



**Nelson Mandela
Metropolitan
University**

for tomorrow

Keys to Success

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(NMMU)
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What is 'Keys to Success'?

Keys to Success consists of a series of developmental workshops, offered to students on a voluntary basis, or packaged as part of a personalised management plan informed by an assessment conducted by Student Counselling. *Keys* is the operationalisation of *Roadmap to Success*¹ culminating in the development of a student's Portfolio.

Most importantly, *Keys* also forms a central part of an ongoing orientation programme for first-year students. *Keys* aligns itself with the NMMU vision of the transformation and development of our communities by offering interventions which provide support for all students.

The experiential learning approach underpins the *Keys* workshops.

Background

Concerns over student retention rates continue to dominate Higher Education debates. Orientation programmes are vital institutional strategies that underpin retention initiatives. However, research has shown that the influence of the initial orientation period on student retention is minimal, but that once extended, significant increases in retention have been reported. Several studies (amongst others, Mullendore & Banahan 2005, and Pascarella & Terenzini 1991) show evidence that positively links extended first-year orientation programmes with first year persistence and ultimately with degree completion.

The NMMU attracts a diverse student population, comprising mainly students from disadvantaged backgrounds, whose needs are mainly financial, and academic, social and cultural adjustment. These needs necessitate pedagogical interventions from university support programmes.

The South African Department of Education has stipulated that the NMMU has to grow its success rates by 7% by 2010. *Keys to Success* is a

¹ *Roadmap to Success* : the concept is explained in K. Ramasamy's proposal for poster presentation.

university-wide retention strategy to address the challenge of improving student success rates.

Statistics from the Student Counselling *Ukubamba*² Data Base informed the selection of topics for *Keys* workshops.

Evaluation

Methodology

Aim: To explore and describe participant perceptions of the *Keys* workshops.

Research Design: Triangulatory, using both quantitative and qualitative self-report data.

Assessment instrument: A one-page Group Sessions Evaluation Form. The broad categories covered are: programme content and presentation, areas of most benefit and areas needing improvement.

Target population: Students who attended *Keys* workshops during 2007 (N = 1 725).

Pilot sample: Students who attended the Wellness and the Learning Skills Development (LSD) workshops (N=147).

Sample description

A diverse sample of NMMU students participated in this study, indicating the following demographic profile:

- fairly equivalent numbers of female and male students (48% and 52% respectively)
- fairly equivalent numbers of senior and first-year students (47% and 49% respectively, the rest being made up of part-time students)
- the largest group of students were Black (40%), followed by Coloured (17%), White (16%), Indian 0,8%), with the rest made up of other (27%)

² *Ukubamba*: Xhosa word meaning ‘to capture’

- The largest number of students were from the Faculties of Engineering and Business and Economic Sciences (33% each), followed by Arts (24%), Health Science (6%), Education, Science and Law (1% each)

Results

Content and presentation:

The majority of the participants felt that:

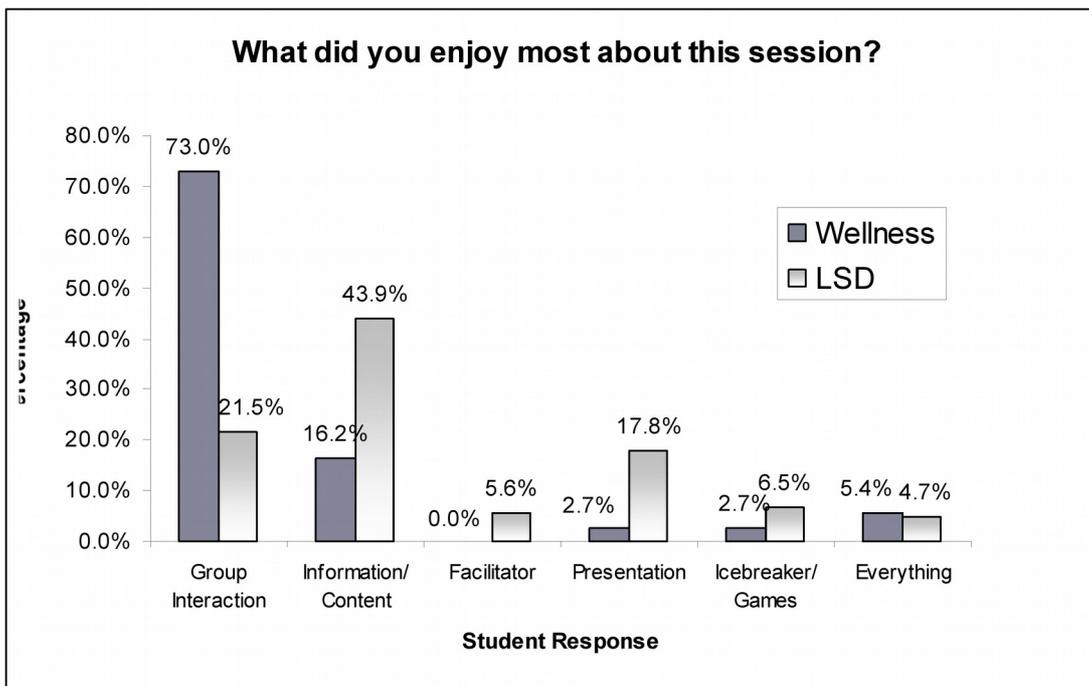
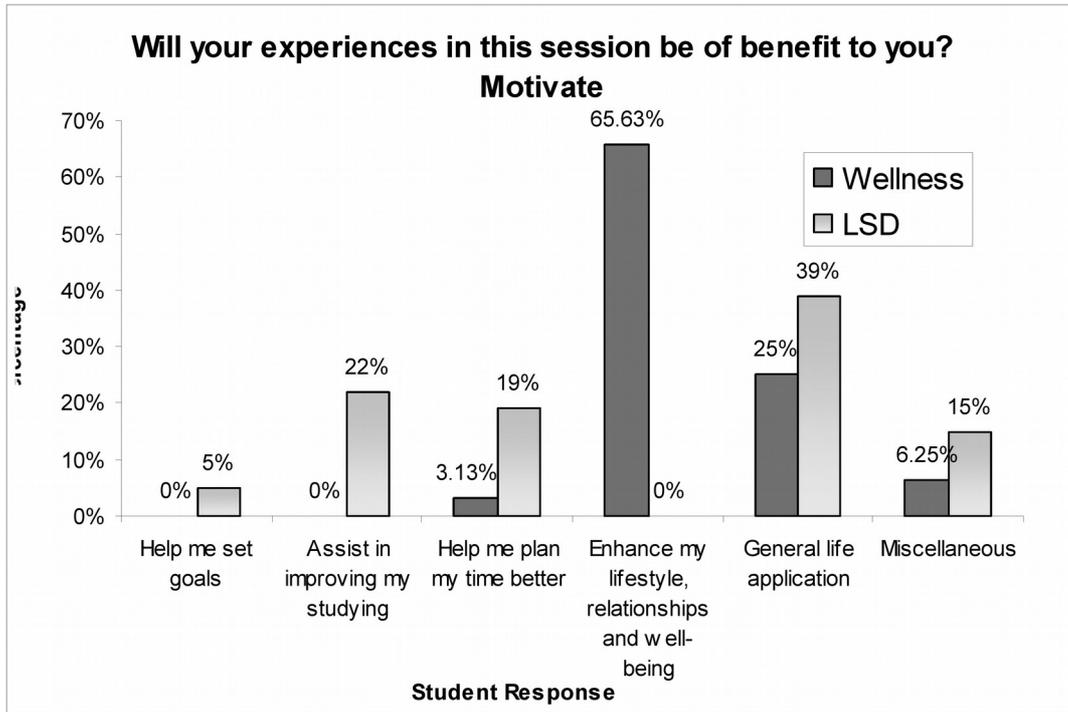
- the objectives of the workshops were met (Wellness - 95%, LSD -95%)
- the information was relevant (Wellness - 97%, LSD - 93%)
- the facilitator was well prepared (Wellness - 95%, LSD - 98%)
- the presentation was effective in both the long and short term (Wellness - 97%, LSD - 95%)
- the level of the workshop was 'just right' (Wellness - 92%, LSD - 90%)

Benefits:

The majority of the participants felt that:

- the workshop had stimulated their thinking (Wellness - 92%, LSD - 88%)
- they had benefited from the workshop (Wellness - 91%, LSD - 80%)

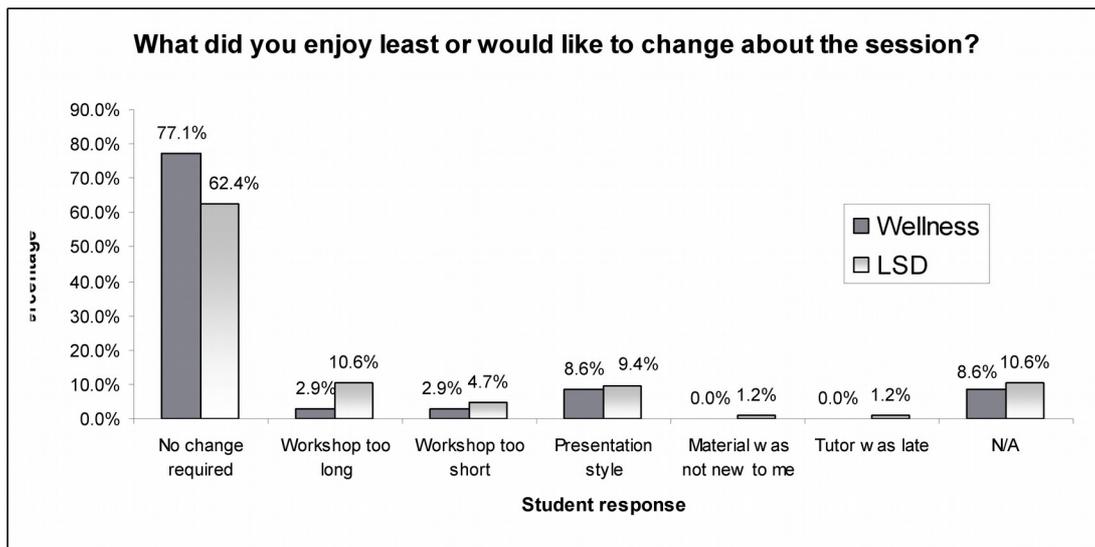
Moreover, other positive benefits are revealed by the following bar graphs, which represent the open-ended spontaneous responses by the participants immediately after each session:



Developmental Opportunities:

The majority of participants felt that all areas pertaining to the topic were covered (Wellness - 89%, LSD - 99%).

Similarly, the open-ended spontaneous response of participants immediately after each session, indicate that no changes to the workshops are required. See bar graph below:



Conclusion

The results indicate that NMMU students are benefiting from the *Keys* programme in a holistic way. This provides motivation for the continuation of the programme.

Recommendations

To improve the impact of the *Keys* programme, it is recommended that it be made compulsory for first-year students as ongoing Orientation. The first prize would be the introduction of the workshops as part of the Faculty academic timetable. In addition, the formal introduction of an individualised Portfolio would encourage students to develop themselves beyond the classroom – *Keys* offers them an important opportunity to do so.

References:

Mullendore, R. H., & Banahan, L. A. (2005). Designing orientation programs as found in *Challenging and supporting the first-year student* by Upcraft, M. L., Gardner, J. N., and Barefoot, B. O. National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Student in Transition (2005). Retrieved October 21, 2005 from <http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/surveyfinding/surveys/survey03.html>.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.