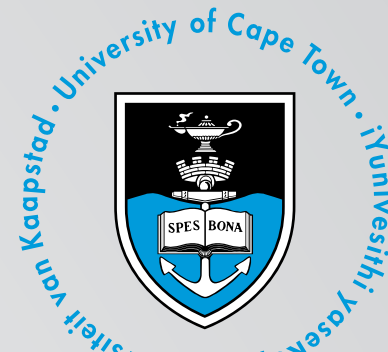


Adjustment issues for first year students in a diverse, multi-professional Health Sciences Faculty

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Introduction

Research highlights significance of FYE at SA HE Institutions, as SA HE has low participation and high attrition¹.

FY success vital in the context of scarcity of skills.

Background for FYE Study

Faculty has introduced radical curricular changes in all U/G programmes.

Biggest impact is on the first year cohort, mostly school leavers.

2009: first cohort of students from revised outcomes based school curriculum entered university.

Questions:

- ☞ preparedness of this group for university life
- ☞ suitability of the measures put in place by Faculty to ensure a good quality FYE

Forms part of overall effort to:

- ☞ Improve quality of student learning
- ☞ Improve general student experience
- ☞ Create an enabling institutional environment
- ☞ Improve student retention
- ☞ Improve the quality and profile of graduates

Objectives of study

- ☞ to document the current experience of first year students
- ☞ to identify aspects that require improvement
- ☞ to suggest ways of improving the FYE

Methodology

Ethical approval received

Data gathered via online questionnaire: quantitative and qualitative

Sample – all 1st Year students in the Faculty: medical, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language pathology and audiology programmes.

Administered during 2nd semester

Data included:

1. Demographics

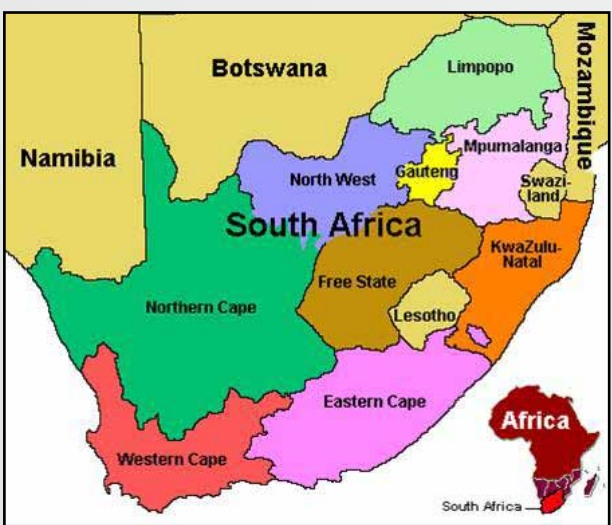
2. Quality of experience, degree of satisfaction, and perceptions of institutional support wrt:

1. adjustment to university environment
2. social adjustment
3. academic adjustment
4. personal growth and development

Results: 1. Demographics

Response rate: 56% (188/337)

- ☞ School leavers 78%
- ☞ Home setting - area:
 - ☛ Urban 83%
 - ☛ Rural 17%



Home setting - type:

- ☛ Suburb 76%
- ☛ Township 12%
- ☛ Village 7%
- ☛ Farm 3%

Language: English First language 62%

Estimated monthly income for family 51% < R20 000 (£1 800)

Fees covered by Family 63%, Scholarships 31%, Loans 23%

Parents' education:

- ☞ Tertiary – 66%
- ☞ Secondary – 29%
- ☞ Primary – 4%

School resourcing:

- ☞ Well-resourced 63%
- ☞ Adequately resourced 25%
- ☞ Poorly-resourced 12%

Living in: UCT residences 46%, Home 29%, Digs 12%

Appropriate accommodation 78%

Easy to travel to Campus each day 78%

Difficult incident that affected academic performance 52%

Results: 2. Adjustment

University / faculty environment:

- ☞ Adjusting well: 95% agree
- ☞ Prefer another academic programme: 15% agree

Use of infrastructural support:

- ☞ Course convenors re: administration 49%
- ☞ Faculty Undergraduate Office re: administration 46%
- ☞ U/G Funding Office re: financial support 37%
- ☞ Satisfied with UCT's efforts to provide safe environment on campus 77%

Availability of social support

- ☞ Satisfied with extracurricular activities at university: 94% agree
- ☞ Satisfied with variety of student societies at university: 97% agree
- ☞ Good friends at university: 95% agree
- ☞ Satisfied with social life at university: 87% agree

"The workload is a lot and there is not much time for going out and socialising."

"There are many opportunities to socialise; UCT is renowned for offering a complete student experience."

Personal growth & development

- ☞ Pleased with decision to attend UCT: 95% agree
- ☞ Thinking about dropping out of university: 8% agree
- ☞ Learning to take responsibility has not been easy: 49% agree
- ☞ Homesickness causing difficulty: 35% agree
- ☞ Having difficulty coping with stresses: 34% agree
- ☞ Will deal with what the future holds at university: 92% agree

Use of non-academic support

- ☞ Academic staff 22%
- ☞ Faculty Undergraduate Office 18%
- ☞ Student/ Peer Mentor 23%
- ☞ Student Wellness Centre 13%
- ☞ Staff & student officials in residence 12%

"The wellness center is extremely difficult to access when you are healthy let alone when you are feeling ill!"

Adjustment to academic demands

- ☞ Keeping up to date with work: 87% agree
- ☞ Volume of work is manageable: 79% agree
- ☞ Difficulty of course content is manageable: 88% agree
- ☞ Satisfied with academic performance: 50% agree [MBChB 38%; H&RSc 63%]
- ☞ Not working as hard as they should: 42% agree
- ☞ Not doing well enough for amount of work put in: 34% agree
- ☞ Manage study time well: 46% agree
- ☞ Enjoying academic work: 88% agree

Academic support available

- ☞ Satisfied with quality of lecturers: 91% agree
- ☞ Satisfied with quality of courses: 98% agree
- ☞ Approached instructors outside of classes 43%

"Yes, tutors and lecturers are incredibly helpful, especially one-on-one!"

- ☞ Approached fellow students 77%

Discussion

Summary

- ☞ University environment & social adjustment is fine for most students
- ☞ Significant proportion find adjusting to level of independence required at university challenging (personal growth & development)
- ☞ Significant proportion find adjusting to the academic demands at university challenging

Current UCT Support

- ☞ Orientation Programme includes academic orientation
- ☞ Mentor Programme throughout the year
- ☞ Monitoring student progress via Test Boards with follow up for struggling students (Early Warning System)
- ☞ Dedicated Student Support Office in the Faculty
- ☞ Individual support for students with non-academic problems, including applications for funding & accommodation
- ☞ UCT Student Wellness Services – clinical psychologist available on FHS Campus
- ☞ Safety Improvement District established
- ☞ FYE task team formed

Way Forward:

- ☞ More financial support for school-leavers and mature students
- ☞ Address problems with accommodation

References

1. Scott I. First-Year Experience as Terrain of Failure or Platform for Development? Critical Choices for Higher Education. In: Leibowitz B, van der Merwe A and van Schalkwyk S, editors. Focus on First-Year Success: Perspectives Emerging from South Africa and Beyond Stellenbosch: African SUN Media, 2009: 17-36.

Acknowledgements

URC Conference Travel Grant

