: Providing first-year students with a comprehensive resource to cultivate active engagement, independence, and organizational skills, alongside various learning strategies. • Orientation Week: Restructuring the programme to emphasize the transition to university-level learning literacies, providing students with dedicated booklets to facilitate note-taking and active participation in all sessions. • Peer-mentoring programme: Integrating the Toolkit to provide a structured and focused programme. • Faculty-specific initiatives: Encouraging faculties to devise tailored approaches. In particular, the Science and Pharmacy Faculties held two first-year student workshops in the first week of term (n=420), focusing on: • What to do during lectures (including a follow-up note-taking exercise in a mock 20-minute physics lecture). • What to do outside of lectures (including preparing and consolidating for lectures, and time management). Document analysis of student lecture notes taken in the mock lecture indicated that the majority of students struggled both to take good lecture notes during lectures and subsequently to consolidate the lecture material. This prompted dialogue between staff and students on improvement strategies. A volunteer focus group discussion (n=27) eight weeks later indicated that students had heard, understood and valued the messages of the workshops. Nonetheless, they also indicated that taking good lecture notes and time management were still problematic for most. In response, follow-up interventions on note taking are planned for Semester 2. This preliminary research underscores the importance of sustained support, and of being mindful of who are the students on the classroom, offering tailored teaching approaches to foster learning literacies effectively. Evaluation of the planned interventions will illuminate areas for refinement and enhancement in 2025, which will include support that is more ongoing, active and focused. Ellery, K. (2021) Widening access in science: developing both knowledge and knowers, Chapter 8.

Gawie, B. and Nunes, C.

The Role of the Student Voice in Shaping Student Success: A Student Leader's Perspective

Student voices are integral to shaping a university environment geared towards student success. Embracing student voices in shaping students' academic, social, and personal development opportunities remains an area of limited exploration, with higher education institutions focusing more on top-down approaches to curriculum development, teaching strategies and academic and social support programmes. This presentation demonstrates how the student voice could be harnessed to enhance student engagement and success by focusing on the voice of students in the delivery of course content and implementation of student academic and social support programmes. The presentation shares the experiences of a Student Leader in the Supplemental Instruction (SI) programme. This academic support programme uses peer learning to improve student retention and success in high-risk modules. The Student Leader reflects on how a lecturer in the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences (FHES) allows the student voice to be heard concerning course content and teaching strategies, indicating areas where lecturers need to adjust their teaching strategies to better support student learning. The student feedback discussion is conducted informally during SI sessions and shared with the lecturer during weekly meetings with the Student Leader. Furthermore, the Student Leader highlights the shortcomings identified by students in the academic and social support services, which affects student retention and success. In conclusion, we argue that accentuating the student voice in decision-making processes could help transform universities into more student-centred institutions and shape student success. By embracing a student perspective, universities can foster a collaborative, supportive and caring learning environment where students feel empowered, valued and engaged in their educational experience.

Gore, O.T. and Louw, R.

Leveraging on the Enabling Factors for Student Success in Support Programmes at a South African University

While access to higher education for first-generation students, primarily from historically disadvantaged groups, has increased in South Africa, graduate outcomes remain low and disproportionately favor traditional students. Various internal and external factors affect individual students' well-being and opportunities for success. In response, most universities have developed programs to address these challenges, but these interventions have not achieved the expected results. One of the reasons for the failure of the interventions is the use of the deficit approach that views students as lacking in certain areas when designing programmes for their support. Adopting the deficit approach is problematic in that it normalises student failure resulting in management and practitioners not acting adequately to address students' concerns. However, when the enabling factors are fully recognised, universities can design more effective student support programmes, by leveraging on the strengths and resources that students already have. Yet there is limited research focusing on what enables these students to succeed in universities. This study therefore addressed the research question: What are the enabling factors for students to succeed in South African universities considering the systemic challenges students encounter? It employs Yosso's (2005) cultural capital model that foregrounds the student's resistance, navigational capacity, familial background, linguistic capability, and aspirational capital to argue that diverse students have the cultural capital to succeed. The paper draws from a qualitative methodology using five focus group discussions with between six and ten participants each, and 15 interviews, all conducted with final-year students at a university. To obtain diverse views, the students that were invited to participate in the study were all enrolled in 32 modules that were purposively selected from the eight university's faculties, based on students' performance. Data were coded and thematically analysed using NVivo 13, a qualitative software. Key findings demonstrate that the diverse students were resilient and able to complete their studies despite having failed some modules. Additional strengths the first-generation students displayed included: being self-motivated because of the need to attain their goals and improve their socio-economic situation at home, having the persistence to circumvent the challenges they faced, and belonging to social and religious groups for social and spiritual support. The study recommends that these strengths and resources be considered, when offering appropriate student support that ensures student success, such as peer mentoring and orientation programmes targeting first-year students.

Govender, N. and Khumalo, N

Fostering Collaborative Learning and Critical Thinking among Undergraduate Students through Writing Centre Group Tutorials

Successful transitioning from school to university remains a challenge for most students in South Africa. Academic challenges include academic writing, English as a medium of instruction and information literacy. As a result, university students need supportive and inclusive spaces to navigate the challenging university environment. The complexity of poor throughput rates in South African universities strongly suggests that student success requires efforts from many sectors of the university community. Writing centres have long been regarded as free spaces that enable students to learn and engage critically. As an academic support unit, the Durban University of Technology (DUT) Writing Centre (WrC) offers student support through collaborative writing consultations through one-on-one and group consultations. Drawing on our experiences as WrC practitioners, we argue that academic support interventions are critical in socialising students to discipline discourse and developing critical thinkers who can contribute to a sustainable future. We maintain that the affective domain of teaching and learning is valued in WrC work as we attentively consider students' experiences, attitudes, knowledge and values. This collaborative engagement is integral to WrC pedagogy and focuses solely on the student's diverse learning abilities and needs. This study therefore explored the effect of WrC group tutorials in facilitating academic support to improve students' epistemological access and success in higher education. WrC group sessions enable us to re-envision the writing tutor and student writer engagement. Since writing is a social construct, WrCs play an important role in fostering academic socialisation between disciplines through student engagements. In the WrC context, group consultation interventions are embedded in students' disciplines. This study employed a mixed-methods research design and gathered data from the student group participants and WrC tutors using semi-structured interviews and surveys. Data was collected from two of the six DUT WrCs, (Durban and Midlands) to understand how group consultations contribute to students' and tutors' educational experiences. The students were selected based on group consultations (face-to-face and online) with the WrC tutors. Furthermore, the research aimed to understand student and tutor experiences and perspectives on group consultation. Data from the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires indicated that students prefer group consultations to one-on-one consultations as they can share ideas with their peers and tutors. Tutors highlighted that pedagogical strategies such as group consultations enabled students to collaboratively engage in critical discussions freely thereby fostering academic socialisation which contributes to academic success. This study concludes that students thrive in interactive, inclusive spaces that foster skills such as critical thinking and lifelong learning.

Govender, R., Ncube, T., Rambharos, S., Mthalane, P., Razack, F. and Kalanga, P.

Understanding the Multifaceted Journey of Student Success: Insights from a Programme at the Durban University of Technology

Student success is multifarious and encompasses the purpose of higher education, what constitutes personal success and what is valued by the society and industry. Whilst students' individual dedication and involvement are significant components in the pursuit of academic achievement, the path towards graduation is impacted by numerous internal and external factors. This research is part of the broader institutional "Hambisa" (moving forward) initiative, which is centred around understanding the factors that impact on student success which create a large middle cohort of students that remain in transition in academic programmes. Tinto's Integration Model underpins this research which focuses on understanding the experiences and challenges faced by students as they navigate the journey towards graduation and prepare for the world of work. The research participants comprised of undergraduate students and lecturers in the Business Information and Management (BIM) programme at the Durban University of Technology. An interpretive qualitative approach was used to explore the multifaceted journey of becoming a graduate, which includes the factors influencing success, the obstacles encountered, and the strategies employed to overcome them. Data gathered through focus group interviews was thematically analysed and nine themes were identified. The themes centred around individual and institutional challenges, student support, extra-curricular activities, lecturer-student relationship, psychosocial factors, enabling factors, learning and teaching, DUT strategic initiatives, and the development of graduate attributes. Preliminary findings underscore the presence of both inhibitory and supportive factors influencing the journey to becoming a BIM graduate. These factors encompass academic and non-academic elements, involving both individuals and institution. Furthermore, the development of graduate attributes and lecturer attributes emerges as pivotal for student success. Emphasis should be placed on preparing students for assessments and the co-construction of knowledge through active engagement in the programme. Importantly, institutional policies, practices and learning conditions cannot be detached from students' success and the journey of becoming. In conclusion, this study emphasises the multifaceted nature of student success and highlights the essential role of various factors in shaping the journey toward becoming a graduate. It calls for a holistic approach within higher education institutions, urging them to address obstacles and strengthen supportive elements to facilitate students' success toward graduation.

Hambrock, H.B. and Ikedinobi, T.

The Battle Between Generative AI Large Language Models (LLM) and Natural Language Programmes (NLP). - Can the Unethical Use of AI Large Language Models be Detected and Conquered by Natural Language Programmes?

The Rationale In the light of the high uptake of student's using generative Artificial Intelligence tools (McDonald, et.al., 2024) such as Large Language Models, various useful traits of the tools have been welcomed by lecturers and students alike, but a huge concern is the temptation of students plagiarizing by copying content directly from an AI generating tools and submitting the content as their own (Lee & Kwon, 2024). This is a battle that educators are facing especially as the AI generative Large Language Models are becoming more sophisticated and can produce astonishing human-like writing (Lee, et, al.,2024). The objective of this study is to analyse two identified tools from an educator's perspective to establish their respective functionalities and to establish if the one can be used to "conquer" the other. Research Methodology The study follows a comparative analysis of the two described programs from an educator's perspective based on theoretical artifacts found in literature (Ozdemir, 2023) as well as a practical activity where an AI generated piece is submitted with a researcher's written work and submitted to be analysed by a NLP. Description of the Study The study focusses on the use of generative AI by students and testing another programme to identify the AI generated text. The study begins with a literature review and includes a clarification of the terms and categories in which the two identified programs (the LLM and the NLP) are found. Thereafter a comparison of history of the programs is presented to understand the aim and context in which they were developed and finally the functionalities of each are presented. In the second part a test text that was generated by the generative LLM AI software with additional test added by the researcher is submitted to the NLP and analysed. Finally, the positives and negatives of the process are discussed and the study ends with suggestions. Results The researcher requested the LLM to write an Essay on the advantages and disadvantages of using ChatGPT for essay writing, by students. Thereafter, the researcher added an introduction, a few linking sentences in between and a conclusion to the essay. 1. The actual wordcount result are as follows: ChatGPT: 623 words Researcher: 192 words Total: 815 words Percentage: 76% was generated by ChatGPT 2. NLP result: The NLP AI detection tool indicated a similarity percentage of 86%. (See in Fig 1) Fig 1. NLP generated results. Fig 2. AI use similarity results. The discrepancy of 10% lies in the word count of the introduction of the abstract which was written by the researcher and was not identified as such by the NLP. Conclusion: One can ask- what does this tell us about the battle of the machines? The study indicates that the LLM is a very powerful generative AI tool and can certainly be used by students and educators for finding, sorting and even summarizing text but should not be relied upon for writing the actual essay/ assignment. The NLP is a programme that finds similarities with written work on the internet and produces a detailed report on what and from where text was copied and which and how much AI generated text was used. This means that even though the AI machines are brilliant and can present an astonishing result, human intervention is still very important for critical editing, proof reading and interpretation. This report indicates the versatility and the huge range of the tools but it also indicates the limitation of the machines and an important finding that human interaction is still needed. Machines may be able to "conquer" by detecting similar, plagiarised text but humans are needed to interpret the result and to make the final decision.

Hatch, M.D and Nhari S.R.

Exploring Student Perspectives on the Expected Advantages of a Mentoring Programme in the School of Accounting, Economics, and Finance at UKZN

Student perceptions of the anticipated benefits of a mentoring programme in the School of Accounting, Economics, and Finance at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) are investigated by exploring academic and non-academic factors perceived as influential in hindering or aiding their epistemological access and success. Responses from 42 students who participated in a self-administered online survey were recorded. Through an inductive thematic analysis, the findings revealed that students expect the programme to assist them with primarily, psychosocial challenges, academic tasks and socioeconomic issues; where psychosocial needs dominated. The findings inform programme designers on how to tailor the mentoring initiative to address the most prevalent student needs. In addition, the insights of the mental positioning of the Mentoring Programme among students, offer valuable information on its potential to enhance the educational experiences of, and foster professional growth among students in the Institution. In recent years, UKZN has experienced a significant increase in the enrolment of students from schools that serve poorer communities. Students from these under-resourced schools present with considerable educational disadvantages which undermine their ability to pass their university modules. It is in this context that the School of Accounting, Economics and Finance (SAEF) Mentoring Programme was introduced at the UKZN in 2020, with financial support from the Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority (INSETA). This analysis and discussion of the findings from the responses to three questions posed to students regarding their challenges, support needs, and expectations from the SAEF mentoring programme provides insights into students' academic experiences and their perceptions of the support required for their success. The responses to the first question, i.e. identify psychosocial challenges, such as personal issues, lack of motivation, and anxiety, as potential hindrances to their academic success. However, when asked about their support needs in the second question, students emphasised the need for academic assistance, including tutorials, mentoring, and resources. While academic support was highlighted, the third question underscored an overwhelming expectation for psychosocial support from the SAEF mentoring programme, including emotional encouragement, motivation, and a sense of belonging. The apparent discrepancy between perceived challenges and expressed support needs emphasises the importance of adopting a holistic approach to student support, addressing both academic and psychosocial dimensions. The key finding in this study is that academic assistance is crucial; however, without adequate emotional and motivational support, the mentoring programme will not foster resilient students, who can achieve academic success. Thus, the findings highlight the need for the SAEF mentoring programme, and similar initiatives in similar contexts, to integrate comprehensive support mechanisms catering to psychosocial needs, which have been found to be central to student success. A systematic approach to psychosocial challenges requires the integration of psychological interventions, social support systems in the mentoring programme, and the development of policies focused on reducing systemic inequalities and promoting mental well-being for students. The primary objective of the SAEF mentoring programme is to improve and support the holistic wellbeing of students so that they are well-positioned to succeed, both academically and as members of society after graduation. The dominance of psychosocial expectations implies the need for an emphasis on emotional and social support in the mentoring programme, while enhancing communication with the appropriate support structures in the institution.

January, C., Dyer, D. and Phethlu, O.

Peer Advising Support for Student Leaders in a Residential Setting

A strategic intervention was developed to support students at risk of dropping out through a partnership between the Department of Student Affairs (DSA) and the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED). The focus was on capacitating peer tutors and peer mentors in residences with peer advising academic support skills. Peer tutors take on civic responsibilities in this regard as a way of promoting social justice (Soudien, 2006; Badat, 2014) where peer learning communities, come together to achieve the common purpose of student success (Vygotsky, 1978; Brouwer et. al., 2022). Peer to peer support considers the cultural and social needs of the learner and empowers students to adapt the formal curriculum (Boughey in Badat, 2016; Altbach et al., 2009).. Peer to peer support creates environments where students engage in mutually supportive behaviours thus fostering care-cantered spaces, vital for student success (Kislik, 2022; Noddings, 2013). It furthermore creates an opportunity for humanizing learning encounters advocated by Freire and in addition it contributes to curriculum renewal (Gedult & Sathorar,2016; Kagisano, 2001). The programme focused on building capacity for two key capabilities, namely, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting help-seeking behaviours to overcome academic challenges. This paper will show how peer tutors (Jama, 2017) are inducted with academic advising skills such that they form a community of practice with their junior peers. In total, 230 residence peer tutors were trained, through a constructivist, humanising approach to assist students in their respective residences. The intervention took place in four curated spaces using the ADDIE: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation methodology. A variety of sessions (n total 4) were custom designed for a combination of audiences including peer tutors (220), head peer mentors (50) and head peer tutors (25). Peer mentors (23) were also consulted in the process given the link between academic performance and mental health, as per the training needs analysis data. A multi-disciplinary team comprised of academic advising staff and residence life practitioners (5 in total) worked on the design, implementation, and review of the programme. Head tutors and head mentors were engaged with in a post training survey and follow up focus groups were organized but did not transpire due to lack of availability of student leaders at the time. The data was gathered using google online surveys and downloaded into excel for sorting. The result of that analytical process with a positive response of 37 of 75 participants (49,3%). The team of three researchers reviewed the responses to the questions and coded each response. Categories emerged that were assigned to themes through a process of consultation. The results further affirmed that firstly a statistically significant number of students attained a sense of belonging 29 or 37 (78%). Secondly, while not as significant as the first but still affirming the programme content as being of notably value, 11 of 37 (29 %) participants developed ‘help seeking behaviours’. Leadership development, time management and problem solving were some capabilities that emerged outside of the two primary areas of training which points to a range of general capabilities required for student success. Following this pilot, the team is now turning toward establishing a set of metrics to measure the impact of the programme particularly mindful of creating supportive environments for students at risk of academic progression.

Jonker, T.

Maximising Academic Support Resources: Harnessing the Potential of a Thrift Shop for Student Success.

Main objective: To broaden the reach, awareness and impact of the University of Pretoria's student support services. Student support services play a pivotal role in fostering academic success, personal development, and overall well-being in tertiary education institutions. Research indicates that students who utilise academic support services demonstrate higher retention rates, improved grades, and increased satisfaction with their educational experience (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). By offering personalised assistance and targeted interventions, academic support services cater to diverse learning needs and promote academic excellence among students. In 2022 an academic support programme called FLY@UP initiated a Thrift Shop initiative to drive the reach and awareness of the support services available at the University of Pretoria by harnessing the appeal and popularity of thrifting. In May 2024, FLY@UP hosted its fifth Thrift Shop and a total of 636 students entered the store. Each student was allowed to take 10 items of clothing, for free, which equaled roughly 6 360 free items of clothing given away. A variety of QR codes to support services, such as academic workshops and higher health screening were placed at the entrance and exit of the shop and those QR codes received 181 and 338 scans respectively. Not only does the FLY@UP thrift shop attract students and expose them to the support services at the university, it also plays an important role for our environment. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), textiles account for 8% of all greenhouse gas emissions globally. Thrifting clothes significantly reduces the demand for new clothing production, thereby decreasing the industry's carbon footprint. Research by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation found that extending the life of clothing by just nine months can reduce carbon, water, and waste footprints by 20-30% per clothing item. The fourth FLY@UP Thrift store hosted in 2023 had 452 students and each student was allowed 7 free items of clothing each which equaled 3 164 items of free clothing. In 2024 the attendance grew to 636 and the clothes given out more than doubled. In conclusion, the positive impact of thrifting clothes cannot be overstated. By reducing environmental harm, and promoting the university's support services, thrifting embodies the principles of sustainability and social responsibility. Similarly, student support services are indispensable components of tertiary education that promote academic success, holistic student development, and equity. By prioritising and expanding these services, institutions can cultivate a supportive learning environment that empowers students to achieve their academic and personal goals, regardless of background or circumstance. The FLY@UP Thrift Shop addresses both of these focus areas that are of high importance in our society and amongst our youth.

Kanyane, R.M. and Versfeld, J.

Enhancing Engineering Education in the Global South: The Impact of Peer-Led Tutoring Systems on Student Learning and Resilience

This research explores the benefits of strengthening the tutoring system for engineering students in a challenging Global South context, focusing on South African universities. Recognising the vital role of student feedback in evaluating support measures, this qualitative study investigates the potential advantages of targeted revision tutorial sessions for high-impact modules. Traditional university tutorials often fall short in addressing the needs of struggling students, leading many to seek private tutoring. To address this issue, Faculty Student Advisors (FSAs) in the EBIT (Engineering, Built Environment and IT) department at The University of Pretoria collaborated with student tutors to provide intensive revision sessions characterised by smaller groups. The study analyses attendance records and employs a qualitative pre- and post-intervention research design to assess the impact of reduced-capacity tutorial revision courses on pass rates and overall academic success among engineering students. Methodology: This study utilizes a qualitative pre- and post-intervention research design, collecting data through online surveys, focus groups with tutors, and post-intervention interviews with participating students and tutors. Thematic analysis is employed to uncover patterns and themes related to the benefits of participating in crash-course style tutorials. Results: The crash-course style tutoring sessions, characterised by interactivity and collaboration, had a significant positive impact on students. Beyond enhanced conceptual understanding, increased confidence, and motivation, students reported improvements in their study skills, including time management and effective problem-solving. The smaller group setting facilitated better communication and interaction among students and tutors, fostering a deeper level of conceptual understanding. Additionally, students gained confidence in tackling complex problems through guided exercises and developed a stronger sense of motivation and engagement. Tutoring sessions also provided valuable insights into effective study practices.

Khanye, G.W. and Thindisa, K.J.

(Re)Imagining Holistic Support: An Institutional Model for Scaled Student Success

As the number of students accessing higher education continues to grow, the system is still experiencing the challenge of addressing the throughput, retention, and achievement gap. Various studies and efforts have explored what the underpinnings are to this perpetual problem, but no conclusive solution has been sought. With an increasingly vulnerable student population, there are incremental annual increases in the number of students at the University of the Free State who are the first in their families to obtain a university qualification (currently 83%). The number of students from low-income households receiving funding through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme for the UFS ranges at 70%, and a significant proportion of students entering the UFS for undergraduate studies are from resource-restrained schools. While efforts are centralised around creating positive shifts in progression, graduation and dropout rates, it is imperative that factors such as the achievement gap do not go unnoticed. The UFS, through the Digitally Enhanced Employability and Student Success Programme, is premised on enabling transformative change. The conceptualisation of the Track Your Success (TYS) project is a perspective of how student challenges and needs can be addressed by institutions being 'student-ready'. Aiming to provide targeted and proactive support to students by infusing technology, the objectives of TYS are to increase the number of minimum time graduates while decreasing dropout. Through integrating proactive and developmental academic advising principles, TYS uses data analytics and technology to identify, reach out, and engage with students. Providing a blueprint for holistic student support, the TYS framework leverages existing institutional support services to address students' needs from a teaching and learning as well as a psychosocial perspective. The TYS framework which comprises of four pillars, has provided the blueprint for enabling a data-driven, responsive and scaled support model. The four pillars are: a.Persona (profiling): While many have used demographics to profile and categorise students for support, TYS adopts profiling with the aim of developing context-aligned success personas. TYS integrates data from various institutional sources to inform success personas that are specific to the UFS student. Success personas have enabled the implementation of effective risk profiling that have informed both preventative and targeted interventions through the leveraging of existing supports. b. Process: Literature describes academic advising as a 'safety-net' or 'hub' of student support (Habley, 2009 and Tinto, 2012). It is not only a connector for students to support but also meets students at their point of need (Tiroyabone and Strydom, 2021). TYS adopts academic advising principles in outlining and thoroughly understanding the existence of institutional support services and their fit for purpose for the scaling and implementation of support. c. Communication: Institutional culture is a catalyst for transformational change. Communication in TYS is a backbone that is both student as well as staff facing. By affording both inbound and outbound communication, this creates an overall shift in the institutional student support culture, particularly how students engage with the institution and how staff continuously adapt to the student needs. d. Technology: In scaling and driving efficiency of support, TYS aims to introduce a technology tool designed to streamline the process of identifying students at risk based on success personas, track, and manage support services. The technology tool will centralize student information (data integrated across the institution), coordinate support efforts of various stakeholders, and monitor student progress. This paper presents the TYS framework and conceptually proposes catalytic factors to consider when developing an integrated model for data-driven, responsive, and scaled student support.

Khunoana, S., Motjoadi, V., Setilo, T. and Ramaila, S.

Bridging the Gap: Exploring Mathematics Transition from Basic to Higher Education

This study delves into the transition from basic education (schooling) to higher education (university), with a particular focus on Mathematics. Mathematics has historically presented difficulties for students transitioning from basic to higher education. This study aims to understand the first-year experience with Mathematics in higher education and how it differs from that in basic education. The methodology employed in this study involved a comprehensive examination of the transition from basic education to higher education, focusing specifically on the challenges posed by Mathematics. The findings reveal a notable shift in students' mindset towards Mathematics between these educational levels, leading to challenges and a declining pass rate in basic education over the years. To address these challenges, a diagnostic report spanning three years of basic education was analysed to identify the gaps in Mathematics education. These identified gaps present significant hurdles for first-year students as they navigate higher education. The ongoing concern revolves around bridging these gaps and facilitating a smoother transition from basic to higher education. The central question at hand is whether to re-educate first-year students using basic education syllabi or implement collaborative approaches, such as intensive tutoring and mentoring, to mitigate these challenges. With disparities identified between the two education systems, the focus lies on effective strategies to support students in overcoming these obstacles and thriving in higher education. The study highlights the need for educational institutions to reassess their Mathematics curriculum and teaching methods to better prepare students for the transition to higher education. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of aligning curricular standards and pedagogical approaches between basic and higher education levels.

Kirkcaldy, H.

The Strategic Value of a Student Mental Health Framework

The mental health status of students has been a cause for concern in recent years, with reported high levels of anxiety, depression, and trauma, together with the manifestation of before undiagnosed learning and neurocognitive difficulties. These indicators have an impact on the daily functioning of students, but very importantly also impact their ability to learn and eventually succeed and proceed towards graduation. The impact of unmanaged mental health difficulties on student throughput and attrition rates at many universities should not be underestimated. Universities traditionally responded to mental health challenges in students with a curative or remedial framework. Students who present at the campus clinic or mental health facility, are supported after being referred by residence structures, faculty members or when they self-refer. This sometimes implies that the student is referred when there are clear signs and symptoms or after being identified as somehow at risk. This could mean that there is already a need for higher level, complex and multi-faceted mental health interventions, or even external referral, which can be time consuming and costly to the organisation. It also means that the mental health and wellbeing of the vast majority of students may remain unchecked and secondary, with subclinical symptoms waiting to evolve into distress or disorder. Preventative interventions are deemed as secondary, and students who are stressed and experiencing milder difficulties are not the main focus of treatment interventions. Additionally, there are many areas of operational interest where mental health and wellbeing has a direct touchpoint with the academic project and student management, be it achieving optimal performance, managing temporary impairments, recognising disability, considering leave of absence, managing behavioural misconduct, or disciplinary matters. Without proper guidelines these difficulties could be administered in an ad hoc and possibly even injurious manner, opening the university to unmanaged and unintentional risks. The problem faced by universities, but particularly by those tasked to manage the mental health of students, is that mental health initiatives could at times be underestimated by management structures and decision makers, as the core business of the university is seen as getting students to pass and graduate. Essential resources and investment must flow in the direction of the academic project. There may even still be a traditional split between academic and support services, with health and wellbeing relegated to a secondary status, together with other supportive functions. This paper makes a case for placing mental health and wellbeing central to the university strategic goals setting and intentional direction. It attempts to support the notion that investment in the wellbeing of students adds value to the organisation in ways that is central to the success of students. For that to be true however, the mental health and wellbeing of students needs fundamental protection and promotion and should not just be the function of a small, and often overtaxed professional support unit. The development of a central mental health framework or strategy within the university, can consolidate the importance of support to students and place mental health as a central pillar in the university's journey to success. Without a formal framework, mental health interventions may remain ad hoc, unorganised, and accidental, however well intentioned. The adoption of a mental health framework or protocol can assist universities in creating a culture and community of care, stipulating various aspects of university and academic life where the university intentionally promotes health and wellbeing. By involving the whole university strategically in the mental health project, it could be considered an investment in student success.

Lekata, S., and Venter, E.

The Impact of Failing English/Academic Literacy: A Market Basket Analysis Algorithms and Applications to Modules Data.

Research related to English/ Academic Literacy has been an ongoing project at SMU since 2023. This institution attracts over 70% first time entering (FTEN) learners from Quintile 1-3, who studied English as a second or additional language at High school level, as well as over 60% first-generation students. Institutional data indicates that English/Academic Literacy is one of compulsory modules in significant number of programmes, and poor performance in this module sometimes causes bottlenecks in students' academic journey. This study uses market basket analysis concepts and algorithms to answer the following questions: 'When students fail English/Academic Literacy, which other modules are they also likely to fail? When they pass English which other modules are they likely to pass?' In the field of econometrics, market basket analysis, also known as frequent itemset mining or association analysis is a data mining technique that analyses patterns of co-occurrence and determines the strength of the link between products purchased together by consumers. Similarly, the research applies market basket analysis data mining algorithms such as Priori and Frequent Pattern Growth (FP Growth) to address the research questions. The algorithms work by looking for combinations of items (passed/failed modules) that occur together frequently, providing information to understand the modules success behaviour. The data mining algorithms employed generate association rules for the modules data set. An association rule implies that if an item A occurs, then item B also occurs with a certain probability. Economists often evaluate the relationships between products and services to better understand the market. For example, consumers normally buy ice cream together with ice-cream cones, coffee with sugar, tennis rackets and tennis balls, printer and ink cartridges, cereal and milk etc. These are called complementary goods, which are products that are typically used together, and usually consumers cannot have one without the other. This research applies concepts of economics consumer behavior to academic modules data. The study is significant as English/Academic Literacy has been proven to be a predictor of academic success in many academic institutions, and research results may be used as early warning mechanisms for students' success. Furthermore, SMU is a health science university, and modules like English/Academic Literacy are not one of the core modules, however, poor academic performance in these modules may keep students in the system and affect throughput rates. English/Academic literacy at SMU has the highest enrolments rates, and an average estimate of 70% pass rates using data from 2017 to 2022.

Leshota, M.

Access for Success and Success for Access: Towards Explicating a Theory of Change for the Pre-University Academy

Between 2022 and 2023, the Excellence Pivot (Grades 10 – 11) of the Pre-University Academy (PUA) comprised 80% of learners from Quintiles 4 and 5 schools and the rest (20%) from Quintiles 1 to 3 schools. Initial observations and interactions indicated quite quickly that learners from higher Quintile schools were outperforming learners from Quintiles 1 to 3 in mathematics, Chemistry, Physics and English. This begged the question: what should the PUA's theory of change for access and success entail? The PUA's first and most critical objective is to foster conceptual understanding of STEM-related fields with a view to gaining access to post-secondary institutions for students especially from impoverished backgrounds; and advances the realization of this objective through instructional strategies that allow for deep understanding of concepts. However, the unique makeup of a classroom comprising all Quintiles while appealing also poses a challenge for productive intervention. Hence a need for a shared understanding among stakeholders. This paper shares views of the learners from the different Quintiles about the PUA towards attaining their goals of access and success. The theoretical grounding of the paper is based on the Science of Learning and Development Framework (SoLD) (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020) which stipulates four main categories for the whole child development as: Supportive Environment, Social and Emotional Development, System of Supports and Productive Instructional Strategies. The learner views were collected through two focus group discussions with the highest performing Grade 11s from the higher Quintiles (4 boys and 8 girls). The questions were open-ended and about learners' lived experiences and conceptions of the effectiveness of the PUA. For the lower Quintiles, individual interviews were conducted offering opportunity for free expression and for researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of their needs. Similar questions were asked to this group but supplemented with questions about home and school environments. All the learners commended the teaching towards conceptual understanding which enabled them to understand the why of doing things at school. However, the girls suggested that the PUA ease up a little on it and focus on the school curriculum towards the end of Grade 11 instead. The learners liked the group work focus in the PUA which allowed for interactions with other learners and learning from each other. Other critical aspects of access and success from the learners included time management lessons, counselling services offered by the PUA, and general support from the teachers and tutors. Specific to the lower Quintile learners, the PUA offered space for learning. The learners further admired the resources (human and physical) availed to them which were not existent in their schools. In response to the learners' views, some structural rearrangements were implemented to allow for more group work, time for individual study, and for flexibility on the Grade 12 programme. Furthermore, from 2024, the PUA has embarked on a success mentoring programme for Grades 10 to 12 in collaboration with the community engagement agency in the university, and a nonprofit organization for career guidance purposes. In conclusion, an effective theory of change for the PUA grounded in system thinking approach, and responsive to the cognitive and psychosocial needs of the differential Quintile constitution of the schools, is needed. While access to success is most critical for the lower Quintiles it is not so for the higher Quintiles whose access to tertiary education is guaranteed. Responsiveness to diversity becomes key, hence.

Mabizela, S., Ndofirepi, E. and Khupe, C.

Retrospective Study on Academic Outcomes of MBBCh Students by Admission Categories at Wits University (2016-2021)

The goal of this study was to understand the link between admission categories and academic achievement in high-risk modules, including Anatomy, Molecular Medicine, and Physiology, among MBBCh students from 2016 to 2021. The retrospective project analysed the results of MBBCh students in Anatomy, Molecular Medicine, and Physiology based on admission categories for the 2016 to 2021 cohorts. As already alluded to, the admission categories consist of four categories: Top 40, Top Rural, Top Quintile, and Top Black and Coloured. Firstly, the chi-square test was used assess the association between admission categories and progression outcomes. Secondly ANOVA tests were performed to explore influence of different admission categories on student performance in Anatomy, Molecular Medicine, and Physiology. Anatomy results: The results of the research revealed a statistically significant association between admission categories and performance in Anatomy, = 55.307, p < 0.001. Among these students n=628, 94.1% (591) passed, while the remaining 5.9% (n=37) failed. In the Top Rural category 232, 79.7% (n=185) passed and 20.3% (n=47) failed. In the category labelled as "Top Black and Coloured," a total of 436 students were assessed. Among these students, 83.5% achieved a passing grade, while the remaining 16.5% did not meet the required criteria for success. The ANOVA analysis results were statistically significant, F= 3, 1202 = 58.893, p < 0.001. The average marks of students in the "Top 40" admission category (M = 68.96) was significantly higher compared to those in the "Top Rural" (M = 60.56), "Top Quintile" (M = 59.86), and "Top Black and Coloured" (M = 61.95) categories. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the admission category has a significant impact on academic performance in Anatomy. Molecular Medicine results: The chi-square test assessing the association between admission categories and students marks in Molecular Medicine was statistically significant (= 74.478, p < 0.001). Within the "Top 40" category, it was seen that 94.4% (n=589) passed, while 5.6% (n=35) failed. In the "Top Rural" category 76.7% (n=181) while 23.3% (n=55) experienced academic challenges. The students in the "Top Black and Coloured" category (n= 435), 83.0% (n=361) passed and 17.0% (n=74) failed. The ANOVA results were statistically significant in students Molecular medicine by admission categories, F(3, 1191) = 100.556, p < 0.001). The post hoc comparisons showed that the "Top 40" students had a significantly higher mean score compared to all other categories with a mean difference ranging from 8.351 to 11.281, p = 001. The study's findings suggest that the admission classification has a significant impact on the students marks in the Molecular Medicine. Physiology results: The results indicate a strong and significant association between the two admission categories and Physiology progression outcome, = 87.28, p < 0.001. The students in the "Top 40" categories achieved a 95.9% (592), while a smaller percentage did not pass 4.1% (n=25). In contrast, the students in the "Top Rural" had a pass rate of 78.1% (n=178) and a failure rate of 21.9% (n=50). Similar patterns of performance were observed for the "Top Quantile" and "Top Black and Coloured" categories. The ANOVA yielded a statistically significant variations in the Physiology mean marks by admission categories, F(3, 1185) = 79.329, p < 0.001. The results indicate that students admitted in the "Top 40" category achieved the highest mean final mark (M = 72.68), which was substantially greater than the mean scores of students in the "Top Rural" (M = 61.56), "Top Quintile" (M = 62.10), and "Top Black and Coloured" (M = 63.80) categories and was statistically significant, p <.005. In conclusion: The findings of this study are very important for the admission procedures and support systems at the University of the Witwatersrand. The differences in academic achievements that have been observed suggest that it is important to implement tailored interventions and support systems to effectively meet the specific needs of students admitted with lower admission scores.

MacGregor, R.G. and Ross, A.J.

Performance of Rural-Origin Health Science Students Compared to National Statistics

This study compares the throughput rate and time to completion of rural-origin health science students supported by the Umthombo Youth Development Foundation (UYDF) with national statistics. Eight cohorts (2008-2015) of UYDF student data (388 students) are compared to the corresponding national data for medical students, as well as 3-year and 4-year qualifications. Data sources include the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) medical student dataset and the Council for Higher Education (CHE) allied health dataset. The UYDF identifies and supports rural-origin health science students to address staff shortages at rural hospitals. The majority of UYDF students matriculated at quintile 1 to 3 rural schools in 3 districts of KwaZulu-Natal. UYDF provides academic and social mentoring, requiring students to meet with mentors monthly. Additionally, students participate in four-week annual work exposures at rural district hospitals and attend an annual Lifeskills workshop focusing on non-academic topics. UYDF also provides top-up financial support to supplement National Student Financial Aid (NSFAS) funding. Mentors help students address academic and social challenges early by accessing university support, though they do not provide tutorial support as they may not be health professionals or subject specialists. Results for allied health disciplines - 3-year qualifications are as follows: Five cohorts of UYDF students achieved a 100% throughput rate, whilst one cohort achieved 93%, another 89%, and one cohort a 50% throughput rate. The best-performing national cohorts (2011 and 2012) achieved a 76.4% throughput rate after 10 years, with the remaining cohorts performing worse. For allied health disciplines – 4-year qualifications comprising eight different disciplines: The lowest throughput rate was 75% (2010 cohort), and the highest was 100%. 58% of UYDF students studying a 4-year qualification completed in the minimum time, 28% in n+1 (total 86%) and 9% after an additional two years (total 95%). The national DHET throughput data for 4-year degrees, covering the same cohorts, ranged from 76.2% (2009 cohort) to 80% (2013 cohort), with 40.7 (2009 cohort) to 47.9% (2015 cohort) completing in a minimum time. CHE data specifically on the throughput of 4-year health science students reported that 49% of the 2011 cohort completed in the minimum time, with 73% completing after an additional 2 years, and 27% dropping out. Medical students – 6-year qualifications: The lowest throughput was 81% (2014 cohort), and the two highest were 100% (2008 & 2009 cohorts), the rest ranged between these two figures. Regarding time to completion, 76% of UYDF students completed in the minimum time versus the national statistics of 63.9% (2010 cohort)-71.6% (2015), 19% of UYDF students needed one additional year (total 95%), and after two additional years, 98% of UYDF students had completed versus 86.1% (2010) - 90.1% (2013) nationally. In conclusion: The throughput rate of UYDF-supported rural-origin allied health science students was better than national statistics for both 3-year and 4-year qualifications, as was their time to completion. While the throughput rate of UYDF-supported medical students was similar to national statistics, their time to completion was better. These results demonstrate the academic potential of rural health science students who received moderate support from the UYDF.

Mafaesa, T. and Bock, L.

The Best of Both Worlds? – Exploring the Use of Qualitative Analysis and Machine Learning Techniques on Academic Advising Data

Introduction Academic advising has been a core pillar of student success at the University of the Free State (UFS) over recent years. It is one of the significant components of the institution's high-impact practices (HIPs). The importance of academic advising has been highlighted in literature in works by Young-Jones et al. (2013) and Tiroyabone & Strydom (2021), to name but a few. These studies highlight that academic advising increases students' awareness of institutional support services that are available at their disposal, as well as providing them with information that is critical in their educational journey. Academic advising also assists students, especially first years, in transitioning from basic education to the more complex and dynamic higher education environment. The Learner Case Management (LCM) system is a tool used by UFS to capture qualitative data relating to academic advising sessions held between students and academic advisors. The information captured on this system includes the narratives of the advisors' discussions with students during their appointments. LCM data is captured together with other academic and demographic information. The LCM system has been used by UFS since 2015, and the data from this system has been used extensively for decision-making and, monitoring and evaluation of the practice. This system was vital during the COVID-19 pandemic as it was one of the primary sources from which student data was collected to understand their needs and design responsive supports. A wealth of valuable information has been collected through the LCM. The LCM narratives detail why the student is seeking academic advising support while also describing what solutions are discussed to support the student's needs. Although some research has been conducted on these narrative data, it has yet to be fully explored. This was due to the need for more analytical capacity in previous years. Aim / Objective In an effort to be more proactive and preventative in academic advising, this paper explores through a qualitative lens the narratives captured in the LCM with the integration of machine learning. It aims to explore the potential benefits of a combined approach to analysing student narratives, with the goal of better understanding the challenges faced by students. Research Question Does a combined approach utilising reflexive thematic analysis and machine learning techniques provide an in-depth understanding of advice narratives, which contain voices from student about their struggles at UFS? Research Methodology Data Collection The target population for this research will comprise students from the University of the Free State (UFS) who have used academic advising services. This data will be extracted from the LCM system. Data Analysis The data analysis will be achieved by employing reflexive thematic analysis utilised by Braun & Clarke (2021) to uncover underlying themes and concepts in the advice narratives. An inductive approach will be used when identifying and assigning codes and themes to the data. Machine learning techniques, like the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), will then be applied to the data to assess potential ways to enhance the analysis. Results Themes from the analysis will be presented and discussed in the results and conclusion section. A discussion of whether machine learning techniques were able to enhance the results will also be made in this section. References Tiroyabone, G. W., & Strydom, F. (2021). The Development of Academic Advising to Enable Student Success in South Africa. Journal of Student Affairs in Africa, 9(2). Young-Jones, A. D., Burt, T. D., Dixon, S., & Hawthorne, M. J. (2013). Academic advising: does it really impact student success? Quality Assurance in Education, 21(1), 7-19. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021).

Mafuya, M.

Reflecting on my Role as a Peer Advisor Supporting Students on a Chatbot Platform at the University of Cape Town

University students face a lot of challenges, related to both their academic and personal lives. This ranges from dealing with the transition from high school to being away from home, to staying on top of coursework. What makes matters worse is that when students try to find help, they are faced with further challenges. As a student myself I have struggled to get help due to delays in communication from the University, information being hard to find and information being outdated. To alleviate the stress caused by this it is very important that students can find help more easily. The UCT Chatbot provides information and assistance to students on weekdays, during office hours . After hours queries that are urgent may also be supported. The Chatbot deals with a wide range of queries, such as applications queries, faculty related queries and general information about the University. Currently, most of our queries come from potential students during the application period. The application process is complex, and it is very important that we help students break down information so it is easier to understand. This includes explaining the National Benchmark tests (NBTs), transcripts, courses offerings and the admission requirements for the different programmes we offer. We also provide information to international applicants on all the different processes that apply to them. Because a lot of students have funding issues, we also let students know how they can fund their studies, making them aware of the options provided by the Fees Office, on our Bursary Noticeboard and how the SRC may also help. As a postgraduate student, I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to work on the Chatbot and be able to use my experience during my years at UCT to help others. For students to receive timely communication and assistance directly from the University releases a lot of anxiety and really shows that the University does care about you and helping you to achieve your goals. It was also super humbling for me to have helped a lot of students especially those who were at risk of academic exclusion as that is such life defining moment and I had to approach it with a lot of sensitivity. There is also no better feeling then when students email you back, thanking you. Because of your help they were allowed to continue with their studies and make something of their lives. I believe my role as a peer advisor has greatly assisted in enhancing the student experience as I have personally gone through most of the challenges that the students have faced, and I know how helpful it is to be assisted by someone who is patient and understands your situation and strives to assist you as best as they can.

Maherry, A.

Gender Performance Gaps in Siyaphumelela 2.0 Network Institutions: A Deep Dive into the Data

Reducing the gender performance gaps is one of the aims of the Siyaphumelela initiative. The 2023 National Senior Certificate results showed that more females wrote their matric (female 56% male 44%), more females passed (female and male pass rate 83%) and more females received bachelor passes to be admitted to university compared to males (42% females achieved bachelor passes compared to 40% of males).This study analyses gender performance gaps in access and success at seven Siyaphumelela 2.0 institutions. We use audited data from the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS), provided by the University of Stellenbosch through their PowerBI platform. Specifically, we examine, access - headcount of enrolled students and success - undergraduate credit degree success rates and headcount of graduates. For the seven Siyaphumelela 2.0 Partner Institutions, the percentage headcount of unduplicated male enrollments for 3-year diplomas and degrees and 4-year degrees has decreased from 44% (64 224) to 42% (72,141). But for the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) CESM grouping (CESM 01, 02, 06, 08, 09, 10, 13, 14 and 15) the male enrolments remained relatively stable from 51% (29 488) in 2015 to 50% (31 625) in 2021. However, if CESM category 8 is removed (Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences) males dominate with enrolments with 58% in 2015 to 57% in 2021, showing that males still dominate in the SET professions, and females are underrepresented. For the seven Siyaphumelela Partner Institutions, the difference in weighted undergraduate credit degree success rates between females and males has increased from 5% in 2015 (males 82% and females 87%) to 7% in 2021 (males 81% and females 88%). This does suggest that the student success interventions have benefited female students more than male students. More females graduate from the 3-year degree/diploma and 4-year degree compared to males, but when considering the SET CESM grouping, excluding Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences, more males graduate than females in the seven Siyaphumelela 2.0 Partner institutions. Historically, more males have enrolled in NQF Level 10 qualifications (PhD), but this gap has decreased and in 2020 and 2021 the enrolments for females and males for their doctorates were very similar, except for SET (excluding Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences). In 2021, 100 more males (796) graduated with their doctorates than females (697). This highlights that the performance gains by females in the undergraduate and masters qualifications do not continue into the doctorate studies. When considering the gender gaps in employability, it's notable that although more females attend university and graduate, their unemployment rate is higher. In the second quarter of 2023, the unemployment rate for females was 35.7%, compared to 30% for males. Black African women fare even worse with an unemployment rate of 39.8% (quarter 2, 2023). The STATSSA report also notes “When women are employed, they are more likely to work in low-paying jobs in vulnerable conditions, and there is a slow improvement forecast for the future” (ILO,2017). This is also why it is important to consider output (graduating on time), outcome (employability) and impact (upward mobility) when evaluating student success interventions, especially with the complex gender issues.

Majozi, B.

AI Companions for Learning: A Friend or Foe? A Reflective Perspective on Ethical and Legal Considerations

From ELIZA in the 60's, to XiaoIce by Microsoft and now ChatGPT, non-task-oriented chatbots have been gaining popularity and research attention largely due to the commercial value they bring. Almost 60 years later, conversational AI is still of research importance and even more so now following Google's breakthrough in 2017 which resulted in OpenAI developing their first Generative-Pretrained Transformer model (GPT-1). This growing research also found interest among educationalist and educational technology developers on how they can leverage AI to improve content delivery through personalised or adaptive learning and recently, employing conversational AI as learning assistants (tutors), debate companions, content creators, and personal companions for learning to mention a few. Students on the other hand, have also been following the recent trends on Generative AI (GenAI) as it has proved to be useful in generating content relating to their studies. This off course caused much of the recent disruption in education post the pandemic where educators had to grapple with ways to measure and validate authentic learning. The focus on the commercially used ChatGPT and related products have masked another threat to academic integrity which is, the ability for advanced students to use Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) from models like the GPT-4 and LLaMA to create context specific chatbots (AI companions) that can be fine-tuned with course material and personal previous writings to both produce academically sound content that accurately mimics the student's style of writing, all done in a private environment. The second problem is the sharing of such AI companions among students with those who either have not bought a book that was used in fine-tuning process, or a sharing with a student/user not enrolled in a module. This is in breach of copyright requirements. Lastly, the use of institution's intellectual property outside of the LMS without limits with anyone with access. This work seeks to expand on this dilemma by exposing further challenges especially by advanced students on the ways that they could use conversational AI models like GPT-4 to advance their academic discourse. This is done by zooming into ethical and legal dilemmas in creating and using (personal) AI companions. This work seeks to contribute to the discussion on responsible use of AI in education contrasting it with meaningful learning experiences. The focus is on what needs to be addressed by managers, policy-makers and educationists in (1) creating frameworks and policies for academic integrity, (2) to grow awareness for educationalist on the latest AI capabilities that are publicly available that can jeopardize academic integrity, (3) the type of student education programmes on the use of AI that needs to be developed, and a (4) reflective and investigative scholarly approach to teaching and learning in the age of advanced AI.

Makhoba, B., Mokati, L., Seapi, K., Dicks, T., Mbonani, T. and Ngidi, S.

Evaluating the Effectiveness and Implementation of Skills, Principles and Strategies in Tutor Training

The Academic Student Tutorial Excellence Programme (A_STEP) at the University of the Free State (UFS) provides peer-led small-group tutorials to help students improve and succeed academically. The program employs internationally benchmarked Supplementary Instruction (SI) principles and focuses on roles, strategies, student engagement, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), blended learning, and academic advising abilities. The two training sessions we will focus on are UDL and Mass Training. According to the University of the Free State (2023: 5 and 6), UDL and Mass training occur at the start of each semester (bi-annually). All A_STEP Teaching and Learning Coordinators (TLCs) conduct the training sessions and all newly appointed tutors are in attendance. The training aims to equip tutors with the knowledge to support students with diverse learning needs and to design inclusive tutorial sessions. Observation surveys are utilised to determine the quality of tutorials. A_STEP uses an automated observation survey to evaluate tutorial facilitation, critiquing session structure, tutor preparation, and incorporation of SI principles, UDL, translanguaging, classroom management, and student engagement. TLCs conduct observations to assess the improvement of facilitation skills, instructional design, and professional development of tutors. The overall objective of this study is to determine whether the facilitation skills and UDL principles taught in the Mass and UDL trainings are effectively implemented. To achieve this objective, this study will seek to answer three research questions: 1.) What is A_STEP tutors' perception of Mass and UDL training sessions regarding tutor readiness? 2.) Do A_STEP tutors implement the learning strategies presented in the A_STEP Mass training in the session planning and facilitation of their tutorials? 3.) Do A_STEP tutors effectively include the UDL principles of representation, engagement and action and expression in the delivery of their tutorials? The study utilizes tutors' training evaluation data from Mass (N=170) and UDL (N=168), as well as tutorial observational data (N=92) collected during the first semester of 2024. The data was collected via survey forms provided by Quest Back Essential for data collection. Observational data was based on the observation of the tutorial sessions by tutorial coordinators of three faculties, namely faculties of Education, Economic and Management Sciences, and Health Sciences. The study utilized exploratory data analysis and sentiment analysis for data analysis. The reason for the use of these methods was to provide a comprehensive understanding of tutors' performance and effectiveness in tutorial sessions. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of both quantitative and qualitative data to identify patterns and trends in tutor behaviour and student engagement. In the training evaluation results, most tutors found that the training helped them demonstrate and apply communication and planning skills in tutorial sessions, enabling them to understand and accommodate different student needs. The tutors generally perceived that the training met their expectations (99%), made them understand the role of a tutor, and provided them with the confidence to conduct effective tutorials. Majority (83%) of the tutors were not aware of UDL principles before the UDL training session. The observation results show that the most applied UDL principle is engagement (52%), whilst 23.2% applied representation and 24.8% action and engagement. A_STEP trains tutors to make use of the 10 SI strategies. The most utilized strategies are probing questions (38%) and redirecting questions (27%).

Maluleke, L. and Shilowe, T.

Enhancing Academic Writing Instruction University-Wide: Empowering Lecturers and Students

This paper highlights the multifaceted benefits of scaling up an academic writing initiative to support both university lecturers and students across various disciplines. By expanding the successful model piloted in the Advanced Diploma in Technical and Vocational Teaching programme, this initiative aims to address the specific needs and challenges faced by educators and learners alike. For university lecturers, the expanded initiative offers invaluable resources and support mechanisms to enhance their capacity for teaching academic writing effectively. Through faculty training programmes, workshops, and access to curated writing materials, lecturers can develop their pedagogical skills and gain confidence in guiding students through the writing process. Moreover, collaboration with writing support centres and peer networks provides opportunities for professional development and knowledge exchange, fostering a community of practice centred on writing instruction. Concurrently, students stand to benefit significantly from the expanded academic writing initiative. By integrating writing-intensive courses into the curriculum and providing access to writing support services, students receive comprehensive assistance at every stage of their academic journey. The incorporation of AI-driven writing tools not only facilitates the development of writing skills but also cultivates digital literacy and critical thinking abilities essential for navigating the modern academic landscape. Furthermore, the initiative promotes a culture of academic integrity and responsible use of technology, equipping students with the tools and knowledge to engage with AI resources ethically and effectively. By instilling a sense of ownership and pride in their writing, students become active participants in their learning process, empowering them to excel academically and beyond. In this presentation, we seek to address the following questions. How can university lecturers be actively involved in the development and implementation of the expanded academic writing initiative? What specific training and support mechanisms are needed to empower lecturers to effectively teach academic writing across diverse disciplines? How can the initiative be tailored to address the unique challenges and needs of lecturers in different academic departments? What strategies can be employed to encourage widespread adoption of the initiative among university lecturers? What are the potential barriers or obstacles that lecturers may encounter in integrating writing-intensive courses into their curriculum, and how can these be mitigated? How can the expanded initiative leverage technology, such as AI-driven writing tools, to enhance the teaching and learning of academic writing? What measures can be implemented to assess the effectiveness of the initiative in improving lecturers' pedagogical skills and students' writing proficiency? How can university lecturers collaborate with writing support centres and other stakeholders to foster a community of practice focused on writing instruction? What opportunities exist for interdisciplinary collaboration and knowledge exchange among lecturers involved in the initiative? How can the initiative be sustainable in the long term, ensuring ongoing support and development for university lecturers in teaching academic writing?

Mamvura, I.

From Enrolment to Graduation: The Impact of Student Tracking on Academic Journeys

In the evolving world of education, student tracking systems (STS) have become crucial tools for boosting both student success and institutional efficiency. This presentation explores the impacts of these systems from student enrollment through to graduation. By analysing student data, STS provide colleges and universities with insights that help tailor learning paths, offer proactive academic guidance, and allocate resources strategically. We will delve into how these systems have evolved progressing from tracking methods to advanced platforms that incorporate artificial intelligence and real time analytics. The discussion will touch upon the features of STS, such as their ability to track progress enhance student engagement and aid in making informed decisions through thorough data analysis. Through case studies and statistical evidence we will showcase how STS significantly contribute to improving retention rates, graduation timelines and overall academic achievements. Additionally, ethical concerns regarding data privacy and the responsible application of analytics in various contexts will be addressed during the presentation. The aim is to provide attendees with an understanding of how student tracking systems are reshaping educational approaches and outcomes by fostering a more supportive and efficient learning environment from enrollment to graduation. This session is particularly tailored for school administrators, tech experts, academic counsellors and decision makers keen, on using technology to enhance students progress and overall success in institutions. The integration of student tracking systems (STS) in higher education has significantly transformed the way educational institutions monitor and support students throughout their academic journey. These systems have evolved from merely storing data to becoming proactive engagement tools, utilizing data analytics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning to predict student performance and suggest timely interventions (Carbonaro, 2005). The use of STS has been associated with improved student outcomes and operational efficiency, leading to increased retention and graduation rates (Dockx et al., 2019). By leveraging these technologies, universities and colleges can personalise learning experiences and provide targeted support to students, ultimately enhancing their success (Maaz et al., 2008). However, the implementation of STS also raises important implications related to privacy, data protection, and potential drawbacks of relying on data-driven decision-making (Timmermans et al., 2018). Educational leaders need to address these concerns as they incorporate STS more extensively into their administrative and academic approaches. It is crucial to carefully consider the ethical and legal aspects of gathering and utilizing student data to ensure that the benefits of STS are balanced with the protection of students' privacy and rights (Ehlers & Schwager, 2020). Research has shown that educational systems with early tracking may increase inequality in academic performance between students compared to systems with late tracking (Chmielewski et al., 2013). Additionally, the impact of family background is reinforced by early tracking, while comprehensive schooling promotes equality of opportunity (Pareja et al., 2021). Furthermore, vocational tracks can inhibit educational attainment and limit students' expectations and aspirations, potentially constraining their benefits of a sense of belonging (Burger, 2022). In conclusion, STS have the potential to revolutionise higher education by providing institutions with the tools to monitor, analyse, and shape student paths from enrollment to graduation. While offering numerous benefits in terms of personalised support and improved outcomes, the ethical and practical implications of utilizing STS must be carefully considered to ensure that they are implemented in a responsible and equitable manner.

Manyage, T. and Tisetso, N.

Exploring the Need for Student Academic Advising to Attain Students' Academic Success in Rural Based Higher Education Institutions

Many rural-based higher education institutions lack the services of Student Academic Advisors. Faced with various academic challenges, students must independently identify, categorize, and seek assistance, a method that is not universally effective. There is a pressing need to explore the necessity of Student Academic Advisors for achieving academic success in these rural institutions. By investigating the nature of the challenges students face and how they resolve them, we can better understand the need for such advisors. The planned study will focus on three main objectives: Students' belief systems and expectations of higher education institutions; the reality of their experiences within these institutions; and the challenges they encounter throughout their academic journeys. A qualitative research method will be employed, using an exploratory research design to guide the study. Data will be purposively collected from 90 rural university students. The findings will provide a clear understanding of the need for Student Academic Advisors, particularly for first-time university students.

Maseko, M. and Gumede, B.

Annual Academic Development Officer Report on the Impact of the Academic Monitoring Support (AMS) Programme “Perception of an Academic Mentor”

Globally, there is widespread acknowledgment of the necessity for robust student support systems to combat high rates of student attrition and low throughput. This report delves into the examination of an Academic Monitoring and Support System (AMS) aimed at bolstering student progression. Specifically, it investigates the efficacy of the Academic Mentorship Programme housed within the College of Health Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The evaluation of this programme seeks to explain the perspectives of current academic mentors on four key outcomes. It provides an overview of the programme’s existing framework, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses, while also offering recommendations and solutions for its enhancement. In gathering insights, 65 employed mentors participated in a survey conducted via Microsoft Forms, facilitating the submission of monthly reports. Previous assessments of the program have yielded positive feedback. However, they have also revealed notable deficiencies, particularly concerning communication gaps between lecturers and mentors, as well as shortcomings in the current administrative processes. Addressing these issues is paramount to realizing the full potential of our student support endeavours.

Masuku, A.S. and Twala, R.

Enhancing University Experience and Cultivating Student Success through the Adapt@DUT First Year Students Orientation

The transition to higher education presents numerous challenges for students, critically affecting the success of first-year students. Despite targeted interventions aimed at addressing institutional issues such as retention rates, student success, and low throughput rates, these challenges persist. To facilitate the integration of first-year students, the Durban University of Technology (DUT) implemented the ADAPT@DUT initiative. This study aims to evaluate the impact of ADAPT@DUT on students' university experience and success. ADAPT@DUT seeks to ensure a smooth transition and enhance student success and retention by putting students at the centre of both curricular and co-curricular activities. By enabling students to co-create their university experience through partnerships with faculties, support units, and student leaders, the initiative aims to empower students to engage, learn, and thrive in their university community and beyond. This research explores how the initiative helps students manage academic anxiety and fosters a sense of belonging. The presentation will analyse data collected through surveys and student interviews, reflecting on the impact of the reconceptualised orientation programme designed to holistically integrate students into university life. The inclusion of student voices is critical for a comprehensive understanding of their academic and campus experience

Mathabathe, K., Kanyane, R. and Versveld, J.

Peer Assisted Learning: A Social Justice Issue for a Transforming University

The high failure rate in certain courses presents a significant challenge for many universities globally, including those in South Africa. This qualitative study investigates peer-assisted learning (PAL) as a potential solution to this issue by examining the experiences of senior students who served as tutors in a PAL initiative. These tutors were specifically chosen based on their lived experience of overcoming academic struggles in a high-failure-rate course and successfully achieving good results. The main objective of this study is to understand their perceptions and experiences of facilitating learning during tutorial sessions, providing valuable insights into how their personal academic journeys and teaching strategies influence their role in helping other students. The methodology involved semi-structured interviews with the tutors to capture their narratives, challenges, and reflections on their teaching practices. The interview questions were designed to explore how their own academic struggles informed their approach to tutoring and to elicit insights into their interactions with students, as well as the perceived impact of the PAL program on the academic performance of tutees. Data from these interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analysed to identify recurring themes and patterns. Results indicate that tutors found their own lived experiences of overcoming challenges to be crucial in building rapport with students and creating a supportive learning environment. Their familiarity with the course's difficulties allowed them to identify common misconceptions quickly and tailor their teaching methods accordingly. Tutors reported that their empathetic approach, combined with practical strategies for mastering the coursework, fostered a positive learning atmosphere and improved student engagement. Several tutors noted that students seemed more comfortable asking questions and participating actively in tutorials due to the relatable guidance provided. However, the study also uncovered challenges, such as garnering lecturer buy-in, managing diverse student needs and expectations and the need for consistent training and support for tutors themselves. Despite these challenges, tutors overwhelmingly perceived the program as beneficial to both themselves and their tutees, citing improved communication skills, increased confidence in their knowledge, and satisfaction from contributing to the academic success of others. In conclusion, this study demonstrates the potential of peer-assisted learning programs to address high failure rates in challenging courses. By leveraging the unique insights and empathy of tutors who have overcome similar academic struggles, universities can create a supportive, effective learning environment that promotes student success. Further research is recommended to optimize tutor training and to explore the long-term academic benefits of PAL initiatives for both tutors and tutees.

Meintjes, A. and Posthumus, H.

Are Students Ready for the Workplace? Exploring Student Voices to Understand Career Preparedness at the University of the Free State

The transition from higher education to the workforce is crucial, especially in South Africa, where economic disparities and high youth unemployment rates present formidable challenges for graduates. This paper focuses on the Career and Workforce Preparation (CWP) module from the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE), critically assessing the role of higher education institutions in equipping students for professional careers. Drawing on data collected in 2023, this study analyses quantitative and qualitative responses from 619 first-year students and 1506 seniors, exploring their educational experiences and perceptions of career preparedness. The results highlight that a majority of students experience their education as relevant to their career aspirations, with 84% of first-years and 91% of seniors affirming that their learning aligns with their career plans. However, the need for more practical experiences and better integration of technology in career preparation is evident. Despite general confidence in their career-oriented skills, many students have yet to engage in career preparation activities provided by their institutions, such as CV support, mock interviews, or meetings with career services staff. Yet, awareness of and the intention to participate in these services is high among students. The paper proposes strategic interventions to enhance co-curricular activities, expand work-integrated learning opportunities, and strengthen career service offerings, based on student feedback. These recommendations highlight the importance of incorporating student voices in developing educational strategies that enhance success and employability. Overall, the insights from the CWP module underscore the current state of career preparation and its role as a critical feedback mechanism for institutional improvement. This study offers a valuable approach for using student feedback to drive educational enhancements, thereby fostering a more employable graduate pool across South African universities.

Mohloai, T., Chili, M., Samosamo, M. and Madzimure, J.

The Role of Students' Voices in Shaping Student Success at one South African Higher Education Institution

Recognising students' voices as vital stakeholders in their education has gained traction as a way to enhance educational outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Without robust mechanisms to integrate student feedback into institutional practices, educational goals may not be fully achieved. This study explores the extent to which students' voices are heard and their impact on student success in South African higher education institutions (HEIs). It is grounded in Student Engagement Theory, which posits that active participation in educational processes enhances learning outcomes and overall student success. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, beginning with a structured survey administered to ten students in the education department. The survey aims to measure their perceptions of involvement in decision-making processes, the responsiveness of institutions to their feedback, and the impact of this involvement on their academic and personal development. Following the survey, focus group discussions will be conducted with students from diverse backgrounds to gain in-depth insights into their experiences and perceptions. These discussions will explore specific instances where student feedback led to tangible changes and assess the perceived effectiveness of these changes. Preliminary findings indicate that although mechanisms for student feedback exist, factors such as institutional culture, communication gaps, and lack of awareness hinder effective student engagement. As a result, students often feel their feedback is not taken seriously. While these initial findings are not sufficient for making broadly applicable recommendations, they suggest that to enhance the role of student voices in shaping student success, institutions need to: Establish robust and transparent processes for acting on student feedback; regularly communicate outcomes to students; foster an inclusive culture where all students feel valued and heard; and continuously assess the impact of student feedback on institutional changes and student success, using data to inform ongoing improvements.

Mohloai, T., Tabane, M., Malope, A., Mamvura, I. and Chili, M.

Enhancing Student Services through Technology: The Case of Vaal University of Technology's Success Portal

Incorporating technology to enhance student support services has become a focal point in today's higher education landscape. Universities globally are leveraging tools to improve student engagement, retention rates, and academic success (Van der Schaaf et al., 2023). Vaal University of Technology (VUT) has embarked on establishing a Student Success Portal aimed at streamlining and enhancing support services to create a more responsive learning environment for its students (Adeyemi & Issa, 2020). This initiative reflects a shift towards unified, student-centered approaches that align with current trends in educational technology. The implementation of the Student Success Portal at VUT addresses significant administrative challenges faced by the institution and its students. A key hurdle has been the absence of a centralised data repository, which historically hindered VUT's ability to effectively collect, analyse, and utilize student data (Adeyemi & Issa, 2020). This deficiency has traditionally limited VUT's capacity to provide timely support to students at risk of academic difficulties. To overcome these challenges, VUT has focused on enhancing its IT infrastructure and providing staff training to optimise the functionality of the Student Success Portal and promote its adoption among users. Despite initial implementation challenges, such as data management and system integration hurdles, the Student Success Portal is beginning to demonstrate its potential in creating a supportive learning environment. By providing personalised support and leveraging data-driven decision-making, VUT aims to enhance student outcomes and foster academic success. This presentation explores VUT's journey in developing and implementing the Student Success Portal, highlighting the strategies employed to overcome obstacles and improve system functionality. By examining these processes, the study contributes valuable insights into the integration of technology in higher education settings, particularly in enhancing student services and support systems. It underscores the transformative role of technological adaptation in achieving educational goals and improving student outcomes. `

Molokwane, S., Sishi, K., Kamwendo, A., Mtshali, C. and Mthabela, K.

Analysis of Correlation between Students Engagement and Student Success

The study investigates the relationship between student engagement and student success at Durban University of Technology (DUT). Student engagement has long been recognised as a critical factor in shaping the academic success and overall well-being of students within educational institutions. The level of engagement exhibited by students in their learning experiences encompasses various dimensions, including academic participation, social interactions, and involvement in extracurricular activities. Extensive research has underscored the positive relationship between student engagement and academic achievements, highlighting the multifaceted benefits it brings to students' educational journeys. The study adopted a mixed method approach using both qualitative and quantitative data. The study was carried out on a sample of 150 second- and third-year students in the Human Resource department at DUT using a simple random sampling approach and convenience sampling. Data were collected using semi structured interviews and closed ended questionnaires. The quantitative data was examined using both descriptive and inferential statistics and qualitative data was evaluated using thematic analyses. As educational institutions strive to enhance student outcomes and foster comprehensive personal growth, understanding the intricate interplay between student engagement and student success becomes imperative. This study aims to delve into this relationship, exploring the extent to which student engagement influences academic achievement and overall student well-being. Through a comprehensive analysis of diverse facets of student engagement, this research seeks to illuminate the correlation between engagement levels and various indicators of student success. By examining this correlation, educators and institutions can gain valuable insights into effective strategies for promoting student engagement and enhancing student outcomes in educational settings. Applying critical theory to student engagement necessitates educators and institutions to critically examine existing practices and consider transformative approaches to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of students.

Moodley, V.

The use of Learner Explanations in Fostering a Deeper Understanding of Mathematical Ideas in a Pre-University Academy

Using multiple solution strategies to solve mathematics tasks fosters a deeper understanding in learners of the particular topic whether in algebra or any other topic in mathematics. The use of multiple solutions of a single task promotes the understanding of solutions, their application as well as the advantages of each solution. However, Große and Renkl (2006) found in their study that learners only benefit from the use of multiple solution strategies if they reflect on the different solution strategies. One of the ways to do this is to encourage explanations by learners. The focus of this paper is to show how a teacher used learner explanations to encourage reflections of different solutions with benefits of a deeper understanding of algebra and functions. The University of Pretoria's Pre-University Academy (UP-PUA) aims to foster a deeper understanding of science related subjects to promote access and success into tertiary institutions. We at the UP-PUA believe that one of the reasons for the poor performance in mathematics is the lack of a deep understanding of topics in mathematics. Mathematics teaching at many South African schools is characterised by direct teaching. However, learners at the UP-PUA are encouraged to explain their thinking in line with constructivist approaches with learners' prior knowledge used to connect between previous and new knowledge. I focus on two lessons where explanations of multiple solutions provide learners with the opportunity to reflect on the solutions. I analyse these episodes in the lessons qualitatively to look at how the explanations promote deeper understanding of mathematical topics. In so doing, two major benefits were inductively identified i.e. comparing the benefits of different solution strategies and promoting connections between different topics in mathematics. I observed one teacher in two different mathematics classes; a grade 11 and a grade 12 class in two different topics. In the grade 11 mathematics lesson on simplification of surds, the teacher divided the class into groups. Each learner wrote the solution to a question on their mini-whiteboards and passed this to the person on their right. Learners examined this on their own. She asked a learner with a different solution from the others to explain to the class which method he preferred and why he thought his solution was more efficient. The learner included in his explanation that when a teacher is explaining rules of exponents the second solution would be a better one but the first is more efficient. The mathematics highlighted is the idea of perfect squares and how they are simplified. On the other hand, the second solution demonstrated the connection between exponents and surds. The two solutions therefore have different benefits and dependent on what is appropriate under different circumstances. In a grade 12 class on functions learners worked in four groups on a question before the teacher asked a learner from each group to share their solutions. Four solutions were demonstrated on the board using analytical geometry, algebra, trigonometry and use of a formula. The teacher asked the rest of the learners which they believed was the most efficient solution strategy and why. The solutions incorporated connecting different topics. The focus is to outline how explanations promote deeper understanding of topics. Learners may sometimes not grasp the solution on their own therefore sharing their ideas with others in their groups helps them to better grasp the mathematical idea. The teacher asked learners to share ideas with rest of the class before a discussion ensued. In both classes learners worked in groups before sharing with the class. Two benefits were identified. First learners could reflect on the benefits of each solution like efficiency versus greater understanding. The second benefit is the connecting of different mathematical ideas thus encouraging mathematics as a set of interconnected ideas.

Mthethwa, N.

The Effect of a Pre-University Academy on Access and Success

The University of Pretoria launched a Pre-University Academy (UP-PUA) in 2019 to improve learner academic outcomes in basic education to ensure a smooth transition into higher education. The programme is currently offered on two campuses, namely on Mamelodi Campus (for grades 8 to 10, and Groenkloof Campus for grades 11 and 12. This programme aims to encourage learner access into university through the development and implementation of curriculum frameworks aim at the development of learners' conceptual understanding in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics (STEAM) subjects. The subjects offered are Mathematics, Natural Science (NS), Academic and Creative Writing (ACW), Academic Readiness and Support (ARS), Computer Literacy (CL), Physics and Chemistry. In broadening the conceptual understanding of learners, a constructivist teaching and learning approach is implemented to improve learner academic outcomes and soft skills. The UP-PUA conducted qualitative surveys to gauge whether the learners found the programmes beneficial to their academic progress. Most of the learners responded positively, however; the current study aimed to qualify the learners' voices through quantitative analysis of their academic progress. This study investigated how the programme offerings affected learners' academic progress with focus on Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry in the 2023 grade 11 learners in the Pre-University Academy. The study focused on how the learners progressed in the UP-PUA and in school by comparing their UP-PUA marks with their marks in school over the course of a year. The learners in the UP-PUA completed several formative assessments of which the study analysed the overall performance of the learners for semester 1 and 2 in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry. The study aimed to identify whether the implementation of conceptual teaching and learning methodologies in the UP-PUA positively affected the academic progression of learners enrolled in the programme and whether this progression affect access and success in higher education. The results of this analysis informed whether the learners' perspective of the impact of the programmes correlates with their academic performance. The outcome of the programmes is to ensure that learners enrolled in the programmes have an increased chance of access and success in higher education. The learners in this study are currently in grade 12. These learners' progress will be tracked throughout 2024 to identify whether they gain university entrance and whether they perform better in higher education in comparison to first year students who were not enrolled in the UP-PUA.

Nevhutalu, A.P., Rathilal, S. and Khumalo, M.

The Possible Delayed Impact of COVID-19 and other Exogenous Factors on DUT Students' Performance.

The negative impact of COVID-19 on the learning process and outcomes in educational institutions worldwide is well-documented. Research has consistently shown that students from disadvantaged communities were particularly affected. Studies by Morton et al. and Kunfeld et al. demonstrate that COVID-19 had a cumulative negative effect on student learning, with scores from poorer backgrounds suffering more significantly. Despite expectations of a significant drop in success rates due to the pandemic, high success and throughput rates were recorded. During the pandemic, the Siyaphumelela 2.0 initiative was planned and implemented. At the Durban University of Technology (DUT), one focus was on improving student success through the HAMBISA programme. However, the data used to identify programmes for the pilot was not consistent with the results observed during and after the pandemic. Recently the success rates and throughput rates have declined. It is our contention that while the effects of the pandemic may have been investigated at the time, a longer term investigation is needed. The majority of students enrolled at DUT come from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at DUT on the pipeline students as well as the future student generation has yet to be understood. At DUT, the declining success rates have led to a phenomenon of 'enrolment bulge' characterised by students spending more time at the institution in order to complete their studies. This presentation will focus on the performance indicators of students over a period of 3 years 2021 until 2023 and propose a systematic long-term project to track the impact of the pandemic on students learning in the coming 10 years. The presentation will also outline innovative intervention strategies to manage and reduce the enrolment bulge. It will critically engage with implementation challenges and explore possibilities for upscaling these interventions by improving success, graduation, and retention rates. These interventions will constitute a large component of the Siyaphumelela 3.0 initiative at DUT, helping to ensure equity and success through data-driven and informed support.

Nhlenyama, N. and Khumalo, M.

Leveraging Student Activism: Inculcating Student Agency for Enhanced Academic Performance and Success

The pervasive dissatisfaction with performance indicators within higher education institutions underscores a pressing need for transformative action. Despite concerted efforts to address issues such as retention rates, student success, and low throughput rates, the status quo often remains unchanged. The Durban University of Technology, like other institutions, faces these challenges, identifying factors such as student academic withdrawal, protests, and diminished morale as contributing to a bulging phenomenon characterised by high access and low throughput. In response, there arises a necessity for student activism to emerge as a potent force capable of advocating for change, amplifying voices, and challenging entrenched norms. As primary stakeholders, students possess a unique role in demonstrating their steadfast commitment to fostering a more equitable campus environment and in collaboratively devising sustainable solutions to prevalent challenges. This study utilized a phenomenological research tradition, which facilitated a depth of understanding of how university strategies enhanced student leaders' ability to proactively respond to the academic challenges, and use their influence to inculcate a culture of active involvement in teaching and learning, for enhanced performance indicators. This on-going research project will present preliminary data on the perceived role of student leaders in contributing towards improving student success.

Nongauza, N.

Addressing Equity Gaps in Student Success Measures: Interventions at Walter Sisulu University

This study provides an overview of strategies implemented at Walter Sisulu University (WSU) to reduce equity gaps in student success measures. Employing a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis and qualitative research, the study aimed to enhance academic achievement and retention rates for underrepresented student populations. Interventions included tailored academic support, mentorship programmes, and initiatives promoting inclusivity. Positive outcomes include improved graduation rates, Grade Point Average distribution, and retention rates among underrepresented students, highlighting the importance of evidence-based interventions in higher education. The study aimed to identify evidence-based interventions to diminish equity gaps in student success at WSU, focusing on enhancing academic achievement and retention rates for underrepresented students. A mixed-methods approach was used to analyze institutional data through thematic analysis and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to identify disparities. Qualitative research was employed to understand the contributing factors. Stakeholder engagement played a crucial role in informing the development of interventions. Interventions at WSU included tailored academic support, mentorship programmes and initiatives promoting inclusivity and belonging. These efforts aimed to address disparities in graduation rates, GPA distribution, and retention rates among underrepresented students. Preliminary findings show improved graduation rates, GPA distribution, and retention rates among underrepresented students. The study indicates enhanced satisfaction with support services and increased sense of belonging. Challenges remain in sustainability and scalability. In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of implementing evidence-based strategies and interventions to reduce equity gaps in student success measures within WSU and similar higher education institutions. By prioritising equity and inclusion in teaching, support services, and resource allocation, WSU can create a more equitable learning environment where all students could thrive academically and personally. However, it is essential to recognise that addressing equity gaps requires ongoing commitment and collaboration among administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Future research should focus on evaluating the long-term impact of these interventions and identifying additional strategies to further advance equity and inclusion in higher education.

Nsibande, R., Majozi, B., Mathabathe, K. and Mphanda, E.

Leveraging Technology for Systematic Attendance Tracking and Capturing Student Feedback to Enhance Teaching Quality and Manage Resources

This practitioner presentation aims to share insights from efforts to leverage technology to address two identified challenges, namely the collection and analyses of student feedback on learning sessions. Traditionally, students have an opportunity to share feedback which takes place only at the end of a course to evaluate teaching strategies and learning experiences, which means teaching efforts often fail to be responsive to learning needs. The other challenge is the absence of a centralised platform to collect tutorial attendance data for meaningful reporting to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) for the usage of the UCDG Grant. Collecting continuous feedback during individual learning sessions, such as lectures, practicals, tutorials, and discussions, is often impeded by limited resources and the effort required for real-time data analysis. To address the challenges, an in-house tool was developed to systematically collect data on students' participation and feedback on experience across teaching and learning sessions. In exploring the utility of the tool along with early feedback, the noticeable benefits include the tool's ease of use for all stakeholders and that it is a centralised platform for collecting attendance data and ongoing feedback from various learning sessions, resulting in reports that inform efforts to monitor provision and evaluation of students' experiences. Generated reports demonstrate the potential to further improve the management of teaching sessions and decision-making through real-time insights that enhance the overall learning experience. The results underscore the value of this approach in institutional planning, operations, and decision-making with regard to teaching, identification of students who potentially could be at risk and allowing for responsive targeted actions based on generated insights to elevate the quality of teaching and learning ultimately.

Rambharos, S., Govender, R., Ncube, T., Razack, F., Kalanga, P. and Mthalane, P.P.

Leveraging Student Feedback for Enhanced Learning Experiences in Business and Information Management Education

Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) instruments are widely used in the higher education sector to mine feedback from students regarding the quality of learning and teaching offered by universities. However, feedback obtained from students through administering these instruments is normally disregarded or read by the individual lecturer, with no strategies put in place to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Furthermore, there is a paucity of studies on how feedback obtained from these instruments is analysed at various levels of the institution for improvement purposes. This study aims to engage in research about factors enabling and inhibiting completion of studies in the Business and Information Management (BIM) qualification at the Durban University of Technology using a variety of data sources. This is part of the "Hambisa" project introduced at an institutional level, to identify enablers and impediments to becoming a university graduate, through analysis of various data sets. This paper discusses findings obtained from analysing completed SETs. The focus is primarily on the open-ended section of the instrument. The study adopted a qualitative approach through analysis of completed SET documents completed by students. SETs completed between 2019 – 2023 were analysed adopting document analysis approach, to interrogate and excavate feedback from students on their perspectives regarding the enablers and constraints of becoming a university graduate. Findings indicate various factors as enablers and impediments to becoming a university graduate which were then categorised into themes. The themes under enablers include linking classroom knowledge to industry and entrepreneurial expectations, the adoption of a variety of teaching strategies by lecturers, availability of student support initiatives, development of graduate attributes and lecturers possessing desired attributes and skills. Inhibitors include the structure of the programme, absence of extra classes and tutors, lack of provision of summarised chapters, attributes and skills of lecturers, workloads of lecturers and students, internet connectivity, provision of data and devices and when and how students are prepared for assessments. The study recommends strategies for better utilisation of feedback obtained from SETs. Further recommendations regarding mitigating the impeding factors at various levels of the institution are put forward to assist students in becoming university graduates. These could include the intentional development of academics as university teachers and scholars. This study has implications for curriculum, provision of resources, and better utilisation of SETs for improvement purposes.

Rathilal, S., Mavela, N., Zikalala, N., Ntombela, B., Kalanga, P., Makondo, L. and Nxumalo, C.

An Exploration of the Challenges to Student Success in a Nursing Programme at a University of Technology in South Africa

Low success rates continue to be a challenge in higher education undergraduate programmes. Some programmes report that a considerable number of students in a cohort are experiencing challenges with completing their qualifications as a result of not being successful in one or two modules. In an undergraduate Nursing programme at a South African University of Technology, a significant number of students are reported as not completing the qualification in the minimum time. As part of a pilot of the Siyaphumelela project at the institution, an analysis of the programme was undertaken to understand the factors impacting on student performance to inform the conceptualisation and implementation of high impact practices to improve student success. A mixed methods study was undertaken that used programme reports, surveys, cohort analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews for data production. This presentation will report on the analysis of the focus group interviews conducted with staff from the Nursing department that adopted a Design Thinking approach to redefine the problem of low student success rates from their staff perspective so that relevant interventions could be initiated. A thematic analysis of the interviews highlighted multiple factors that influenced student performance such as challenges with academic literacies, psycho social influences, influence of habits of senior staff in professional practice. Broadly most of these factors spoke to a lack of student agency that allowed for external forces to influence the students and have a negative impact on their success. Adopting the Specialisation Dimension of Legitimation Code Theory as an analytical framework allowed for making explicit the underlying organising principles of staff perceptions on what hindered student success. The analysis highlighted that the challenge was not as much the theory practice divide as was previously suspected but rather that the attributes and dispositions that was being expected to succeed as Nursing students or Nursing professionals was not present. An initial exploration of the curriculum revealed that there was limited focus on the development of this knower and on developing student agency. Although clinical practice provided opportunity to observe other professional nurses, students were easily influenced by bad practices. They did not have the confidence to question such practices. In the exploration of possible interventions, staff engaged with interventions that focus on both knowledge building and knower building which requires firstly an understanding of the attributes that needs to be developed, unpacking what this manifests as for Nursing students and professionals. The presentation will share the proposed interventions in respect of additional support initiatives for students, a reworking of the tutorial activities within the programme, the creation of policies and procedures that explicitly legitimates particular knowers and the implications on the Nursing curriculum and pedagogies adopted. In future the interventions will be evaluated in relation to their impact on developing the expected attributes and dispositions. In addition, student performances will also be studied for impact of interventions. The pilot is intended to further influence the adaptation of curriculum and pedagogy in other Health Sciences programmes at the institution and beyond.

Richards, Z., Sesheba, L., Wagner, F. and Meyers, C.

Conceptualisations of Mentorability: A Qualitative Exploration of Mentee Perspectives in a University Mentorship Programme

University mentorship programmes have become increasingly prominent as a form of high-impact practice towards student success. However, several challenges undermine the effectiveness of mentorship programmes. This study presents a qualitative study aimed at understanding mentorability within the context of a university mentorship programme. Mentorability, defined as the capacity of individuals to benefit from a mentoring relationship, plays a pivotal role in maximizing the effectiveness of such programmes. The study focuses on the experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of mentees enrolled in the First-Year Experience Mentorship Programme at Wits University. The research is guided by a conceptual framework that identifies five thematic areas crucial to mentorability: Transitioning and Needs, Attitudes Towards Change and Growth, Understanding the Mentee's Level of Mentorability in Relation to Commitment, Meaningful Interactions, and Mentee Reciprocity and Engagement. This study aims to delve into these thematic areas through qualitative formative research comprising individual and focus group discussions with students from the current and previous cohorts of mentees. The research questions will serve as guiding beacons, illuminating the study's path towards a deeper understanding of mentorability: 1. How do mentees perceive their transition into university life at Wits, and what are their areas of need during this crucial phase? 2. What are mentees' attitudes towards feedback, learning opportunities, and personal growth within the mentorship programme? 3. To what extent do mentees demonstrate commitment to their mentorship partnerships, and how does this impact their mentorability? 4. How do meaningful interactions between mentors and mentees contribute to mentorability and overall programme effectiveness? 5. In what ways do mentees actively engage in the mentorship relationship, fostering reciprocity and mutual benefit? The study is currently in the data collection phase. The study outcomes will be presented at the Siyaphumelela Conference, and we anticipate that the findings will not only contribute to the scholarly literature on mentorship but also inform practical strategies for enhancing mentorability and optimising mentorship programme outcomes at Wits University and beyond.

Stokes, S., Mtshali, Z., Thaver, W. and Pillay, S.

The Impact of Support Strategies: A Pathway to Students' Academic Success and Personal Well-being

Students entering university face a multitude of experiences, with students requiring skills to transition and adapt to university. If acquired early on, the skills for academic success prevent future academic distress, underperformance, and premature dropout and improve student engagement. Students need to develop these skills early in their educational career to avoid poor progression, leading to continued academic underperformance, exclusion risk, lowered self-esteem and confidence, questioning career choice, and directly affecting mental well-being. UKZN's Academic Monitoring and Support (AMS) Policy and the early identification (robot) system, which monitors progression and allocates risk codes to student profiles, offer collaborated support interventions university-wide. Risk codes are labels attached to students' academic records that define their level of progression across the academic semesters, and based on the codes assigned 18 months after entry into the academic programme, collaborated support interventions are offered. The framework allows students to contract with support teams, have accountability over their studies, and access support interventions. To achieve academic success, the student requires skills to balance the demands of university life and work towards graduation. These skills development sessions are often offered as interventions once a student has underperformed. This concept paper shares the Aiming for Success (AFS) programme, a timeous, tailored and holistic intervention approach followed by the College of Health Sciences at UKZN offered by Student Counsellors in Student Support Services. In 2023, 601 risk codes were released across the two semesters, with 532 students responding to the interventions. Students complete a survey during registration, which ascertains student perceptions, offers them a voice to share their experiences and what led to underperformance, and creates a platform for them to shape their support plans. Uptake is monitored and regularly reported at case management meetings with the AMS team (ADOs, Student Counsellors and Academic Leaders: Teaching and Learning). Student progress is tracked periodically at strategic intervals. Key objectives of the programme include student (1) self-regulation skills development for academic success and maintaining positive personal well-being; (2) empowerment and sharing reflections and lived experiences; (3) accessing a tailored program designed to address challenges in both individualised and group interventions; (4) completing a self-study LMS module designed for transformative learning and personal development; and (5) referrals of support to stakeholders for continued support and intervention. The student voice in their academic journey is documented at all points of intervention, while continuously reviewing and offering support to address factors hindering academic progress.

Strydom, F., Meintjes, A. and Posthumus, H.

Where are the Guys? Understanding Male Engagement in Higher Education

The achievement gap between male and female students has been a longstanding concern in higher education. Studies focused on the gender gap have been conducted in various countries including Malaysia, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and South Africa. In 1995, Birrell, et.al.(1995) indicated that US female students had not only caught up with males but were outperforming them. In South Africa an analysis by Broekuizen and Spaull (2017) found that relative to their male counterparts, we find 27% more females who qualified for university, 34% more who enrol in university, 56% more who complete any undergraduate qualification and 66% more who attain a bachelor's degree. At the University of the Free State, an analysis of gender differences mirrors these findings, showing that males have a lower rate of enrolment, a higher dropout rate, and a lower rate of degree completion. As part of the UFS's commitment to reduce achievement gaps, the Siyaphumelela team has identified understanding and addressing the achievement gap between males and females as one of its key objectives for Siyaphumelela 3.0. In order to achieve this objective, a nuanced understanding of gender differences is paramount. The paper aims to stimulate discussion based on an exploratory analysis of the national, longitudinal data using the South African Surveys of Student Engagement (SASSE). Results will be shared around the engagement of first year and senior male students. Possible avenues for further investigation and implications for the development of interventions will be explored.

Sunder, R., Chitanand, N., Thamae, M. and Thaba-Nkadimene, K.

Reimagining Student Success in Teacher Education: Adopting Multiple Voices and Perspectives

In the dynamic landscape of higher education, quantitative data analytics wield significant influence, shaping resource allocation and educational strategies. However, a deeper exploration of student success within specific academic programmes reveals its multifaceted nature. This research study focuses on the Natural Sciences stream of a Bachelor of Education programme, asserting that student success transcends mere numerical metrics. Drawing from the Siyaphumelela-Hambisa pilot study conducted in the School of Education (SoE), we aim to strengthen the STEM stream within teacher education programmes. The primary objectives of Hambisa entail identifying the multiple challenges affecting student success and implementing impactful strategies to address them. Employing a critical-interpretive mixed-method approach, we gathered data from diverse sources including performance metrics, reports, and student evaluations. Recognising the limitations of these traditional datasets, we supplemented our analysis with surveys, focus group discussions, and arts-based visual data production, engaging both students and staff. Our comprehensive analysis revealed insights beyond quantitative trends, delving into teaching and learning dynamics, curriculum strengths and challenges, as well as students' sense of belonging, motivation, and overall well-being. Significantly, this exploration was enriched by the active participation of students, whose voices were instrumental in shaping our understanding of success. Central to our inquiry was the question: “What is the meaning of success for the preparation and development of schoolteachers-in-becoming?” Using multiple datasets, we conclude that relying solely on quantitative metrics inadequately captures the essence of student success. In this presentation, we share some of the insights from the Hambisa project in the SoE and the broader implications for student success more generally. We recommend that a (w)holistic, transformative and sustainable understanding of student success necessitates the integration of qualitative data, underscoring the importance of initiatives that prioritise equity, social justice, institutional interventions at scale, and the invaluable contributions of student perspectives in shaping student success initiatives.

Thindisa, K. and Mathabathe, K.

Transformative Impact for Students from Low-Income Households: A Scalable Wraparound Support Programme

The introduction of fee-free education by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) for students from low-income households has largely removed the financial barrier to post-school education, but many other hurdles remain for these students across various institutions including the University of Pretoria (UP), leading to unsatisfactory retention, throughput rates, and a widening achievement gap. With increasing numbers of first generation and low-income household students at UP facing low prospects of successfully completing their studies, there was a need for a cost-effective way to scale a student success model. The Sikelela Scholars Programme (SSP) is premised on the need for more than financial support for low-income and disadvantaged students to succeed in post-school education. This view has been articulated by the South African Department of Higher Education. SSP was launched in 2016 to test the concept of a scalable Wraparound support programme at UP. The intention was that the programme would: • Target First Time Entering Undergraduate students eligible for NSFAS and studying towards a professional or in-demand degree • Leverage institutional support resources and structures to offer student support • Deploy technology to facilitate student interaction and offer “guided pathways” instead of in-person intervention • Build the evidence-base of providing non-financial support by comparing the progress and outcomes of students on the programme to other NSFAS students It was hypothesised that a programme offering academic, psychosocial and career preparedness support, delivered via existing university support structures, and targeting the beneficiaries of NSFAS-funding, could: • Create a new type of intermediated support system. • Operate at scale to reach greater numbers. • Significantly lower the cost per student of providing impactful wrap around support After 6 years of piloting the programme at UP, an evaluation was conducted to determine the impact and success of SSP, and inform a go-forward strategy. The evaluation focused on four program aspects: 1. Student performance: How the programme impacts academic performance and completion outcomes of scholars supported compared to benchmarking groups at UP. The programme has produced a 98,7% retention rate, with 78% of graduates completing their degrees in minimum time. 2. Student wellbeing: How effectively the programme addresses challenges of low-income students and areas of support that most significantly contribute to improved overall student wellbeing and university success outcomes. The evaluation outcomes showed that SSP students exhibited significantly higher levels of wellbeing in comparison to the control group. The programme played a crucial role in providing a supportive framework for these students. 3. Economic impact: The expected long-term benefits to scholars as comparison to the cost of the program and overall economic investment, focusing on earning potential, tax contribution, and transformation of key professions. The factors that were found to mostly influence the economic impact are ‘N-track’ status (Minimum time completion), and the SSP targeted interventions. 4. Programmatic lessons: The extent to which the program implementation is in line with the original conceptual program design and opportunities to enhance effectiveness/efficiency of the programme, particularly at greater scale. The implementation of the SSP Triage system, which strategically focuses on students at different stages, has resulted in a substantial revenue impact of over R3 million on the lifetime earnings of SSP students. The evaluation data overall shows that SSP achieves the following primary outcomes: 1. Improves the retention and throughput rates of students from low-income households. 2. Contributes to more employable low-income household graduates in key professions. 3. Improves the lifetime earning potential of graduates from low-income households.

Van Rooyen, C. and Kondo, V.

Enhancing Asynchronous Engagement for Student Success in Online Learning: Reflections from Free On-Demand Short-Learning Programmes at the University of Johannesburg

Online learning is attracting worldwide attention from students, lecturers, and university administrators alike. For example, an EDUCAUSE 2022 report indicates that the percentage of American student respondents who prefer mostly or entirely online courses has increased three-fold over two years – from 9% in 2020 to 29% in 2022 (Robert 2022). One of the concerns raised about online learning, though, is less student engagement. However, student engagement is crucial for successful learning (Northey et al. 2015), especially in online spaces (Chiu 2021; Everett 2015). In online learning, two learning modalities can occur: synchronous and asynchronous. Given that one of the critical advantages of online courses is their flexibility, they tend to be overwhelmingly asynchronous. However, this can easily only involve passive content consumption. Creating a sense of community and making sense and meaning asynchronously together is challenging. In this presentation, we reflect on our use of various design elements to enhance asynchronous student engagement in free on-demand short-learning programmes (SLPs) offered by the University of Johannesburg. UJ currently offers six such SLPs, with five more being deployed in the second semester of 2024. These SLPs are offered for free on-demand online to UJ students and staff, as well as the general public, with an online certificate on merit completion. Around 15 000 students achieve these annually. UJ shares knowledge, skills and values for the common good through these SLPs. The topics of the SLPs serve three broad purposes: (1) enhancing employability in the future world of work through skills-focused offerings (the two SLPs on information literacies are examples of this), (2) world-relevant topics that centre African realities, narratives and insights (the SLPs on Africa Insights, Artificial Intelligence in the 4IR, and Introduction to the Sustainable Development Goals are examples of these), and (3) life enhancement (the SLP on financial literacy is an example). In all the SLPs we centre social justice in the content, design and delivery of the SLPs. For example, our context requires fully online courses designed for low bandwidth, given the high cost of data and its unreliability in various contexts across Africa, where the majority of the enrolled students are from. We draw on Garrison and colleagues' (2000) community of inquiry model to design for social, cognitive and teacher presence in the fully online SLPs. We also included Costa's (2022) additions of regulatory and existential presences. This involved what Leslie (2020) calls the trifecta of student engagement: interacting with the course content, engaging peers, and engaging the learning facilitators. We reflect – with a social justice lens – on, amongst others, the use of text-based and video-based content discussion forums, 'tea-room' discussion forums, regular personalised course announcements, using data from the learning management system (LMS) to target personalised messages to specific students, continuous asynchronous engagement after voluntary synchronous engagement. As part of our reflections on enhancing asynchronous engagement to ensure student success, we draw on 2023 and 2024 pre- and post-survey data from students (around 20-25% of those who completed the SLPs complete these surveys), as well as LMS analytics.

Versfeld, J., Mackenzie, M., Mawelele, M., Vinson, C. and Kanyane, R.

Refinement of the Student Success Reflection (SSR) Module: Enhancing Academic Resilience through Informed Interventions

This paper examines the strategic refinement of the Student Success Reflection (SSR) Module, focusing on its impact on at-risk students in the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment, and Information Technology (EBIT) at the University of Pretoria (UP). Following a 2023 pilot, the online support module for at-risk students was refined in 2024 based on Root Cause Analysis (RCA) questionnaire which asked students to identify foundational academic challenges they believe led to their academic exclusion. The SSR Module, with its mandatory participation, provides structured support to students struggling with foundational courses, particularly calculus. The study explores how this strategic intervention, through academic advising frameworks, addresses key themes related to academic resilience, such as time management, university workload adjustment, and escalating mental health challenges. The refined SSR Module contributes to improved student success by promoting a culture of support, offering practical resources, and encouraging student engagement with academic advising services. Sample and Data Collection: The study involved first year EBIT students registered in 2023 at the University of Pretoria. Data were collected via an online questionnaire focusing on students at risk of academic exclusion, with 137 participants providing insights into the factors impacting their academic resilience. Findings: Analysis revealed critical themes influencing academic success: Time Management: Challenges in organisational skills and self-regulation were prominent, with external factors like power outages also impacting study schedules. University Workload Adjustments: Many students struggled with the transition from secondary to tertiary education, highlighting a gap in preparedness and the need for enhanced academic and social skills. Mental Health Challenges: The interplay between mental health and academic performance was significant, with stress and anxiety adversely affecting student outcomes. There remains a reluctance to seek help, emphasising the need for a supportive campus culture. Implementation and Enhancement of the SSR Module: Student responses were analysed and the SSR module was enhanced to better address identified challenges, with new content aimed at improving time management and mental health support. The module's mandatory nature ensures broad engagement and addresses the specific needs identified through the analysis. The SSR Module's design targeted at-risk students to mitigate academic exclusion. The module's mandatory nature ensured consistent engagement, particularly among those who might not voluntarily seek help. Following the RCA findings, the 2024 curriculum was adapted to address pressing challenges, including enhanced time management strategies and activities and interactive content, designed to engage and motivate students. This strategy aimed to demonstrate the tangible benefits of the module's offerings, fostering student involvement. Discussion and Recommendations: The adaptation of the SSR Module’s curriculum addresses the root causes of academic struggles, with a focus on enhancing organisational skills and mental health support. Recommendations for further improvements include refining time management workshops and developing structured learning communities to reduce isolation. Conclusion: The refinement of the SSR Module marks a significant advancement in supporting at-risk students by addressing academic exclusion’s root causes and fostering an environment conducive to academic and personal growth.

Zikalala-Mabope, L.A., Wium, A.M., Summers, B. and Meyer, J.C.

Student's Lived Experience of University Life Related to Academic Success and Failure in a Problem-Based Learning Programme

Failure and low completion rates are a general concern for universities, governments, and students globally. Understanding qualitative data on students' success and/or failure allows lecturers and the university to gather rich and detailed information about students' experiences within the programme and the university. This could be beneficial in enhancing the teaching and learning practices to meet the diverse needs of the students and to improve student outcomes. Also help inform educational policies and practices that better support student learning and development. The aim of this study was to explore and gain a deeper understanding about determinants related to academic success and failure from a student perspective (voice). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted among 13 participants (11 BPharm students still in the programme at that time and two students who had already graduated in 2017). They were purposively selected based on three criteria: 1) Passed all modules at first attempt. 2) Re-examination granted in one/more modules and 3) Failed and repeated one/more modules from the PBL BPharm programme, across the four levels of study. An attempt was made to select participants from both gender groups and from each academic level of study in the PBL programme, within each of the above groups. An overarching theme of "Students' lived experience of university life" emerged from the in-depth interviews and was rooted in four distinct main themes: institutional environment; teaching and learning environment, life skills and psychosocial factors. Each of the main themes were underpinned by several sub-themes and in certain cases, categories as well. Sub themes were as follows: Institutional environment (living conditions, resources for learning, extra activities and facilities for learning, financial resources); Teaching and learning environment (PBL methodology, work-based learning, support programme for students); Life skills (transition to university, language of instruction, study skills, time management) and Psychosocial factors (self-efficacy, locus of control, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation). The findings are supported with verbatim quotations from the participants. They emphasised the effectiveness of structured teaching and learning and support programmes for students in the PBL programme. Some highlighted that such a programme should function as a coordinated unit within the School of Pharmacy and the university to address all aspects of students' experience at university. Although the university does provide student support in various areas, e.g. finance, study skills and psychosocial well-being, students are not always aware of these, or might not have the courage to access these facilities. It was evident that lack of adjustment to, and engagement with the institution and/or academic programme, comes with its own challenges. Some students across all levels of study, were unable to maximise their predicted potential due to various factors, such as adaptation to university environment, studying in a second language and lack of study skills, which all affect time management, subsequently leading to psychosocial challenges and an adverse effect on their academic performance. It is evident that students' voices need to be heard to achieve constructive outcomes in the development of learner autonomy, thereby strengthening their ability to become competent graduates. Despite the availability of support systems within the university, the findings advocate for a structured and formal student support program within each school. This programme should work in collaboration with existing university student support units and, most importantly, include early monitoring of students' progress throughout their academic careers. Understanding student voices regarding academic success and failure can be a relevant agenda for further research, providing insights into ways of mitigating challenges.

Zulu, S., Mthiyane, N. and Thamae, M.

Providing Opportunities for Mathematics Preservice Teachers' Voices to Come Out in their Learning Process

This study draws on data from a project that has a twofold benefit. The first benefit is the honing of preservice teachers' skills in addressing misconceptions and bridging content knowledge gaps in mathematics learners. The second benefit is improving learners' understanding of mathematics, problem solving skills, and their pass rate in the subject. The project is a partnership between the Durban University of Technology School of Education, the Department of Basic Education uMgungundlovu district, and one of the Comprehensive Secondary Schools in the district. Lecturers in the school of education are in constant communication with the school teachers who provide a weekly brief on identified key areas that learners struggle with in mathematics. The lecturers relay this information to the preservice teachers, and actively work with them in preparing an intervention lesson for each week. After the lesson delivery the involved preservice teachers provide feedback of their experiences through interviews. The interviews are semi structured to allow the pre-service teachers to expand on their responses and provide additional information. To view the shared experiences, this study employs the experiential learning theory, which is also used to develop the analytical framework to analyse the collected data. A key observation that is made in this study is that the preservice teachers had so much to say in the interviews compared to their written reflections. They freely express their views beyond what they are asked in the interviews. The data reveals that the preservice teachers see a need for better articulation amongst courses, more time dedicated to their pedagogical content knowledge development, and an alignment of their university content to the teaching practice. In sharing their experiences, they also express the importance of being given more opportunities to collaborate in tasks that develop pedagogy because they also learn a lot from their peers. These findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective strategies for enhancing mathematics education and teacher preparation programmes. Furthermore, they contribute to the retention and growth of learner participation in STEM subjects.