Siyaphumelela
we succeed

2025 CONFERENCE

**Reimagining Student Success and
Expanding Opportunity for All**

08-11
July
2025

Indaba Hotel, Spa and Conference Centre, Fourways, Johannesburg

Welcome by the Saide CEO

Welcome to the Siyaphumelela Network Student Success Conference 2025

On behalf of Saide and The Kresge Foundation, we have great pleasure in welcoming you to the 2025 Siyaphumelela Conference. This year's gathering, under the theme *"Reimagining student success and expanding opportunity for all"*, invites us to reflect, reimagine, and renew our collective commitment to transforming student success in South Africa's higher education sector.

Launched in 2014, Siyaphumelela was born out of a bold vision: **to improve student success through data-informed decision-making and evidence-based practices**. Over the past 11 years, the initiative has grown from a pioneering idea into a national movement that is reshaping institutional cultures, policies, and practices. Now in its third phase with an expanded – and still growing – partner network, Siyaphumelela builds on a decade of learning and impact, with a deep focus on equity, sustainability, and systemic transformation.

We are proud to be joined by 20 of South Africa's 26 public universities, reaching approximately 80% of all students in public higher education. Through collaborative learning, data, and a relentless focus on student outcomes, Siyaphumelela institutions are taking huge strides in improving retention, throughput and other success rates, especially for underprivileged students. These remarkable achievements are a testament to the commitment of institutional leaders, student success change agents, and our partners.

In partnership with The Kresge Foundation, Saide serves as the backbone organisation of the Siyaphumelela initiative. But we are more than a support structure. Our role is to convene, support, and amplify the work of institutions and other stakeholders committed to student success. We are a catalyst for innovation and systemic change in education.

As we embrace this critical moment, we invite you to bring your curiosity, engage critically and be fully present. Let's continue building this into a transformative student success movement.

Welcome to Siyaphumelela 2025.

Innocent Nkata

Saide CEO

Welcome by Saide Programme Lead: Student Success

Welcome to the Siyaphumelela Network Student Success Conference 2025

This year's conference theme, *"Reimagining student success and expanding opportunity for all",* aims to inspire delegates to reimagine traditional approaches and embrace new and innovative strategies that empower students to complete their studies successfully, thrive in their careers, contribute meaningfully to society and achieve lasting economic mobility. The theme further encapsulates our vision of scaling out, scaling up and scaling deep, fostering innovation and collaboration and driving systemic change.

The Siyaphumelela Conference aims to:

1. **Share Evidence-Based and Scalable Interventions** – Share with delegates proven strategies that can be implemented for transformative post-secondary student success.
2. **Encourage Collaboration** – Create spaces for inter- and intra-institutional sharing of insights, learn from each other's experiences and work together to drive change.
3. **Advance Scholarship in Student Success** – Explore what student success looks like from a Siyaphumelela practitioner's perspective, how it is integrated within the institution, and deepen the academic discourse.
4. **Embed the Student Voice** – Ensure students actively participate in presentations and discussions to keep their perspectives central.
5. **Foster Innovation and Advocacy** - Advocate for Siyaphumelela as a transformative, sustainable and scalable model for Student Success, encouraging innovative practices and solutions.

The venue: The Indaba Hotel, Spa and Conference Centre is situatedon on Winnie Mandela Drive Fourways, Johannesburg GPS Co-ordinates: S25.9996779, E28.0123028). Secure parking is available.

Registration: This will take place in the foyer of the Kgotla from 09h00-18h00 on Tuesday 8 July, and from 08h00 to 18h00 on the remaining days, except for Friday 11 July where the registration desk will close at 10h00. Please register at the desk to receive your name tag, conference programme and delegate gift.

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

The conference includes:

- **Plenary sessions:** Keynotes, invited papers and panel discussions.
- **Concurrent sessions:** Including multi-institution engagements, Siyaphumelela Network Partner Sharing presentations and 30 minute and 15 minute presentations. We received over 140 proposals, carefully reviewed with 123 selected for the conference. The concurrent session themes are: Student Support; Use of Data; Institutional Change; Teaching and Learning; Student Voice; and Beyond Completion.
- **Poster Session:** This year reintroduces the Poster Session, taking place on Tuesday 08 July. Please join us for snacks, a drink and networking from 18h00
- **Cocktail Function**: All delegates are invited to join our cocktail function on Thursday 10 July from 18h00.
- **Parking**: Delegates can park for free at the Indaba Hotel, Spa and Conference Venue.
- **Connectivity**: Free Wi-Fi will be available for all delegates at the conference venue. The password will be provided at the venue. 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 a successful, reimagined student success conference filled with collaboration, sharing and networking.

Best wishes

Ashton

Saide Programme Lead: Student Success

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About the 2025 Siyaphumelela Conference

Siyaphumelela Conference Aims

The Siyaphumelela Conference aims to:

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3. **Advance Scholarship in Student Success** – Explore what student success looks like from a Siyaphumelela practitioner's perspective, how it is integrated within the institution, and deepen the academic discourse.

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Some Conference Highlights

Keynote Presenter: Dr Tim Renick

Named one of the World's 50 Greatest Leaders by Fortune magazine, Timothy Renick is the founding Executive Director of the National Institute for Student Success and Professor at Georgia State University. Between 2008-2020, he directed the student success efforts of the university, overseeing a 70% improvement in graduation rates and the elimination of all equity gaps based on students' race, ethnicity, or income level. Dr. Renick has testified on strategies for helping university students succeed before both the U.S. Senate and House, and he has twice been invited to speak at the White House. His work has been covered by the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Time, and CNN and cited by former President Barack Obama.

Dr. Renick has been recognised as one of the Most Innovative People in Higher Education by the Washington Monthly. He received the Award for National Leadership in Student Success Innovation and the prestigious McGraw Prize in Higher Education. With over $70 million in grants, he has led initiatives aimed at improving outcomes and equity in college education. Dr. Renick graduated summa cum laude from Dartmouth College and holds an M.A. and Ph.D. in Religion from Princeton University.

Guest Speaker: Andrew Magliozzi

Andrew Magliozzi is the Co-Founder and CEO of Mainstay, a mission-driven technology company dedicated to helping learners navigate critical moments in their educational and career journeys through human-centered, AI-enhanced coaching. For more than a decade, Andrew has led innovation in higher education technology, improving enrollment, retention, and completion outcomes for millions of students—particularly those from historically underserved populations.

A passionate advocate for equity and innovation, Andrew frequently speaks on responsible and effective uses of AI in education and workforce development. His recent appearances include the ASU GSV Summit, AACRAO, AASCU, and the AI Assistant Summit, and his insights have been featured in Inside Higher Ed.

Andrew holds degrees from Harvard College and Hack Reactor, and continues to explore the transformative intersections of behavioral science, education, and technology.

![Siyaphumelela logo — we succeed]

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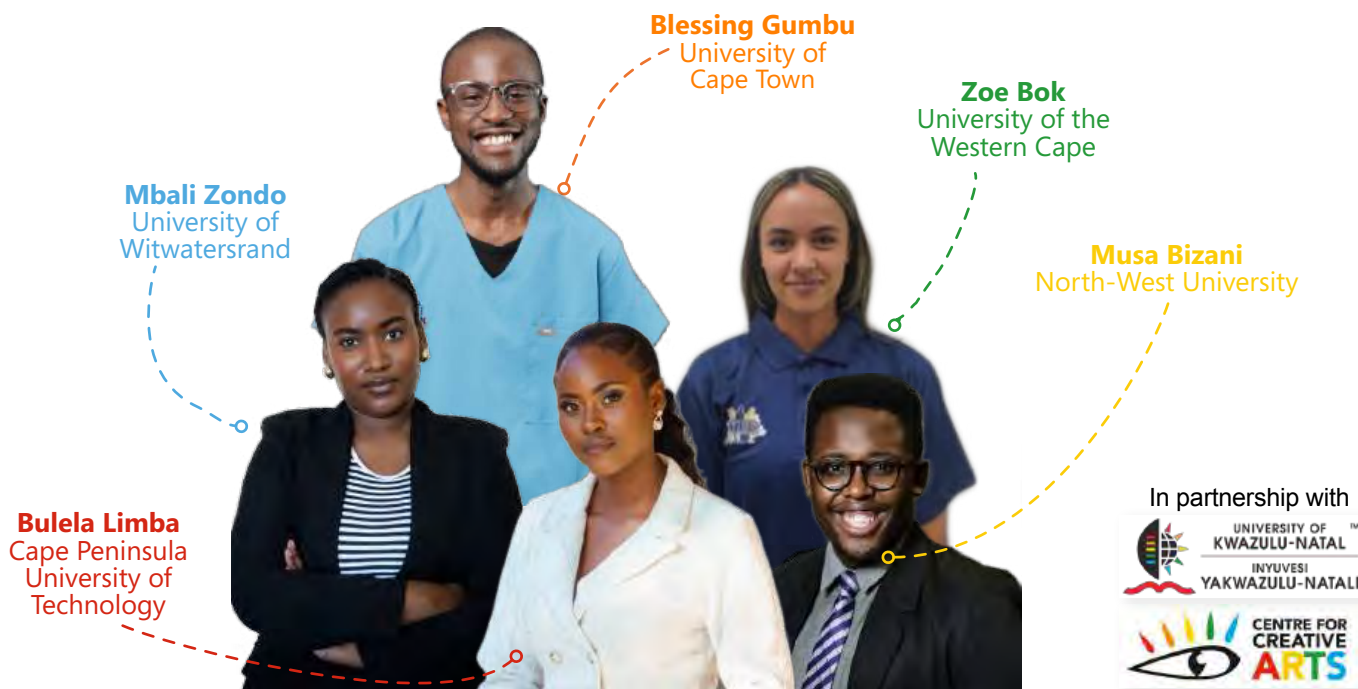Indaba Hotel, Spa and Conference Centre, Fourways, Johannesburg

Social Events

A highlight of the conference will be the Siyaphumelela Conference Cocktail Function, taking place on the evening of Thursday, 10 July 2025. This social event offers a valuable opportunity for informal engagement and networking among higher education professionals, policymakers, funders, and partners committed to advancing student success. The evening will feature light refreshments and drinks, and a relaxed atmosphere designed to foster meaningful networking beyond the formal sessions of the conference. Delegates will also have the opportunity to unwind and enjoy time on the dancefloor. We look forward to your participation in this special occasion.
Dress: African / Traditional / Heritage. (Optional)

Siyaphumelela Scholars 2025

The Siyaphumelela Scholar Programme is an inspiring initiative designed to recognise and celebrate outstanding students from our network of 20 universities across South Africa. **Five scholars have been selected** from nominations submitted by these institutions, celebrating students who benefited from Siyaphumelela student success interventions at their institution, exemplifying leadership, resilience and a commitment to helping other students succeed in their studies. Each selected scholar will have the opportunity to develop and present their *"I Am"* poems, a powerful expression of their personal journeys, identities, and aspirations. These poems will be recited during the conference, providing a platform for the scholars to share their unique voices. The conference will culminate in a panel discussion on the final day, where the scholars will engage in a thought-provoking dialogue, reflecting on their experiences and the transformative impact of the Siyaphumelela Initiative.

Blessing Gumbu
University of Cape Town

Zoe Bok
University of the Western Cape

Mbali Zondo
University of Witwatersrand

Musa Bizani
North-West University

Bulela Limba
Cape Peninsula University of Technology

In partnership with

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

CENTRE FOR CREATIVE ARTS

Programme

8 July

Registration 09:00 - 18:30

Venue: Kgotla Foyer

Finger Lunch 12:00 - 13:30

Venue: Kgotla 1 & 2

Plenary Session 13:30 - 17:00

Venue: Kgotla 1 & 2

13:30 - 14:00

Welcome and Introduction

Bill Moses
The Kresge Foundation

Innocent Nkata
Saide

14:00 - 15:30

Keynote
Chair: *Bill Moses*
Transforming Student Outcomes for All: A Systemic Approach to Equity and Student Success
Timothy Renick
Georgia State University
Atlanta
United States

15:30 - 16:00

Refreshments and Networking Venue: Kgotla Foyer

16:30 - 17:00

Invited Speaker
Chair: *Francois Strydom*

Trends in funding collaboration for student success
Thandi Lewin
University of Johannesburg

16:30 - 17:00

South African Dream Scholar 2025
Chair: *Ashton Maherry*

I Am Poem
Bradley Gawie
Central University of Technology

Sibahle Mabaso
University of the Free State

Raising the Tide for Student Success - A Conversation with Business and Philanthropy (By Invitation Only) 17:00 - 18:00

Venue: Lethabo
Chair: *Francois Strydom*

Poster Session 17:00 - 18:00

Venue: Plenary: Kgotla 1 & 2

Art gallery of Student Voice for Enabled Student Agency: The Case of Walter Sisulu University Extended Curricula Programme FTEN Orientation Programme
Mathentamo, P. and Mnengi-Gweva, D.
Walter Sisulu University

Co-Creation of a First-Year Transition Programme Phrough Student–Staff Partnership
Bok, Z., Adams, B., Hlanjwa, T. and Jaftha, M.
University of the Western Cape

Knowing, Doing and Transforming: Developing an Implementation Framework for Building Institutional Capacity Towards a Data-Informed Culture at Durban University of Technology
Muller, N., Parker, K. and Maherry A.
Saide

Socratic GPTs: Enhancing Critical Thinking and Student Engagement through AI
Noqamza, M.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

StudyWell: A Strategic Framework for Student Well-being
Ribas, C. and Du Toit, C.
North-West University

The Finish Line Game: Advancing Student Success through Equity-Based Simulation
Mmbadi, E. and Meintjes, A.
University of the Free State

Thriving Students: Linking Well-being and Student Success
Sinclair, E. and Davids, C.
Stellenbosch University

UCT's Chatbot Evolution: From FAQ-based to AI-powered
Charitar, D. and Sithaldeen, R.
University of Cape Town

Western Cape Regional Network Collaboration on Student Success
Western Cape Siyaphumelela Regional Network
University of Cape Town

9 July

Registration 09:00 - 16:00

Venue: Kgotla Foyer

Plenary Session 09:00 - 10:30

Venue: Kgotla 1 & 2

09:00 - 09:10

2025 Siyaphumelela Scholar
Chair: *Ashton Maherry*

I Am Poem

Blessing Gumbu
University of Cape Town

09:10 - 10:20

Deputy-Vice Chancellor Panel Discussion
Chair: *Ashton Maherry*

Eucebious Lekalakala-Mokgele	*Muki Moeng*
University of Venda	Nelson Mandela University
'Mabokang Monnapula-Mapesela	*Catherine Moran*
Rhodes University	University of Canterbury
	New Zealand
Ruksana Osman	
University of the Witwatersrand	

10:20 - 10:30

2025 Siyaphumelela Scholar
Chair: *Ashton Maherry*

I Am Poem

Zoe Bok
University of the Western Cape

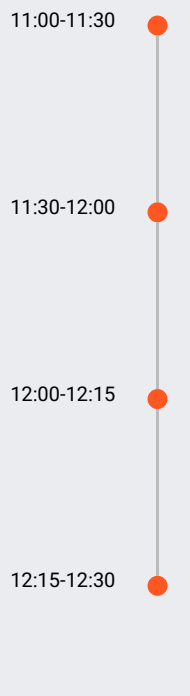**10:30 - 11:00**

Refreshments and Networking
Venue: Kgotla Foyer

Concurrent Sessions 11:00 - 12:30

Concurrent Session 1: Institutional Change 11:00 - 12:30

Venue: Kgotla 1 & 2
Chair: *Wendy Kilfoil*

11:00-11:30 — **Partner Sharing: Co-Creating Institutional Change for Student Success: The Inaugural Work of the Siyaphumelela 3.0 Student Success Committee at UWC**
Pather, S., Hassan, S. and Bok, Z.
University of the Western Cape

11:30-12:00 — **Partner Sharing: Enhancing Student Success: Insights From the UJ's Rolling Fut of the Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT)**
Graham, S.
University of Johannesburg

12:00-12:15 — **Building Institutional Data Culture at UWC Through a Capacity Development Approach**
Booi, E.
University of the Western Cape

12:15-12:30 — **Behind the Scenes of Success: A Reflective Qualitative Study of Administrative Lived Experience in the Siyaphumelela Project at UWC**
Oppel, T.
University of the Western Cape

Concurrent Session 2: Student Support 11:00 - 12:30

Venue: Lethabo
Chair: *Ephraim Mhlanga*

11:00-11:30 — **Partner Sharing: A Data-informed Holistic Student Support Model at the University of Venda**
Mulaudzi, L.M.P., Hlabane, S., Nyete, L. and Tshililo, T.
University of Venda

11:30-11:45 — **An Emic Perspective of Senior Student Experience at the University of the Free State**
Mahlatsi, B.
University of the Free State

11:45-12:00 — **Click, Learn, Thrive: North West University's Self-Paced Academic Skills Workshops**
Koekemoer, R.
North-West University

12:00-12:30 — **Amplifying Student Success through Social Media: The FLY@UP Case Study**
Jonker, T.
University of Pretoria

Concurrent Session 3: Student Voice 11:00 - 12:30

Venue: Auditorium
Chair: *Bala Pillay*

11:00-11:30
Partner Sharing: Informing Institutional Quality and Employability
Strydom, F. and Mabika, B.
University of the Free State

11:30-12:00
Digital Transformation of Peer Tutoring Through Aligned Perspectives of Tutors and Tutees
Mosikare, K.
Sol Plaatje University

12:00-12:15
Addressing Gender Disparities in Mental Health Engagement: A Focus on Male Students at Durban University of Technology
Mbatha, P. and Mjadu, S.
Durban University of Technology

12:15-12:30
Application of student feedback to enhance learning and teaching in high priority service modules
Maropola. M.
University of the Western Cape

Concurrent Session 4: Use of Data 11:00 - 12:30

Venue: Lecture Room 6
Chair: *Alan Amory*

11:00-11:30
Partner Sharing: Advancing Education Through Data: The National Student Data Warehouse Initiative in South Africa
Nazir, A., Mc Loughlin, K. and Saide
University of the Witwatersrand

11:30-12:00
Partner Sharing: Co-Creating Ethical Practice: Developing a Framework for Student Data Use through Stakeholder Engagement
Sithaldeen, R.
University of Cape Town

12:00-12:15
A Risk-Management Approach to Understanding and Enhancing Student Well-being
Du Toit, C. and Ribas, C.
North West University

12:15-12:30
Crunching the Numbers to Improve Success Rates of First-Year Mathematics Students in Applied Sciences
Joubert, E.D. and Mewalal, N.
Durban University of Technology

Concurrent Session 5: Teaching and Learning 11:00 - 12:30

Venue: Lecture Room 8
Chair: *Maryla Bialobrzeska*

11:00-11:15 • **Partner Sharing: Bridging the Gap: The RULearning Toolkit Series as an Intervention Towards Students' Success**
Kitchen, T. and Vorster, K.
Rhodes University

11:15-11:45 • **AI as the New Literacy: Preparing Students for an AI Fluent Future**
Lee, A. and Morkel, J.
STADIO Higher Education

11:45-12:45 • **Can Eswatini Lead the Way in Generative AI Training for Educators?**
Ferreira-Meyers, K. and Dunaway, M.
Institute of Distance Education, University of Eswatini

12:15-12:30 • **A Problem-Based Learning Initiative to Strengthen Mathematics Preservice Teachers' Professional Development: Bridging the Gap in content knowledge**
Sibongile Zulu, Anele Xaba and Dlamini Vezubuhle
Durban University of Technology

Lunch 12:30 - 14:00

Venue: Chef's Boma

Concurrent Sessions 14:00 - 15:30

Concurrent Session 1: Teaching and Learning 14:00 - 15:30

Venue: Kgotla 1 & 2
Chair: *Norman Duncan*

14:00-18:00 • **AI in Higher Education: Rethinking Student Success**
Verhoef, A., Fourie-Jardim, M. and Adendorff, H
North-West University

Concurrent Session 2: Student Support 14:00 - 15:30

Venue: Lethabo
Chair: *Ashton Maherry*

14:00-14:30
Digitally Empowered and Inclusive: Reimagining Student Success through UCT's Student Success Hub
Nzala, A., Malibongwe, A. and Manono, S.
University of Cape Town

14:30-15:00
Bridging the Gap: Equitable Performance of Extended Curriculum and Mainstream Medical Students at a South African University
Nyathi M, NJ Malaivusa, B Kubheka-Chauke, P Radebe
Sefako Makgatho health Sciences University

15:00-15:15
Fostering Collaborative Learning and Critical Thinking Through Writing Centre Group Tutorials
Khumalo, N. and Govender, N.
Durban University of Technology

15:15-15:30
Integrated Student Mental Health Support Model: Embedding Psychological Support in the Student Journey
Nomalungelo, N. and Khanyisa, Z.
Nelson Mandela University

Concurrent Session 3: Student Voice 14:00 - 15:30

Venue: Auditorium
Chair: *Thea de Wet*

14:00-14:15
Partner Sharing: Incorporating Student Voice in Institutional Frameworks for Holistic and Equitable Student Success
Petersen, M. and Vilakazi, N.
Stellenbosch University

14:15-14:45
Let the Learners Speak: Using Student Voice to Shape Inclusive Teaching in STEM Access Education.
Belay, M.Z.
University of Pretoria

14:45-15:00
Co-creating With Students to Write a First-Year Guide
Taylor, D. and Gumbi, B.
University of Cape Town

15:00-15:30
Postgraduate Students Experiences of Access at Nelson Mandela University
Neale-Shutte, M. and Mbangezeli, S.
Nelson Mandela University

Concurrent Session 4: Use of Data 14:00 - 15:30

Venue: Lecture Room 6
Chair: *Koo Parker*

14:00-14:30

Partner Sharing: Determining the indicators of student success at North-West University: Students' perspectives
Gore, O. & Louw, R.
North-West University

14:30-15:00

Beyond Retention: Mentorship Engagement as a Leading Indicator of Student Persistence in Higher Education
Richards, Z., Billings-Padiachey, A. and Andreas, L.
University of the Witwatersrand

15:00-15:30

From Insight to Impact: Translating Data Analytics into Targeted Academic Interventions in Engineering Education
Rawatlal, R.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Concurrent Session 5: Institutional Change 14:00 - 15:30

Venue: Lecture Room 8
Chair: *Alan Amory*

14:00-14:30

Partner Sharing: Every Success has a Beginning: Milestones on Walter Sisulu University Journey Towards Building a Coherent, Integrated and Intentional Student Success System
Mnengi-Gweva, D.
Walter Sisulu University

14:30-15:00

Partner Sharing: Data-driven Student Support Ecosystem and Transition Framework Integration
Sekonyela, L. and Nimy, E.
Sol Plaatje University

15:00-15:30

Partner Sharing: Driving Institutional Change: The Journey of the Central University of Technology
Malebo N.J., Nunes K.C., van Heerden L. and Khohliso X.D.
Central University of Technology, Free State

Refreshments and Network 15:30 - 16:00

Venue: Kgotla Foyer

Concurrent Sessions 16:00 - 18:00

Concurrent Session 1: Institutional Change 16:00 - 18:00

Venue: Kgotla 1 & 2
Chair: *Jenny Glennie*

16:00-18:00 ● **Invited Imbizo: New Rules of AI in Student Success**
Magiliozzi, A.
Mainstay

Concurrent Session 2: Student Support 16:00 - 18:00

Venue: Lethabo
Chair: *Wendy Kilfoil*

16:00-16:30 ● **Partner Sharing: Data-Driven Institution-Wide Collaborative Intervention and Support**
Cupido, X., Mkonto, N., Nakhooda, M., Farrar, T. and Masango, M.
Cape Peninsula University of technology

16:30-16:45 ● **Innovating Student Support for Efficiency: The Early Implementation of the Departmental Digitalisation Strategy**
Majozi, P.C., Gumede, T.M., Peterson, M. and Mbele, F.N.H.
University of Pretoria

16:45-17:15 ● **Evidence to Action: The Transformative Power of Data and Coordinated Support in Driving Student Success**
Khanye, G.W. and Mohoanyane, E.
University of the Free State

17:15-17:30 ● **From Zero to Digital: Exploring the Learning Curve of University Students Using Computers for the First Time**
Matete, K. and Mokoena, M.
Central University of Technology, Free State

17:30-17:45 ● **Enhancing Digital Literacy Through a First-Year Orientation Programme at Nelson Mandela University**
Mdiya, Z. and Pityana, R.
Nelson Mandela University

17:45-18:00 ● **Integrated Student Mental Health Support Model: Embedding Psychological Support in the Student Journey**
Nomalungelo, N. and Khanyisa, Z.
Nelson Mandela University

Concurrent Session 3: Teaching and Learning 16:00 - 18:00

Venue: Auditorium
Chair: *Ephraim Mhlanga*

16:00-16:15   ●   **Breaking the Silence: The Case for Effective Language Policies in Fostering Inclusion in a South African University**
Mgweba, C. and Molebatsi, P.
Walter Sisulu University

16:15-16:45   ●   **A Comparative Study on Pre- and Post-COVID Class Attendance**
Meintjes, A. and Bernard, E.
University of the Free State

16:45-17:15   ●   **Aligning Technology in Higher Education with Sustainable Development Goal 4: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Directions in a South African Context**
Sishi, K.K. and Ncube, T.R.
Durban University of Technology

17:15-17:30   ●   **Bridging the Digital Divide: Advancing Technology-Enhanced Learning Pathways for Marketing and Retail Business Students at Vaal University of Technology (VUT)**
Samosamo, M., T Mohloai, T. and Chili M.M.
Vaal University of Technology

17:30-18:00   ●   **Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Frameworks Focused on Teaching and Learning for University Professionals**
Lelliott, T.
Saide

Concurrent Session 4: Student Voice 16:00 - 18:00

Venue: Lecture Room 6
Chair: *Bala Pillay*

16:00-18:00   ●   **Designing Equitable Higher Education: Students Co-Creating Institutional Change**
Gawie, B., Weaver, R., Britto, D., McMican, J. and Carpenter. F.I.
Achieving the Dream

Concurrent Session 5: Use of Data 16:00 - 18:00

Venue: Lecture Room 8
Chair: *Elizabeth Booi*

16:00-16:30

Partner Sharing: From Detection to Intervention: Using Programme Analytics and Student Population Balances to Improve Throughput
Chili, M.M., Mohloai, T., Samosamo, M. and Khoza, C.
Vaal University of Technology

16:30-17:00

Data-Driven Support for High Impact Modules: Module Reviews and Customised Reporting
Lemmens, J-C. and Janse van Vuuren, H.
University of Pretoria

17:00-17:15

Explainable AI for Student Success
Sekonyela, L. and Nimy, E.
Sol Plaatje University

17:15-17:30

Enhancing Student Support through Data-Driven Insights: VUT's Implementation of Anthology Illuminate
Tabane, M. and Rabapane, M.M.
Vaal University of Technology

17:30-17:45

Bridging Data and Action: Empowering Student Success Through Data and AI
Nzimande, N., Mambo, T., Ndlovu, S. and Letsholo, T.
University of South Africa

17:45-18:00

Unpacking the Gender Gap: Investigating Male Student Underperformance in South African Higher Education
Mamvura, I. and Makuapane, L.
University of Witwatersrand

Dinner for Invited Guests 18:30 - 21:00

Venue: Ndaba Palace

10 July

09:00 - 09:40

Invited Speaker
Chair: *Bill Moses*

Invited Imbizo: New Rules of AI in Student Success
Magiliozzi, A.
Mainstay

09:40 - 10:20

Invited Speakers
Chair: *Elizabeth Booi*

AI in Higher Education: Rethinking Student Success
Prof Anné Verhoef, Dr Mariette Fourie-Jardim, Dr Hanelie Adendorff
North-West University

10:20 - 10:30

2025 Siyaphumelela Scholar
Chair: *Ashton Maherry*

I Am Poem

Musa Bizani
North West University

10:30 - 11:00

Refreshments and Networking
Venue: Kgotla Foyer

Concurrent Sessions 11:00 - 12:30

Concurrent Session 1: Teaching and Learning 11:00 - 12:00
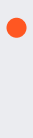
Venue: Kgotla 1 & 2
Chair: *Maryla Bialobrzeska*

11:00-11:15 — **Collaborative Staff Development for Student Success in Online Learning: Making Use of the Community of Inquiry Framework**
Van Rooyen, C., Vilakati, N. and Naidoo, K.
University of Johannesburg

11:15-11:30 — **Demystifying Causal Factors for Student Performances in High-Priority Modules: A Longitudinal Analysis of Student Performance Trends**
Mbambo, S., Mbebe, F. and Khumalo, M.
Durban University of Technology

11:30-11:45 — **Cultivating Student Prompt Engineering Skills through Collaborative OER Development**
Mdanyana, L. and Nontsonto, A.
Walter Sisulu University

11:45-12:15 — **Impact of Innovative Teaching and Assessment Strategies on First-Year Student Assessment Outcomes**
Molokwane, S. and Pillay, S.
Durban University of Technology

12:15-12:30 — **Fostering Holistic Success: Design Thinking and PBL in Engineering Education**
Rambharos, S. and Jeawon, R.
Durban University of Technology

Concurrent Session 2: Institutional Change 11:00 - 12:30

Venue: Lethabo
Chair: *Ashton Maherry*

11:00-12:30 — **Unifying for Impact: Developing a University-wide Framework to Accelerate Student Success**
Sampson, K., Ogude, N., Moran, C., Rivera, G.M. and Kilfoil , W.
University of Canterbury

Concurrent Session 3: Student Voice 11:00 - 12:30

Venue: Auditorium
Chair: *Norman Duncan*

11:00-11:15 — **Student Leadership for Student Success**
October, H.
Stellenbosch University

11:15-11:30 — **Reclaiming the Curriculum Through Dialog: Student Voice and Curriculum Co-creation for Inclusive and Just Higher Education**
Matsie, R. and von Muellen, N.
North-West University

11:30-11:45 — **Reimagining Campus Food Systems: A Student-Led Call to Action for Equity and Academic Success**
Nase, S.
Durban University of Technology

11:45-12:00 — **The Role of the Student Representative Council (SRC) in Integrating Student Services and Academic Support to Enhance Durban University of Technology Students**
Ximba, S. and Nkosi, S.
Durban University of Technology

12:00-12:30 — **Reimagining Student-Staff Partnerships: A Theory of Change Approach to Social Justice in Higher Education**
Mosienyane, T. and Cupido, X.
University of Cape Town
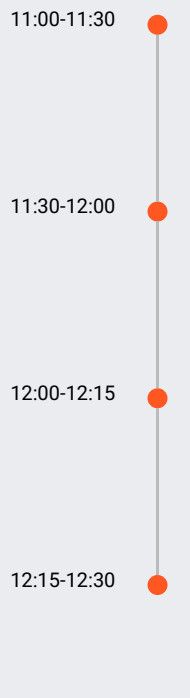
Concurrent Session 4: Use of Data 11:00 - 12:30

Venue: Lecture Room 6
Chair: *Thea de Wet*

11:00-11:30

Partner Sharing: Mentorship That Matters: Leveraging Data to Improve Belonging, Engagement, and Retention
Mathabathe, K., Gumede, T. and Israel, V.
University of Pretoria

11:30-12:00

Partner Sharing: Leveraging Technology-Mediation for Early Identification of At-Risk Students and High-Impact Modules: An Academic Advising Case Study
Khumalo, M. and Gaddiah, D.
Durban University of Technology

12:00-12:15

From Data to Action: Enhancing Undergraduate Success at the University of Johannesburg
Loots, R.C. and Meyer, A.
University of Johannesburg

12:15-12:30

Harnessing Machine Learning to Improve First Year Student Success at DUT: A Siyaphumelela Data Working Group Initiative
Ncube, T.
Durban University of Technology

Concurrent Session 5: Student Support 11:00 - 12:30

Venue: Lecture Room 8
Chair: *Koo Parker*

11:00-11:30

Partner Sharing: Towards a MERL Model for Action Research: African Proverbs in Motion
Ruffin, F. and Dlamini, N.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

11:30-11:45

Partner Sharing: Unisa's Coaching Path: Navigating Success Together
Rachidi, L., Sigwane, N., Febana, Z. and Mofokeng, T.
University of South Africa

11:45-12:15

Partner Sharing: Siyaphumelela Supplemental Instruction (SI) Network Collaboration and Reflection
Smith, L. and Ribane, M.
Nelson Mandela University

12:15-12:30

Masculinity, Margins, and the Myth of Merit
Khan, F., Madiba, M. and Makhetha, T.
University of the Western Cape

Lunch 12:30 - 14:00

Venue: Chef's Boma

Concurrent Sessions 1: Teaching and Learning and Beyond Completion 14:00 - 15:30

Venue: Kgotla 1 & 2
Chair: *Alan Amory*

Teaching and Learning

14:00-14:15 — **Supporting the learning process in a language diverse classroom through self-directed learning, OER and peer assessments.**
Olivier, C.
North-West University

14:15-14:30 — **Teaching for Food Security: A Review of How Students Learn Circular Economy in Agriculture**
Aruwajoye, N.N. and Coetzee, R.
North-West University

14:30-14:45 — **The Role of Interdisciplinary, Multidisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Education in International Collaborative Learning: Insights from a COIL Entrepreneurship Project**
Mbinda, B. and Maome, I.
Durban University of Technology

Beyond Completion

14:45 - 15:00 — **Invited Speaker**
Siyaphumelela Student Success Indicator Dashboards and Reports for Institutional Leads from Partner Institutions.
Mbongi Ndlovu
IDSC

15:00-15:15 — **Bridging the Digital Divide: A Practical Advanced Excel Intervention to Empower Employability at Midlands TVET College**
Maganyana, A. and Zinto, S.
Midlands TVET College

15:15-15:30 — **Fostering an Entrepreneurial Mindset for Advanced Diploma Students in Apparel Technology**
Mavutha, W.
Durban University of Technology

Concurrent Session 2: Institutional Change 14:00 - 15:30

Venue: Lethabo
Chair: *Koo Parker*

14:00-15:30 — **Bridging the Gender Gap: Academic Success and Employability in Higher Education**
Strydom, J.F., Meintjes, A. and Duncan, N.
University of the Free State

Concurrent Session 3: Teaching and Learning 14:00 - 15:30
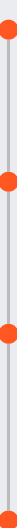
Venue: Lethabo
Chair: *Maryla Bialobrzeska*

14:00-14:15

Share2Teach: A Collaborative OER Platform for Equitable, Self-Directed Learning in South Africa
Laubscher, D. and Bosch, C.
North-West University

14:15-14:30

Reality Check: Introducing Virtual Reality into Higher Education Health Care Sciences to Improve Student Learning
Venter, E. and Hambrock, H.
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

14:30-14:45

Supporting Academic Staff in Digital Curriculum Transformation: A Practice-Based Approach
Mashiteng, E.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

14:45-15:00

Reimagining Student Success and Expanding Opportunity for All Through the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC)
Zikalala-Mabope, L.A., Mosiane, T., Poka, M.S. and Mncwangi, N.P.
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

15:00-15:30

Reimagining Mentorship in Teacher Education Through Participatory Action Research: Towards a Digitally Responsive Framework
Jiyane, L.
University of Mpumalanga

Concurrent Session 4: Use of Data 14:00 - 15:30

Venue: Lecture Room 6
Chair: *Norman Duncan*

14:00-14:30

Beyond the Red Flags: Predicting Student Success with Data-Driven Insights
Mafunganyika-Ndlovu, A. and Mamvura, I.
University of the Witwatersrand

14:30-14:45

Impact of Increasing NSC Maths on Depth of Learning in Mathematics
Ballim, Y. and Mamvura, I.
University of the Witwatersrand

14:45-15:15

Reconceptualising Module Importance: A Data-driven, Collaborative Framework for Identifying High-Priority Modules
Van der Merwe, T. and Posthumus, R.
University of the Free State

15:15-15:30

Overview of the Early Alert System: Impact on Student Success
Adamiak, J. and Rachidi, L.
University of South Africa

Concurrent Session 5: Student Support 14:00 - 15:30

Venue: Lecture Room 8
Chair: *Nthabiseng Ogude*

14:00-14:15 ● **Pioneering Digital Mental Health Support in Higher Education: The Funda Module at Nelson Mandela University**
Gradidge, D. and Kama, T.
Nelson Mandela University

14:15-14:30 ● **Not Comfortable at All: Insights from a Pre-Orientation Module Aiming to Navigate Digital Disadvantage**
Byles, H.
University of Pretoria

14:30-15:00 ● **Mentoring for Success: Improving Students' Academic Performance and Employability Through Holistic Support**
Hatch, M.
University of KwaZulu-Natal

15:00-15:15 ● **Parental Engagement as a Redress Strategy for Success: Lessons from the Pre-University Academy**
Leshota, M.
Pre-University Academy, University of Pretoria

15:15-15:30 ● **Peer Advising as a Catalyst for Equity and Success in the Road to Success Programme**
Maleswena, T., Nayager, A. and Shungube, M.
University of the Witwatersrand

Refreshments and Network 15:30 - 16:00

Venue: Kgotla Foyer

Concurrent Sessions 16:00 - 18:00

Concurrent Session 2: Student Support 16:00 - 18:00

Venue: Lethabo
Chair: *Ephraim Mhlanga*

16:00-16:15

The Impact of High School Mathematics Pathways on First-Year University Performance: A South African Case Study
Kone, N.B.
University of Johannesburg

16:15-16:30

The Potential of Diagnostic Tests to Inform Targeted Student Success Interventions
Rathilal, S., Mbambo, S. and Rambharos, S.
Durban University of Technology

16:30-16:45

Spatiotemporal Analysis of National Senior Certificate Results: Implications for Higher Education Recruitment
Nzimeni, S.
University of the Free State

16:45-17:15

The Analytical Advantage: Transforming Academic Support Through Data-driven Decision Making.
Mohoanyane, W. and Mbonani, T.
University of the Free State

17:15-17:45

Scaling Evaluation of Teaching: Leveraging Microsoft Forms, Power BI, and Power Automate for Impact
Rabotapi, T.
Walter Sisulu University

17:45-18:00

Reflecting on FIDBAK APP in Data Collection of Tutorial Attendance Through the Lens of CHAT: Towards Responsive Use of Technology
Mphanda, E., Majozi, B., Gumede, T. and Nsibande, R.
University of Pretoria

Concurrent Session 3a: Institutional Change 16:00 - 16:30

Venue: Auditorium
Chair: *Thea de Wet*

16:00-16:15

Reimagining Student Success: A Literature Review of South African Research
Parker, K., Lelliott, T. and Maherry, A.
Saide

16:15-16:30

Building Institutional Literacy in Students Through a User-Centred Support Portal
August, L.
University of Cape Town

Concurrent Session 3b: Student Support 16:30 - 18:00
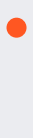
Venue: Auditorium
Chair: *Bala Pillay*

16:30-16:45
Ulwaluko Kwa Xhosa (Xhosa male initiation) and the Reimagining of Positive Masculinities: Cultural Capital as a Resource for Academic and Personal Success in Higher Education
Siswana, A.
University of the Witwatersrand

16:45-17:00
A Learning Ecosystem - Living and Learning Communities
January, C.
University of Cape Town

17:00-17:15
Using Innovative Strategies to Support Second-Year Students
Seane, L.
Sol Plaatje University

17:15-17:30
The Nexus of Community and Individual Action in Peer Mentoring: Towards Epistemological Becoming
Ndabula, Y. and van der Poel, N.
Rhodes University

17:30-17:45
The Impact of Virtual Mentoring on the Wellbeing of Students: A Case Study of Central University of Technology, Free State
Joannou, N.
Central University of Technology, Free State

17:45-18:00
Undergraduate Male Students' Academic Experiences at a South African Higher Education Institution: An Ecological Systems Analysis
Maluleke, T., Mochochoko, V., Moosa, R., Tshuma, L., Siswana, A. and Innocent Mamvura, I.
University of the Witwatersrand

Concurrent Session 4: Institutional Change 16:00 - 18:30

Venue: Lecture Room 6
Chair: *Elizabeth Booi*

16:00-18:00
A Collective Impact Approach to Student Success: Western Cape Siyaphumelela Regional Network
Sithaldeen, R., Cupido, X., Nakhooda, M. and Booi, E.
University of Cape Town

Concurrent Session 5: Student Support 16:00 - 18:00

Venue: Lecture Room 8
Chair: *Nthabiseng Ogude*

16:00-16:15

Smart Marking for TAs: Building Capacity for Ethical, Consistent Marking in a Hybrid Institution
Ms Faith Mathibedi
University of Pretoria

16:15-16:30

Systematic Support: A Data-Informed Approach to Academic Advising through the Phafoga Project
November N. and Majozi P.C.
University of Pretoria

16:30-16:45

Reimagining Academic Recovery: Reflections from At-Risk Students on the Role of Academic Advising
Manatsa, I., Kalanga, T., Mavela, N. and Makondo, L.
Durban University of Technology

16:45-17:00

Supplementing the Curriculum: The Impact of Structured Co-Curricular Programmes on Academic Achievement in Living and Learning Communities
Twala, R. and Khumalo, M.
Durban University of Technology

17:00-17:15

The Impact of First-Year Student Orientation Programmes on Student Performance: An Investigation on Student Success
Thamsanqa, H.
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

17:15-17:45

Intersectional Insights into Performance and Aspirations in a Pre-University Academy STEM Programme
Moodley, V.
University of Pretoria

17:45-18:00

Efficacy of the Mentorship Programme for First Year Students at a Health Sciences University in South Africa
Sekgobela, M.J.
Sefako Makgatho Health Science University

Cocktail Function for All 18:00 - 21:00

Venue: Kgotla 1 & 2

11 July

Venue: Kgotla Foyer

09:00 - 09:20

2025 Siyaphumelela Scholar
Chair: *Ashton Maherry*

I Am Poem

Bulela Limba
Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Mbali Zondo
University of the Witwatersrand

Best Paper Presentation 09:20 - 09:50

Chair: *Innocent Nkata*

09:20-09:50

The First-Year Experience at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Scaling Equity-Centred High-Impact Practices
Bux, R., Ngubane, P.P., Hoskins, R. and Rama, S.
University of KwaZulu Natal

09:50 - 10:30

Siyaphumelela Scholars Panel Discussion
Chair: *Ashton Maherry and and Ephraim Mhlanga*

Musa Bizani
North West University

Zoe Bok
University of the Western Cape

Bradley Gawie
Central University of Technology

Blessing Gumbu
University of Cape Town

Bulela Limba
Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Sibahle Mabaso
University of the Free State

Mbali Zondo
University of the Witwatersrand

11:00 - 12:00

Building Siyaphumelela Collaboratively: Key Elements
Chair: *Jenny Glennie*

Gugu Khanye
University of the Free State

Lis Lange
Stellenbosch University

Matete Madiba
The University Of the Western Cape

Nthabiseng Ogude
Affiliated to University of Canterbury

Francois Strydom
University of the Free State

12:00 - 12:30

Closing Remarks

Bill Moses
The Kresge Foundation

Innocent Nkata
Saide

12:30

Packed Lunch and Departure

Abstracts

Overview of the Early Alert System: Impact on Student Success
Adamiak, J. and Rachidi, L.

Unisa's Early Alert System (EAS) provides actionable analytics through the Referral Mechanism (RM), to enable both the use of the data for decision making, but also to record actions taken to support the identified at-risk students. The RM is a Microsoft Teams platform that hosts Spreadsheets containing demographic data (i.e. funding, disability, employment status, etc.) in addition to the risk profile of all undergraduate students in all qualifications. The academic risk factors include non-submission of assignments, assignment results, repeats, etc. Refreshed data is provided weekly. The uptake and use of the RM is rather low, and those using it and capturing intervention data, have analysis conducted to assess impact. The results show that there is a positive correlation between the number of support hours and the students' final results (more hours = better results). In the latest iteration of the EAS, the development is focusing on exam result prediction. User guidelines for ease of interaction with the Referral Mechanism have been developed in an effort to increase the use of the platform. Furthermore, the use of analytics to guide the provision of student support, is well captured in the 2025 teaching and learning portfolio operational plan, and this will assist with increased uptake and use.

Teaching for Food Security: A Review of How Students Learn Circular Economy in Agriculture
Aruwajoye, N.N. and Coetzee, R.

Food security is a growing global concern, and the youth have an important role to play in addressing it. Circular and regenerative food systems could be an innovative approach to addressing this concern. However, students need to be equipped with the right knowledge and skills. The problem is that there is uncertainty whether current education systems are meeting this need. In pursuit of answers, this study presents findings from a systematic review on how circular economy concepts are included in agricultural education. Articles were sourced from ERIC, Scopus, and Web of Science using search terms on circular economy, agriculture, and education. From over 500 papers, studies were selected based on their focus on student learning through surveys, projects, or hands-on tasks. Many applied experiential methods such as school gardens, group projects, and field-based learning. These helped students grasp topics like composting, biodiversity, and resource efficiency, while building skills in teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Most studies were at the university level; fewer included secondary schools. Surveys and statistical tools showed gains in awareness and sustainable behavior. However, few explored long-term impacts, addressed digital learning gaps, or included students from rural or low-income backgrounds. Future research should prioritise under resourced learners and pair curriculum innovations with accessible, low tech digital tools.

Building Institutional Literacy in Students Through a User-Centred Support Portal
August, L.

What if student portals didn't just inform, but helped students belong? This presentation shares a promising early-stage design intervention from the University of Cape Town's Science Faculty that reimagines its student portal as a tool for building institutional literacy—the ability to understand, navigate, and act within university systems. A recent audit of UCT's student-facing platforms revealed that many remain dense, technical, and structured from an institutional rather than student perspective. These often assume insider knowledge and unintentionally exclude first-generation and under-resourced students. Drawing on Yosso's (2005) concept of navigational capital, Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital, principles of user-centred design, and Compassionate Learning Design (Gachago, Bali & Pallitt, 2023), the intervention centres care, equity, and relationality. Using hypothetical student personas and journey maps, the team identified points of confusion and disconnection. While co-creation with students is planned for later phases, the current work reflects on how to involve students ethically, equitably, and meaningfully from the start. This isn't just portal design—it's a reimagining of the student-university relationship. One that embeds institutional literacy and compassion into digital infrastructure, where equity gaps often stem not from students' abilities, but from inaccessible, unspoken systems.

Impact of Increasing NSC Maths on Depth of Learning in Mathematics
Ballim, Y. and Mamvura, I.

Abstract: Exploring the Depth of Learning Behind Rising NSC Mathematics Performance In response to national efforts declaring 2023 the "Year of Mathematics," South Africa witnessed a notable increase in National Senior Certificate (NSC) Mathematics performance, with the proportion of learners achieving 50% or more rising from a historical average of 20–22% to 26% in 2023—an upward trend that continued into 2024. This improvement prompts critical inquiry: does it reflect deeper mathematical understanding or surface-level exam strategies? This study, led by the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) Business Intelligence Services in collaboration with Umalusi, explores whether improved NSC Mathematics outcomes among WITS applicants correlate with academic depth and success in university-level mathematics-based courses. Leveraging NSC symbols, normalised scores, and band distributions for the 2019–2024 period, the project examines trends in first-year mathematics performance, socio-economic and gender disparities, and the predictive value of matric performance on university success. Preliminary findings suggest narrowing performance gaps across quintiles and a moderate but consistent correlation between NSC results and university success. However, the study emphasises the need for standardised national NSC data to validate and generalise these insights.

Let the Learners Speak: Using Student Voice to Shape Inclusive Teaching in STEM Access Education.
Belay, M.Z.
This paper highlights the role of student voice in promoting inclusive teaching within STEM access programs. Analysing weekly reflections from high school students for 4 months using open-ended questions at the University of Pretoria's Pre-University Academy (UP-PUA), the study reveals key themes of engagement, significant learning experiences, and instructional gaps. Students found that hands-on activities, group work, and simulations effectively enhanced their understanding of complex topics, such as electron configuration, mitosis, and factorisation. However, they also faced challenges with abstract concepts, curriculum misalignment, and the fast pace of instruction. By categorising learner narratives into daily highlights, new knowledge, best experiences, and areas needing support, the study creates a framework for responsive teaching based on real-time feedback. The findings contribute to the literature on success pathways, demonstrating how learner insights can inform teaching strategies and support, particularly in under-resourced contexts. The paper introduces a 'Learner Feedback Loop' model to integrate student voice in STEM curriculum development.

Co-Creation of a First-Year Transition Programme Phrough Student–Staff Partnership
Bok, Z., Adams, B., Hlanjwa, T. and Jaftha, M.
This poster explores the implementation and reflective evaluation of a student-staff partnership model within a First-Year Transition Programme (FYTP) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). The intentional design of the First-Year Transition Programme (FYTP) is to co-create the programme with students for students. The Academic Student Success Advisors (ASSAs), who are staff working in partnership with the First Year Transition Officers (FYTO)/students, on the content of the programme. The programme aims to enhance first-year students' sense of belonging and academic integration. Guided by Cook-Sather's (2014) three principles of student-staff partnership: respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility, the FYTOS and ASSAs worked collaboratively however being mindful that although both students and staff have the opportunity to contribute equally, it may not necessarily be in the same ways. The partnership fosters mutual learning and empowerment, where FYTOs contributed lived experience, empathy, and peer insights that complemented the knowledge of the staff on student support. Reflections on the involvement of the students as partners resulted in more responsive, inclusive, and contextually grounded transition support. Further reflection on successful engagement included: role clarity, shared decision-making and accountability to each other. Although, some of the areas of discomfort were noted, overall the student-staff partnership brought about a deeper sense of community, enriching the culture of care and belonging.

Building Institutional Data Culture at UWC Through a Capacity Development Approach
Booi, E.
The University of the Western Cape implemented a data literacy strategy, grounded in the Digital Skills Framework and findings from a data culture survey. This is a collaboration between academic and support units aimed at integrating ethical, equity-focused, and data-informed decision-making into institutional practices. It includes six accredited short courses and four open-access workshops focused on leveraging data for decision-making, employing agile methods, using business intelligence (BI) tools, and design thinking. In 2024, a total of 110 staff members and 35 student interns attended training, with an additional 95 staff members completing some training by May 2025. The training and workshops are evaluated using pre- and post-training assessments, and we monitor the uptake of institutional business intelligence (BI) reports. The recent data culture survey indicates improvements in data literacy scores, and the BI portal shows increased access to the platform. The data literacy strategy focuses on equity, enabling staff to interpret disaggregated student success data. This allows them to design and deliver targeted support effectively. Insights to be shared will include curriculum design for capacity-building, strategies for embedding literacy into institutional systems, and lessons learned in promoting ethical data practices. These insights will offer value to institutional leaders and student success teams in advancing sustainable change.

The First-Year Experience at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Scaling Equity-Centred High-Impact Practices
Bux, R., Ngubane, P.P., Hoskins, R. and Rama, S.
This presentation outlines the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) reimagined First-Year Experience Programme (FYEP) and its scaling since its 2022 pilot. UKZN enrols about 9,000 first-year students annually, prioritising students from quintile 1–3 schools. The FYEP is a non-credit, year-long, university-wide initiative supporting students' transition via a hyflex pedagogic model. The FYEP four units, with their structured assessments, are rooted in UKZN's commitment to access, equity, diversity, and social justice. Completion certificates are issued, and from 2024, participation is mandatory under the new BR10 rule. Over 7,700 students completed it in 2024—up from 2023, when it was voluntary. Peer mentoring enhances student engagement and sense of belonging. Student voice is integrated through regular evaluations of the units and mentoring sessions and this will be presented. Annual reviews of the curriculum ensure quality. Challenges include Wi-Fi access, digital literacy, and delayed delivery of devices for NSFAS students. Key lessons highlight the importance of cross-institutional collaboration, committed leadership, and adapting high-impact practices to students' contexts. Future plans include AI and analytics to identify at-risk students and improve support. These insights may guide institutions seeking to implement scalable, equity-focused first-year initiatives. Challenges can be overcome by improved Wi-Fi access and digital literacy training of students.

Not Comfortable at All: Insights from a Pre-Orientation Module Aiming to Navigate Digital Disadvantage
Byles, H.
This study compares the online engagement of first-year students in the University of Pretoria's Pre-Orientation Module (2023–2025). The module, launched each January, introduces unconditionally admitted students to the online academic environment. In Unit 1: Computer Confidence, students self-identify as "not comfortable," "moderately comfortable," or "comfortable" using computers. The study focuses on comparing the online behaviour of students who self-identified as "not comfortable" (N = 636 in 2023; N = 292 in 2024; N = 677 in 2025) with that of the entire module cohort across three years (total cohort N = 9,752 in 2023; N = 9,363 in 2024; N = 10,704 in 2025). Data includes student demographics (ethnicity, gender, school quintile) and platform engagement metrics (course access minutes, number of interactions). Findings show that students identifying as "not comfortable" consistently invest more time engaging with the module than their peers: average course access minutes for this group exceeded cohort averages in all years (e.g., 254 minutes vs. 145 for all students in 2023). By comparing online behaviour across three cohorts and self-identified confidence levels, the study aims to provide evidence on patterns of digital readiness and engagement disparities, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It also seeks to inform the development of targeted interventions to better support students as they transition into digitally mediated learning environments.

UCT's Chatbot Evolution: From FAQ-based to AI-powered
Charitar, D. and Sithaldeen, R.
The UCT Chatbot was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic as a means of providing accurate and up-to-date information to students 24/7. Initially developed as a rule-based system in 2021, the UCT Chatbot served as a digital support tool to answer frequently asked questions by drawing information from a predefined database. In 2025, the UCT Chatbot evolved into a more advanced, AI-powered tool capable of understanding natural language, retrieving information from multiple sources, and understanding and responding in various languages. This poster will illustrate the evolution of the UCT Chatbot over a four-year period, highlighting the different phases of implementation and presenting data on usage and trends over time. The poster will also highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the FAQ-based and AI-powered versions of the Chatbot and will conclude with lessons learnt from this project.

From Detection to Intervention: Using Programme Analytics and Student Population Balances to Improve Throughput
Chili, M.M., Mohloai, T., Samosamo, M. and Khoza, C.
Many institutions identify gatekeeper courses with high failure rates, but often lack visibility into how students' progress through entire programmes over time. True innovation lies not only in spotting difficult courses, but in combining course-level data with broader patterns of student progression. This presentation introduces the Programme Analyst component of Auto Scholar Advisor, a tool that integrates course pass rates, prerequisites, and institutional data to expose structural barriers to student success. A key feature is its use of student population balances-a method of tracking credit accumulation across semesters to uncover where and when students tend to stall or drop out. These insights enable institutions to move beyond general academic support toward more targeted interventions, focusing efforts on specific semesters, programmes, or student cohorts where progression challenges are concentrated. Additionally, the tool supports academic planning by informing curriculum design, course sequencing, and timetable optimisation to improve credit flow. Auto Scholar Advisor delivers real-time insights at scale, shifting academic planning from reactive to proactive. This session will present findings from early implementation at Vaal University of Technology and share how institutions can advance from basic analytics to curriculum-wide intelligence that drives more effective, data-informed academic support and programme design.

Data-Driven Institution-Wide Collaborative Intervention and Support
Cupido, X., Mkonto, N., Nakhooda, M., Farrar, T. and Masango, M.
The establishment of the Student Transition, Access, Retention, and Success (STARS) Committee within the Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) marks a strategic institutional move aimed at improving student success through an integrated, holistic, data-informed approach. The STARS Unit's framework is rooted in the philosophy that 'student success is everybody's business,' emphasising institution-wide accountability and collaborative engagement at every level. The emphasis on collaboration among all CPUT stakeholders ensures that student success initiatives are not siloed. This aligns with Kuh et al's (2010) argument that high-impact practices require broad institutional participation to be effective. The commitment to data-informed decision-making is a crucial element of the STARS Committee. Research shows that institutions using data analytics to inform interventions have effectively improved retention and graduation rates. Using this integrated approach, CPUT draws on its capacity and employs student data interns placed in faculties, STARS is operationalising its commitment to student success in a way that decentralises data usage and embeds analytics directly into faculty-level planning.

A Risk-Management Approach to Understanding and Enhancing Student Well-being
Du Toit, C. and Ribas, C.
Student well-being is a critical concern in higher education, directly impacting key student outcomes, including academic performance, retention, and overall success. Despite growing awareness, many institutional responses remain consensus-based and lack theoretical grounding, measurable impact, or a clear return on investment. Although well-intentioned, many interventions fail to adequately reflect the diverse needs and lived experiences of students. The StudyWell initiative addresses this gap by applying evidence-based risk management, underpinned by the Study Demands-Resources (SD-R) framework, to better understand student well-being through the lens of organisational psychology. StudyWell is developing a student well-being monitoring system designed to measure, identify and aggregate individual well-being profiles, including risk indicators. The system utilises culturally fair questionnaires explicitly validated for our university's student population. Using advanced analytics, it will inform timely, targeted, and data-informed interventions — supporting strategic decision-making and fostering institutional learning. Students play a central role in the process. While the prototype is still under development, initial findings indicate strong engagement, contextual relevance, and the potential for scalability across campuses and institutions. Through this presentation, StudyWell repositions student well-being as a strategic, evidence-based priority— essential for leaders in student success, academic support, and institutional transformation.

Can Eswatini Lead the Way in Generative AI Training for Educators?
Ferreira-Meyers, K. and Dunaway, M.
This session provides an evidence-based overview from a 'GenAI for Educators' short online course (Oct 2024-Jun 2025). Over 300 educators mainly from Eswatini, but also from Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria, Namibia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe showed significant learning gains, confidently applying AI tools and solving problems in educational settings. Participant feedback informed instructional refinements. Scaling involved phased expansion and community building, addressing challenges like apprehension and equitable access. The project aims to eliminate equity gaps by empowering educators to create inclusive learning environments. The evaluation of the short online course used quantitative surveys on perceived gains, application and self-efficacy, alongside qualitative feedback. Key insights include the critical role of continuous professional development in fostering AI literacy among educators, the importance of fostering a collaborative environment for sharing best practices, and the transformative potential of AI in promoting participant engagement and personalised learning. These insights will be valuable for instructional designers, faculty development specialists and educational leaders seeking aiming to integrate AI in ways that are both effective and equitable. Session participants will also explore the critical role of metacognitive awareness in educators' adoption of new technologies. The presentation will highlight practical strategies for evaluating learning outcomes and adapting instructional approaches to meet the specific demands of various tasks.

Designing Equitable Higher Education: Students Co-Creating Institutional Change
Gawie, B., Weaver, R., Britto, D., McMican, J. and Carpenter. F.I.
What happens when students are no longer just the subject of research—but co-authors of change? This interactive virtual session, led by student leaders from South Africa and the United States, explores the transformative power of student voice in advancing equity and systemic change in higher education. Drawing on cross-continental narratives and institutional practices, the session showcases how students' lived experiences are being converted from anecdotal stories into actionable data. From mental health campaigns that led to new housing models to feedback loops that reshaped institutional policies, participants will see how real student experiences have driven tangible change. The session highlights how institutions like the Central University of Technology (CUT) in South Africa and Achieving the Dream DREAM Scholars in the U.S. are partnering with students not just for input—but for co-creation. Designed as a hybrid workshop, this session emphasizes sustainability, scalability, and storytelling. Through powerful examples and interactive dialogue, participants will gain insight into how embedding student voice into strategic planning leads to stronger outcomes and reduces equity gaps. Participants will leave with: • A practical toolkit for amplifying student voice on campus •Strategies to transform feedback into actionable change—beyond the suggestion box • Approaches to address disparities and promote a sense of belonging • A network of student advocates already leading change • Confidence in using personal experience to influence systemic improvements. Key takeaways: • Student experiences matter: Discover how personal challenges have become data points that administrators act on • Real stories, real impact: Learn how student advocacy has reshaped mental health services, housing options, and campus policies • Cocreation, not consultation: Understand the difference between students being asked for input and being empowered as a strategic partner. Why it matters? By 2026, the goal isn't just to include students in decision-making —it's to have students co-design the systems that shape their educational experience. This session equips participants to help make that vision a reality—on any campus, in any country. Come ready to be inspired, equipped, and connected with a global community of student leaders proving that student voice doesn't just matter—it can transform higher education.

Determining the indicators of student success at North-West University: Students' perspectives
Gore, O. & Louw, R.
There has been an increasingly use of data to improve student success in South African higher education. While the use of relevant indicators in student success interventions is essential, the nature of indicators to use has remained contentious. Simultaneously, universities tend to concentrate on indicators of academic achievement, which are predominantly quantitative in nature, for reporting purposes. Although this is helpful, students' holistic experiences and the real challenges faced are given less attention, limiting the universities to provide support needed timeously. This study aimed to investigate the student success indicators at North-West University. The researchers drew on qualitative data obtained using 5 focus group discussions with between 6 and 10 participants each, and 15 in-depth interviews with final-year students selected from 8 university faculties. The interview data were coded using NVivo 14, a qualitative software. The analysis followed the principles of grounded theory. Data were thematically clustered to form themes, which subsequently formed the indicators. The data shows that students were enabled and constrained to succeed in the dimensions of preparedness, belonging, persistence, engagement and wellbeing. The implication of these findings is for universities to use these indicators as diagnostic, planning, monitoring and evaluation tools when responding to students' needs, which contributes to inclusivity and equity of student outcomes.

Pioneering Digital Mental Health Support in Higher Education: The Funda Module at Nelson Mandela University
Gradidge, D. and Kama, T.
Students in higher education face numerous challenges impacting their wellbeing and academic success, including mental health issues, trauma, financial stress, food insecurity, and housing instability. At Nelson Mandela University, Emthonjeni Student Wellness (ESW) supports students through a wide range of psychological services, including individual counselling, group sessions, and outreach initiatives. From 1 January to 9 May 2025, ESW handled 626 new counselling requests, providing 1,447 individual sessions with psychologists and registered counsellors. The social worker supported 25 students through 38 sessions, while 2,997 students participated in 77 group sessions. To meet ongoing demand, ESW established a digital engagement team to create an innovative, inclusive digital ecosystem. This includes the Funda Module, hosted on the NMU Learning Management System (Funda, formerly Moodle). The ESW Funda Module is currently in development. The module will offer interactive mental health resources, private guided reflections, branching video scenarios, and a referral system. It aims to provide early, tailored support through data-driven insights. This presentation will introduce delegates to the Funda Module, outlining its features and monitoring and evaluation plan. Data is not yet available on its effectiveness as the module is still in development. Student feedback will be sought during stage 2 of the development process, and on an ongoing basis thereafter.

Enhancing Student Success: Insights From the UJ's Rolling Fut of the Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT)
Graham, S.
As a Siyaphumelela 3.0 partner, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) implemented the Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT) in 2025 to evaluate staff perceptions of the university's student success ecosystem across seven dimensions. Only 109 staff members completed the survey but the diversity in terms of both academic and support staff participation was useful. The survey provides qualitative and quantitative insights into institutional strengths and areas for improvement, supporting UJ's 2035 Strategic Goal of fostering an inclusive, caring teaching and learning environment. UJ's ICAT participation aimed to inform strategic planning, promote staff engagement, and guide equity-focused transformation. The tool complements student feedback by examining institutional culture from a staff perspective. Key challenges included securing buy-in and addressing survey fatigue; targeted internal communication and leadership advocacy were vital in response. Evaluation includes staff participation levels, analysis of the ICAT report, and follow-up actions from dialogue sessions. This presentation shares insights on scaling diagnostics, aligning efforts institution-wide, and using evidence to close equity gaps—valuable for institutional leaders and student success practitioners across the sector.

Mentoring for Success: Improving Students' Academic Performance and Employability Through Holistic Support
Hatch, M.
Universities are experiencing an increase in student enrolment that has led to a more diverse student body. Mentoring programmes offer a promising strategy to ensure the academic success and industry preparedness of all students, yet their impact remains under-researched. This study explores the University of KwaZulu-Natal's, School of Accounting, Economics and Finance Mentoring Programme, which supports second-year to postgraduate students with a coursework component to their qualification. Using three data sources—mentee feedback at the start of 2023, academic status comparisons for semester one of 2024, and graduate reflections in June 2025—the study evaluates the programme's impact on students' academic performance and post-graduation success. The ongoing success of the programme is anchored in its mentor-mentee relationships, with mentors selected for their care and excellent work ethic. Regular feedback from mentees, mentors and project assistants informs ongoing improvements, ensuring the programme remains responsive and relevant. Since its inception in 2020, the programme has grown from approximately 180 to over 300 actively engaging mentees. Growth has been driven by word of mouth, strategic promotion, and the demonstrated value of mentoring in supporting students. This study offers insights into how a scalable mentoring programme can promote inclusion and success of all students while highlighting challenges like mentor retention and sustainable funding.

A Learning Ecosystem - Living and Learning Communities
January, C.
Universities are complex learning systems. The Department of Higher Education Transformation calls for research that explores the broad and complex relationship between student housing and academic success and in particular with a focus on the ability of black working-class students to succeed academically. Data was collected from 172 peer tutors (78% of the 2020 cohort) within the residence system to examine how living and learning communities, in collaboration with faculties, can foster student success. The data collected highlighted key elements of an optimal living and learning environment as well as the collaborative holistic learning needs of students. It also revealed the similar and distinct ways in which faculty staff, student development practitioners, student leaders and residence staff can begin to reflect on their specific roles within the context of an emerging student success framework. The data was collected following a series of annual training sessions. To scale the framework, the programme will need to be piloted at one university, with the view to sharing the emerging model for broader consideration across other universities. This ecosystem empowers learning communities to take ownership of their success by developing their capability to transform human capital and material resources into meaningful outcomes for student achievement. A monitoring and evaluation tool will be developed to assess the programme's impact.

Reimagining Mentorship in Teacher Education Through Participatory Action Research: Towards a Digitally Responsive Framework
Jiyane, L.
In an era of accelerated digitalisation and growing educational inequality, rethinking mentorship in teacher education has become imperative. Traditional mentorship models, often developed for static, face-to-face contexts, are increasingly misaligned with the evolving needs of preservice teachers who must navigate blended and digitally mediated environments. This study responds to this challenge by exploring how mentorship can be transformed through collaborative, context-sensitive processes that integrate digital tools while promoting social justice. The study aimed to co-construct, implement, and evaluate a responsive mentoring framework that supports professional growth among preservice teachers during teaching practice. The central research question guiding the inquiry was: How can a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach be used to design a contextually relevant and digitally responsive mentoring framework in a teacher education programme? Drawing on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the study positioned mentor lecturers, mentor teachers, and preservice teachers as active co-researchers in iterative PAR cycles. Rather than treating participants as data sources, the study engaged them in collective sense-making, critical reflection, and collaborative decision-making throughout the research process. A total of 30 participants were purposefully selected: Five mentor lecturers, Five mentor teachers, and 20 preservice teachers.

The Impact of Virtual Mentoring on the Wellbeing of Students: A Case Study of Central University of Technology, Free State
Joannou, N.
The study explores the impact of a virtual mentoring (VM) intervention aimed at enhancing student wellbeing, retention and success. VM provides an additional modality to support existing academic advising. Digital interventions offer flexibility, convenience & accessible platforms for involvement. The research problem addresses the challenge of student engagement and questions whether providing students with online interventions can serve to increase wellbeing. The Central University of Technology (CUT) Atleha online mentorship programme is open to all first year students. There are 1193 first-year students on the Welkom campus. The intervention can be scaled to include senior students. Each online session is evaluated through a feedback survey. The primary aim of the study is to evaluate the impact of the VM programme. The study will seek to i) determine if the VM programme has contributed to the students' sense of wellbeing & inclusivity; ii) evaluate the impact of the programme in fostering student engagement & participation; iii) determine the perceived benefits from the student perspective. Using a mixed method approach, the study explores the students' perspective, through surveys and focus group interviews to determine the effectiveness of the strategy. The preliminary findings are expected to reveal that current support is enhanced when complemented by VM and an 'influential presenter'. The research aims to inform practice on innovative support systems and relatable mentors.

Amplifying Student Success through Social Media: The FLY@UP Case Study
Jonker, T.
The University of Pretoria's FLY@UP campaign ("The Finish Line is Yours") strategically uses social media—primarily Instagram—to increase student awareness and uptake of institutional support. Since adopting this approach, Instagram followers have grown from 150 to over 12,700 (as of May 2025), with a monthly reach exceeding 28,000. Facebook, TikTok, and LinkedIn are also used, with Facebook as the second-most engaged platform. Content highlights academic, wellness, and financial support, delivered in formats aligned with student preferences. Central to the campaign is student co-creation: students appear in, shape, and share content, fostering authenticity and peer resonance. While a direct correlation between digital engagement and student success outcomes is still being developed, future evaluation will include asking students, at service points, how they accessed support (e.g. social media, peers). Equity impact is difficult to measure due to platform data limits, but broader reach suggests improved access for first-generation and remote students. The presentation includes digital student feedback that is integrated via polls and story responses. This evidence-based approach offers a scalable, cost-effective model for enhancing student engagement and support access in higher education.

Crunching the Numbers to Improve Success Rates of First-Year Mathematics Students in Applied Sciences

Joubert, E.D. and Mewalal, N.

Hambisa is an institutional-wide initiative designed to enhance student success. Rooted in the African philosophy of Ubuntu—emphasising interconnectedness, empathy, and the principle of "I am because you are"—the project fostered collaboration between academic and professional staff, breaking down silos across departments. The approach focused on identifying and implementing targeted strategies to support specific student cohorts within faculties, using data to inform intentional curriculum and pedagogical design. A student representative was included in the working group to ensure diverse perspectives. The initiative particularly emphasised supporting students in the "middle group," who often remain in academic transition. Initial data analysis was used to identify key modules for intervention. The project was scaled by engaging selected academic departments, with subject lecturers contributing disciplinary expertise to enable a more nuanced and immediate understanding of module-level challenges. Mathematics is globally recognised as a bottleneck subject that hinders progression and throughput. Strategies for improved performance were implemented from 2023; data analysis of student pass rates for the years 2019, 2023 and 2024 showed early impact of the interventions. Data from 2020 to 2022 were excluded due to significant changes in pedagogy and assessment practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Class sizes during the three years analysed ranged between 70 and 150 students. This presentation discusses the successes and challenges of the pedagogical interventions and outlines plans for a longitudinal study to track ongoing impact.

Masculinity, Margins, and the Myth of Merit

Khan, F., Madiba, M. and Makhetha, T.

Persistent gender disparities in academic performance continue to shape student trajectories in South African higher education. While female students generally outperform their male counterparts in terms of pass rates and graduation outcomes, these trends often obscure deeper structural inequalities, intersecting with race, class, and first-generation status. This presentation interrogates the gendered dimensions of academic success and failure, with particular attention to institutional conditions that enable or constrain equitable outcomes. Drawing on emerging findings from a study at the University of the Western Cape on the experiences of first-generation Black students, this paper explores how gender influences students' aspirations, academic transitions, and vulnerabilities. A concerning pattern has emerged: male students, especially from working-class and rural backgrounds, are disproportionately represented in academic exclusion statistics. These students frequently report high levels of marginalisation, disengagement, and inadequate psychosocial support. In response, the presentation advocates for a shift from "gender-neutral" student success models toward gender-responsive frameworks that directly address the differentiated needs of male and female students. It critically assesses current support structures and proposes targeted interventions, including mentorship programmes for at-risk male students, curriculum reform that promotes alternative masculinities and gender justice, and mental health

Evidence to Action: The Transformative Power of Data and Coordinated Support in Driving Student Success

Khanye, G.W. and Mohoanyane, E.

Evidence-based student support is critical for student retention and success. The Track Your Success (TYS) project at the University of the Free State (UFS) exemplifies this, moving institutions from reactive to proactive, personalized support. TYS advances this vision by combining academic advising principles with data analytics and institutional collaboration to identify and support students exhibiting behaviors that negatively impact their progress and success. This paper reflects on TYS's institutional impact over a two-year period, examining it through three interconnected dimensions: data (behavioral tracking), student-led communication, and support. As an integrated and coordinated model, TYS aligns data, academic, socio-emotional, and administrative functions to respond to student needs. Over two years, TYS identified 15,425 students, reaching 12,279 with targeted nudges and timely referrals. This comprehensive approach supports both group and individualized interventions and enhances institutional agility using a high-tech and high-touch experience. TYS demonstrates how flexible, technology-enabled advising facilitates proactive engagement and timely support at scale, as envisioned by Bates (2015). The project has positively contributed to improved student retention and a stronger culture of student-centredness. Importantly, students reached by TYS achieved an average final mark 3% higher than those not reached, showcasing a transformative institutional gain.

Leveraging Technology-Mediation for Early Identification of At-Risk Students and High-Impact Modules: An Academic Advising Case Study
Khumalo, M. and Gaddiah, D.
Academic advising plays a critical role in fostering student success in higher education, especially among individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds; however, persistent challenges, most notably issues related to the availability and accessibility of quality advising. Technology- mediated tools present significant opportunities for enhancing student success and effectiveness of academic support initiatives. In response to persistent challenges marked by declining student success indicators, the university undertook a strategic reconfiguration of its academic advising practices by systematically enhancing the functionalities of the Auto-Scholar application. This paper employs a case study approach to examine how machine learning algorithms and predictive analytics, implemented through Auto-Scholar, can be utilised to analyse historical academic data, student engagement patterns, and course performance metrics in order to proactively inform and enhance academic advising interventions. The findings of this intervention have revealed enhanced academic performances of students identified as high priority, post individualised interventions through early identification, provision of support and tracking. Using data-driven advising strategies, the paper argues for the integration of technology-mediated tools to enhance academic success through data-driven advising strategies.

Fostering Collaborative Learning and Critical Thinking Through Writing Centre Group Tutorials
Khumalo, N. and Govender, N.
Writing centres have long been seen as open spaces that allow students to learn and engage critically. We maintain that the affective domain of teaching and learning is valued in writing centre work as we thoughtfully consider students' experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and values. Drawing from our experiences as writing centre practitioners, we argue that academic support interventions are vital for socialising students to discipline discourse and developing critical thinkers who can contribute to a sustainable future. This study examined the impact of writing centre group tutorials in facilitating academic writing support to enhance students' epistemological access and success in higher education. This study employed a mixed-methods research design and collected data from 93 undergraduate student participants and 22 writing centre tutors through semi-structured interviews and surveys. Data was gathered from the Durban University of Technology (DUT) writing centres during one semester to understand how group consultations contribute to students' and tutors' educational experiences and perspectives. Findings indicated that students prefer group consultations to individual ones, as they can share ideas and engage in discussions with their peers and tutors. Students flourish in interactive, inclusive environments that promote critical thinking and lifelong learning. This study proposes a multifaceted approach to learning and teaching that is agile, inclusive, and responsive to the evolving needs of students.

Bridging the Gap: The RULearning Toolkit Series as an Intervention Towards Students' Success
Kitchen, T. and Vorster, K.
National and Institutional data from 2019 to 2023, drawn from surveys (BUSSE, Cengage, SASSE), National Benchmark Tests, and student and staff feedback, pointed to a persistent gap between what students were expected to do academically and what they were able to do. Hidden expectations around learning and disciplinary literacies constrain the learning experience, often falling into a 'grey zone' of responsibility. In response, the Student Academic Development team conceptualised the RULearning Toolkit initiative, a series of practical, student-focused resources aimed at building both general learning literacies and discipline-specific knowledge practices. This presentation showcases two of the first toolkits: Learning at University, which covers foundational skills such as time management, note-taking, and academic engagement, and Becoming a Scientist, a toolkit developed in collaboration with the Science Faculty to explicitly teach disciplinary ways of thinking, writing, and learning. Drawing on initial qualitative feedback from staff and students, we highlight how the toolkits are being used in both learning and living spaces, and how they have been experienced in relation to making these hidden expectations visible. We reflect on the collaborative development process, the importance of embedding the student voice, and the challenges of making the curriculum visible and actionable.

Click, Learn, Thrive: North West University's Self-Paced Academic Skills Workshops
Koekemoer, R.
To expand equitable access to academic support, North West University's (NWU's) Academic Advising Programme launched nine self-paced online workshops in February 2025. Developed from webinars delivered during the COVID-19 period, the courses were peer-reviewed by student academic advisers and cover soft academic skills, including time management, academic writing, study methods, and group dynamics. The content is designed to support both contact and distance students and is embedded in the LMS using Rise360. Since launching these skills workshops, a large number of students have completed at least one course, with the top three workshops, From School to the Great Beyond, Goal Setting, and Time Management, showing the highest engagement. The courses are prescribed by faculties, recommended by lecturers, and integrated into advising. Students are the primary beneficiaries and have shared positive feedback on accessibility, relevance, and flexibility. The initiative aims to close equity gaps by reaching first-generation, distance, and underprepared students through flexible, low-barrier learning. Ongoing evaluation includes usage data, surveys, and continuous peer review. Key insights include the value of repurposing pandemic-era resources, interdepartmental collaboration, and embedding support across modalities. The model is scalable and replicable for institutions seeking cost-effective strategies to support student success, especially where one-on-one interventions are limited.

The Impact of High School Mathematics Pathways on First-Year University Performance: A South African Case Study
Kone, N.B.
This study investigates the impact of how Pure Mathematics and Technical Mathematics in high school affects students' academic performance in a first-year university mathematics module. With the growing differentiation of mathematics curricula in secondary education, there is increasing concern over whether the technical pathway sufficiently equips students for the rigors of tertiary study. Drawing on quantitative analysis of academic records from a cohort of first-year students doing a foundation mathematics course at a South African university, the study compares performance indicators such as diagnostic assessments, assignments, tests and exam scores. The sample includes all 24 Technical Mathematics students registered for the module in 2024, matched with 24 randomly selected Pure Mathematics students who had comparable Grade 12 marks. The findings reveal a marked disparity in performance, with students who took Pure Mathematics in high school demonstrating higher success rates compared to their peers from the Technical Mathematics stream. The results indicate a significant performance gap, with students from the Pure Mathematics stream outperforming their Technical Mathematics counterparts. The findings underscore the need for systemic reforms such as revised admissions policies, targeted academic support, and improved curriculum alignment between school and university to bridge the preparation gap and support student success.

Share2Teach: A Collaborative OER Platform for Equitable, Self-Directed Learning in South Africa
Laubscher, D. and Bosch, C.
Share2Teach is a collaborative Open Educational Resource (OER) platform developed at the North-West University (NWU). The platform addresses the need for free, curriculum-aligned, and locally relevant teaching resources to support equitable and self-directed learning among South African teachers and learners. The initiative began with renewable assessment tasks for final-year education students, who created digital artefacts aligned with Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) themes. Since then, the project has expanded to include various contributions within NWU's Faculty of Education. Promoting a culture of student co-creation, Share2Teach enables students and teachers to upload, adapt, and share resources across phases and contexts. While the initiative is still evolving, it is supported by a growing repository and commitment from stakeholders. Ongoing evaluation gathers evidence for further development through user feedback data, platform analytics and contributor engagement data. The platform will be officially launched this year as an open-access platform, and multiple stakeholders across educational institutions, the DoE and interested NGOs will be invited to share resources. A key insight has been the empowering potential of positioning students and teachers as knowledge creators. This presentation shares the project's development, lessons learned and future directions.

AI as the New Literacy: Preparing Students for an AI Fluent Future
Lee, A. and Morkel, J.
As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly embedded in daily personal and professional life contexts, AI literacy must be recognised as a core graduate competency. However, a gap remains between how students use AI tools and their ability to engage with them ethically, effectively, and critically. Many students access AI informally, with little guidance on responsible use, underlying mechanisms, or academic applications. Equity and access concerns also persist, particularly around how AI adoption in higher education may widen existing disparities. This session reports on a qualitative study contact- and distance-learning students across several campuses. Surveys and focus-group interviews probed students' definitions of AI literacy, their self-assessed preparedness, and their expectations of institutional support and workplace demands. Results highlight the need to align informal student engagement with structured educational approaches so that AI can enhance accessible academic support, promote student success, and support responsible use. A key outcome is a framework for the design of an AI Fluency "Stripe," free to all students. The Stripe builds foundational skills for ethical, responsible AI use in academic contexts. It also addresses equity gaps revealed in the study, supporting students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and learning contexts. Finally, the session outlines a scalable model for expanding the Stripe into a suite of related micro-courses.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Frameworks Focused on Teaching and Learning for University Professionals
Lelliott, T.
This presentation introduces a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) framework developed by Saide's OER Africa initiative to support the career development of higher education professionals in teaching and learning. The framework includes four domains: Course Design, Materials Development, Facilitating Learning, and Effective Assessment and Feedback, each with capability descriptors. Linked openly licensed resources have been sourced and evaluated for use in CPD interventions, and are accessible online and adaptable to institutional contexts. The framework has been piloted with academic staff across several institutions and shows downloads of 527 resources in 2025. Students are indirect beneficiaries, and feedback from both academics and students will guide refinement. Designed for scalability, the framework's open licensing and digital access support adoption across institutions. It promotes equity by offering free, adaptable resources that address disparities in access to professional development, especially in under-resourced contexts. Evaluation includes tracking resource use, participant feedback, and changes in teaching practice. Key insights include the importance of contextual adaptability, the value of peer-led CPD, and the need for sustained institutional support. These will benefit academic developers, institutional leaders, and practitioners aiming to enhance teaching quality and student success.

Data-Driven Support for High Impact Modules: Module Reviews and Customised Reporting
Lemmens, J-C. and Janse van Vuuren, H.
Launched in 2019, the High Impact Modules (HIMs) project at the University of Pretoria aims to improve the success rates of challenging modules, defined as those with success rates below 70%. Facilitated by the Department for Education Innovation, the initiative combines academic support with structured module reviews, drawing on expertise from instructional designers, educational consultants, tutoring services, and a research unit. The project has delivered consistent improvements in success rates, including gains of 13.3% in 2019 and 12.6% in both 2020 and 2023. Module reviews are guided by a structured reflection process supported by Power BI dashboards that provide insights into performance trends, including differential pass rates by gender, race, school quintile, qualification, and repeat status. These dashboards are accessible to Deputy Deans and Heads of Department, while a centralised PowerApps platform captures reflections, proposed interventions, and automates stakeholder notifications and tracking. To address limited Power BI access among lecturers, parameterised reports using Quarto have been introduced. These reproducible, lecturer-specific reports integrate LMS, SIS, and survey data to support continuous improvement in teaching and learning. This session demonstrates how integrated technological systems, Power BI, PowerApps, and Quarto work together to enable data-informed, scalable, and locally relevant academic interventions.

Parental Engagement as a Redress Strategy for Success: Lessons from the Pre-University Academy
Leshota, M.
The Pre-University Academy (PUA) is a targeted enrichment programme supporting high-potential STEM learners from under-resourced backgrounds in their transition to university. The initiative addresses systemic inequalities in access and success by closing academic and skills gaps and strengthening learner support networks. A key feature of the programme is parental engagement implemented though regular information sessions and expert-led workshops focussed on adolescent development, communication, resilience, and mental health. Six workshops over three years have maintained consistently high attendance and yielded positive feedback. Parents have reported stronger relationships with their children and greater confidence in supporting their academic success. Learners contribute to programme development, including suggesting workshop topics, thus ensuring responsiveness to their needs. Evidence of success includes qualitative feedback, sustained engagement, and reported behavioural changes. The PUA presents a scalable model with clear implications for first year university success: learners arrive better prepared, with stronger family support structures and enhanced self-regulation skills.

From Data to Action: Enhancing Undergraduate Success at the University of Johannesburg
Loots, R.C. and Meyer, A.
In response to institutional priorities around undergraduate throughput, this presentation examines two data-informed interventions at the University of Johannesburg. The first demonstrates the use of academic analytics to adapt organisational processes by monitoring student load, in terms of module registration and cancellations. Load is defined as the number of modules that make up a standard curriculum per qualification. Launched in 2024, this initiative shows promise, evidenced by a significant decline in module cancellations and a potential correlation with improved module success rates. In 2025, we have noticed improvements in student loads, particularly in mainstream undergraduate programmes. We hope this will translate into improved completion rates. The second example, a learner-centred approach, analysed the preparedness of students from other faculties taking mathematics service modules in the Department of Mathematics, Faculty of Science. We analysed how these students performed compared to their peers and the effects of taking Mathematics versus Mathematical Literacy in matric. A trend shows that these students have a lower success rate in math services modules than their peers, pointing to the need for targeted academic support, evaluating student feedback, and potential curriculum refinement to align with student preparedness. The presentation shares early results, outlines methods for assessing impact, and concludes with insights for scaling these practices.

Beyond the Red Flags: Predicting Student Success with Data-Driven Insights
Mafunganyika-Ndlovu, A. and Mamvura, I.
Early warning systems (EWS) in higher education are vital for identifying at-risk students and guiding timely interventions. At one university, the Student Support Unit applied the Persistence Model to assess 120 readmitted Humanities students' (1st–4th year) likelihood of academic success or exclusion. The model draws on academic histories and socio-economic data from the Biographical Questionnaire completed at registration. Using statistical and machine learning techniques, the model generates monthly, quarterly, and annual risk profiles based on course pass/fail rates, average marks, and Learning Management System (LMS) engagement. It identifies students already 'at risk' at registration based on performance trends linked to gender, socio-economic status (e.g., school quintile, digital access), and Matric results in Pure Mathematics and English First Additional Language (FAL). Student involvement was limited to completing the Biographical Questionnaire. However, the model directly addresses skewed performance patterns by informing targeted support such as academic counselling, tutoring, and digital skills development. Findings show that readmitted students typically have lower LMS engagement and persistence scores, reinforcing the predictive value of behavioural and academic data. The model supports a proactive, equity-oriented approach to student success.

Bridging the Digital Divide: A Practical Advanced Excel Intervention to Empower Employability at Midlands TVET College
Maganyana, A. and Zinto, S.
This presentation by Otniz Solutions aligns with the Siyaphumelela student success initiative, "Beyond Completion", conference theme by targeting digital skill gaps among Midlands TVET students. It introduces an advanced Microsoft Excel intervention to improve employability, workplace readiness, and entrepreneurial potential. Data collected from 40 students revealed that 82% rated themselves as intermediate Excel users, only 5.5% considered themselves advanced, highlighting the need for further skills development. The proposed programme includes structured workshops, peer support, and flexible learning methods to accommodate students with limited access to technology. Qualitative feedback from students showed they recognise Excel's value across careers in administration, finance, and data management. They also suggested deeper integration of Excel into coursework, more hands-on practice, and industry-specific applications. With 95% of students showing interest in advanced training, the initiative shows strong potential. Otniz Solutions proposes a formal partnership with Midlands TVET to co-develop curricula and create scalable, inclusive digital skills solutions. The aim is to bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world demands, promoting employment and entrepreneurial outcomes. The project is aligned with national goals for youth empowerment and skills development through practical, accessible, and industry-relevant education.

An Emic Perspective of Senior Student Experience at the University of the Free State
Mahlatsi, B.
Universities have the generative capacity and vital responsibility to innovate, enhance student engagement, and support senior students facing academic challenges, financial strain, and employability concerns. However, there is limited emphasis on structured support mechanisms for senior students as they transition into their second, final and postgraduate studies to entering the workforce. This presentation is an insider's perspective that evidences how student success is being re-imagined at the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the University of the Free State (UFS) through the #SecureTheGrad initiative. #SecureTheGrad hosts webinars - under the themes of senior orientation, finance, academic support, careers, and wellness - with leaders and experts who share insights on academic and professional growth. Between 2024 and 2022, 5272 students attended the webinars. The evaluation feedback describes students' experience with #SecureTheGrad: "My experience has been positive; the webinars provide invaluable insights and actionable strategies that help bridge the gap between academic life and the professional world." Another student stating: "I gained inspiration from former graduates", "After attending the webinars, I deeply looked into bursaries that are offered at UFS, and one can apply". This presentation aims to invite insights from interested colleagues and encourage scholarly collaboration through the exchange of best practices.

Innovating Student Support for Efficiency: The Early Implementation of the Departmental Digitalisation Strategy
Majozi, P.C., Gumede, T.M., Peterson, M. and Mbele, F.N.H.
At the University of Pretoria's Department of Student Affairs, student success is being advanced through a series of innovative, student-centred initiatives. One such initiative, Level UP, is a structured mental fitness training programme developed by the Student Counselling Unit to promote wellbeing and academic resilience. Concurrently, the Student Governance and Leadership Unit has digitised key administrative processes to improve efficiency and student experience. The personal fund approval process, once hindered by manual paperwork and sequential reviews, now operates through an automated system with electronic submissions, digital routing, and real-time notifications. Similarly, the event booking pre-authorisation process—with its three-stage approval system—has been digitised to streamline workflows and increase transparency. In support of the Student Development and Disability Unit, additional digital projects have been initiated, including the automation of mentor-mentee pairing for the mentorship programme and the enhancement of support systems for student entrepreneurship. These innovations are scaffolded by ongoing digital capabilities and literacy training to ensure staff are equipped for a digitally empowered support environment. Collectively, these efforts demonstrate how collaboration, resourcefulness, and technology can reshape institutional practices, embed care and accountability, and drive scalable, sustainable transformation in student support.

Driving Institutional Change: The Journey of the Central University of Technology
Malebo N.J., Nunes K.C., van Heerden L. and Khohliso X.D.
The Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT), like many higher education institutions in South Africa, faces challenges with student retention. Data from 2025 indicate that 97% of first-time entrants are African, with most coming from historically disadvantaged and poorly resourced backgrounds. Improving throughput at this institution could significantly help address educational and socioeconomic inequalities. An important finding since joining the Siyaphumelela Network is that many student support programmes at CUT tend to operate in siloes. To tackle these issues, the university, through its participation in the Siyaphumelela Network, has introduced several strategies to break down these siloes and to develop student success initiatives systematically and collaboratively. The first strategy was establishing a student success committee to serve as a platform for ongoing engagement with student success and to unify all related initiatives. In this presentation, we will briefly share early insights. First, we report on progress in developing a student tracking dashboard based on existing institutional data structures and insights gained from partner institutions. Next, we discuss the importance of academic advising in supporting student success. Finally, we illustrate how evaluating curriculum and assessment data can help identify suitable approaches for high-impact modules.

Peer Advising as a Catalyst for Equity and Success in the Road to Success Programme

Maleswena, T., Nayager, A. and Shungube, M.

Situated within the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management (CLM), the Road to Success Programme (RSP) reimagines student support through a peer advising model that is both relational and strategic. At the core of the RSP is a commitment to meeting students where they are—academically, socially, and emotionally. Peer advisors, who are senior undergraduate students, are trained in empathy, ethics, and reflective practice. They facilitate one-on-one consultations, run group tutorials, and lead workshops on themes such as time management, study skills, and test preparation. This multi-modal engagement fosters relatability and trust, enabling students to openly discuss academic habits and challenges in a non-hierarchical environment. The programme's success is underpinned by a data-informed strategy. In May 2025, institutional reports highlighted that over 150 first-year students participated in these workshops, with many reporting enhanced preparedness for assessments and a better understanding of university-level expectations. Peer advisors act as cultural translators, demystifying institutional expectations and fostering a sense of belonging. The RSP exemplifies how equity-driven peer advising can enhance student success and institutional effectiveness. By centring student voices, leveraging data, and fostering inclusive academic communities, the RSP offers a scalable model for higher education institutions committed to justice, retention, and excellence.

Undergraduate Male Students' Academic Experiences at a South African Higher Education Institution: An Ecological Systems Analysis

Maluleke, T., Mochochoko, V., Moosa, R., Tshuma, L., Siswana, A. and Innocent Mamvura, I.

Between 2020 and 2024, the average completion rate in the minimum required number of years for female students in the faculty of Humanities at the University under investigation was 58%, compared to 43% for male students; and this is a cause for great concern. This study explores how contextual factors facilitate and/or constrain Humanities undergraduate male student engagement and academic performance. Guided by the ecological systems perspective, the study adopts a mixed methods approach to examine the environmental, institutional, and socio-cultural influences that shape male students' academic experiences. Data were collected through an online survey with 142 undergraduate male humanities students and followed by focus group discussions with 45 students. The study participants were purposefully selected male undergraduate students enrolled in different years of study at a in the Faculty of Humanities. Findings from this pilot phase reveal that access to academic resources, quality of teaching, and curriculum relevance significantly influence male student motivation and participation. Academic success is not determined by individual aptitude alone. Male students from under-resourced communities face challenges like financial instability and inadequate academic preparation. The study will be expanded to four other Faculties in the university before implementing Faculty-specific student support interventions specifically targeting male students.

Unpacking the Gender Gap: Investigating Male Student Underperformance in South African Higher Education

Mamvura, I. and Makuapane, L.

Abstract Male students in South African universities are increasingly falling behind their female counterparts in academic achievement, degree completion, and retention. National data reveal a consistent trend of higher female graduation rates and pass rates across multiple disciplines. This study investigates the root causes of this gendered academic performance gap using a dual-method approach: quantitative analysis of institutional Business Intelligence (BI) data and qualitative data collected through a structured student survey. The quantitative analysis draws on over 20,000 student records spanning 2016–2023, while the qualitative survey explores motivational, psycho-social, and structural challenges faced by male students. The survey was sent to all struggling male students in the Faculty of Humanities and approximately 160 responses were received and additionally 45 students attended the three focus groups.The proposal is guided by the expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. The results show that male students under-perform across a range of indicators including first-year course success, repetition rates, and graduation within minimum time. Financial stress, weaker non-cognitive skills, and lower engagement levels emerge as key contributing factors. This paper contributes to the growing body of evidence highlighting the urgent need for gender-sensitive support interventions and institutional policy responses to male academic under-performance.

Reimagining Academic Recovery: Reflections from At-Risk Students on the Role of Academic Advising
Manatsa, I., Kalanga, T., Mavela, N. and Makondo, L.
In the complex landscape of the higher education journey, satisfactory academic student success rates remain a persistent concern, particularly among students who receive formal academic warnings. While universities often implement structured support systems to address this challenge, questions remain about the relational dimensions of such interventions and their impact on student recovery. This concept paper reflects on the experiences of students who were once classified as academically at risk but later succeeded, drawing attention to how academic advising shaped their trajectories. Within the South African university context where throughput rates are under constant scrutiny and student support remains uneven this study foregrounds advising as a site of both institutional accountability and human connection. It explores how students navigate these advising encounters, what forms of support they remember, and how those experiences contributed to their resilience and academic re-engagement. Guided by Tinto's Theory of Student Integration, which emphasises the importance of academic and social integration in student persistence, this paper adopts a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a purposive sample of students who overcame academic warnings. Data will be thematically analysed to uncover key patterns in how students experienced and interpreted academic advising. The study aims to surface alternative narratives of academic advising

Application of Student Feedback to Enhance Learning and Teaching in High Priority Service Modules
Maropola, M.
The integration of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) Siyaphumelela 3.0 initiative and the Student Feedback on Teaching and Modules (SFTM) project aims to investigate issues underlying poor student performance in four high priority service modules within the Faculty of Natural Sciences. In this endeavour, we work collaboratively with the faculty lecturers to design the feedback collection processes and develop action plans. The inclusive approach encourages accountability and fosters deeper reflection on the student voice among academics within a safe space. This presentation will outline our approach to collecting student feedback and examine possible factors contributing to poor student performance in key service modules. Lecturer reflections point to several factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, student absenteeism and limited collaboration with the students' primary faculties. In contrast, student survey responses highlight issues related to teaching methods, the effectiveness of tutors and tutorials, the role of Graduate Learning Assistants, module content, learning materials as well as the overall learning environment. In one module, we were able to assess student responses to specific intervention strategies that have already been implemented. These preliminary findings highlight the value of this collaborative initiative—not only in monitoring high-priority modules but also in refining student feedback processes and reinforcing internal quality assurance mechanisms.

Supporting Academic Staff in Digital Curriculum Transformation: A Practice-Based Approach
Mashiteng, E.
This presentation shares insights from my role as an Instructional and Learning Designer in a University-wide Digital Curriculum Transformation project, focused on supporting academic staff in integrating digital tools into their teaching practices. The work involves practical, hands-on support to help lecturers enhance their modules through the use of platforms such as H5P, Canva, Moodle Book Tool and PHET simulations. Key areas of support include structuring modules for clarity and student navigation, aligning learning outcomes with activities and assessments, and introducing interactive content to promote student engagement. Academic staff are also enrolled in a curriculum design support module to build their long-term instructional design capabilities. The presentation outlines the strategies used to support lecturers, the tools introduced, and the observed patterns in lecturer engagement and confidence. It reflects on how targeted support and digital skill development contribute to broader goals of student success, improved teaching quality, and sustainable digital transformation in higher education.

From Zero to Digital: Exploring the Learning Curve of University Students Using Computers for the First Time
Matete, K. and Mokoena, M.
Computer literacy is crucial for student success in today's digital learning environments, yet many first-year students particularly from low socioeconomic backgrounds start university with minimal computer skills. This study investigates the experiences of such students at the Central University of Technology (CUT), Free State, as they engage with computers for the first time. Drawing on Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, the research explores how participation in a computer support initiative for students who required assistance influences students' confidence, engagement, and ability to navigate online learning platforms. A mixed-methods approach is used, combining pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, digital literacy module results, and LMS engagement data, alongside in-depth interviews with participating students. Quantitative data is being analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data is analysed thematically. Participants indicate that the intervention positively influenced academic performance in the digital literacy module and students are more confident engaging with the LMS and other digital platforms. These improvements suggest increased comfort and competence with digital tools. The study highlights the value of student voice in shaping effective support strategies and suggests that computer literacy initiatives can significantly enhance motivation, engagement, and academic performance, especially for disadvantaged learners.

Mentorship That Matters: Leveraging Data to Improve Belonging, Engagement, and Retention
Mathabathe, K., Gumede, T. and Israel, V.
There is limited evidence-based research on the effectiveness of first-year mentorship programmes in fostering a sense of belonging, engagement, and retention. Literature on student success highlights the importance of social and academic integration in reducing dropout and improving graduation rates. At the University of Pretoria, the Department of Student Affairs has hosted a first-year mentorship programme for over a decade. Senior students volunteer as mentors and complete self-paced training via the university's learning management system. Mentors are expected to organise co- and extracurricular activities and meet their mentees at least three times per quarter. Previously, there was no formal mechanism for tracking mentee engagement. In 2025, the department deployed an app—originally only used for tutorial attendance—to record mentorship attendance and capture mentee feedback. The resulting data supports real-time monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. It has also enabled cross-data analysis to assess the impact of mentorship on student engagement, belonging, and academic success. By linking logins to the institutional systems, the team can identify trends across student demographics and detect which groups are not engaging. These insights inform the ongoing improvement of programme design and mentor training, enabling a more responsive and evidence-informed approach to student support.

Art Gallery of Student Voice for Enabled Student Agency: The Case of Walter Sisulu University Extended Curricula Programme FTEN Orientation Programme
Mathentamo, P. and Mnengi-Gweva, D.
Student agency is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of transformative education, yet many institutional structures still marginalise student voices. This presentation explores an innovative initiative, the Art Gallery of Student Voice, designed to reimagine student engagement through creative expression, dialogue, and co-creation. The gallery serves as both a metaphor and a mechanism for enabling student agency grounded in the belief that everybody is an artist. Foundation students are immersed in a creative environment where they engage through multimedia artworks to express their experiences, aspirations and perspectives. As part of the process, students name their groups, sing and dance as a form of introduction, and design T-shirts to express their views on the African University experience and their understanding of the auditing profession. The gallery also becomes a space for broader cultural engagement—celebrating Arbor Day and honoring the contributions of women throughout African history. The initiative positions students as active agents in shaping their learning environments. Drawing on participatory design principles, critical pedagogy, and student-led research, while the gallery functions as a dialogic space that informs curriculum development and support strategies. This presentation reflects on the development, impact, and institutional integration of the gallery within foundation student support. It highlights how creative platforms can serve as catalysts for authentic engagement, amplify diverse voices, and and contribute to building a more inclusive and responsive university culture.

Smart Marking for TAs: Building Capacity for Ethical, Consistent Marking in a Hybrid Institution
Mathibedi, F and Barry, G.
Smart Marking for TAs is an emerging intervention at the University of Pretoria to strengthen marking practices among postgraduate Teaching Support Staff (TSS), including tutors, AKMs, and PhD markers. Recognising that these roles are critical yet under-supported, the course builds capacity for fair, consistent, and ethical assessment. The intervention includes a compulsory synchronous session on marking principles and an optional self-paced module on using institutional digital tools. Activities include case-based marking practice, reflective discussion, and interactive engagement with university policy to foster confidence and rigour in feedback. Evidence of Success: Feedback from over 100 participants across four 2025 cohorts shows improved confidence, awareness of bias, and better use of rubrics and memos. Student Involvement: All participants are postgraduate students in TSS roles. Scalability: The modular, context-flexible design supports adoption across faculties and disciplines. Equity Focus: Equips markers to apply criteria consistently, supporting fairer outcomes and helping reduce equity gaps. Evaluation: In addition to session-based feedback, a planned follow-up with participants at the end of the academic year will assess long-term impact. This will explore whether the training has adequately prepared them for assessment. Key Insight: Initial training is essential, but follow-up dialogue after lived experience is key to refining sustainable, high-impact support.

Reclaiming the Curriculum Through Dialog: Student Voice and Curriculum Co-creation for Inclusive and Just Higher Education
Matsie, R. and von Muellen, N.
Globally, higher education continues to prioritise Western paradigms, marginalising indigenous, African, and other non-Western epistemologies. This study responds to the call for transformation in South African higher education by exploring curriculum co-creation as a student-centred practice that fosters inclusive and quality education. Rooted in a qualitative design, the study will engage approximately ten final-year undergraduate students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds as co-creators of knowledge through participatory methods. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be used to surface dominant narratives and evaluate how student-centred practices disrupt hierarchical, top-down curriculum approaches through co-creation. Evidence of success will include qualitative data from participatory workshops (using the Partici-plan strategy) and reflective dialogue (Focus Group Discussions), as well as changes in students' engagement and sense of agency. To evaluate the intervention before considering scale-up, a pilot study will be conducted to assess relevance, feasibility, and impact in real time. This proposal will directly contribute to eliminating equity gaps by amplifying the marginalised voices of students. Key insights to be shared include the importance of scaffolding student participation, shifting lecturer mindsets, and enabling inclusive discourse.

Fostering an Entrepreneurial Mindset for Advanced Diploma Students in Apparel Technology
Mavutha, W.
The integration of entrepreneurship in the Apparel Technology programme has been happening since the inception of the programme, more than 30 years ago. Students get introduced into Entrepreneurship from first year through Business Management and Production Technology. Where they are encouraged to establish their own brands, which they present at the end of 3rd year. This has been developed to equip students with the entrepreneurial skills required to create long-term career opportunities, as well as to build practical skills for innovation and business development within the apparel technology industry. Through a comprehensive business plan assignment, product and concept development, prototyping, marketing and branding. Students are tasked with conceptualising, researching, and delivering viable technology-driven services in the apparel industry, addressing real-world needs and market gaps. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence is being collected to access the effectiveness of this strategy. Quantitative metrics include assignment performance and pass rates, as well as the number of participants that successfully transition to entrepreneurial ventures or secure internships upon completion. Qualitative insights are drawn from student reflections, focus group discussions, and feedback from industry partners. These sources suggest that students are developing stronger strategic thinking skills, gaining confidence in commercial communication, and demonstrating an improved understanding of market dynamics.

Demystifying Causal Factors for Student Performances in High-Priority Modules: A Longitudinal Analysis of Student Performance Trends
Mbambo, S., Mbebe, F. and Khumalo, M.
Recent developments in educational discourse increasingly position students' teaching and learning experiences as critical determinants of academic performance in higher education. This phenomenon is multifaceted, encompassing factors such as socialisation, language barriers, staff-to-student ratios, prior knowledge exposure, and other biographical variables. However, the correlation between these factors and student performance remains largely anecdotal. This study investigated the underlying factors influencing student performance in high-priority modules through a longitudinal cohort study. Declining performance in the priority modules raises concerns about the quality of learning outcomes and student progression. This mixed-methods study draws on analyses of performance data and student and lecturer interviews. Key variables include attendance patterns, assessment methods, academic support initiatives, teaching strategies and socio-economic factors. The presentation will highlight the importance of ongoing assessment and adaptation of pedagogies to meet the evolving needs of students. Moreover, this study will use Social Constructivist Theory to provide insights into how students construct knowledge and understanding in high-priority modules, and how pedagogies impact their learning. By demystifying the root causes of performance disparities, this study contributes to the development of targeted interventions that support academic success in critical areas of study.

Addressing Gender Disparities in Mental Health Engagement: A Focus on Male Students at Durban University of Technology
Mbatha, P. and Mjadu, S.
Mental health is a critical component of student well-being and academic success, yet gender disparities persist in the utilisation of support services. Across higher education institutions, male students are consistently underrepresented in counselling programmes, a trend that reflects broader societal norms around masculinity, stigma, and help-seeking behaviour. This issue intersects with global concerns about gender equity and mental health access. At the Durban University of Technology (DUT) Midlands campus, these disparities are particularly evident. Despite the availability of counselling services, male students remain reluctant to engage. This study explores the underlying factors influencing this disengagement, aiming to understand and address the unique barriers faced by male students at DUT. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines survey data with qualitative insights to examine perceptions, motivations, and deterrents related to counselling. Preliminary findings highlight stigma, cultural expectations, and a lack of awareness as significant obstacles. The study advocates for gender-sensitive outreach and inclusive mental health strategies tailored to the needs of male students. This paper argues that centering male students' voices is essential to reshaping how mental health services are communicated and accessed.

The Role of Interdisciplinary, Multidisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Education in International Collaborative Learning: Insights from a COIL Entrepreneurship Project
Mbinda, B. and Maome, I.
Interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary education are essential in preparing students for real-world challenges by integrating diverse perspectives and expertise. This study explores the role of international collaboration in higher education through a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project, where students from different continents engaged in an entrepreneurship module. The project facilitated knowledge exchange on business development and prototype creation while also fostering a rich cultural exchange among both students and lecturers. From an educator's perspective, the collaboration highlighted differences in teaching methodologies, entrepreneurial mindsets, and problem-solving approaches, demonstrating the value of cross-border learning. The study adopts a qualitative methodological approach, drawing from personal reflective analysis and observations during the COIL project. Findings suggest that interdisciplinary collaboration enhances students' critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. Exposure to diverse business ecosystems enabled students to develop innovative and contextually relevant prototypes. However, challenges such as time zone differences, technological limitations, and varying academic expectations required structured facilitation.

Cultivating Student Prompt Engineering Skills through Collaborative OER Development
Mdanyana, L. and Nontsonto, A.
This initiative supports the development of students' prompt engineering skills through a collaborative platform designed for sharing and refining AI prompts. The project will result in a freely available Open Educational Resource (OER). Student engagement will be measured using both quantitative data—such as prompt submissions and platform activity—and qualitative feedback from surveys and focus groups, capturing perceptions of skill development and the OER's impact on learning. More than 100 students will take part by co-creating prompts, attending refinement workshops, and using the final OER. This process fosters critical thinking and digital literacy while promoting hands-on learning. The platform is scalable, cross-disciplinary, and requires minimal maintenance once launched. A key strength of this initiative is its focus on equity: by offering free, accessible tools, it enables all students—regardless of socio-economic background—to build foundational AI literacy. By democratizing access, the project aims to bridge digital divides and improve AI proficiency across diverse learner populations. Evaluation will involve continuous user feedback, expert review of prompt quality, and performance analysis on AI-related tasks. We anticipate that structured peer feedback will play a central role in producing high-quality prompts and will offer actionable insights for institutions seeking to integrate practical AI competencies into their curricula.

Enhancing Digital Literacy Through a First-Year Orientation Programme at Nelson Mandela University
Mdiya, Z. and Pityana, R.
The rise in access to low-cost smartphones has advanced digital inclusion for low-income and rural households in South Africa. However, while access to smartphones mitigates certain digital access inequalities, they may not fully support the comprehensive digital inclusion and engagement required in higher education. Many students still lack skills and exposure to essential digital tools such as learning management systems, Microsoft Office applications, and other resources critical for academic engagement and success. To address the skills gap, Nelson Mandela University's George Campus launched the Basic Computer Skills Training as part of the first-year orientation programme in 2024. The initiative trained 177 students in 2024 and expanded to 670 students in 2025. It equips students with foundational skills in digital communication, academic content management, and collaborative tools, critical for navigating academic platforms, completing assessments, and engaging with peers and lecturers. FYS Buddies, as peer mentors, receive training from ICT Services to support the facilitation of these sessions, simultaneously enhancing their own digital and facilitation skills. The initiative aims to bridge the digital divide for rural and low-income students. Its impact will be assessed through pre- and post-training digital literacy surveys. If successful, it could be scaled through faculty-specific programmes across campuses, contributing to the broader goal of closing equity gaps.

A Comparative Study on Pre- and Post-COVID Class Attendance
Meintjes, A. and Bernard, E.
In the post-pandemic higher education context, students' views on class attendance are shifting, reflecting new preferences for how and where they engage with learning. This session presents findings from a comparative study at the University of the Free State (2019 vs 2024), exploring changes in undergraduate attendance patterns, motivations for attending or skipping class, and how students define attendance in a blended learning environment. Survey data from 2850 students shows a rise in full attendance: 59% in 2024 compared with 27% in 2019. Academic reasons like understanding content and staying up to date remain key, but motivations differ. Students who attend less frequently cite extrinsic reasons such as getting test scopes or complying with compulsory attendance rules. Main barriers include overlapping assessments, academic workload, and a preference for self-study. The study found a positive correlation between academic success and both class attendance and asynchronous activity on Blackboard. Students who engage more—whether in person or online—achieve higher average marks and pass rates. These findings highlight the need for blended learning environments that support flexible engagement, well-designed classes, and targeted support to help students manage competing demands.

Breaking the Silence: The Case for Effective Language Policies in Fostering Inclusion in a South African University
Mgweba, C. and Molebatsi, P.
This study examines the impact of the lack of indigenous language policy implementation at a restructured university on student success in the Faculty of Management and Public Administration Sciences. Despite national efforts for multilingualism, many higher education institutions do not effectively apply these policies, leading to academic and socio-cultural difficulties for students. Using a convergent mixed methods approach, data were collected from 100 first-time students and 10 Level 1 lecturers through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate a strong link between insufficient support for indigenous languages and lower student engagement, understanding, and confidence. Lecturers face challenges in addressing linguistic gaps due to inadequate institutional policies. The study concludes that without intentional policy and resource allocation, efforts for institutional change may continue to marginalise specific knowledge systems. Recommendations include integrating multilingual practices into the curriculum and establishing inclusive support systems to improve student success and equity in post-merger academic settings.

The Finish Line Game: Advancing Student Success through Equity-Based Simulation

Mmbadi, E. and Meintjes, A.

This artefact presents a South African adaptation of Achieving the Dream's Finish Line Game—a boardgame-style simulation designed to surface barriers students face on their path to success. Adapted by the University of the Free State (UFS), the game has been used for over a decade in contexts such as academic staff orientation, tutor and teaching assistant training, academic leadership programmes, and advising workshops. It was developed and continuously updated by the Centre for Teaching and Learning to reflect local student realities, including financial exclusion, language barriers, and transport challenges. The artefact visually represents the student journey through a game board, with locally relevant personas encountering events that may help or hinder their progression. Participants must interpret these events, prompting critical reflection on their own teaching and institutional assumptions. Evaluation data—both qualitative and quantitative—show that the game fosters empathy, promotes equity-mindedness, and strengthens staff capacity to understand and support diverse student experiences. Key insights include the value of experiential tools in shifting perspectives on student engagement, and how student success results from both student behaviour and institutional practices. Ideal for academic developers, teaching centres, and institutional leaders, this artefact shows how simulation can drive more inclusive, responsive education environments.

Every Success has a Beginning: Milestones on Walter Sisulu University Journey Towards Building a Coherent, Integrated and Intentional Student Success System

Mnengi-Gweva, D.

The evolving higher education landscape has prompted universities to reimagine their support structures and data-driven strategies. This proposal outlines Walter Sisulu University's (WSU) journey in conceptualisation, design, and implementation milestones of a comprehensive Student Success System for equitable and inclusive student success. Drawing from a systems thinking approach, the university is engaged in institutional transformation of the student support project; the promising practices chronicle the development of the Student Success System from initial needs assessment to the integration of predictive analytics, early warning systems and collaborative student support pathways. Despite experiencing challenges such as change resistance and siloed operations, the university is making steady progress towards an integrated, data-driven approach to student development. The key milestone is a multiple-stakeholder student success committee that engages to develop a shared understanding of student success in the WSU context, aligning with institutional strategic goals and global demands. Emphasis is placed on the importance of cross-functional collaborations, student voice, and iterative design in building a responsive and sustainable student success ecosystem. WSU has reduced silo practices, developed early warning system to inform practices, engaged in surveys for evaluation of progress. Importantly, the university is also in the process of developing a student success framework.

The Analytical Advantage: Transforming Academic Support Through Data-driven Decision Making.

Mohoanyane, W. and Mbonani, T.

In an era of data-driven decision-making in higher education, the Academic Student Tutorial and Excellence Programme (A_STEP) at the University of the Free State (UFS) presents a compelling case of how institutional tutorial data can be leveraged to close equity performance gaps, enhance student tracking, and evaluate academic support initiatives. This presentation shares a data-driven approach to managing and evaluating a university tutorial programme aimed at enhancing student engagement and success. The model integrates survey design, secure data handling, continuous data integration to the university database, performance tracking, tutorial attendance and engagement analytics. We collaborate with academic advisors to identify at-risk students and modules for early intervention, as well as monitor their engagement. Additionally, we apply an evidence-based framework for the development of our tutors and the program, using feedback from students, tutors, and staff. This presentation demonstrates the value of student data over a six-year period between 2019 and 2024, where A_STEP facilitated tutorials in 439 modules to 45 575 unique students, who ultimately achieved an average of 62.57% in their final mark. Data is visualised and used in daily processes through informative Microsoft Power BI dashboards that drive continuous improvement and foster evidence-based culture. Further, the data is used to produce evidence-based reports, improve processes, financial efficiencies and re

Impact of Innovative Teaching and Assessment Strategies on First-Year Student Assessment Outcomes
Molokwane, S. and Pillay, S.
First-year student success is pivotal for overall academic trajectories and institutional outcomes. This three-year longitudinal study (2022-2024) investigated the sustained impact of lecturer-implemented interventions, comprising innovative teaching and diversified assessment strategies, on the academic performance of first-year undergraduate students in the Department of Public Management and Economics. Employing a pre-post intervention design, student assessment results from selected core first-year modules were collected over defined periods. Lecturer intervention strategies included problem-based assessments, varied summative assessments and seminar presentations. Qualitative data regarding attitudes and opinions on the intervention outcomes were sourced through student focus group discussions and engagements with participating lecturers. The findings reveal that students exposed to these lecturer-driven pedagogical interventions demonstrated statistically significant improvements in their assessment performance across the study periods compared to pre-intervention cohorts or baseline data. This research underscores the critical role of lecturers in enhancing first-year student outcomes through targeted teaching and assessment innovations, offering practical, evidence-based strategies for improving learning and achievement in foundational university courses

Intersectional Insights into Performance and Aspirations in a Pre-University Academy STEM Programme
Moodley, V.
The University of Pretoria Pre-University Academy (UP-PUA) offers a math and science programme to support learners in accessing university and succeeding in STEM disciplines. The focus is on promoting a deep understanding of concepts in maths and science, rather than surface level knowledge. UP-PUA engages a diverse group of learners from various racial, socio-economic, gender, and school quintile backgrounds. This diversity enriches the learning experience, but also presents challenges especially psycho-social factors influencing performance and career aspirations. This presentation explores how these intersectional factors affect learner outcomes. A comparative framework is used to examine the barriers and enablers experienced by girls and boys, particularly from quintile 1–3 schools. Findings show that background and support systems play a key role. For instance a learner from a quintile 1 school may face mental health issues with limited support, while a peer from a higher quintile may benefit from strong family support sometimes accompanied by pressure to pursue specific careers. In response to these disparities, UP-PUA plans to partner with an organisation to offer psycho-social support mainly to girl learners to address the challenges they face in STEM pathways. Practical insights are offered to schools and universities seeking to improve access, retention, and success Understanding these factors is key to creating more equitable educational environments.

Reimagining Student-Staff Partnerships: A Theory of Change Approach to Social Justice in Higher Education
Mosienyane, T. and Cupido, X.
The Decolonial and Social Justice Project (DSJP) is a multi-institutional initiative involving students and staff from three differently orientated Cape Town universities aimed at co-creating decolonial and socially just models for student-staff partnerships (SSPs). In response to tensions around role clarity, power, and purpose, our collective developed a Theory of Change (TOC) to clarify the change we seek and how it can be achieved. Our ToC foregrounds relationality, inclusion, and critical reflection, building on theories of social justice, ubuntu, decoloniality, and the pedagogy of sentipensante ("feeling/thinking"). This session shares qualitative evidence of success from our ToC workshop, highlighting key outcomes such as co-developed values, guiding agreements, and a shared conceptual pathway. Students have been central throughout; serving as co-researchers, facilitators, and owners of the process. Reflections and Padlet data reveal how intentional design challenged existing hierarchies and created equitable third spaces. Our approach illustrates how a values-driven ToC can eliminate equity gaps by embedding justice, empathy, and co-agency into SSP design. Evaluation is ongoing, using reflective, participatory tools rather than extractive metrics, offering a decolonial alternative to M&E. This session offers insights for institutions seeking to reimagine partnership, foster inclusion, and catalyse deep, systemic change in higher education.

Digital Transformation of Peer Tutoring Through Aligned Perspectives of Tutors and Tutees
Mosikare, K.
This study investigates the transformative impact of digital innovations in Sol Plaatje University's Tutorship Support Programme (2021-2024) through an analysis of 3,575 tutee evaluations and 325 tutor reflections. The research highlights how peer tutoring facilitates successful transitions into higher education, with 94.2% of tutees reporting increased academic confidence through tutors' academic and emotional support, while simultaneously identifying needs for more structured sessions. Tutors similarly reported significant personal growth (94.2%) and enhanced communication skills, though challenges like inconsistent participation emerged. To address these gaps, the programme implemented three key solutions: a self-paced online training course focused on tutor preparation, a tutor request portal, and a comprehensive student tracking system. These innovations effectively bridged previous disconnects between tutor preparedness and tutee attendance while creating new accountability mechanisms. The findings demonstrate a synergy between tutor self-perceptions and tutee experiences, particularly in valuing empathetic academic support. This alignment, combined with digital transformation, has elevated the programme from a supplementary service to a vital academic support system. As one tutor reflected, "Seeing tutees improve daily reminds me why this matters" - underscoring its impact

Reflecting on FIDBAK APP in Data Collection of Tutorial Attendance Through the Lens of CHAT: Towards Responsive Use of Technology

Mphanda, E., Majozi, B., Gumede, T. and Nsibande, R.

Tutorials are a vital academic support mechanism at the University of Pretoria, especially in large-enrolment modules with historically low pass rates. However, a longstanding challenge has been the lack of systematic, accurate data collection on tutorial attendance, —critical for assessing their effectiveness and reach. In 2024, the University piloted the FIDBAK App, purpose-built and designed to digitise and streamline tutorial attendance tracking and feedback collection across faculties. This presentation reflects on the app's implementation and impact, using Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), to examine and understand how the app reshaped the activity system of tutorials. The app allows tutors and lecturers to manage sessions, generate and share attendance keys, and collect real-time feedback, while students log attendance and submit feedback seamlessly. Early results indicate that the app reduces manual errors, eases administrative burdens, and enhances data availability for informed decision-making. However, challenges, —such as device compatibility issues, internet dependence, and user resistance, —highlight the need for ongoing training and support to ensure adoption and usability. Despite varied uptake across faculties, the FIDBAK App demonstrates the potential of integrating digital tools in higher education to improve operational efficiency, student engagement, and institutional accountability.

A Data-informed Holistic Student Support Model at the University of Venda

Mulaudzi, L.M.P, Hlabane, S., Nyete, L. and Tshililo, T.

UNIVEN has developed a comprehensive Holistic Student Support System Model designed to enhance academic success and student well-being through an integrated network of support services. At the core of this model is the Academic Advisor, who functions as a vital link between faculties, students, and a range of academic support personnel including supplementary instructors, peer mentors, tutors, and writing practitioners. This centralised coordination ensures that students receive timely, personalised and effective academic assistance. A key innovation in the model is the introduction of UNIVEN Booking.com, a centralised digital platform that streamlines access to support services. Through this system, students can schedule sessions with various support providers, ensuring equitable access and efficient resource allocation. The model also incorporates a Feedback and Recommendation System that gathers insights from support interventions and relays them to both academic advisors and faculties. This feedback loop supports data-informed decision-making, drives the continuous improvement of support strategies, and enables the proactive identification of at-risk students. While this model demonstrates significant strengths, there remain opportunities for further development. Future enhancements could include the integration of predictive analytics to anticipate student needs, mobile accessibility for broader engagement, and cross-departmental collaboration tools to foster interdisciplinary support.

Knowing, Doing and Transforming: Developing an Implementation Framework for Building Institutional Capacity Towards a Data-Informed Culture at Durban University of Technology

Muller, N., Parker, K. and Maherry A.

This visual narrative presents the development and validation of the Knowing-Doing-Transforming implementation framework at Durban University of Technology (DUT), designed to foster a data-informed institutional culture. The artefact was produced by the Institutional Planning office during the Siyaphumelela 1.0 and bonus grant projects, culminating in the Durban University of Technology (DUT) Data Day (D3) held in August 2019. D3 reimagined DUT's biennial Institutional Research conference as a practice-based exhibition, showcasing data use in decision-making and launching key initiatives like the DUT data warehouse and AutoScholar. The framework integrates three dimensions: Implementing (Policy, Incentives, Community of Practice, Training, Infrastructure), Evaluating (Solidify dataset, Strengthen skillset, Sharpen toolset, Shift mindset), and Impacting (Knowing, Doing, Transforming). The visual artefact, a three-dimensional digital cube, captures this progression. Key insights from D3 feedback reveal a growing culture of data use, especially at departmental and individual levels, with strong executive support. These findings suggest that the framework is effective in catalysing institutional transformation and may benefit other higher education institutions aiming to embed data-informed practices.

Reimagining Campus Food Systems: A Student-Led Call to Action for Equity and Academic Success

Nase, S.

Food and nutrition insecurity is an enduring and frequently unseen obstacles to students' success in South African higher education. Many students, especially those in the "missing middle", face daily challenge to accessing adequate, healthy, and reasonably priced food. Student are forced to compromise their well-being due to financial strain, the rising cost of living, and a limited number of healthy food options on campus, which has a direct effect on their capacity to learn, focus, and complete their studies in record time. Despite increased awareness, institutional responses to student food insecurity in higher education have remained largely reactive and fragmented. There has been limited integration of changes in campus food environments into broader, strategic plans for student success. In response to this gap, student-led initiatives are beginning to emerge, addressing systemic food inequities from the ground up. One such initiative is the Fix My Food youth advocacy movement, a coalition of young people advocating and working toward equitable food systems where healthy food is available, accessible, affordable, and safe. My participation in the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit highlighted that student food insecurity is not unique to South Africa. Rather, it reflects a global trend in which corporate-controlled food systems, often referred to as "Big Food", prioritise profit over nutrition. This results in widespread availability of highly processed, unhealthy and unsafe food, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Advancing Education Through Data: The National Student Data Warehouse Initiative in South Africa
Nazir, A., Mc Loughlin, K. and Saide
The presentation on the National Student Data Warehouse (NSDW) Initiative in South Africa, will provide a comprehensive update on this transformative project aimed at integrating and analysing student data across the nation's education system. The NSDW, led by the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in collaboration with the South African Institute for Distance Education (Saide), seeks to bridge critical data gaps between basic and higher education by creating a unified database of matriculation (DBE) and higher education (HEMIS) data. This initiative aligns with the National Development Plan (NDP) and the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP), focusing on evidence-based policy making, reducing inequalities, and enhancing student success. The presentation will outline the project's three-phase implementation: Phase 1 (planning, completed), Phase 2 (current development, integrating matric and HEMIS data), and Phase 3 (Maintenance and future expansion to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and skills development). Key milestones include the deployment of a cloud-based Microsoft Azure platform, the development of analytic dashboards, and predictive modelling tools to track student pathways. The timeline spans 2025–2027, with ongoing maintenance and scalability planned beyond 2027. Attendees will learn about the NSDW's benefits, such as enabling real-time analytics for policymakers, improving institutional decision-making, and providing students with predictive insights into academic success. The project also addresses data privacy and stakeholder collaboration through committees.

Harnessing Machine Learning to Improve First Year Student Success at DUT: A Siyaphumelela Data Working Group Initiative
Ncube, T.
In recent years, student success has emerged as a central focus in higher education, as institutions grapple with the complex challenge of translating access into success. Similarly, the Durban University of Technology (DUT) has not been immune to this trend, with student success indicators declining from 90% in 2020 to 85% in 2023, despite notable gains in previous years. Whilst is it is always assumed that disruptions to student socialisation and preparedness during and post COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the decline, such explanations remain largely anecdotal. Addressing this challenge requires more intentional, data-driven and multi-faceted strategies that leverage technology to enable timely and effective interventions. This paper presents insights from the development and pilot implementation of predictive machine learning models aimed at enhancing the academic success of first year students. It explores the impact of these models on early identification and support mechanisms, highlighting their contribution to improved student outcomes. It advocates for the integration of technology-mediated tools within broader student support frameworks that promote holistic and equitable student success. In addition, the paper emphasises the need for critical awareness of potential biases embedded in algorithmic predictions—particularly those arising from biographical data—underscoring the importance of ethical considerations in the design and implementation of data-driven support systems.

The Nexus of Community and Individual Action in Peer Mentoring: Towards Epistemological Becoming
Ndabula, Y. and van der Poel, N.
Alongside knowledge-sharing in academic spaces, the creation of educational communities (Tinto, 2003) beyond the classroom is rendered important for supporting mentees in becoming effective students. Peer mentoring seeks to fulfil this purpose at Rhodes University through two multi-tiered sister programmes which partner almost 2 000 students, viz., the RUMentoring and Ncedana Student Peer Mentoring Programmes. In this presentation we discuss these inclusive peer-led interventions which create structures and systems designed to empower undergraduate students to become agential, engaged, independent, organised and conceptual thinkers (Ellery, 2024). Drawing on ongoing student feedback we outline limitations and benefits of this practice, including ways in which students engage with mentoring. We reflect on scaling of the intervention and how this aims to encourage a wider transference of ideas and practices amongst students. Key insights include consideration of how activation and reactivation within students hold the capacity to facilitate iterative states of equilibrium and disequilibrium, which in turn call for individual action. We reflect on how educational communities and individual action in this peer mentoring system may contribute to epistemological becoming.

Postgraduate Students Experiences of Access at Nelson Mandela University
Neale-Shutte, M. and Mbangezeli, S.
Postgraduate (PG) studies are key to developing critical skills, advancing research and innovation, and enabling universities to drive transformation and respond to national priorities. Nelson Mandela University has seen a decline in PG and international enrolments, poor conversion of acceptances into registrations, and increasing PG dropouts. The University conducted a two-year, convergent parallel mixed-methods institutional research project to explore PG students' experiences of access and identify barriers and enablers to access at the University. Access was examined through 1) a non-registration survey of accepted but non-registered students; 2) a profile of registered PG students; 3) focus groups with first-year PG students; and 4) interviews with academic and support staff involved in the PG access value chain. Findings from these sources were analysed and triangulated. Equity issues in access and areas of convergence or divergence were explored. Key enablers included affordability of studies, financial support – albeit limited, and reputable programmes and academic staff. Barriers included funding constraints, inadequate staff capacity, administrative inefficiencies, limited flexible learning options, and limited support focused on PG students. Drawing on both student voices and staff perspectives offered comprehensive insights that led to proposing broad recommendations to the University. It is hoped that the University will utilise these in crafting its responses.

Integrated Student Mental Health Support Model: Embedding Psychological Support in the Student Journey
Nomalungelo, N. and Khanyisa, Z.
In today's evolving higher education landscape, student success hinges on innovative, collaborative strategies that break institutional silos. This proposal introduces an integrated student mental health support model grounded in a student-centred, equity-driven approach. The model bridges academic departments, student health services, residences, the Transformation Unit, and Universal Accessibility and Disability Services (UADS) with external partners such as mental health professionals and community organisations. Unlike traditional siloed services, this framework embeds mental health support throughout the student journey from first-year experience to faculty-based interventions and post-crisis care, offering prevention, development, and remediation pathways. Students actively co-create interventions through advisory roles, peer-led networks, and mental health campaigns. Over 2,000 students have benefited directly from these services, others indirectly supported through awareness and skills-building initiatives. Peer educators and faculty-based liaison counsellors work collaboratively to create safe, inclusive spaces that promote early intervention, holistic support. The model directly supports the Siyaphumelela objective of eliminating equity gaps by offering culturally responsive care. Residence-based mental health workshops have increased by 50% in just six months. The model promotes wellbeing, but also drives academic success, resilience and personal growth

Socratic GPTs: Enhancing Critical Thinking and Student Engagement through AI
Noqamza, M.
I have developed Socratic GPTs—AI-driven conversational agents employing the Socratic method—to foster critical thinking and ethical AI usage. Rather than providing answers, these agents guide students through questioning to promote deeper understanding and self-directed learning. In the Critical Social Justice module, the reflective tutor GPT has recorded over 1,000 chat interactions. A recurring insight from students is that these agents offer personalised support, helping to level the academic playing field. The Undergraduate Physics Studies GPT, launched in April 2025, has facilitated over 200 interactions. To date, approximately 2,000 students from diverse academic and socio-economic backgrounds have been given access to these GPTs. Feedback has been positive, with students highlighting the creation of safe, judgment-free spaces for dialogue. Due to growing academic interest, a Neuropsychology GPT is currently in development. Additionally, several participants in our 2025 design sprint course (26 enrolled) have expressed interest in integrating similar tools into their own modules. This initiative includes pre- and post-assessments to evaluate impact. Socratic GPTs are accessible to all students, including those using free-tier ChatGPT accounts - reinforcing equity of access. Evaluation thus far has relied on informal qualitative methods, including student feedback and focus group discussions. The next phase involves structured pre- and post-intervention assessments.

Systematic Support: A Data-Informed Approach to Academic Advising through the Phafoga Project
November N. and Majozi P.C.
The first-year experience (FYE) in higher education is a critical phase in a student's academic journey. Tinto (2014), as cited in Schreiber, Lueschkes, and Moja (2016), frames FYE within three theoretical domains: student adjustment and retention, stage models of academic progression, and equitable epistemological access. These frameworks highlight how behaviours, academic transitions, and inclusivity shape student success. Responding to these complexities, the Phafoga Project at the University of Pretoria integrates data analytics and visualisations to support first-year students in Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) gateway modules. One of these, STK113, is a foundational statistics module for students who did not meet the 60% maths entry requirement. Through Power BI dashboards embedded within the institutional Support@UP platform, the project equips academic advisors with real-time performance data, enabling them to identify students not thriving, those progressing steadily, and those excelling. From the data extracted, 9,276 students were identified, and 784 attended coaching sessions. This data-informed approach facilitates in-time personalised interventions and empowers faculty advisors to make evidence-based decisions that promote student success. The project exemplifies how intrusive, developmental and prescriptive advising models can be strengthened through data-informed practices, even in their early stages.

Bridging the Gap: Equitable Performance of Extended Curriculum and Mainstream Medical Students at a South African University
Nyathi, M., Malaivusa, N.J., Kubheka-Chauke, B. and Radebe, P.
Medicine traditionally attracts high-performing students in Mathematics, Physical Science, and Life Sciences. This disadvantages talented learners from poorly resourced schools (quintiles 1 & 2), who achieve minimum university entry requirements. At Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), the MBChB Extended Curriculum Programme (MBChB-ECP) offers a unique one-year foundation program targeting such students. It comprises six modules: Introduction to Human Body, Biophysics and Numeracy, Biology, Biochemistry, English for Medicine, and Study Skills & Information Management. Students who pass all six modules with ≥50% progress to the mainstream MBChB programme. This study compares the academic performance of student gaining entry through MBChB-ECP and mainstream MBChB students after 2022 curriculum reform that introduced integrated modules (Anatomy/Physiology/Medical Terminology [MHBT012], Indigenous Languages [MINL012]) and revised Practice of Medicine (POME) curriculum. Methods: A retrospective analysis of 2022–2023 academic records for 400 mainstream and 104 MBChB-ECP students. SPSS was used for data analysis. Results: • MHBT012: MBChB-ECP (71.1% in 2022; 67.8% in 2023) vs. mainstream (68.9%; 68%). • POME: MBChB-ECP (69.3%; 69.4%) vs. mainstream (70.6%; 70%). • MINL012: MBChB-ECP (73.9%; 82.9%) vs. mainstream (75.9%; 83%). Conclusion: MBChB-ECP effectively prepares disadvantaged students

Digitally Empowered and Inclusive: Reimagining Student Success through UCT's Student Success Hub

Nzala, A., Malibongwe, A. and Manono, S.

The Student Success Hub at UCT demonstrates how digital empowerment combined with inclusivity leads to new student success approaches. The presentation demonstrates a groundbreaking initiative that operates within the University of Cape Town's Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment through the Student Success Project. The initiative demonstrates how post-secondary institutions can transition from isolated support systems to data-based scalable models that deliver inclusive results for all students. The Student Success Hub functions as a digital platform that unifies academic, psychosocial, and administrative support services for first-year students. The platform combines early risk evaluation with personalised coaching scheduling, progress tracking features, and resource access to meet students' immediate needs while supporting data-based decisions. The platform has reached students and enabled the delivery of 25 workshops and initiation of 35 peer-led study groups and detected 121 at-risk students through established intervention programs. The project demonstrates an institutional transformation of student success by expanding individualised learning environments supported by digital technology. The presentation demonstrates implementation strategies and challenges alongside measurable results while presenting a model for institutions to replicate their equity-focused higher education student success.

Bridging Data and Action: Empowering Student Success Through Data and AI

Nzimande, N., Mambo, T., Ndlovu, S. and Letsholo, T.

In response to the growing need for data-driven decision-making and digital innovation in higher education, UNISA is implementing transformative strategies to bridge the gap between analytics insights and impactful student interventions. This presentation showcases how UNISA is leveraging Data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance institutional effectiveness, student success, and operational efficiency. It focuses on a case study involving a student nudging solution deployed across high volume modules. The solution uses real-time tracking of student engagement to enable timely, automated interventions. These personalised nudges are delivered via: SMS, email, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, Mobile App notifications, and AI-enabled automated calls. The nudges target students based on their participation and performance. Students who miss assignments or critical activities receive reminders or encouragement messages, while those who succeed receive congratulatory messages. The session will highlight practical tools, platforms, challenges, and lessons learned, offering replicable strategies for other institutions. This work contributes to the broader conversation on digital transformation in higher education and aligns with the Siyaphumelela Conference's focus on student success, institutional research, and evidence-based transformation.

Spatiotemporal Analysis of National Senior Certificate Results: Implications for Higher Education Recruitment

Nzimeni, S.

The South African higher education (HE) sector is constantly evolving requiring higher education institutions (HEIs) to adapt their strategic outlook and practices. This presentation focuses on one critical strategic dimension: access to higher education. While existing literature extensively explores equity gaps across racial, gender and income factors, our study draws attention to a frequently overlooked dimension, space. Using spatiotemporal analysis, we examine National Senior Certificate (NSC) results at school-level for the period 2017 to 2024. These data were sourced by scraping the Department of Basic Education's School Performance Report. The resulting dataset contains a sample of 5 265 high schools across South Africa. This dataset is supplemented with OpenStreetMap data, the CSIR Mesozones and EU Copernicus remote sensed data to create comprehensive view of community dynamics. Emergent Hot Spot Analysis across eight metropolitan municipalities reveal sub-municipal variation in NSC outcomes with distinct consecutive, emerging and sporadic hotspots. These Spatial Regimes give rise to pertinent questions for HEIs, including whether student recruitment efforts are optimally geared toward reaching learners in (semi) rural locale and whether our marketing efforts are sufficient to identify outlier schools that outperform their circumstances. Attempting to address these questions can only aid our understanding of (spatial/regional) access to education in the South African context.

Student Leadership for Student Success

October, H. and Langa, S.

Fourie-Malherbe (2021) argues that student success remains an intractable challenge in South African higher education institutions, primarily due to the ongoing tension expanding access and ensuring academic success—especially when co-curricular programmes as an extension of the academic project. A key challenge is the lack of evidence from a systems perspective – a holistic view that considers ALL the contributing factors to student success, beyond anecdotal insights. The role of "student leadership for student success" remains under-researched and remains under-utilised at institutions. Through this student panel discussion, students will share how involvement in leadership development programmes offered by the Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert Leadership Institute has contributed to the development of core graduate attributes: engaged citizen, dynamic professional, digital knower, enquiring learner and caring individual. The panel will draw on student experiences across the Institute's extensive leadership offerings, highlighting how participation in peer mentoring, focus groups, and collaborative programme design fosters personal growth and academic resilience. With over 2,000 students participating annually across South Africa, the programme demonstrates significant scale. It also reflects strong equity principles, being open to all registered students, and was the first South African institution to enroll in the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL). Evaluation is ongoing through programme renewal and alignment with graduate attribute development. Evidence of success includes high enrolment numbers, successful completion rates, and formal transcript recognition. This session offers key insights into how intentional, inclusive student leadership programmes can serve as a strategic driver for institutional student success.

Supporting the Learning Process in a Language Diverse Classroom Through Self-directed Learning, OER and Peer Assessments.

Olivier, C.

Finding reliable geography learning support material on the internet can be a challenge. Much of the material may not be relevant to the specific curriculum you require. In South Africa, in post foundation phase around 80% of learners are not educated in their mother tongue which creates language barriers to learning. The purpose of this project is twofold: firstly, to use the students' mother tongue in the learning process to overcome the language barrier and; secondly, to create reliable mother tongue learning support materials for school learners and future students. The assignment output is in the form of a PowerPoint presentation with a voice over. The topic is selected from a list of topics identified by Geography teachers as problematic to grade 10 and 11 learners. To accommodate large classes the peer assessment is administered on the university's teaching and learning platform. No formal research has been done yet, but informal feedback from student evaluations include the use of words such as; good, fun, happy, great and excited to describe their feeling using their mother tongue during an assessment. There are marginal differences in the results of the assessments done in the different language groups, but the positive feedback suggests other benefits such as student motivation and a possible improved student-lecturer relationship. A hundred percent of the responses were positive regarding how students felt using their mother tongue.

Behind the Scenes of Success: A Reflective Qualitative Study of Administrative Lived Experience in the Siyaphumelela Project at UWC

Oppel, T.

This qualitative reflective study explores the lived experience of an administrator working within the Siyaphumelela Student Success Initiative at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), a national initiative aimed at improving student success through data-informed transformation in South African higher education. Drawing on narrative inquiry, critical reflection and thematic analysis, the study uncovers the often-invisible yet indispensable administrative labour that supports innovation, continuity and engagement in student development initiatives. It aims to answer a key question related to the goals of Siyaphumelela: how do administrative practices contribute to the overall goals of student success and project sustainability? Using detailed journaling, a reflective self-interview and analysis of project documentation, the study reveals how administrative roles extend beyond routine tasks to become acts of care, coordination and strategic alignment. Preliminary findings highlight key challenges such as workload intensity, limited recognition and the emotional labour of navigating diverse stakeholder needs. The study advocates for institutional cultures that recognise administrative professionals as co-creators of student success, offering recommendations for professional development, ethical support structures and inclusive policy reform. The research contributes to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) by illuminating the administrator's voice in the broader transformation agenda.

Reimagining Student Success: A Literature Review of South African Research
Parker, K., Lelliott, T. and Maherry, A.
Saide is conducting a literature review of South African student success initiatives from 2014 to 2024 to contribute to the scholarship of student success. Supporting Siyaphumelela 3.0, the review aims to provide accessible, evidence-based resources to partner institutions. It evaluates around 60 academic publications: 50% qualitative, 13% quantitative, 11% conceptual, and 9% intervention-based. The review synthesises evidence to assess the effectiveness of student success strategies. While many studies are institution-specific, they highlight promising practices and gaps that can inform broader implementation. Though not an intervention, the review analyses studies involving students as participants and beneficiaries, showing how student voices shape intervention design and evaluation. Systemic factors, including financial constraints and student demographics, institutional factors such as interventions, and equity and inclusion emerged as the three dominant themes. The review also assesses methodological rigour and identifies areas needing further evaluation. Preliminary findings suggest that while the body of work is growing, it remains fragmented, localised, and often frames challenges as student deficits. The presentation will share insights on building a more cohesive and impactful research agenda, offering value to institutional researchers, academic developers, and student success practitioners.

Co-Creating Institutional Change for Student Success: The Inaugural Work of the Siyaphumelela 3.0 Student Success Committee at UWC
Pather, S., Hassan, S. and Bok, Z.
This presentation explores the inaugural activities of the Siyaphumelela 3.0 Student Success Committee (SSSC) at the UWC. The deliberate shift from Siyaphumelela 2.0's engagement fosters a more inclusive, participatory approach to institutional transformation. The aim is to drive collaborative, data-informed student success initiatives that cut across institutional boundaries, drawing on the lived experiences and insights of both staff and students. This new approach will empower SSSC members to share knowledge and co-design student success strategies. The inaugural meeting employed the World Café methodology to promote student-staff dialogue, inclusivity, and a space for diverse voices. UWC's four key Siyaphumelela projects were introduced as focal points of the World Café activity, which was intentionally framed to move from a siloed approach towards synergy, underpinned by design thinking principles. The presentation reflects on how this methodology supported shared ownership, relational engagement, and collaborative knowledge creation, bringing into focus student and staff voices. Key outcomes of the activity include enhanced student-staff partnerships, a stronger sense of trust, co-agency, and shared understanding. The formation of the new SSSC gestures more than a continuation; it is a reimagining of how institutions can structure collaboration, leverage diversity of experience, and mobilise collective intelligence to advance equitable student success outcomes.

Incorporating Student Voice in Institutional Frameworks for Holistic and Equitable Student Success
Petersen, M. and Vilakazi, N.
Contemporary higher education discourse increasingly recognises the limitations of traditional academic achievement metrics in defining student success. Leading educational scholars advocate for holistic approaches that position students as active partners rather than passive recipients in their educational journey. This paradigm shift acknowledges that comprehensive student success encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions: academic integration and achievement, social and cultural integration, personal development and well-being, and institutional belonging and engagement. Stellenbosch University's commitment to developing comprehensive student success frameworks exemplifies this progressive institutional approach. By incorporating authentic student voice into governance, curriculum development, and strategic planning processes, institutions can create more equitable and responsive educational environments. Tinto and Kuh emphasise the critical role of intentional and structured student engagement in educationally meaningful activities, advocating for students to be active participants in defining and achieving their own success. The research proposes a multi-faceted methodology for capturing student voice through diverse data collection approaches. The incorporation of student voice represents more than consultation—it constitutes genuine partnership in institutional transformation by systematically integrating student perspectives into institutional processes.

Scaling Evaluation of Teaching: Leveraging Microsoft Forms, Power BI, and Power Automate for Impact
Rabotapi, T.
This presentation will showcase the ongoing transformation of the Evaluation of Teaching (EOT) process at a rural South African university. Previously affected by fragmented data collection and inefficient manual reporting through Google Forms, the EOT system has been significantly enhanced by integrating Microsoft Forms and Power BI, with recent advancements incorporating Power Automate. The session will detail the successful transition from individual module-level Google Forms across 27 departments to a centralised, data-consistent, and Power BI-driven dashboard approach. This shift has led to measurable improvements in data quality, increased participation rates, and reduced turnaround times for feedback reports. This process uses the Learning Analytics Cycle model, which includes structured data collection, analysis, interpretation, and actionable feedback. This model supports continuous improvement in teaching quality by creating feedback loops between students, departments, and institutional decision-makers. The presentation will also highlight how the current model enhances transparency, allows historical tracking of teaching performance, and promotes data-driven academic development. It will conclude by exploring next steps, including deeper integration of Power Automate for real-time feedback flows and the potential alignment of EOT data with institutional systems for identifying and addressing at-risk modules.

Unisa's Coaching Path: Navigating Success Together
Rachidi, L., Sigwane, N., Febana, Z. and Mofokeng, T.
The Student Success Coaching (SSC) programme is aimed at supporting first generation students to successfully navigate their first year at Unisa. Twenty five Unisa graduates have been appointed to serve in the role of coaching groups of 50-100 students (weekly 1-on-1 and group sessions). They were interviewed and then trained online over 3-days. The training was evaluated and will be revised accordingly. A pairing system was designed to auto-allocate students to a coach, according to College/Faculty. The system is built to apply other demographic variables as needed, i.e. gender, age, race, etc. Once the pairing takes place, an automated email is sent to the students informing them about who has been appointed as their coach and provides links to the booking system to make 1-on-1 bookings. To ensure continuous improvement, weekly check-ins will be conducted with the coaches to provide ongoing support throughout the pilot phase. Secondly, and adhering to the principle 'Nothing about us without us,' feedback will be gathered from the students participating in the coaching sessions. Lastly, feedback will be solicited from the SSC coordinators to assess the overall success of the programme. We are planning to have 100 Coaches appointed for 2026, to coach 10 000 first generation and students from quintile 1-3 schools. The scaling up will largely be informed by the evaluation of the pilot programme.

Fostering Holistic Success: Design Thinking and PBL in Engineering Education
Rambharos, S. and Jeawon, R.
This presentation explores the transformative impact of integrating Design Thinking (DT) and Project-Based Learning (PBL) within the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment (EBE) at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), aiming to reimagine traditional student success paradigms. DT is a human-centred collaborative and iterative methodology, focused on understanding and addressing complex real-world challenges by enabling the co-creation of innovative solutions. We share insights on how this active learning methodology was integrated into students' learning experiences through projects that are guided by the DT process. Students are able to make connections across ideas and experiences (integration), and foster personal and social development (empathy, human-centredness). Such learning equips students for holistic success - improving pass rates; social and academic engagement; sense of belonging, and emotional connections to DUT. We will describe how DT/PBL initiatives challenged students (n=300) intellectually, cultivated communication skills, built self-discipline, prepared students for professional practice and fosters confidence. The implementation of DT/PBL in FEBE has grown from 5 projects in 2023 to 7 in 2024 and 10 in 2025. Staff have indicated that students' experiences in DT/PBL directly impact student engagement and overall success. We will discuss practical insights for the implementation of innovative approaches to authentically engage and empower students.

The Potential of Diagnostic Tests to Inform Targeted Student Success Interventions
Rathilal, S., Mbambo, S. and Rambharos, S.
Student success in higher education is shaped by the interplay of academic preparedness, psychosocial wellbeing, and institutional responsiveness. Diagnostic assessments offer a valuable mechanism for identifying students' strengths and needs early. This paper examines how to move beyond generic diagnostic testing to inform targeted, equitable, and developmentally appropriate interventions responsive to specific student contexts. Drawing on the use of Standardised Assessment Tests for Access and Placement (SATAP), this paper critiques the reliance on overall performance scores alone. This approach limits the ability to pinpoint specific competencies within areas like Academic Literacies, Mathematics, Numeracy or Scientific Reasoning that require targeted support. The paper advocates for a nuanced interpretation of diagnostic results to create integrated interventions. The framework's effectiveness will be evaluated by tracking improvements in student retention, course success rates, and targeted academic competencies. If successful, this data-driven model can be scaled across different institutional contexts and adapted for various diagnostic tools, providing a transferable blueprint for developing more equitable and effective student support systems. The presentation will highlight the limitations of generic, academic support, and emphasise individual contextual support for learning.

From Insight to Impact: Translating Data Analytics into Targeted Academic Interventions in Engineering Education
Rawatlal, R.
While data analytics in higher education has gained significant traction, its translation into actionable strategies for enhancing student success remains inconsistent. Commonly, institutions act on insights through broad student support initiatives—such as wellness programs and financial aid—while overlooking more direct academic interventions. This gap is often due to the perception that teaching and learning support is too content-specific or pedagogically complex to be scalable. This presentation challenges that assumption by showcasing how data analytics can drive specific, high-impact academic interventions—particularly within engineering education. We outline a series of case studies where data-informed insights were translated into automated, modular teaching content integrated with adaptive learning pathways. These interventions were designed to align with instructional design principles while remaining discipline-specific and scalable. A classroom-based control study is presented, demonstrating statistically significant improvements in student performance metrics where automated learning interventions were deployed. We argue that modern technologies and instructional frameworks now allow for a seamless bridge between analytics and academic support, and that institutions may evolve their implementation strategies accordingly. Our findings offer a roadmap for institutions seeking to move beyond general support into alternative teaching and learning methods.

StudyWell: A Strategic Framework for Student Well-being
Ribas, C. and Du Toit, C.
This poster expands on our promising practice submission by showcasing the evolving StudyWell initiative and creating space for in-person engagement with conference participants. StudyWell, based at North-West University (NWU), adopts an evidence-based, risk-management approach to student well-being. Informed by organisational psychology and grounded in the Study Demands-Resources (SD-R) framework, the initiative addresses fragmented and reactive institutional responses by developing a monitoring system that identifies individual and group well-being risk profiles. The system integrates culturally fair, psychometrically sound questionnaires with advanced analytics to support targeted interventions and institutional decision-making. Students play a central role, contributing qualitative and quantitative data that shape the framework's contextual relevance and responsiveness to diverse needs. While still in prototype development, key measures have undergone rigorous evaluation to ensure reliability, validity, and appropriateness for South African higher education contexts, with future scalability in mind. This interactive poster showcases the StudyWell conceptual framework—its theoretical foundations, strategic relevance, and potential to inform proactive, data-driven, and focused student support. Key insights will illustrate how student data has informed the SD-R model and how the envisioned monitoring system can support meaningful, measurable student success outcomes.

Beyond Retention: Mentorship Engagement as a Leading Indicator of Student Persistence in Higher Education
Richards, Z., Billings-Padiachey, A. and Andreas, L.
Student persistence in higher education, with a focus on mentorship engagement, measured by frequency, quality, and duration emerges as a key leading indicator beyond traditional retention metrics. This evidence-based intervention, led by the Student Transitions and Persistence Unit (STPU), was implemented across five faculties and residences. Of 6,338 first-year students assigned mentors, 3,595 maintained sustained engagement. Comparative data across two semesters show a positive correlation between consistent mentorship and persistence towards academic goals. Among engaged mentees, 2,091 were academically on track, while 1,904 were at risk. These figures were disaggregated by faculty and informed through the STPU Dashboard. The intervention design was co-informed by student voice through surveys and structured feedback from mentees, mentors, and residence/faculty check-ins. These engagements surfaced relational and academic challenges that shaped mentor training and targeted support. Feedback mechanisms were embedded into the evaluation cycle and contributed to the development of student-informed indicators. Demographic and academic data were triangulated to identify and address equity gaps, particularly among historically disadvantaged groups: 76% African, 60% female, 34% first-generation, with African student representation increased from 69% in 2020 to 76% in 2024. The paper positions mentorship as a scalable strategy and measurable indicator of persistence.

Towards a MERL Model for Action Research: African Proverbs in Motion
Ruffin, F. and Dlamini, N.
To advance institutional change, UKZN is applying a monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL) model to action research on Academic Advising (AA) and Academic Monitoring and Support (AMS) systems. This presentation evidences successful components of our journey thus far, such as establishing functionalAcademic Advising Network (AANs); developing curriculum for an in-house AA short-learning programme as well as an ETDP-SETA funded AA training programme; creating an AA framework for governance; joining in on an AMS dashboard being piloted by a college; planning the upscaling of a student wellness system, and designing modalities to capture the student voice. The action research will help reveal how to address equity gaps. Our MERL unity movement is underpinned by African ways of knowing heart- centredness. Together we interrogate and jointly determine how to plan and implement the model such that those experiencing the issues under query are likewise conceptualisers and problem-solvers. This means weaving African ways of knowing and being into organisational structures. MERL indicators are grounded in African proverbs. The monitoring element for action research on AANs and AMS yield research and learning outcomes intended to provide evidence for culturally responsive evaluative mechanisms. Relationality and relational accountability figure prominently into the equation. This presentation offers useful insights into participatory planning when designing MERL models.

Bridging the Digital Divide: Advancing Technology-Enhanced Learning Pathways for Marketing and Retail Business Students at Vaal University of Technology (VUT)

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

Vaal University of Technology (VUT) identified a gap between Marketing and Retail Business students' strong theoretical knowledge and limited practical skills in digital, tech-rich work settings. Survey data showed over 75% of graduates lacked exposure to industry-standard tools, limiting problem-solving and employability. To address this, VUT implemented a three-part technology-enhanced learning strategy: (1) simulation-based training for students and staff using My Marketing Experience and MyLab Marketing; (2) a digital marketing "tech-stack" portfolio building SEO, content curation, and web design skills; and (3) enterprise-level project management using Monday.com Pro to support collaborative workflows. Guided by Experiential Learning Theory and the TPACK framework, the project evaluated improvements in digital literacy, decision-making, and collaboration. Since integrating MyLab Marketing into the 2024 Retail Operations Management module, student performance improved, with the pass rate rising to 88%, up from 76% in 2023. Many students earned above-average scores in simulations and assessments. Qualitative feedback also indicated enhanced cross-module understanding. The platform supported both theory and practical skill development. Continued use is recommended to prepare students for the evolving digital marketing landscape. This initiative aligns with VUT's mission to cultivate innovative, techno-entrepreneurial graduates equipped for modern industry demands.

Unifying for Impact: Developing a University-wide Framework to Accelerate Student Success

Sampson, K., Ogude, N., Moran, C., Rivera, G.M. and Kilfoil , W.

This workshop will provide an approach to developing a framework to accelerate student success for all students. To close the equity gaps in outcomes for university learners, it is essential to foster a culture of student success, guided by evidence-based practices. Yet, conventional siloed structures of universities can hinder a unified strategy for achieving this. Fragmented approaches can result in scattershot, duplicated and boutique programmes (Kinzie & Kuh 2017), which are a challenge to scale. While resources are expended, the lack of integration is a significant barrier for system-level change. As part of a national project aimed at employing a data-driven approach to student success in New Zealand, the University of Canterbury sought to develop a comprehensive framework aimed at unifying efforts and improving student outcomes. Using the strength-based 5D Appreciative Inquiry: Define, Discover, Dream, Design and Deliver (Cooperrider et al. 2008, Fitzsimons 2025), our Define phase commenced by developing our Theory of Change. The Discovery phase involved the development of a self-assessment tool, undertaken to evaluate our readiness and capability against critical institutional drivers such as strategic vision and leadership, and data utilisation. The results of the institution-wide assessment informed a workshop (Dream Phase) that examined survey results, past achievements, and ways to enhance success. These data led to the development of an integrated framework (Design Phase) that incorporated six strategic drivers and five key workstreams –Curriculum, Academic Success, Large Courses, Student Voice, and Holistic Student Support. An additional team will focus on Working with Data. This workshop will actively guide participants through the 5D process, applying insights from UC to analyse a subset of the institutional drivers. Through collaborative working groups, participants will explore how this process facilitates the development of an institutional framework. Afterwards we will demonstrate, how developing the plan must include and apply the student voice alongside representation from equity support groups. This will ensure that a diversity of voices will more effectively close the equity gaps in outcomes. Grounded in research (Tinto 2017; Kuh & Kinzie 2018; Pascarella & Terenzini 2013; Siemens & Gasevic 2015) and our 20+ years of experience in student success, this process clarifies how sub-plans integrate into a unified institutional plan (Deliver Phase). Implementation closes the loop and enables us to Deliver, consistent with the 5Ds of Appreciative Inquiry. The goal of the workshop is to guide participants to identify institutional priorities and explore how this bottom-up approach can be used to develop their own institutional frameworks for student success.

Using Innovative Strategies to Support Second-Year Students

Seane, L.

This study explores students' first to second year transition experiences in the Faculty of Natural and Applied Sciences, using transition theory to guide innovative academic advising interventions. A progression evaluation session was held to assess student progress and offer personalized strategies to support their academic journey. Students were grouped by field: Diploma in ICT (42.59%), Agricultural Sciences (40.74%), and Bachelor of Science (16.67%). A guided online problem-solving survey highlighted key concerns, including module-related support, peer engagement, academic advising, and psychosocial needs. These results revealed variation in support needs across programmes. Using a developmental advising approach and technology, 54 students received real-time personalised feedback and were referred to relevant support structures: academic, psychosocial, and faculty-based. This feedback informed adjustments to the student support plan, with targeted interventions. Tracking showed that 57.40% accessed tutorship support, while only 3.70% used academic advising. Encouraging students to identify challenges and draw on institutional resources helped promote smoother transitions. Integrating appropriate technology in AA improves efficiency and student engagement, ultimately enhancing their academic progress. However, increasing student participation in advising sessions remains a challenge.

Efficacy of the Mentorship Programme for First Year Students at a Health Sciences University in South Africa
Sekgobela, M.J.
The transfer to higher education offers first-year undergraduate students both possibilities and problems as higher education institutions (HEIs) change to satisfy increasing societal and economic demands. Mentorship programmes have become a popular strategic intervention to help students with their academic and social development. This study examines how mentorship programmes help first-year undergraduate health sciences students adjust to university life. The study compares the experiences and academic achievement of students who are involved in a mentorship programme with those who are not, using a mixed-methods methodology. Quantitative analysis will evaluate variations in academic scores, social network development, and engagement, while thematic content analysis will examine perceived benefits in qualitative data. The results are intended to show how well structured mentoring supports students' academic achievement and social integration in their early university years.

Explainable AI for Student Success
Sekonyela, L. and Nimy, E.
Ten years into its journey, Sol Plaatje University (SPU) remains firmly committed to strengthening student-centricity as a cornerstone of its institutional strategy. This approach is essential to ensuring equitable access, student success and holistic development through personalised learning, active engagement, and effective technology integration. Aligned with this strategic intent, the current study presents the development and implement of an the explainable AI (XAI) prediction model designed to support student success. Leveraging historical student data, the model predicts the likelihood of a student passing all modules and offers interpretable, individualised explanations using visual tools and counterfactual explanations. These insights enable targeted support strategies such as personalised recommendations and dynamic student support pathways. Key features of the model include proactive interventions, regular updates and the use of measurable outcomes —such as pass rates and participation in the student support ecosystem—to evaluate impact. The model enhances the university's student support transition framework, promoting meaningful engagement between students and advisors. The model demonstrates reliability in identifying students at risk through strong performance metrics. Crucially, the study demonstrates that ethical and transparent use of AI can align predictive accuracy with institutional values. It highlights best practices in AI-driven academic support, showcasing the synergy between explainability, actionable data insights, and equitable student development. The discussion will focus on the ethical implications of AI in higher education and how predictive insights can be responsibly translated into equity-focused student success strategies.

Data-driven Student Support Ecosystem and Transition Framework Integration
Sekonyela, L. and Nimy, E.
The study examines the student support ecosystem at Sol Plaatje University's (SPU), with a focus on how data-driven tools and collaborative frameworks contribute to student success. SPU student profile data (2021-2025) reveals that the majority of students are first-generation and face moderate to significant financial challenges. Despite serving a predominantly marginalised student population, the university has achieved consistently high student success indicators, including a high retention rate (>97%), throughput rate (>50% minimum time), and module pass rate (85%). To sustain, SPU student support is grounded in Meleis's Transition Theory (2015), which frames the higher education journey as a continuous transformation of identity and thinking. This theoretical lens emphasises the importance of aligning data analytics with institutional strategies to support students effectively through key transitions. At an institutional level, the study demonstrates how SPU's holistic student success framework addresses core challenges by integrating academic and psychosocial support systems. These are strategically mapped to respond to transition triggers—situational, developmental, and organisational—ensuring that interventions are timely and relevant. At the student level, the research captures and analyzes student feedback to highlight how tailored support interventions shape their experience. The support ecosystem is collaborative, dynamic, and data-informed, with continuous refinement based on student needs and institutional insights. Interactive dashboards play a central role by visualisng student engagement and outcomes. These tools enable proactive decision-making, help scale support efforts, amplify the student voice, and drive ongoing improvement in institutional practice.

Thriving Students: Linking Well-being and Student Success
Sinclair, E. and Davids, C.
The Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) at Stellenbosch University is evolving a dynamic, integrated student support model that acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between mental health and student success. This poster presents a visual narrative of how the CSCD's holistic framework has been shaped in response to changing student needs and the growing evidence linking well-being to academic achievement. The model embeds mental health services within the broader academic and developmental support ecosystem of the university, offering layered interventions—from preventative wellness promotion to therapeutic care. It emphasises prevention, developmental opportunities, cross-campus collaboration, and student-centred practices as key enablers of success. In 2024, approximately 2 500 students received individual support and 5 461 participated in group interventions, targeting both psychosocial and academic needs. Key insights include the value of integrated systems thinking and ongoing evaluation driven by student feedback. These lessons are relevant to academic advisors, student affairs professionals and institutional leaders reimagining student success through collaboration, responsive and equitable support models.

Aligning Technology in Higher Education with Sustainable Development Goal 4: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Directions in a South African Context
Sishi, K.K. and Ncube, T.R.
The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) champions inclusive, equitable quality education and is increasingly reliant on effective digital technology integration in higher education. While global ed-tech discourse is rich, a significant research gap persists concerning its contextualised impact and alignment with SDG4, particularly in South African Universities of Technology (UoTs). This study addresses this gap by conducting a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review of peer-reviewed research (2020-2025) exploring technology integration in South African higher education and its contribution to achieving SDG4. Searching Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCOhost, and ScienceDirect, the review will identify English-language articles focused on HE technology integration that fosters inclusive and quality education. Selected studies will undergo screening, eligibility assessment, and quality appraisal. A thematic synthesis will illuminate key areas such as student perceptions, pedagogical innovations, equity and access challenges, and institutional policy alignment with SDG4. The findings aim to provide a consolidated, evidence-based understanding of the opportunities and challenges in leveraging educational technology within South African UoTs to advance SDG4. This synthesis will offer valuable direction for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders to strategically enhance digital practices in pursuit of these critical global and national educational goals.

Ulwaluko Kwa Xhosa (Xhosa male initiation) and the Reimagining of Positive Masculinities: Cultural Capital as a Resource for Academic and Personal Success in Higher Education
Siswana, A.
Ulwaluko Kwa Xhosa (Xhosa male initiation) and the Reimagining of Positive Masculinities: Cultural Capital as a Resource for Academic and Personal Success in Higher Education This is a proposal for Imbizo what I conceptualise as a men's kraal which draws from my published work on Ulwaluko Kwa Xhosa (Xhosa Male Initiation) to reframe the practice not solely as a cultural rite of passage, but as a transformative space for cultivating positive masculinities. In the context of the Siyaphumelela conference theme Reimagining Student Success and expanding opportunity for all this presentation explores how ulwaluko potentially equips first-year Xhosa male students even beyond first-year with cultural capital that can be harnessed for academic resilience, discipline, and holistic success in higher education. Many Xhosa male students enter university having recently undergone initiation, emerging with newly acquired social roles, expectations, and internalised ideals of manhood. These young men carry with them culturally embedded principles such as resilience indoda iyanyamezela, discipline for self and others, ukuhlonipha/intlonipho (respect), optimism, and a sense of brotherhood values deeply embedded in the initiation process. Far from being rigid or toxic, these teachings can foster constructive and healing masculinities that contribute to psychological well-being and academic performance. By integrating psychological insight with African epistemologies, this paper proposes that ulwaluko offers untapped potential for reimagining student development strategies, especially among historically marginalised male students. The talk argues for the recognition of cultural identity and indigenous knowledge systems as valuable assets within the university context, advancing not only access but success and socio-emotional thriving. Moreover, it highlights the importance of scaling deep by embracing community-rooted values, scaling up by aligning cultural resilience with institutional support, and scaling out through collaborative models that integrate cultural wellness into student success programmes. Ultimately, this imbizo challenges higher education institutions to move beyond deficit-based approaches and instead affirm the agency, strength, and positive masculinities that many Xhosa male students bring into their academic journeys.

Co-Creating Ethical Practice: Developing a Framework for Student Data Use through Stakeholder Engagement
Sithaldeen, R.
The increasing use of student data in academic analytics presents both significant opportunities for enhancing teaching and learning and improving student success, alongside complex ethical challenges. Navigating the legal and regulatory landscape, in South Africa, necessitates a robust ethical framework. The University of Cape Town's Data Analytics for Student Success (DASS) Task Team has developed an Ethical Framework for Evaluation and Research Involving Student Data. The development process was explicitly designed to pull together different perspectives, placing data management rigour in conversation with educational evaluation and research priorities. A series of three workshops, held in 2022, involved a wide community of students, scholars, and stakeholders. Participants provided insight, critique, experience, and expertise, specifically emphasizing that the framework should be practical, function as a resource, and guide rather than dictate. This presentation will outline the process of stakeholder engagement and present an overview of the resulting framework including a statement of scope and an articulation of core principles in the document. It will also describe a set of implementation resources developed alongside the document.

A Collective Impact Approach to Student Success: Western Cape Siyaphumelela Regional Network
Sithaldeen, R., Cupido, X., Nakhooda, M. and Booi, E.
Institutions to learn from one another, share expertise, and build on each other's strengths. In 2020, this intention was further emphasised by the establishment of regional Siyaphumelela networks. Although led by a designated institution responsible for convening and facilitating regional activities these networks aim to 'collectively understand, design, and implement integrated mechanisms that promote student success, while aligning with each institution's strategic goals'. In this session we will reflect on the collaborative engagement between three higher education institutions in the Western Cape. Using the Collective Impact Framework as proposed by Kania and Kramer (2011), as a lens, we will describe our efforts in building the five key elements of collective impact. These elements include:
- Establishing a common agenda despite differing institutional contexts
- Developing a shared toolkit to understand and measure student success
- Maintaining continuous, productive, and effective communication
- Designing mutually reinforcing activities
- Ensuring the quality of the support backbone

While this session is based on an inter-institutional collaboration, the principles for building towards collective impact can be applied at any scale. In this session participants will be invited to engage with the five elements through a Framework Mapping Exercise. Participants will provide examples of challenges that would benefit from collective impact. They will be divided into groups to brainstorm and map out:
- What the elements look like in practice
- Potential challenges to implementing this element
- Success indicators for this element

Groups will create visual representations using sticky notes, drawings, or mind maps. Each group then presents their visual explaining how they might apply the framework to their case. The team will also present their work to date on the co-creation of a toolkit for collaborative engagement on student success.

Siyaphumelela Supplemental Instruction (SI) Network Collaboration and Reflection
Smith, L. and Ribane, M.
Supplemental Instruction (SI) is a non-remedial support strategy designed to promote student academic success through regularl scheduled, voluntary group study sessions held outside class. These sessions are driven by students' learning needs and focus on fostering deep engagement with course content. SI Sessions are facilitated by trained peer leaders who use collaborative learning techniques and activities to encourage active peer-to-peer interaction in small group settings. The programme is is implemented in high-risk courses- identified based on factors such as high g=failure or withdrawal rates - in consultation with academic staff. Ongoing support and quality assurance are provided by trained SI coordinators. Nelson Mandela University (NMU) hosts the SI National Office for SA and have implemented SI as an institutional student success initiative from 1993 to present. The programme was selected not only for the academic success potential but also the non-remedial, student-driven nature of the programme that aligned with the university's transformation agenda in 1993. Data will be shared on the scaling of SI at NMU over the past 31 years and an experienced NMU SI Leader will share her perception on the contribution the programme has made to her student success and graduate attributes in collaboration with other Siyaphumelela initiatives. During Siyaphumelela 2.0 the SI National Office offered one SI Supervisor Training workshop per year to the network. In Siyaphumelela 3.0 the offering was formalised in the MoA and scaled to include SI Advanced Supervisor Training. The presentation will reflect on SI offerings to the Siyaphumelela network, attendance and feedback data, and lessons learnt during Siyaphumelela SI workshops.

Engagement as Evidence: Informing Institutional Quality and Employability
Strydom, F. and Mabika, B.
Engaging students in higher education learning and campus community is a critical challenge facing universities in a post-COVID technology disrupted world. Student engagement data offers a powerful lens to understand how institutional practices shape learning, development, and graduate readiness. Drawing on national SASSE data collected pre- and post-COVID, this presentation explores how student voice can inform responses to two key priorities in South African higher education: enhancing quality and improving employability. Post-COVID trends reveal increased academic challenge and deeper reflective learning, particularly in blended environments. Yet these gains are undermined by declining student–staff interaction and inequities in access to high-impact practices like work-integrated learning. These mixed patterns highlight both progress and gaps needing attention. The presentation links student engagement insights to national frameworks such as the QAF and HEPS, and showcases how the data has been applied in curriculum review, graduate attribute tracking, and improved student support. Combining national trends, institutional case examples, and student reflections, the session invites delegates to consider how they can use engagement data more intentionally in quality and employability strategies. It ultimately argues that listening to students—through structured data and open-ended feedback—is vital to building responsive, inclusive, and future-ready institutions.

Bridging the Gender Gap: Academic Success and Employability in Higher Education
Strydom, J.F., Meintjes, A. and Duncan, N.
This session forms part of an emerging Siyaphumelela workstream focused on understanding and addressing gender disparities in student success and graduate employability. It builds on a think tank discussion held in December 2024 and introduces a two-stream approach: one stream exploring gender differences in higher education academic performance, and the other examining disparities in employment outcomes after graduation. Facilitated by individuals from multiple institutions involved in this collaborative work, the session will begin with a brief recap of discussions to date, highlighting key trends and the rationale behind the two-stream structure. Delegates will then be invited to contribute their input on this approach. This will be followed by a summary of a literature review outlining international trends in interventions designed to address gender disparities in higher education. A reflective discussion will create space for participants to consider how these intervention strategies could be contextualised within their own institutions. The session will conclude with a facilitated group discussion focused on generating ideas for collaborative research focus areas moving forward. Delegates will leave the session with a clearer understanding of the two-stream structure, insights into global intervention trends, and an opportunity to shape a collaborative research agenda. Student delegates are encouraged to participate and share their perspectives on gender-related challenges in higher education. By exploring both academic and employment-related gender disparities, this session aims to support efforts to eliminate gender-based equity gaps. Participants will be actively engaged through structured reflections, peer learning, and the co-creation of research priorities.

Enhancing Student Support through Data-Driven Insights: VUT's Implementation of Anthology Illuminate
Tabane, M. and Rabapane, M.M.
"The Vaal University of Technology (VUT) has implemented Anthology Illuminate as part of its digital transformation strategy to improve student support and institutional planning. Aligned with the theme Student Support and the sub-theme Promising Practice Sharing, this initiative empowers the university to make real-time, evidence-based decisions to identify and assist at-risk students and improve overall progression rates. Anthology Illuminate is fully integrated with VUT's Student Information System and Learning Management System (Blackboard). Hosted in a secure cloud environment, the system provides scalable, POPIA-compliant access to academic analytics, custom dashboards, and cohort tracking tools. Role-based access ensures data integrity and targeted use by academic and support staff. The shift to Illuminate was driven by the need for dynamic, predictive insights into student engagement and academic performance. The platform now enables benchmarking at institutional, faculty, and programme levels—facilitating early interventions, improved student tracking, and more strategic curriculum design. This presentation will outline the technical setup, challenges faced, and initial benefits observed. It will also highlight how Illuminate supports ongoing programme review and contributes to a more responsive, student-centred learning environment at VUT. "

Co-creating With Students to Write a First-Year Guide
Taylor, D. and Gumbi, B.
In order to create content for our first-year guide, we ran writing workshops with students, ranging from first-year to postgraduate students. The student work was included in various ways, including snippets in the margins, 'my story' pieces, lists of advice and ideas in the main text. In addition, three of the editors were students. The guide has been used since 2024 in our first-year mentoring programme, where a postgraduate student meets weekly with a group of first-year students. In 2025, we developed chapter worksheets and 'game plans' to provide mentors with resources for running their mentor sessions. In this presentation, the lead editor (Dale) and one of the student creators (Blessing) will dialogue about the co-creation process. Blessing (a Siyaphumelela scholar for 2025) participated in the writing workshops from his second year onwards. In parallel, of his own initiative, he started creating vodcasts in which he interviewed science faculty and students. He is now bringing these two experiences together to create vodcasts and podcasts about the student guide. The guide includes chapters on culture shock, discrimination, decolonisation and neurodiversity, along with chapters on time management, study skills, metacognition and well-being. It is open access, with a Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) 4.0 International licence. The chapters are available at: https://zivahub.uct.ac.za/projects/ Science_is_Tough_But_So_Are_You_/198274.

The Impact of First-Year Student Orientation Programmes on Student Performance: An Investigation on Student Success
Thamsanqa, H.
This study investigates the impact of first-year orientation programmes on first year students' academic performance and overall academic success in a health sciences institution. First-year orientation programmes are intended to facilitate the transition from high school into the university life. By employing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis (based on academic performance, results/marks from the first trimester) with qualitative insights from student surveys, this research intends to check how orientation programmes impact students' academic performance. The findings shows a positive relationship between participation in orientation programmes and higher academic achievement, and improved student satisfaction. These results underscore the importance of structured orientation initiatives as a strategic component of institutional efforts to promote student success during the critical first year.

Supplementing the Curriculum: The Impact of Structured Co-Curricular Programmes on Academic Achievement in Living and Learning Communities
Twala, R. and Khumalo, M.
Notions and discussions around student success have expanded beyond student throughput rates to encompass a holistic approach—one that considers the full student life cycle, from access to success. This holistic student support approach includes not only relevant student support services but also the shaping of teaching and learning contexts, and the active engagement of students in transforming the university experience. However, very little attention has been given to understanding how student development programmes enable students to access powerful knowledges. These student support and development programmes are often decontextualised, lacking explicit and structured connections to disciplinary knowledge that students must engage with in their coursework. As a result, students may struggle to understand to enact the disciplinary knowledge and practices required for success in their fields of study. Too often, such initiatives are designed to be generic and reactive, rather than developmental and strategically aligned with epistemic demands. Furthermore, student development initiatives rarely encourage students to develop agency or provide students with the conceptual tools needed to identify and engage with what is considered legitimate or valued knowledge in academic spaces. This paper presents evidence-based practices from Living and Learning Communities that demonstrate measurable impacts on student academic performance. It argues for the recognition of a distinct epistemology of student development—one that positions these initiatives as socially embedded, disciplinary knowledge-informed practices that contribute to the cumulative transformation of the student experience.

Reconceptualising Module Importance: A Data-driven, Collaborative Framework for Identifying High-Priority Modules
Van der Merwe, T. and Posthumus, R.
Traditional approaches to identifying 'high-risk' modules in higher education often rely on binary indicators of student success rates, potentially overlooking the nuanced interplay of factors that truly hinder student progression. This paper details the reconceptualisation of 'high-risk' to 'high-priority' modules at the University of Free State (UFS). We present the theoretical underpinnings and the iterative, consultative process undertaken to develop a novel institutional framework for identifying these critical modules. This involved a multi-stage data analysis and a series of consultations across seven faculties to move beyond simplistic risk assessment. Our redefined approach distinguishes between risk factors (impediments to student success) and impact factors (such as enrolment numbers and reach) of 2779 modules, culminating in a 'high-priority' designation for 129 modules exhibiting high levels of both. This paper outlines the specific analytical methodologies employed, offering a replicable model for other institutions. We detail the data considered for the modules and illustrate the refinement process that led to our final 'recipe' for module identification. Crucially, the shift from 'risk' to 'priority' necessitates a collaborative approach. This ensures institutional buy-in and fosters long-term sustainability for interventions aimed at enhancing student success. The findings underscore that a data-informed, yet contextually sensitive and participatory process is critical in similar projects.

Collaborative Staff Development for Student Success in Online Learning: Making Use of the Community of Inquiry Framework
Van Rooyen, C., Vilakati, N. and Naidoo, K.
Against the background of the launch of UJ Digital, the Online Learning Experience Design Co-LAB was developed in response to academic staff having to design engaging online learning experiences. Grounded in the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, the Co-LAB offered a collaborative and structured setting of professional staff development for student success. We wanted an evidence-informed hands-on space in which we could model how the cognitive, social and teaching presences of COI can inform the design of engaging online learning. Over 11 weeks, 54 academics from 8 faculties participated in online weekly Huddles, an online Co-LAB site (on Moodle), and hands-on workshops. We collected data from weekly and post-Co-LAB survey feedback, LMS analytics, facilitator reflections and initial quality checks of the courses designed as part of the Co-LAB. This data suggests the emergence of varying levels of improvements in academic confidence to design engaging online learning experiences, a deeper awareness of student-centred approaches, and of online community-building strategies. A full quality assurance process of the designed courses is currently underway. Data from this, and student success in and student feedback on the online courses once they have run, will help us determine the effectiveness of the Co-LAB. If proven successful, we will offer the Co-LAB twice annually to all University of Johannesburg (UJ) academics and will consider offering it as a UJ-certified Short Learning Programme.

Reality Check: Introducing Virtual Reality into Higher Education Health Care Sciences to Improve Student Learning
Venter, E. and Hambrock, H.
The integration of virtual technologies in Health Professions Education (HPE) is growing, yet effective implementation remains challenging without adherence to best practices. This study explores baseline confidence, training needs, and best practices related to virtual technology use among academics at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU). A mixed methods research approach will be used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data will be gathered through surveys administered to lecturers, while qualitative data will be obtained through a literature review on best practices for teaching and learning with virtual reality (VR) devices. The study will involve second-year students, with approximately 20 students per class and a total sample of up to 100 participants. Based on the research findings, two blended learning courses—one for lecturers and one for students—will be developed to support the effective use of VR devices in teaching and learning environments. All lecturers at SMU are invited to participate in the study. A follow-up research study will be conducted in which students will be asked about their experience of the training sessions and the use of the VR devices. A post survey with will also be conducted with staff. Findings, to date, indicate lecturers have minimal prior experience with virtual reality, highlighting the need for targeted training and support. The blended learning course aims to equip lecturers with the skills and tools to effectively integrate virtual technologies into higher education.

AI in Higher Education: Rethinking Student Success
Verhoef, A., Fourie-Jardim, M. and Adendorff, H.
This multi-institutional discussion will be specifically aimed at the impact of AI on student success in the teaching and learning domain. Drawing on experiences from three South African Universities, we will reflect on both the challenges and opportunities that AI present in our context. Following an imbizo style discussion, we will highlight key concerns before turning to the affordance of AI for enhanced learning and student success. Some of the most prevalent concerns include over-reliance and dependence on AI, delegating cognitive tasks to AI, academic misconduct, compromising critical thought processes and core literacy competencies, and the lack of understanding, discernment and creativity in the application of AI. On the other hand, integrating AI into education offers several compelling possibilities, including the use of generative AI and tutor bots to enhance learning and comprehension, support problem-solving, assist in the creation and refinement of educational content, aid academic writing, facilitate brainstorming, generate summaries, and conduct literature reviews. The central question is how to navigate AI's risks and affordances in an informed and strategic manner, avoiding both uncritical embrace and reactionary rejection. We will share our experiences — ranging from grappling with academic integrity challenges posed by AI (North-West University), to integrating AI into assessment practices (Stellenbosch University), to developing a more holistic, values-driven approach (University of the Western Cape). Through these practical examples from our contexts, and by listening to some student voices, we will reflect on how we've learned from one another and invite participants to contribute their own insights on how other institutions are responding to AI's evolving role in higher education.

Western Cape Regional Network Collaboration on Student Success
Western Cape Siyaphumelela Regional Network
The Siyaphumelela Western Cape Regional Network hosted a series of collaborative workshops focused on advancing student success. The workshops explored four key themes: defining student success, measuring student success, factors affecting student success, and supporting students along their journey to student success. Staff and students from CPUT, UWC and UCT participated in these workshops to share their lived experiences and institutional perspectives. Student success is a multifaceted concept that begins with understanding who our students are and the challenges that they face. Foundational needs must be met—drawing on Maslow's hierarchy—before students can achieve academic and personal growth, as described by Bloom's taxonomy. Rather than being seen as a fixed endpoint, student success should be understood as an ongoing, transformative journey. Student success metrics should go beyond conventional KPIs to include student agency, well-being, and employability. Institutions need to create enabling environments where all students have the opportunity to succeed. This series of posters will illustrate the key insights and recommendations that emerged from these collaborative workshops, offering a visual summary of the collaborative efforts on student success in the Western Cape.

The Role of the Student Representative Council (SRC) in Integrating Student Services and Academic Support to Enhance Durban University of Technology Students

Ximba, S. and Nkosi, S.

This study examines the role of the Student Representative Council (SRC) in integrating student services and academic support to enhance student success at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), where low pass rates remain a concern. Student engagement platforms, including the Student Success Summit, have revealed that many DUT students come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. A large number are also first-generation university students who face challenges such as academic pressure, limited access to resources, lack of awareness of support systems, and difficulties adapting to digital tools required for academic activities. Using a mixed-method approach, this research investigates how the SRC acts as a bridge between students and the university. It focuses on key SRC-led initiatives such as the SRC Grant, the Phakimpilo food security programme, support for the Disability Rights Unit, and the allocation of Motsepe Foundation donations and SRC budget to student support and debt relief efforts. Preliminary findings suggest that active SRC involvement contributes to a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This promotes student engagement, improves academic performance, and enhances student well-being. The study concludes that a committed and well-supported SRC plays a vital role in increasing pass rates, improving retention, and advancing student success at DUT.

Reimagining Student Success and Expanding Opportunity for All Through the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC)

Zikalala-Mabope, L.A., Mosiane, T., Poka, M.S. and Mncwangi, N.P.

Interprofessional collaboration is essential in healthcare; however, traditional academic structures often restrict opportunities for shared learning across disciplines. The Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC) framework promotes team-based learning, mutual understanding, and equity among healthcare professionals.. This study explores the perceptions of interprofessional learning, the goals of multidisciplinary team-based health care and knowledge of different healthcare professions among fourth-year pharmacy and medical students at a South African university. A quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional study using a Likert-scale online survey was conducted. Data were analysed using ANOVA. Results: Respondents 201 (75.28% response rate), 76.61% agreed that multidisciplinary teamwork benefits patients. All pharmacy students supported shared learning, while 2.54% and 5.73% of medical students disagreed or strongly disagreed, respectively. These differences point to varying understandings of professional roles and the value of collaboration. Findings highlight the need to integrate IPEC principles into curricula to enhance collaboration, mutual respect, and equity. Interprofessional Education not only improves team readiness but also promotes inclusion and success for all students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds.

A Problem-Based Learning Initiative to Strengthen Mathematics Preservice Teachers' Professional Development: Bridging the Gap in Content Knowledge

Zulu, S., Xaba, A. and Dlamini, V.

This project strengthens the professional development of mathematics preservice teachers (PSTs) through a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) initiative grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. A collaboration between the Durban University of Technology's School of Education and the uMgungundlovu District, the project addresses limitations of traditional Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) by immersing PSTs in classroom environments throughout the academic year. PSTs work in groups and are placed in partner schools where they identify key mathematical difficulties and learner misconceptions. Each group rotates teaching responsibilities, allowing members to take turns in leading lessons while others observe and support. This structure fosters peer learning and collective reflection within real teaching contexts. The PSTs work with their university lecturer to design and plan innovative teaching interventions. These strategies are implemented in schools, after which PSTs engage in guided reflection sessions to critically analyse their teaching experiences, assess the effectiveness of their interventions, and refine their pedagogical approaches. The project has helped PSTs bridge gaps in content knowledge, enhancing their confidence and preparedness for the demands of the teaching profession. The PSTs highlighted the need to extend this model across all teaching majors, emphasising its effectiveness in promoting context-driven learning and reflective practice.

About Siyaphumelela

The *Siyaphumelela ("We Succeed") Initiative* seeks to broaden evidence-based strategies for post secondary student success in South Africa. Launched in 2014 with funding from the *Kresge Foundation*, the initiative is led by *Saide* and draws on insights from global student success innovators like the *University Innovation Alliance* and *Achieving the Dream*.

In 2019, with additional funding support from the *Kresge Foundation*, *Saide* launched *Siyaphumelela Network 2.0*. By 2022, 17 South African public higher education institutions had joined the network. The current phase, *Siyaphumelela Network 3.0*, was launched in June 2024. A total of 20 institutions were admitted as members of the network, representing 20 out of 26 public universities in South Africa. These 20 institutions receive grant funding from the *Kresge Foundation* to accelerate and embed their student success efforts.

About Saide

Established in 1992, *Saide* is an education support organisation founded on social justice and open learning principles. We believe that education is the foundation for lifelong success. As such, we are on a mission to unlock the power of education and expand opportunity for children, youth and adults across Africa.

Innovating data-informed solutions and leveraging technology, *Saide* supports education providers across diverse modes of provision (in-person, remote and hybrid), partnering with governments, public and private institutions, as well as civil society organisations. We work across the education system from early learning through primary and secondary schooling, to higher education and training.
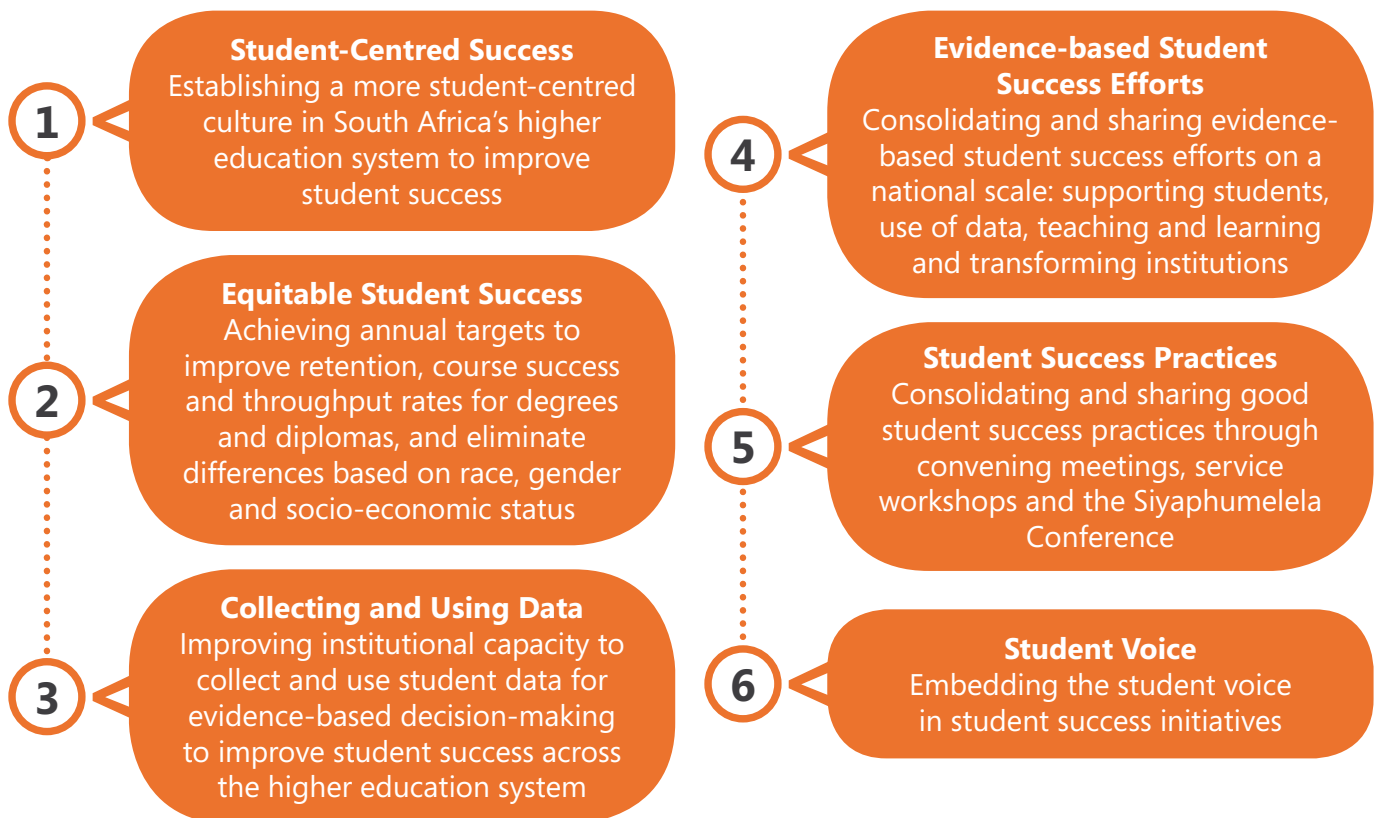
What we do

We transform institutions

The design and development of *Siyaphumelela 3.0* builds on the solid foundation of *Siyaphumelela 1.0* and 2.0 incorporating insights gained from an analysis of partner reports and lessons learned.

As we transition into *Siyaphumelela 3.0*, our commitment remains focused on fostering enhancing student success and, in particular, on actively involving executive leadership from newer institutions in the network, ensuring their full support for the Siyaphumelela initiative within their respective institutions. Two further focus areas include the need to strengthen learning and teaching efforts and concerns about graduate employability.

Additionally, the *Siyaphumelela Network 3.0* aims to further develop and enhance the objectives established in the first two phases of the *Siyaphumelela Initiative*. These objectives focus on collaborative efforts to promote equity in South African higher education by:

1 **Student-Centred Success**
Establishing a more student-centred culture in South Africa's higher education system to improve student success

2 **Equitable Student Success**
Achieving annual targets to improve retention, course success and throughput rates for degrees and diplomas, and eliminate differences based on race, gender and socio-economic status

3 **Collecting and Using Data**
Improving institutional capacity to collect and use student data for evidence-based decision-making to improve student success across the higher education system

4 **Evidence-based Student Success Efforts**
Consolidating and sharing evidence-based student success efforts on a national scale: supporting students, use of data, teaching and learning and transforming institutions

5 **Student Success Practices**
Consolidating and sharing good student success practices through convening meetings, service workshops and the Siyaphumelela Conference

6 **Student Voice**
Embedding the student voice in student success initiatives

Siyaphumelela Network 3.0 **Objectives**

Impact

Impact through collaboration

20 out of 26 Public Higher Education Institutions

80% of Students in Public Higher Education reached

Over 1000 University Staff trained through capacity building courses and workshops in Siyaphumelela 2.0

Main Hotel Entrance

William Nicol Drive

Chiefs Boma

Mowana Spa

Room 811 - 821
822 - 829
Lecture 15 - 16
Lethabo
Ndaba Palace
Injabulo
Room 801 - 810
830

Auditorium
Lecture 2 - 5
Lecture 9 - 14
Kgotla
Bishops Court
Lecture 6 - 8
Tasting Room

Room 710 - 718
Room 701 - 709
201 - 206
207 - 215

Executive Boardroom
Reception
Ingidini
Epsom
301 - 302
303 - 310
102 - 110

Kgotla Dam

401 - 409
436 - 439
419 - 435
Rooms 410 - 418

Rooms 900 - 925
Rooms 926 - 951
Rooms 952 - 969
Rooms 970 - 987

Side Entrance
STAFF ONLY

Pieter Wenning Street

N
W   E
S

Witkoppen Ext.

Gin School
Hair Salon
Fitness Centre
505 - 510
Rooms 511 - 530
Rooms 531 - 550
501 - 504

1st Block
2nd Block
3rd Block
4th Block
5th Block
7th Block
8th Block
9th Block
Other Facilities

Funders

THE
KRESGE
FOUNDATION

Implementing Partners

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

SOL PLAATJE UNIVERSITY

Stellenbosch UNIVERSITY IYUNIVESITHI UNIVERSITEIT

University of Cape Town

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 UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA UFS UV

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

University of Venda Creating Future Leaders

VAAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY Inspiring thought. Shaping talent

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Contact

Contact **info@siyaphumelela.org.za** or visit

www.siyaphumelela.org.za to find out more.

Siyaphumelela Conference 2025
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