

## CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

### KEYNOTE: PETER DIETSCHKE

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#### SMALL STEPS TO A BIG IDEA: PERSONALIZING THE POSTSECONDARY EXPERIENCE

For nearly a century, educational philosophers and theorists from John Dewey to Alexander Astin and Terry O'Banion have highlighted the need for alternative ways of delivering postsecondary education. During the same time higher education underwent a transformation making the experience available to an increasingly diverse student population. By and large, however, a pedagogy of 'academic Darwinism' was dominant. At the turn of the century, an emphasis by government policy makers on outcomes measurement, performance indicators and accountability frameworks for higher education highlighted low graduation rates and high attrition in many institutions. These results, when combined with a renewed interest in human capital theory as a means of bolstering economic growth, energized research on policies, processes and structures within higher education to improve the postsecondary experience, promote learner engagement and, ultimately, student retention and persistence. During the past decade, theory, research and practice focused on maximizing learning and student retention have held a consistent message; institutions must engage their learners. However, the diversity that so profoundly characterizes today's postsecondary student population presents a challenge recognized by John Dewey in his 1938 book, *Experience and Education*. He argued that to effectively engage learners we must recognize and accommodate the different backgrounds, experiences, strengths and weaknesses of individual students. When faced with this prospect, higher education administrators typically argue the enormous cost of doing so within a context of limited financial resources makes such efforts impossible. This keynote will argue that, while there are only a few examples of institutions adopting a personalized approach to the delivery of the postsecondary experience, those that do exist suggest the need for another transformation of higher education. And it is one that is long overdue.

### KEYNOTE: IAN SCOTT

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#### FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE AS TERRAIN OF FAILURE OR PLATFORM FOR DEVELOPMENT? CRITICAL CHOICES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The traditional image of first year at a university is one of exciting intellectual and personal discoveries, independence in thought and behaviour, widening horizons and growth in confidence. This is close to reality for some students, but for many others – in fact, the majority in South Africa – the experience is marred by failure, loss of confidence, and perhaps disillusionment. This has far-reaching consequences for the individual, for the development of South Africa's talent, and thus for social, economic and political well-being. If this situation is avoidable, surely all reasonable efforts should be made to avoid it. The fact that improving the learning experience is persistently under-prioritised in the academic community arises primarily from a range of cultural and attitudinal factors but may be exacerbated by a lack of clear analysis of the choices confronting the sector, and their consequences. Such choices, whether they are explicit or implicit, have critical implications for the nature and outcomes of the learning experience, particularly the first-year experience, of the great majority of South African students. Drawing particularly on some recent South African and American research, this presentation will: (a) outline the significance of first-year performance for the individual, for the higher education sector and for development; (b) discuss the special role and purposes of first-year learning in the educational continuum; (c) assess aspects of current praxis against these purposes; and (d) consider some key choices that must be made if there is to be substantial positive change in the first-year experience of South Africa's increasingly diverse student intake.



PAPER

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PANEL DISCUSSION

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POSTER PRESENTATION

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**ADAMS, ANTHEA (CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY);  
DASSAH, MAURICE OSCAR**

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**THE READING FLUENCY, INTEREST IN, AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS READING OF FIRST-YEAR  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP STUDENTS AT CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

University students have to read a lot in order to do many of the tasks required of them in the course of their studies. As such, reading is of vital importance to their academic success. During departmental quality assurance review meetings at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and other forums, lecturers often cite lack of reading and reading difficulties as the main reason for students' poor academic performance. Yet lecturers often do not know the nature and extent of these problems. This classroom-based research assessed the reading fluency, interest in, and attitudes towards reading of 50 first-year students of Entrepreneurship at CPUT in order to devise appropriate intervention strategies to overcome reading problems. A qualitative approach was used, involving four instruments. First, to ascertain students' backgrounds that may have a bearing on their reading proficiency, biographical data were sought. Secondly, a reading rate test was administered to test students' fluency or their decoding accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. Thirdly, to test reading comprehension and to correlate the findings in the fluency test, a cloze test was given. Finally, to ascertain students' interest in, and attitude towards reading, a questionnaire on reading engagement was administered. Different reading rate and cloze tests were given in the pre- and post-tests stages. The dependent variables were reading fluency and comprehension, while the independent variables consisted of various intervention strategies to help students overcome reading problems. The findings indicate that although students read with a good degree of accuracy, their level of automaticity is considerably lower than expected. In other words, when measured against the target norms for first-year students whose home language is not English (the language of instruction) their overall reading rate is cause for concern given the correlation between reading rate and comprehension. The overall low scores for the cloze test suggested that students were unable to use connecting, synthesizing and inferencing skills to construct meaning. Inability to draw effectively on their metalinguistic and metacognitive knowledge implies that these students will experience difficulty understanding academic texts that require of them to make use of these higher-order thinking skills. The data also suggested a discrepancy between the availability of English reading material at home and the frequency with which students engage in leisure reading. Since the campus library is mainly visited for study purposes, intervention strategies focused on developing students' intrinsic motivation to read. Classroom based reading research of this nature is helpful in making decisions that inform the designing of appropriate instructional methods and intervention strategies.



**ADENDORFF, HANIELIE JANINI (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY);  
VERHOEVEN, PAUL**

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**BEYOND OUR GOOD INTENTIONS: A CASE STUDY ON ADDITIONAL SUPPORT TO  
MAINSTREAM CHEMISTRY STUDENTS IN A LARGE FIRST YEAR MODULE**

First year chemistry has a long history of being perceived as difficult. To complicate matters, students in some programmes can enrol for first year Chemistry at Stellenbosch University (SU) without having done any Physical Science at school level. In response, the Chemistry department at SU started offering lunch hour extra classes to support students who feel the need for extra help. A 2007 study to determine the perceived usefulness of these classes revealed that many students used it as an additional 'tutorial' session. The small group setting, slower pace and ability to revisit class work were mentioned amongst the positive aspects, while a tension between the need to focus on the basics – for those students without a Physical Science background – and the need to reinforce what was done in class was mentioned as a negative feature. Separate to these, the institutional tutor-mentor programme developed at the same time. In this programme groups of four to eight students are assigned to tutor-mentors. These tutor-mentors receive substantial training for the mentoring part of their function, but get little or no guidance for the content-based tutoring role and often have little or no contact with the lecturers in the modules they serve. Yet, discussions with tutor-mentors revealed that these sessions went mostly toward handling content related questions and issues. The 2007 study mentioned above highlighted a number of problems with these additional support programmes, such as (1) lack of coordination between the different options, (2) lack of alignment with the module, and (3) creating a false sense of security for students. It also found that student success was inversely proportional to attendance of additional support offerings. This paper reports on an attempt to coordinate these efforts. It describes the redesign of the tutor-mentor programme and lunch hour extra classes as well the newly introduced background knowledge lectures aimed at students with a lacking Physical Science background. It also notes the reasoning behind the changes as well as some of the dilemmas encountered and lessons learned during the process.



**BAGUS, KULSUM (UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE); FILIES, GERARD**

**“OH, SHOULD I PICK THAT UP?”: UNIVERSITY STUDENTS’ BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES TO LEARNING**

A study done to determine the academic performance of foundation year and mainstream students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) revealed a qualitative theme related to students attitudes to learning and class activities. This paper looks at two categories that emerged and creatively entitled as “Are you talking to me” and “Waar brand dit” (Where is the fire). These categories relate to the students behaviour and attitudes that seem to display a lack of interest and urgency connected to lectures and learning. The first category of “Are you talking to me” recount student behavioural examples of coming late to lectures, wanting to leave lectures early, not paying attention, not removing their bags, not opening their books, and playing with their cellphones. The second category “Waar brand dit” (where is the fire) recount behavioural examples of procrastination resulting in an image of no urgency. The qualitative data were extracted from the lecturers’ journals and a focus group with the two lecturers and the two academic literacy tutors involved in the teaching of the same class of students. As a means to unpack the above-mentioned student phenomenon, theoretical constructs and literature about students entering the university settings, developmental psychology and personality development and group and organizational dynamics were explored. This paper ultimately endeavors to provide an understanding of the student behavioural characteristics and attitudes and the reasons for these. Furthermore, recommendations for lecturers and academics will be presented.



**BASS, GREGORY HYLTON (DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY)**

**ARTICULATING THE GAP BETWEEN SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY**

At a time that South African Higher Education institutions are concerned about low throughput rates, the Dental Technology programme in the Department of Dental Sciences at the Durban University of Technology opted to take advantage of Department of Education funding to restructure its existing extended curriculum programme. This Extended First Year Programme (EFYP) has been in place in various forms since 1995. The idea of extending a first year curriculum is based on findings that show that a lack of learner success is partially due to the large gap between academic literacy practices of schools and those expected in universities. In Dental Technology, identified practices included that learners displayed difficulty in understanding a new and often foreign subject matter and nomenclature. Furthermore, they experience difficulty in communicating this newly acquired knowledge in acceptable academic style at the required academic level. The aim of the extended curriculum programme is to assist successful grade 12 learners to be inducted into university academic life and thus succeed academically. This paper reports on findings of a study undertaken for a Master in Education. The study found that the EFYP bridged the gap between the practices of school and those customary at a university. Analysis of semi-structured interviews with learners showed that the course was successful because of a combination of factors. It mediated learners’ acquisition of complex and new Dental Technology concepts while at the same time narrowing the articulation gap between the literacy practices of school and tertiary education. This paper will consider how the current EFYP structure allows for this success. In particular it will consider the need in a first year curriculum for discipline specific subjects which have an integrated focus on university practices such as academic and computer literacy. Academic literacy is integrated into general credit-bearing dental subjects and thus the practices learnt are applied in a specific dental context. When offered in this manner, the explicit foregrounding of academic literacy practices promotes the acquisition of analytical, reading and writing practices and conceptual understanding around real tasks in the specific discipline. Alongside a carefully designed core course structure developed over the last 12 years was the recognition of the need to address social as well as academic identity issues. The study showed that a correlation existed between academic success and how socially integrated and contented the learner was at university. The realisation of the need to address a learner’s social well-being and its contribution to success was achieved through a well defined mentorship programme that ran parallel with the academic programme. Findings of the study suggest that a similar integrated and holistic approach should be applied to all first year learners entering tertiary education.



**BITZER, ELI M (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY)**

#### **ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN THREE FIRST-YEAR GROUPS: A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE**

The academic and social integration of 'new' students in higher education settings seem crucial for study commitment, study success and preventing early student departure. Bean (1983) and Tinto (1993) have indicated that the level of integration into an institution and a learning programme has a major influence on both the commitment of students to their studies and the contribution towards study success. Jarvis, Holford & Griffin (1998) and Gibbs (1992) have also pointed to the relationship between integration and student motivation. There is, however, a complex relationship among personal, academic and social factors (Terenzini et al. 1994; 1996) that make any simplified explanation of student persistence and study success problematic. When Kember (1995:99) referred to integration as "...encompassing all facets of a course and all elements of contact between an institution and the student whether these are of an academic, administrative or social nature", a holistic view was obviously foregrounded. Similarly, integration theory has been used to predict student persistence (McGivney 1996; Milem & Berger 1997; Peelo & Wareham 2002), while Cabrera et al. (1992; 1993) have pointed to the important influence of external social factors such as family and peer encouragement. A contextualised framework was developed by Louw (2005) whereby student background factors (also see Bitzer & Troskie-De Bruin 2004), student-related and institution-related factors have been identified as major contributors to persistence potential in a South African higher education setting. This paper builds on the findings of Louw (2005) who has isolated 14 student-related and 13 institution-related factors - 19 of an academic and 8 of a social nature - that influenced students' first-year drop-out and persistence decisions. Using Louw's study as contextual framework, a survey was conducted amongst 579 first-year students in three faculties at Stellenbosch University in 2008. Three modules, Accounting I, Chemistry I and Educational Psychology I, were selected on the basis of the latter being a "non-risk" module (i.e. a module with relatively low student drop-out and failure rates) and the two others being of "higher risk". The survey questionnaire included 4 sets of factors, namely student-related academic (8), student-related social (5), institution-related academic (7) and institution-related social (1) factors. The questionnaire was implemented towards the end of the first quarter of the academic year during class time for all three modules. The paper compares the findings from the three-tiered survey for the three groups and discusses its implications for student integration and potential study success against the framework provided by Louw and others. It points to the potential value of such surveys for feedback in terms of potential study success, lecturers' teaching and support strategies as well as academic services' support roles.



**BROSCHK, HEIDI (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG)**

#### **LEARNING TO WRITE AND WRITING TO LEARN**

The Academic Development Division of the University of Johannesburg offers extended National Diplomas in the Engineering, Management and Humanities Faculties. These extended diploma programmes offer an alternate access path to Higher Education for students who do not meet the minimum entry requirements to enter directly into the diploma of their choice. Fundamental Research Practice is the language module offered in all extended programmes. This paper aims to establish whether a journal intervention is a useful tool to promote the language aptitude and skills of the first year extended diploma students, primarily those second language English speaking students, who are struggling with language. Every year the language lecturers in the extended national diplomas are extremely encouraged by the language abilities of the new intake of students. This is attributed to the fact that assessments in the first weeks are conducted orally. However, once the assessments progress to written skills, the inadequate language skills of these students become apparent. This impression changes once the first written assessments marks are compiled, as they contradict the optimistic evaluation made in the early weeks. Over the years, many interventions have been used to improve the ever-present problem of the poor writing skills of the extended national diploma students, for example, grammar exercises, vocabulary enhancement, sentence construction skills, etc. Although these suggestions have a valid place, they do not seem to offer a holistic solution to improving students' writing skills. A journal intervention, with precise and detailed instructions, was introduced into the Fundamental Research Practice module in 2008 to address the predicament of second-language English speakers. A comparative study will be conducted to establish whether the writing of the students exposed to the journal intervention after a semester has improved significantly in comparison to their initial writing before journal intervention commencement. This study will be done according to a set of criteria decided on by all Fundamental Research Practice lecturers. A further comparison will be conducted on the written work of students who were not exposed to the intervention as opposed to the students who did the journal intervention. This study attempts to reveal that by applying a strategy of continuous writing through journal entries the overall written English and research skills of students have improved. Furthermore, these students now feel comfortable enough to reveal their life stories to their relevant Fundamental Research Practice lecturer. This enables the Academic Development Division to pick up the students with severe issues and send them to counselling. Current recommendations are to continue applying the journal intervention in the Fundamental Research Practice module since research within journaling has shown that this type of intervention should be considered as an instructional tool in various subjects, such as mathematics 1, and not just restricted to language.



## BROWN, FAITH ANNA (UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA)

### DEVELOPING GENERIC SKILLS FROM THE FIRST YEAR: AN APPRAISAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA STUDENTS

This study explores the level of importance the first year students at the University of Botswana (UB) attach to generic skills, the development of specific skills through courses offered by their departments, and students' general awareness of generic skills. Previous studies have shown that the development of generic skills is essential for proper students' integration and adaptation to university life and commendable performance in the workplace because jobs today require flexibility, initiative and the ability to perform many different tasks (Ingleton et al. 2000; Hager et al. 2002). In a recent study, Brown (2008) investigated students' views on the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategy in the EAP courses they had completed. Findings showed that 70% of the subjects claim that it fostered their development of generic skills (e.g. problem solving; critical thinking; greater responsibility for self and the group; communication skills; teamwork); slightly ahead of academic benefits, such as enhanced learning and improved academic performance. In this study, 200 randomly sampled first year students at UB completed a questionnaire. Findings reveal that the subjects consider generic skills very important and the students are largely aware of generic skills. However, the students appear to believe that their content courses can better help them develop generic skills through student-centred learning. The mean score for each generic skill indicates that the skills the students believe their content courses have helped them develop most are: a) collect, analyse and organise information (86.39); b) think and reason logically (82.18); c) work with minimum supervision (78.96), and d) communicate in writing (78.66). The least developed skills are: a) question accepted wisdom (57.36); b) communicate orally (65.07), and c) be open to new ideas and possibilities (67.10). The students believe that the most important skills are: a) communicate in writing (98.85); b) think creatively (94.73); c) collect, analyse, and organise information (94.33); d) think and reason logically (94.21); e) adapt knowledge to new situations (91.71); f) be open to new ideas and possibilities (91.62); g) work in team (91.09); and h) communicate orally (90.56). The least important skill is question accepted wisdom (78.18). Suggestions by students on how their departments can effectively assist in their development of generic skills include: creating a balance between theory and practice instead of much emphasis on theory; increasing student participation in class; more practical work, group work and oral presentations. It is suggested that the research be broadened to include students in all years of study, and a different research conducted to explore final year students' development of generic skills. Also, further research which taps into lecturers and employers' views on the subject is recommended.



## COOPOO, PREM (UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND); SHABALALA, NOKUTHULA; SEBOKEDI, ERIC; LEGARI, KGOMOTSO; CHALUFU, SIBUSISO

### ENRICHING THE TOTAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

The aim of the panel presentation is to explore mechanisms through which institutions can revisit the manner in which they initiate students into the academic discourse. Arguments advanced and sustained in this panel discussion are premised on the assumption that graduateness of students is defined by the total learning experience to which institutions expose students. The critical question asked in this presentation is "how can universities coordinate learner support to advance the rigour of the total learning experience of students and the attainment of envisaged graduateness?" The presentations are based on the baseline research conducted by the HEQC on student affairs services for the Student Participation in Quality Assurance project[1], and the case study on student mentorship at the Tshwane University of Technology. Papers presented in this session use a variety of methodological paradigms including a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in the baseline study conducted by the HEQC, documentary and discourse analysis, and a case study on a student mentorship programme. The methodological paradigm that finds more emphasis in these papers is the qualitative methodology, which focuses on telling real-life experiences and reflecting on the implementation of programmes put in place to enhance the quality of the total learning experience of students. Following hereafter are abstracts of individual papers presented in this panel discussion.

**Paper 1:** "Stepping in and out of quality". The logic of student participation in curriculum development and quality improvement by Mr Kgomoitso Legari (HEQC) and Mr Nhlanhla Cele (WITS) - paper presented by Mr. Kgomoitso Legari

**Paper 2:** The expectations of students in relation to learner support mechanisms: the student voice: Dr Nokuthula Shabalala (UCT)

**Paper 3:** Enhancing the total learning experience of first year students: a case study of the first year residence mentorship programme at Tshwane University of Technology: Mr Eric Sebokedi (TUT)

**Paper 4:** Repositioning Student Residences for academic success: the Wits University experience: Ms Prem Coopoo (WITS)

[1] The HEQC introduced the SPQA project as an attempt to seek clarity on the ways and models through which student participation in quality assurance is defined and conceptualised. It is envisaged that this understanding will assist the HEQC in its effort to put in place intervention programmes to enhance the participation of students in quality assurance within higher education institutions.



CHIBAYA, COLIN (RHODES UNIVERSITY)

**COMPUTER SKILLS FOR UNIVERSITY ENTRANTS: A NEGOTIATED CURRICULUM FOR EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED CANDIDATES**

Computer Skills is a compulsory single credit bearing course offered in Extended Studies Programmes at Rhodes University. These Extended Studies Programmes are designed for South African students who, although they may not meet the requirements for direct entry into mainstream courses, show potential to succeed in tertiary studies. Most of the students who enrol into Extended Studies Programmes bring different learning experiences that are inadequate for success in tertiary studies (Boughey, 2003). A large proportion of these students have not used computer before. They would prefer to avoid any computer related studies in fear of the unknown and rather enjoy full recognition of their previous achievements. However, computing skills are becoming indispensable and individuals with limited or no computer expertise are becoming a minority. Commonly, students who enrol into the Extended Studies Programmes perceive the programme as racially discriminatory (RHODOS, 2007). Consequently, there is often a danger that the enrolled students are not motivated. They barely see and understand the need and importance of each skill offered in the courses (Chibaya, 2007). As a result, Extended Studies Programmes would fail to play their true role of preparing these students for success in future studies and career. This paper presents an innovative needs-driven approach that is motivated through frequent student-lecturer negotiations, as well as cross curricula demands. In this approach, students are introduced to specific computing skills only when the need arises and when students are capable of perceiving the relevance. We present six computing skills that University entrants should master, precisely considering students who come from educationally disadvantaged and under resourced township schools. We present mainly the justifications for why and when each of these skills we prescribe is relevant to students. Our emphasis is on providing a link between computing skills and cross curricula needs that would arise as students progress in their first year of studies. The results we achieved with students enrolled in the past three years (2005, 2006 and 2007) indicate that our innovative needs-driven curriculum calibrates interest as well as encouraging deep learning (Luckett and Sutherland, 2000), not only for marks, but also for lifelong computing skills.



CHIHOTA, MAPFUMO (UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN); MCMILLAN, JANICE;  
SALDANHA, JUNE

**CROSSING BOUNDARIES: RECRUITING EXPERIENCE INTO ACADEMIC WRITING**

The student body in higher education has become increasingly diverse and the challenges for educators working in the sector are increasing as we strive to improve our practice and the learning experience for our students. We are three educators based in CHED at UCT where we work with adult learners who are studying for qualifications in the field of adult education and training. This paper is a reflective and analytical account of our practice and in particular, of our developing understanding of the ways in which experience is, and can be, drawn on in the context of academic studies. In order to do this, we will provide a case study of the Diploma in Adult Education at UCT. The key question this paper tries to address is: How can we enable students to navigate the boundary between experiential and more academic forms of knowledge in ways that value both? UCT has run a Diploma in Education for adult educators at UCT since the mid 1990s. This is an NQF level 5, 2-year part-time Diploma aimed at adult educators and trainers who work in a variety of workplaces. All the learners have experience as professionals in the field and it is on this basis they are selected onto the Diploma. Our course is therefore based around experiential learning – i.e. drawing on learners' professional and life experiences as the basis of our curriculum. One of the key challenges we have faced over the years is the fact that the Diploma was not designed as an access into higher education programme but as an initial professional qualification for educators and trainers where we work with them to develop their identity and skills (building on already existing knowledge and skills) as critical reflective adult education practitioners. However we have to confront 2 critical things: 1. our *assessment is formal* – almost entirely written – and the learners emerge with a UCT Diploma that is recognised both in the workplace and in some other educational institutions as a qualification. 2. while we did not design the course for access, for many adult learners it *becomes an access course* into higher education as they wish to study further once they have completed the course. Based on the above, a number of questions have emerged for us through reflections on our practice: Given that the Diploma is based at the university, what are the implications for curriculum development, including academic development? How can we design academic development initiatives that assist in demystifying 'academic discourse', thereby assisting these learners to access the discourse without losing their own experiential discourse? This paper will analyse and reflect on the initiative and the new challenges it has posed for us as educators, and for our students, both in terms of their identity as adult learners, and their capacity for agency as educators *and* learners in higher education.



**CHMELA-JONES, KATARZYNA ANNA (VAAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY);  
GAEDE, ROLF; BUYS, CHRISTINA**

#### **THE UTILISATION OF VISUAL LEARNING AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES WITHIN A FIRST YEAR GRAPHIC DESIGN SETTING**

Graphic design education has been a part of the South African higher education sector or many years. As in other institutions of higher learning in South Africa, the relatively low skills base of most entry level learners, the comparatively high expense of graphic design education as well as the high expectations of industry remain challenges that need to be addressed in both the practical and the theoretical learning components of the graphic design offerings at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT). At VUT, the subject History of Art and Design 1, which forms part of the broader curriculum for graphic design learners, has been plagued by weak examination results, ultimately affecting the overall performance of the learners negatively. This low throughput rate raises the question whether the current teaching methodologies are of optimal benefit to the learners, or whether alternative teaching methodologies such as visual learning and co-operative learning would be better options. At VUT, the learners come from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and common challenges include a lack of basic art history knowledge (history as a school subject not being a pre-requisite for the course), language proficiency (English is the language of instruction at VUT, but seldom the mother tongue of the learners), as well as a lack of awareness of how the theory and practical subjects of the offering relate to each other. This paper discusses an exploratory study implemented at three campuses of the Vaal University of Technology in response to weak examination results in one of the subjects in the graphic design curriculum. The aim of the study was to investigate the feasibility of utilising visual learning and co-operative learning strategies in combination with each other in this setting. While the respective strengths and weaknesses of visual learning and co-operative learning are well described in the higher education literature, theoretical literature regarding the combination of these two approaches is sparse. The present paper thus also indirectly aimed to contribute to - and possibly to extend - theory by discussing some of the issues encountered as well as the main the lessons learned when these two approaches were applied concomitantly in a higher education setting. The results suggest that although the learners enjoyed and saw value in some aspects of the visual learning and co-operative learning strategies, the combination of these was seen as disruptive to the learning environment and is thus unlikely to lead to a significant improvement in examination results in the long term.



**CILLIERS, CHARL (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); BREMRIDGE, CAREY;  
MENKVELD, HANNIE**

#### **ENRICHING THE FIRST-YEAR CURRICULUM OF STUDENTS' IN HEALTH SCIENCES AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY WITH A MODULE ON PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Universities world-wide are challenged by a growing demand to deliver graduates who are optimally prepared for the world of work and, as such, sought after by employees. The university-wide trend, therefore, is moving beyond literacy and numeracy to operacy. This is one of many evaluation criteria used to rate universities internationally. Traditionally curriculum designs and adaptations focus on content and skills directly linked to the main "academic focus" of the specific discipline, often largely ignoring other generic skills needed to successfully integrate and apply these skills in the "real world", and also ignoring the fact that the "whole student" has to be empowered to be able to live and work. The question "What makes a good health science student and practitioner?" has, therefore, not received the attention that it should. Where attempts have been made to address these generic skills through explicit and additional short courses or workshops, students had often regarded these as "unimportant" and "too time-consuming". Attendance figures for such courses were mostly low. In an attempt to contribute towards addressing this challenge, a research project was initiated by the Centre for Student Counselling and Development at the beginning of 2008 to equip all first-year students of the Faculty of Health Sciences at SU with pivotal personal and professional development skills needed not only as students, but also in their later professional lives. The main objectives of the project were to determine the need for this type of intervention and the evaluation of the impact thereof in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The project forms part of the Foundation Phase (Module 1, theme 4), which is compulsory for all first-year students in the faculty. All students (N=360) completed a questionnaire (as pre-test) before lectures started on 26 February 2008. The purpose of this questionnaire was to assess the students' existing attitudes, skills and knowledge regarding generic skills applicable to a successful health scientist. Students were also asked to complete a similar follow-up questionnaire (as post-test) after the last lecture on 9 May 2008. The results were statistically analysed to determine whether there were differences between the results of the two questionnaires. The results will also be compared with the outcomes of focus group interviews with a representative group of the students in November 2008 to establish the impact of the intervention and to determine the extent to which transfer of the module contents took place. As this project is research in progress, final results will only be available towards the end of 2008. It could lead to the adaptation of the present curriculum to improve its effectiveness.



COETZEE, MARISCA LIESL (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); VAN DYK, TOBIAS JOHANNES; ZYBRANDS, HELENA; CILLIÉ, KARLIEN

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#### THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC LITERACY INTERVENTION ON THE WRITING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS IN THE HEALTH SCIENCES

As a result of several changes in the South African educational landscape over the last couple of years (the introduction of a new outcomes-based curriculum, the replacement of the former final matric exam with a new end of school exam and certificate, the massification of higher education, etc.), many students arrive underprepared at tertiary institutions. There are indications that particularly first-year students struggle to survive academically. Academic challenges affect all students, even those who have high academic potential and the reasons include low levels of academic literacy. Numerous studies indicate that these students have a great deal of difficulty in comprehending, analysing, synthesising and evaluating prescribed academic material. They also find it difficult to produce acceptable academic written work. As students are largely evaluated on their written work, a capability to write well plays an important role in a student's overall success in their academic work. Weideman (2003:163) claims that [w]riting is critical because, in mass education settings, such as in many first-year classes, this is the only communication channel open between lecturer and student. This problem started receiving focused attention at the Stellenbosch University in 2005 with the gradual implementation of compulsory academic literacy courses for all first-year students. In 2008 the Faculty of Health Sciences implemented a new curriculum as part of the foundation phase of the first-year which included an academic literacy module. The Language Centre of the University was responsible for conceptualising, developing and teaching this module. Since academic literacy interventions are still relatively new at this University it was important to follow a reflective approach to determine the impact of this type of intervention on students' academic literacy levels. Student writing shows that students are often aware of micro-level problems, i.e. issues on the level of words, phrases and sentences, but that they ignore the importance of the macro-level during writing. In the module, issues on both micro-textual and macro-textual level received attention. Student writing was assessed before, during and after intervention. The quantitative data comprises a correlation between the pre, mid and post intervention marks of student writing. However, qualitative data form the object of the study and include an analysis of typical mistakes made in pre and post intervention writing. Student feedback was also taken into account as another qualitative variable. Preliminary conclusions in terms of the impact of the course are drawn as first iteration towards a longitudinal study to measure the possible effectiveness of academic literacy intervention on students' writing performance.



DAVIDOWITZ, BETTE (UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN)

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#### INFUSING ADJUSTMENT ISSUES INTO THE CURRICULUM: THE SKILLS FOR SUCCESS IN SCIENCE COMPONENT OF THE FOUNDATION PROGRAMME AT UCT

Several studies have emphasised the importance of addressing social and emotional factors in facilitating adjustment to tertiary education. This paper describes the Skills for Success in Science, S<sup>3</sup>, programme for first-year students registered in the General Entry for Programmes in Science, GEPS, which is the foundation offering in science at the University of Cape Town. The broad aims were life skills development and improved adjustment which are assumed to underpin academic performance. The S<sup>3</sup> intervention is infused into the GEPS curriculum and based on the notion that group work has the potential to enhance students' learning. Weekly small-group sessions over the first semester in 2005 were conducted by psychologists. Skills in the following areas were developed: adjustment, group work and co-operative learning, coping and stress management, resources on campus, assertiveness and communications, time management, study skills and examination competence. The process of the interventions was experiential and participative, while containing didactic aspects. Themes were introduced using worksheets, exercises or paired discussions and psycho-educational information was shared. Students were encouraged to share their experiences, their opinions and any concerns they had, to present problems and ideas and find shared solutions using role plays to develop certain behavioural repertoires. While the S<sup>3</sup> sessions were not compulsory and non-credit bearing, attendance was excellent. Questionnaires and focus groups discussions were used to evaluate the 2005 programme and provided positive feedback from students. Students valued the programme and described it as a 'must' for all first year science students. They noted the benefit of being in a group and the normalisation of their experience during their first year. Participants spoke about the improvement they experienced in coping with the new demands of being at university and the sense of mastery they derived from the programme. Interviews with the 2005 cohort at the beginning of 2007 revealed that the benefits of the programme extend beyond the first year. The vast majority of the senior students were positive about their S<sup>3</sup> experiences. There were three perceived strengths of the programme namely confidence-building, sharing views on personal problems and strengthening of study habits. The original programme has been extended and now runs throughout the year. Participation of personnel from the Centre for Higher Education Development since 2008 has made it possible to introduce sessions focusing on generic skills such as language development, information literacy and career management skills.





**DE GAMA, RAFIA AKRAM (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY)**

**IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON THE WAY THAT FIRST YEAR STUDENTS ENGAGE WITH COURSE MATERIALS**

This paper will deal with problems faced by diverse population of first students when lecturers make course materials available that can only be accessed through the use of technology. Students may or may not have engaged with the technology that is required to access the course materials prior to starting their studies at University. This problem would be particularly acute in the first semester of first year. The fact that students cannot access materials timeously or at all would affect their learning experience negatively if this inability to access relates to their unfamiliarity with the required technology. The question then arises: how can lecturers help students overcome this particular obstacle. The paper will focus on these aspects: Are the programmes put in place to teach students who do not have these skills sufficient? Do these programmes provide the help required at the right time? What effect does the lack of skills have on the way the student acquires and interacts with the material? This paper includes case study of the course taught by the author to obtain statistics from a body of students that comes from economically diverse backgrounds and from schools which are capacitated differently.



**DE GROOT, MOIRA (UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND);  
BUTTON, ALISON**

**TRAINING POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS TO PROVIDE LEARNING SUPPORT FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS**

In contexts where lecturers are under pressure to research as well as to teach large first year classes, providing learning support for first year students is often low on the priority list. It has been our experience that, in these contexts, first year students face all the difficulties associated with large class teaching, such as difficulties in understanding the demands of the transition to tertiary study, problems in accessing help and a sense of anonymity and helplessness. The challenge to “sink or swim” results in high failure and drop-out numbers in first year courses. In the Wits Faculty of Humanities, a system is in place where post graduate students tutor small groups of first year students on a weekly basis. We have found that this intervention makes a significant contribution to the quality of the first year learning experience. The success of this tutoring programme is largely dependent on the support and training that is offered to these inexperienced student tutors. Because this support varies considerably across different disciplines, the teaching and learning advisors in the Faculty of Humanities have developed a tutor training programme which has been commended as a best practice model. The presentation will describe and reflect on this model for training and supporting student tutors.



**DIKOBÉ, MAUDE (UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA)**

**BENDING THE IAMBIC PENTAMETER: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF EXPERIENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING POETRY**

With a teaching philosophy borrowed from 'bell hooks', who sees "teaching [as] a performative act... that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom." (Hooks, 1994:11). In the last two years, I have experimented with different modes of teaching poetry in first year, which do not make the first year English student hate the "iambic pentameter" for the rest of their lives. My introduction to poetry starts with the students writing poems on any subject, and then reading them out in class. From there, some poems are selected to be included in the English Department First Year Poetry anthology. I learnt this best practice when I was a graduate student at University of California Berkeley in 2000, where one of the professors in African American Studies, the late Professor June Jordan, ran a poetry writing workshop called "Poetry for the People". This project, like the one I have started with my students at the University of Botswana, is not only interactive but it also allows the students to start with their own experiences and then move on to relate that to poetry in general. This approach also allows the instructor to introduce the students to different types of poetry. By tapping from their experiences, the students are able to embrace poetry not as something where one has to learn the canonical rules of identifying the rhyme scheme, quatrains, couplets and so on. But, they also bring in their experiences and imagine the feelings of the speakers in the poems before they are bombarded with the technicalities. By adopting a learner centered approach to teaching and learning, I argue that as educators we need to move from antiquated ways of teaching poetry to more interactive ways of making students appreciate and enjoy poetry, especially as the English used and some of the symbols remain alien to the African student's experience. In my paper, I will use different kinds of poetry to highlight my argument. These will include: Sonnet 43: "How Do I love Thee? By Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Khoikhoi-Son of Man" by Modikwe Dikobé and "Dis Poetry" by Benjamin Zephaniah. These poems will be juxtaposed with some of the poems by my first year students to illustrate some of the claims and points I will be making.



**DISON, LAURA (UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND);  
GRANVILLE, STELLA**

**RESEARCH AND THE FIRST YEAR STUDENT**

This paper will describe and reflect on a first year course entitled "Language and Research Practices", a major component of an Academic Literacy Foundation Course in the Humanities Faculty at the University of the Witwatersrand. Generally, in undergraduate curricula, there has been an absence of carefully formulated research training. The purpose of this course was to prepare first year students to become independent researchers and to introduce them to the new discourse community of the University and to take on their 'ways of knowing' (Zamel, 1993). The students undertake a small-scale six-month long research project in self-selected groups of 4-5 students. They select their own topics, broadly in the field of Sociolinguistics. Some examples of topics are: Kwaito music in South Africa; Attitudes to Tshivenda and Xitsonga; The Dominance of English as a Threat to African languages; The Use of English in Parliament; Exploring men's perceptions about their wives keeping their own surnames, etc. We argue that the research approach to academic literacy development provides multiple opportunities for student learning to take place: it encourages students to be active, independent learners; it develops enquiry-based skills; provides opportunities for creative problem solving and fosters initiative and resourcefulness (Brown et al, 1997). This, we believe, differs from the conventional 'skills-based' approaches adopted in many other foundation programmes (which we also teach). After a number of 'input lectures' on topics relating to language policy and practices, the students are taken through the research process step by step. They write proposals; analyze and interpret data; draw conclusions and present their findings both orally to their class and in a written research report. One of the advantages of this project is that it provides learners with multiple opportunities for learning and language development. Students traverse the whole landscape of 'field', 'tenor' and 'mode' (Halliday, 1985). The field focuses on language in society. In terms of 'tenor' learners and tutors take on different roles: at different phases the students were variously learners, researchers, team workers, presenters or 'experts' in their chosen topic. In terms of 'mode' students had to learn to use different genres of spoken and written language (interviews, questionnaires, abstracts and reports). As Derewianka (1990) comments: the adopting of these roles is aimed at empowering the students by 'encouraging them to see themselves as apprentice learners of the discipline, moving from a tentative grasp of the field toward a more definite, more confident control (1990:p200). We also argue for the cognitive benefits especially relating to thinking processes around description, analysis and interpretation of data. Developing a 'research mentality' encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and thinking as well as fostering a spirit of enquiry.



## **DOCKRAT, SHAFEEKA YUSUF (TSHWANE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY)**

### **PROFILING STUDENTS AT RISK FOR ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT**

Alan Seidman's (2005) formula for student success postulates that  $\text{Retention} = \text{Early Identification} + (\text{Early} + \text{Intensive} + \text{Continuous}) \text{ Intervention}$ , where "Early Identification" refers to determining at the earliest possible time if a student is at risk for not attaining personal and/or academic goals. Relevant research has identified numerous risk factors, some for which appropriate interventions can be provided, others which are less susceptible to change. The Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) risk-profiling evaluation attempts to identify students at risk for academic underachievement, to determine a starting point for the provision of relevant interventions that are likely to enhance the student's chances of graduating. The risk-profiling evaluation is both diagnostic and prescriptive: diagnostic, as it identifies strengths and weaknesses, and prescriptive as it provides feedback on areas where students may be ineffective and need to enhance their skills, attitudes, motivations and beliefs. First-time entering students were evaluated at the beginning of the academic year. Emotional intelligence, learning and study skills, career choice and awareness, and English proficiency were assessed. This paper focuses on the risk profiling battery. The Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP) addresses four clusters of emotional skills, namely Interpersonal (Assertion), Leadership (Comfort/Social Awareness, Empathy, Decision Making, and Leadership/Positive Influence), Self-management (Drive Strength, Time Management, and Commitment Ethic) and Intrapersonal skills (Self Esteem, and Stress Management). Aggression, Deference, and Change Orientation are potential problem areas that are also assessed. The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) is an assessment of a student's awareness about and utilisation of learning and study strategies related to skill (Information Processing, Selecting Main Ideas, and Test Strategies), will (Anxiety, Attitude, and Motivation) and self-regulation (Concentration, Self-Testing, Study Aids, and Time Management) components of strategic learning relevant to successful learning in higher education, and that can be modified or remediated through appropriate interventions like learning skills and study methods courses. The English Literacy Skills Assessment (ELSA) Intermediate Scanner version comprises only two scales: Cloze Procedures, and Vocabulary in Context. It quantifies a student's English language skills performance in terms of grade level. The career choice questionnaire aims to identify if a student has made an informed career decision, and is aware of what the selected course entails. The paper also discusses the evaluation process, feedback and reporting procedures for students and relevant staff, and the recommended intervention plans for each of the areas evaluated. Descriptive statistics for the students assessed are presented. Directions for future research include validating the battery as a predictor of academic achievement, and studies on the impact of the different interventions.



## **DU PLESSIS, ALTEN (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); MENKVELD, HANNIE**

### **THE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS: THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF A TRACKING SYSTEM**

According to Dietsche (2005) a tracking system is a decision support system in which student-based data is used for various purposes, like the generation of information on student experiences. The data is used to create a culture of evidence. This is particularly profitable to generate evidence to determine the developmental needs of first year students so that these needs can be met and eventually impact on student success, retention rates, throughput rates etc. The Tracking System at Stellenbosch University (SU) was initiated in 2001 with the main aim to determine the full first year experience, including the developmental needs of the students. As a first tool to determine the extent and types of these developmental needs, two questionnaires, the Alpha Baseline Questionnaire (ABQ) and the Alpha Progress Questionnaire (APQ) were developed in 2001 by a team of experts at the SU and implemented in 2002. These questionnaires generate data that helps to build a profile of SU first year students. However, as it was evident that the results of these questionnaires alone do not give a complete profile of those students who need help, another questionnaire, the Early Support Survey (ESS), was developed and implemented in 2007 in an attempt to generate more data on the developmental needs of first year students. The results of the 2004 – 2007 cohort first year students who completed the ABQ, as well as the 2007 cohort first year students who completed the ESS, are used to identify the developmental needs of the different cohorts. Based on the questions that deal with developmental needs four categories were identified that best represent these needs. These categories are: participation, perception of own abilities, generic skills and wellness. The results of the four categories are discussed separately for the university as a whole and also per race and per language, and some conclusions are made. The results of the two questionnaires are also compared. As the developmental needs of individuals differ, individualized responses for each student are also made available to help individual students. Examples of different types of support are discussed. General comments and recommendations are also included. The sustainability of the impact of the Tracking System and the effectiveness of its functioning are monitored continuously by the Coordinator: Tracking System and if necessary the tools are refined or adapted. The fact that different editions of the questionnaires and offerings of support have been used since 2002 and that other questionnaires such as the Early Support Survey have been developed are evidence of this.



**DURANDT, RINA (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG);  
VAN DER WESTHUIZEN, DUAN**

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#### **SUCCESS IN FIRST YEAR MATHEMATICS: A COMPUTER-SUPPORTED PROGRAMME**

This paper reports on the theoretical and methodological positions of a research project in Mathematics Education that is undertaken at the University of Johannesburg. The purpose of the research is to develop a framework for a computer-supported learning programme for first-year students in Mathematics. Increasingly, lecturers in Mathematics at the University have found that students find it difficult to pass the Mathematics modules, and that throughput rates are low. Indeed, over the past decades, issues have been raised on Grade 12 results in Mathematics. In addition, first year student perceptions and attitudes towards Mathematics may be a further cause that leads to poor results. In this research we propose that a possible solution to overcome poor results may be the use of computers for Mathematics learning. Computer integrated learning is a well established method to enhance learning. Moreover, it may be a way of stimulating positive attitudes towards Mathematics as a subject. In this paper then we expound on the purpose of a computer-supported learning programme, as part of a tutorial programme, which aims to emphasise learning as a process of personal understanding and the development of meaning in ways which are active and interpretative. In this context, we view learning as the construction of meaning rather than as the memorization of facts. We also posit that learning is often best achieved when students learn together. Therefore, the theoretical framework for the research is social constructivism. Within the ambit of constructivist learning theory, we also place emphasis on Vygotsky's theory of "zone of proximal development" and theories of scaffolding. The computer-supported learning programme that we will then design will therefore be informed by these theories. In the consideration of our research methodological stance, we propose to make use of design experiments (design based research). In the paper, we justify the selection of this method, as we identify the different key aspects of the design and how it will be implemented in five different phases during the study. The different phases include analysis of the research problem, identify the design elements for the computer-supported programme, perform a pilot study, implement and refine the revised programme and finally to construct a framework for the design and development of a computer-based programme for first year Mathematics university students. Presenting this paper will encourage dialogue on ideal methodological options to solve teaching, learning and student performance problems. At the same time the aim is to construct a body of design principles to guide a computer-supported learning programme for first year Mathematics university students that we envisage will improve learning in Mathematics, and also then performance.



**DYKES, GLYNNIS (UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE)**

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#### **RPL AND SUPPORT: ARE THE LEARNING NEEDS OF RPL FIRST YEAR STUDENTS DIFFERENT?**

In this paper I attempt to answer the question: are the needs of RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) social work first year students' different to those experienced by students who have gained access via the traditional means. The courage to apply and be accepted into a degree programme at a university is generally experienced as empowering and confidence building. The future, for such a candidate, seems bright and full of promise. To a candidate who has gained access to a university programme through the avenue of RPL, this is all the more heartening. These candidates would have been previously barred from access to a university for not meeting the traditional access requirements (that is, matriculation exemption) but now, through RPL, have gained access without a matriculation exemption (endorsement) or senior certificate. South Africa has legislated its acceptance of the international approach of RPL as a mechanism to redress past barriers to higher education institutions as a result of particular socio-political and structural factors (The South African Higher Education Act 101 of 1997). The system of RPL had been established as an avenue of access to higher educational institutions other than the formal and traditional means through a matriculation exemption or certificate. Harris (2000: 39) asserts, "RPL is essentially a fast-tracking device – a boundary-crossing or a boundary-jumping mechanism". In view of Harris' assertion, should it be assumed that those students who "boundary-jumped" the rigours of traditional high school education would need "added" (i.e. in addition to those generic support programmes already in existence in Higher Education Institutions) academic support? The SA White Paper on Education and Training, 1995, denotes learner support as both a principle of open learning and part of the quality assurance assessment. This paper seeks therefore to explore the experiences and learning needs of both access groups: RPL students as well as traditional access social work students. The outcome is to determine whether any fundamental differences exist and whether these indicate an imperative on the part of the academic institution to provide such learning support. For this paper, samples of first year RPL and traditional access social work students were selected for interviews along the themes of their learning needs and expectations as well as the kinds of support that they think would assist in making their first year a success. The findings are related to one another in terms of the identified broad themes. The findings will be of use to those who are involved in teaching and learning of first year students in programmes where access have been opened to RPL students.



**ENGELBRECHT, ERNST HENDRIK (UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE)**

#### **THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE: TOWARDS SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

The University of the Western Cape plays host to a strikingly diverse body of students. Geographic, ethnic and religious diversity is a distinct feature of a very cosmopolitan campus community. The advantages of a student body reflecting such kaleidoscopic backgrounds are obvious and manifold. A healthy exchange of ideas and the awakening of a multi-cultural awareness, resulting in mutual respect and understanding, are the potential advantages of such an ethnically layered milieu. However, this desired outcome appears to be at times elusive, even at a campus such as UWC, a campus characterized by a high degree of tolerance. On a national level there are disconcerting signs of intolerance, as seen by various incidents played out on South African campuses in the recent months. Having taught in various foundation programmes at the University of the Western Cape, I have been exposed to the insecurities and anxieties first-year students are prone to reveal when they commence their studies. When belief systems and cultural norms are questioned by epistemological knowledge, students often feel threatened and ill at ease. Furthermore, this inability to come to terms with perceived criticism of one's own values often impact negatively on the acceptance of others' right to differ, something that can lead to polarization. This polarization is at times reflected in the composition of various students' representative bodies. This paper explores the process of social integration of first-year students at the University of the Western Cape. It examines the role of the orientation programme in terms of fostering cohesion among a disparate group of newcomers to the university community, as well as the role of the residential experience in this regard. The paper also analyses the manner in which academic programmes in the first year can be structured so as to assist in the removal of prejudice and misunderstanding.



**EYBERS, OSCAR OLIVER (RHODES UNIVERSITY)**

#### **PEER FACILITATION: THEORY AND PRACTICAL METHODS OF INDUCTING FIRST YEAR STUDENTS INTO THE USES OF DISCOURSE IN ACADEMIA**

As increasing numbers of students who speak an indigenous African language as their mother-tongue enter the South African university landscape, lecturers are presented with the challenge and opportunity to re-assess their classroom methods of inducting students into the ways of doing at tertiary level. This paper explores my experiences as an English lecturer within the Commerce Extended Studies programme at Rhodes University, and how various theories of learning have lead to my increased incorporation of peer facilitation as a central strategy of my pedagogical approach. My reference to ways of doing focuses upon the enculturation process students undergo in terms of learning the conventions of academic writing and research in academia. Many first-years emerge from high schools where they had no access to either libraries or computer technology. This reality places extra demands on lecturers to not only achieve their own subject-based learning outcomes, but to also equip students with literacy skills which are vital to survival in higher education. Via critical analysis and introspection of my teaching practice, I have discovered that when peers are actively involved in their own learning and collaboration with each other, the final form of assessment, be it an essay or report – tends to be of higher quality, compared to assignments which received sole instruction and preparation from me as an educator. To theoretically elucidate my perspective on the benefits of peer facilitation within higher education, I will harness the views of social-constructivists such as Bruner, who perceive learning to be a socially situated activity that equally relies upon a student's upbringing and previous interaction with knowledge structures. I perceive that students bring to the classroom their own epistemological strategies of accessing knowledge. Instead of expecting students to abandon discursive techniques they have harnessed up until entering university, I perceive that lecturers should allow students to merge their personal discourse style with the features of discourse found in academia. By doing so lecturers are able to excel in attaining their teaching outcomes due to the fact that when students are engaged in peer-collaborated analysis of subject matter, the following processes take place: they are actively involved in the construction of knowledge and the content matter provided by the lecturer introduces new features of discipline-related discourse which the student may amalgamate with their personal lexicon. By describing pedagogical methods I implemented in my English lectures, I hope to share the benefits of peer interaction and facilitation as a helpful mechanism for other educators who earnestly seek to induct first-years into the processes of analysis and discourse at university level.



**EYITAYO, ODURONKE TEMITOPE (UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA);  
ANDERSON, GEORGE**

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**ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF UTILIZATION OF ONLINE MODULES ON GRADES IN A FIRST  
YEAR COMPUTER LITERACY COURSE**

The enrolment in the mandatory first year General Education Curriculum (GEC) courses Area 2 namely, GEC121 and GEC122, Computing and Information Skills Fundamentals I and II each year is over 2500. The students are divided into faculties and further divided into groups. GEC courses were introduced in the University of Botswana to broaden student knowledge by exposing them to subject areas outside of their programmes. These courses introduce students to new content areas and do not assume a great deal of prerequisite knowledge, as is done with students enrolled in courses offered by their “home” department, when the assumption is that they have a large amount of knowledge in the particular subject area. These 1st year GEC Area 2 courses have large classes and are a challenge to teach. Difficulties include managing assignments, quizzes and lab exercises. This brought about the lecturers spending a lot of time to develop an eLearning system to help the students. The courses use a blended learning approach, combining face-to-face classes and online learning during the laboratory sessions. This approach allows for targeting of learners with different learning orientations or at different levels of learning. GEC121 and GEC122 were taught in a one-hour class, with two-hour lab sessions every week for each student. The face-to-face sessions were supplemented with course outline, lecture notes, laboratory manuals, quizzes and discussion forums on a Learning Management System called Blackboard/WebCT while the laboratory sessions were purely done using this Learning Management System. At the end of each academic year students are assessed on the theory aspects with multiple choice questions. These examinations are now being marked using an Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) Reader. This means that it is possible to analyse students performance in each of these areas. The eLearning package also tracks the students use in each of the areas. At the end of April, data will be available on tracking and performance of students in GEC121 and GEC122, two courses done in the 2007/08 academic session. The objective of the study on these first year large classes is to determine if there is any correlation between use of the Learning Management System and student performance in specific areas.



**FANGHANEL, JOELLE (CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON)**

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**THE IMPACT OF PEDAGOGICAL BELIEFS AND PEDAGOGICAL FOCUSES ON APPROACHES TO  
TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The literature on the first year experience focuses on the main challenges facing educators with learners in transition (Harvey, Drew & Smith, 2006) highlighting issues of financial hardship and lack of information about programmes (Yorke and Longden, 2008), and making recommendations for university-wide responses (Pitkethly and Prosser, 2001) and induction to ensure retention of students in the first year. Studies which focus on educational approaches to ensure success promote active and collaborative learning, and supporting learning environments inter alia (Kuh et al., 2005). This paper considers the impact of the micro-level of practice in interfering with measures that might be adopted at the macro-level. It is based on a study that investigated lecturers’ pedagogical constructs described as the way academics conceive of, approach and relate to their practice in the context of teaching (Fanghanel, 2007) in which seven practice filters affecting those constructs were identified, of which pedagogical beliefs (the beliefs lecturers hold about students and learning) was one. I showed in that study that their pedagogical intentions (what they believe the purpose of higher education to be, and the way they translate that belief in practice) also impacted much on the way they go about their practice. I describe here those beliefs and intentions, and suggest here that pedagogical beliefs and pedagogical focuses play an important role in the way academics approach their practice in ways that are difficult to predict or change. The implications for the first year experience are discussed.



**FRICK, BEATRICE LIEZEL (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY)**

**WHAT DO CURRICULUM CHANGES IN THE SCHOOL SECTOR IMPLY FOR SUPPORTING FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS? A SOUTH AFRICAN CASE STUDY**

The quality of the academic experience and intensity of the high school curriculum affect almost every dimension of success in postsecondary education, suggesting that a rigorous high school curriculum can help bridge the gap between school and university. Stellenbosch University has explicitly stated the importance of enhancing first-year success as an institution-wide priority, but academics often lack insight into the academic backgrounds of first-year students towards whom the university curriculum is directed. In the South African context this problem is amplified by the introduction of a new school curriculum at the higher grades (grades 10-12) in the past three years. A study was conducted to investigate the implementation of the new South African Further Education and Training (FET) curriculum at schools in the feeder area of Stellenbosch University. The data suggest that the new National Curriculum Statement (Grades 10-12) has aimed to standardise curriculum through a national policy. There is less focus on content knowledge, but more emphasis on the holistic development of the learner, including the ability to work in a group, source information and access a variety of media sources, take part in interactive discussions, and using a computer to complete tasks. However, it would be imprudent to assume that all learners entering higher education as first-year students have mastered these skills equally well. Reported practices in schools indicate that the actual interpretation and implementation of curricula differs as a result of teacher ability and aptitude, the access schools have to resources, and the academic background of learners. A hybrid curriculum consisting of both old and new elements is expected to result in schools and feed into higher education. First-year students may therefore vary in the extent to which they are able to realise the outcomes envisioned by the new NCS (grades 10-12). The data also suggest that the learners see university studies more as a vocational preparation than a resource for liberal development. They are worried about not finding employment, being disadvantaged in this regard, and not being able to make ends meet. Their concerns do not seem to stifle their sense of confidence in the future and their excitement about entering adulthood and they use and combine various sources to inform and help prepare them for life in adulthood. If the university environment is able to sustain support structures that learners evidently utilise in their quest for success, they may be able to help the first-year student adapt into the new academic environment. The implications for teaching and learning in first-year classes in terms of access, curriculum design and assessment, teaching methods, and lecturer support conclude the paper.



**GARRAWAY, JAMES (CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY);  
SIMON, EDWINE; ROSSOUW, SUZANNE; THOLE, ANDILE**

**ELECTRONIC PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS (E-PDP) IN YEAR ONE**

In this project electronic personal development plans (e-PDP) were designed for graphic design, horticulture and chemical engineering students currently studying on the extended programme with foundation provision. The aim of the project was to enhance students' learning of subject knowledge, knowledge of the field they were entering and overall their ability to learn independently. These three areas formed the research questions for the project which began in January 2008. In personal development planning students are presented with competencies related to their field of study and, in dialogue with tutors, develop plans of action to attain these competencies and provide evidence of having done so. Personal development planning thus involves the processes of collection, reflection and selection/organisation. In e-PDP, the processes are done using digital tools and forms of learning are enhanced through this technology. Overall, approximately 90 students are involved in this research. The first stage is the construction of competencies for that field. The second stage involves designing a framework which typically consists of competencies, what the student already knows about these, what gaps there are in their knowledge, what actions they will take to close these gaps and evidence of their having done so. Next, staff work with an IT specialist on designing the framework electronically and ensuring that staff-student and student-student communication is facilitated. Staff are then required to build the e-PDP in as an additional modular component to the normal programme. Data will be gathered from staff's reflections on the processes, written information from the e-PDP process itself and interviews with students. The data will be organised in the form of an evaluation of the processes and underlying theory, and recommendations will be made about the way forward with this initiative. The theoretical perspective on learning is one of collaborative portfolio development via feedback and discussion from peers and tutors. Where the portfolio is productive rather than reproductive then learning is dependent on the ability of the individual to draw on insights from others (peers and tutors) and hence extend their own horizons; learning through e-PDP is learning as part of a community of practice. This sort of formative feedback is made more easy through the use of digital tools.



**GOVINDJEE, AVINASH (NELSON MANDELA METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY)**

**INTRODUCING LAW TO COMMERCE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY AT NELSON MANDELA METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

The teaching and learning of law at first-year university level poses many challenges. These challenges are enhanced when the subject in question is a “service course” for students registered for degrees other than the LLB. For example, student numbers are so large in the Commercial Law I module at NMMU that triplication is required; students need to understand the significance of studying law when none of them intend to become lawyers; legal concepts need to be introduced in a fashion which deals with the appropriate terminology without unnecessarily complicating the learning experience (especially taking cognisance of the diversity of students’ backgrounds); the method of assessment requires careful consideration; and the large-scale use of cases, a traditional method of teaching law, requires re-evaluation. This contribution specifically addresses the conference theme of teaching and learning in the first-year, including the issues of dealing with large classes, teaching style and curriculum innovation. How to improve the first-year student experience and success rate in this context is the core problem the paper seeks to address. This paper intends to deal with these issues by sharing the author’s experience of teaching the subject using different techniques over a period of six years. By using the formal feedback questionnaires prescribed by the faculty as a indicator of the student experience and by considering the university statistics vis-à-vis the pass rate for the course and the author’s personal teaching experience, it is hoped that some indicators of good practice in this framework will be evident. The use of an appropriate textbook is crucial to the first-year learning experience and appears to influence the pass rate of the course. The use of technology can influence the teaching style adopted by the lecturer and can facilitate student interest and involvement when material is presented to large classes. The choice of lecture venue may also be significant. The method of assessment appears to impact upon both the student experience and the pass rate. Lawyers and legal academics who teach so-called “service courses” in law to first year non-law students at universities should carefully consider the dynamic of the situation they face before adopting a traditional or standard system of instruction. A more flexible approach in terms of selection of an appropriate instruction method which stimulates interest amongst students and a focused and consistent assessment strategy throughout the course, taking into consideration the practical problems common to the assessment of large classes, may have positive ramifications on both the teaching and learning experience.



**GREEN, PAUL (UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER); CASHMORE, ANNETTE; SCOTT, JON; NARAYANAN, GEETHA**

**THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE PROJECT**

Substantial research data exists of the first year student experience in the UK. A significant amount of quantitative data, in the form of questionnaires and surveys, has provided insights into important and emerging issues of student retention, assessment and feedback on the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. The methodology underpinning this research, however, offers less insight into the ways in which students actually live, breath and embody the first year student experience. Even where questionnaire design offers a free form response, such research tends to reflect and reinforce ‘top down’ policy and institutional concerns of quality assurance and accountability. The ways in which students experience the student experience are, in effect, circumscribed by attempts by contemporary universities to professionalize, corporatize and technologize higher education and generically categorise students as learners, citizens, colleagues, consumers and partners. This paper considers the methodological implications and initial research findings of a longitudinal research project involving first year undergraduate students and the use of video diaries. Video diaries have been given to first year students in the Faculty of Biological Science at the University of Leicester to be used for the duration of their three year plus courses. The video diary data is complemented by the involvement of the same students in focus groups. The overall aim of the project is to gain a more fluid and open understanding of the student. Through this, it is hoped that a more nuanced understanding of issues that are central to students’ lives may feed into and enrich the experiences and concerns of future students within the Faculty and University as a whole. Funded and coordinated by the genetics education or GENIE CETL at the University of Leicester, the project provides an ethnographic glimpse into the ways in which students are making sense of and adapting to their first year of university life. The use of cameras by students transcends a text-based approach to research, offering visual understandings of the ways in which students build ontologically-grounded relationships with places, buildings, people and other elements of social and physical landscapes. The project thus facilitates insights into the ‘whole student experience,’ the blurred and yet distinct boundaries of the personal, familial, social and academic world that are embodied and transgressed by students on an ongoing, daily basis. They provide invaluable reflections on the ways in which accommodation concerns, extra-curricular activities and the increasing need to supplement their finances through employment affect their academic performance and the quality of relationships with family and ‘old’ and ‘new’ friends. In short, the project makes a fresh and distinct contribution to ongoing attempts to understand aspects of the first year student experience.





**GREGORY, MICHAEL (UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA)**

**THE CENTRALITY OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND CAMPUS LIFE STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA**

The University of Botswana enrolled 1,803 full-time first year undergraduate students in 2007. With a robust strategy for growth, by 2020, it is predicted that the annual intake of full time first year undergraduate students will be approximately 4,000 each year. During 2006 and 2007 the University has carried out institutional research on the first year student experience. In 2006, a survey of all entering students was undertaken and this identified a number of key issues which the institution needs to address. During 2007, the University wanted to obtain a richer understanding of student perceptions about their early experiences at the University in order to incorporate these into a priority area of the next strategic plan under the heading of a “Student Experience and Campus Life” strategy. This is being conducted through focus group research. The University is also benchmarking the student experience against international and regional standards for significant areas of delivery of student experience and campus life objectives, including: student admissions, orientation, guidance and counselling; academic advising; accommodation and food services; sporting, recreational and social development; wellness; leadership development; implementing a “living and learning” community. This paper will review current concepts and trends in delivering student experience and campus life strategies, highlighting latest ground-breaking ideas drawn from the practices in international universities. The findings of the University of Botswana institutional research projects will be outlined and, grounded through a review of the literature, will outline the University’s thinking on developing this strategic area. The paper, although referenced to recent research on the student experience, will be practical and applied in its approach.



**HERZOG, SERGE (UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA)**

**GAUGING THE INFLUENCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL CONDITIONS ON ACADEMIC PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

There is mounting evidence that U.S. and European secondary schools no longer sufficiently prepare university entrants for the academic rigor at the tertiary level. However, it is not clear to what extent secondary school institutional attributes impact academic achievement and retention of university-enrolled graduates, as research typically does not track students to the post-secondary level and rarely controls for institutional attributes at the individual school level. Using hierarchical linear and non-linear modelling (HL/NM), the study examines twelve institutional attributes of secondary schools attended—including measures of funding, class size, teacher preparation—in combination with twenty-four student-level characteristics that control for demographic background, academic preparation, first-year university experience, and student financial aid. Based on approximately 3,000 first-year students at a research university in the United States, the findings suggest that both the level of academic preparation and a first-year student’s probability to persist into the second year are governed largely by individual student curricular experiences and not institutional attributes or contextual features of the secondary school attended. Although access to computers and student disciplinary problems at the secondary level show a weak relationship to academic preparation at the tertiary level, none of the other examined secondary school attributes display any statistically significant relationship vis-à-vis preparation and enrolment persistence at the tertiary level. Results from this study corroborate findings from the “school production function” literature that control for nested school-level effects on individual student academic experience. Insights gained are translated into improved recruitment of academically prepared students seeking entry to the university.



## **HULME, EILEEN (AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY)**

### **A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO FIRST-YEAR STUDENT SUCCESS**

One of the foundational assumptions in higher education has been a belief that the most effective strategy for enabling students to successfully complete university is to identify their deficits and build programs and services around those areas. However, when student weakness is the focus of attention, a vicious cycle of low expectations is initiated among students, professors, and student life professionals alike. This strategy of deficit-based remediation largely fails to address the most fundamental challenge in producing success in college: student engagement in his or her own learning and development. By expanding the focus from areas of weakness to areas of talent and engagement, university staff are able to tap into student motivation to enable students to learn and develop as persons. Recognizing and nurturing the talents students bring with them to college is a key step toward engaging and motivating students to succeed and to take on leadership roles – a process which involves both instructors in the classroom and student life professionals outside the classroom. Strengths-based education and leadership development is based on the assumption that students have talents that they bring to the academic environment. When combined with knowledge and skills acquired as part of the university experience, talents can be developed into strengths that enable the student to be more effective in their academic pursuits, their relationships, and their leadership roles. Seen from the strengths perspective, the desired outcome of a university education is expanded: Students acquire more than content knowledge and job skills; they develop and apply personal strengths that will enable them to learn and succeed throughout life. Students begin to see themselves differently and with greater confidence: as coherent selves possessing abilities that give them the capacity to adapt flexibly and succeed in new situations. Students also learn to see others differently, within a context of talents and uniqueness that transcends gender and race and cannot be reduced to labels or categories. This paper begins with an overview of the strengths philosophy and evidence of its impact on student engagement and success. Using models of student identity development, ways of incorporating a strengths-based approach to student life issues of relationships, emotional health, and appreciation of differences in others are presented. The paper then expands upon key areas for developing leadership among students through strategies and programs in and out of the classroom that promote hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience. Conference delegates will have the opportunity to experience a sampling of strengths-based activities that can be utilized in a variety of settings and will receive a copy of the instrument from The Gallup Organization that can be used to identify strengths in students and staff, and will receive password-protected access to a website containing further curriculum and best practices.



## **JACOBS, ANTHONY RICHARD (UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE)**

### **PSYCHO-SOCIAL INTEGRATION EMBEDDED IN ACADEMIC AND INFORMATION LITERACY IN THE ARTS FOUNDATION YEAR AT UWC**

At UWC students gain entry to the Arts Foundation Course through the SATAP test. Students whose scores fall within the band just below the entry level score into main stream, will qualify for entry into the foundation year. From past experience it is evident that students display latent cognitive skills. Foundation year students are, typically then, “underachievers”. A great majority of students are non-native speakers of English; many only begin to use English on a regular basis upon entry to UWC. In addition there is a very strong influence on students, of home-based discourses, which also incorporate rigid faith based beliefs. Anecdotal evidence as well as student writing indicates that traumatic events, emotional, psychological and socio-economic problems are a factor for many, possibly most students. Student experiences relate to ongoing exposure to poverty, violence, abuse and also the death of close family members and friends by violent means, the HIV Aids pandemic, instability in the home, peer pressure, as well as substance abuse. There is not much evidence that students are taught the necessary skills in order to negotiate and overcome these challenges, whether at home or at school. This is pretty much the nature, or face of “disadvantage.” One aim of this paper would be to identify, describe and define this “disadvantage” that students come to university with. What this paper proposes to do is to qualitatively analyse student assignments to survey the range and extent of these factors on the Arts Foundation class of 2008 at UWC. In addition I would like to survey the current literature which investigates the relationship between the affective factors and the academic performance of “stressed” students which, I shall hope to prove, comprise the majority of the student body at foundation level at UWC. I would like to open up a line of inquiry which I feel would benefit my own teaching practice and possibly that of other lecturers or teachers as well. I shall explore the relevance of addressing social and emotional factors as part of the foundation that any student needs in order to achieve success. This paper will also take a close look at the structure of the Academic and Information Literacy course which I currently teach and I will show how the course innovatively meets the formal requirements of the institution while encouraging a holistic psycho-social integration of the student as well. While psycho-social integration of students is not an explicit outcome for this course, it has come to be an integral feature of it. Furthermore, because this feature is one which was not intended it needs to be critically examined and this paper will serve as a framework for doing so.



**JACOBS, CECILIA (CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY)**

#### **TEACHING EXPLICITLY THAT WHICH IS TACIT - THE CHALLENGE OF DISCIPLINARY DISCOURSES**

Much of the literature around the notions of discourse and identity explore how education (particularly higher education) might develop discursive identities in students. There is however a dearth of work relating to what the development of discursive identities in students, might mean for the lecturers who teach them. A growing body of knowledge, emanating from both New Literacy Studies and Rhetorical Studies suggests that knowledge of disciplinary discourses, and the identity development that goes along with that knowledge, has a tacit dimension, which makes it difficult for lecturers (the experts) to articulate, and therefore difficult for students to learn. This paper focuses on how lecturers of first-year students can better bring the tacit knowledge and understandings they have of the workings of discourses within their disciplines, into the realm of overt and explicit teaching. This paper reports on the results of a study, more fully explicated elsewhere, which found that lecturers needed to work within their disciplinary discourse communities, while simultaneously having a critical overview of this 'insider' role, from outside of it. The study found that it was through engaging with academic development practitioners, who were 'outsiders' to their disciplinary discourses, that lecturers found themselves at the margins of their own fields, and were able to view themselves as insiders from the outside, as it were. This shifting location from a purely insider perspective, to an insider perspective from the outside, shifted lecturers towards a critical understanding of the teaching of disciplinary discourses and enabled them to make explicit their tacit knowledge and understandings of their disciplinary discourses, for the benefit of the first-year students they were teaching.



**JACOBS, MELANIE (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG); DE BRUIN, GIDEON**

#### **ADMISSION OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS IN SCIENCE PROGRAMMES IN SA**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the practice of student admission in HE Science (Science, Engineering and Health Sciences) learning programmes at South African (SA) universities and to propose a conceptual framework in this regard. The framework is based on validated principles and findings related to academic success in natural science programmes, substantiated by an empirical investigation at a SA university. There are at least five good reasons that necessitate and expedite a study of this nature. The first relates to major changes in and even a redefinition of the SA HE landscape. The number of HE institutions (HEIs) has decreased from 36 in 2003 to 22 in 2005, mainly via mergers of traditional research universities with each other or with so-called technikons (or polytechnics). Government pressure for greater institutional efficiency is a second reason. Universities are challenged to manage student enrolment with a greater emphasis on throughput (to graduate larger number of students in less time) and retention. Literature studies indicates that "...there is a general perception among academic staff that the level of academic skills of students entering higher education today is lower than in years gone by and the students are somehow different from those in the past." This concern, the third reason for this study, is especially pertinent with regard to students studying in the fundamental sciences (mathematics, chemistry, physics, etc.). The matter is fourthly compounded by the first year student intake of 2009, when SA HE institutions will, for the very first time, be confronted with "products" of the "new" school curriculum, which differs (rather dramatically) from the previous curriculum. This means that programme-specific admission practices, currently utilised by SA HE institutions, will have to be reviewed and reshaped in any case. Research has found that the major co-determinants of academic success in HE programmes are a combination of school leaving results and measures of cognitive ability. However, in developing suitable programme admission criteria, the cultural and linguistic diversity of SA students makes the matter just much more difficult to deal with. The fifth underlying reason for this study thus relates to complexity of determining the "real" academic potential of (specifically science) applicants, summarised as follows: "(T)he increasing pressure to select students from disadvantaged backgrounds necessitates the consideration of dynamic psychometric tests measuring potential. It is a fact that educational and socio-economic backgrounds have an impact on performance in static psychometric tests which can result in the underestimation of underlying intellectual potential". Thus current policies and practices relating to student admission to HE learning programmes in SA (especially in science) have to be reviewed and reshaped.



**JACOBS, MELANIE (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG); PRETORIUS, INA**

#### **THE INFLUENCE OF HUMANISING ON THE SUCCESS RATE OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS**

Although the responsibility and accountability for learning could be viewed as a joint contribution between the students and the educator as the two involved parties in the learning environment, the educator is specifically considered responsible for the facilitation of learning which in turn determines the success of students. In the case of the high failure rate of first year students in sciences, this complex relationship becomes a challenge that should be investigated to reveal the specific role and responsibility of the lecturer and curriculum designers in improving the rate of completion and success of students. It is therefore the central focus of this study to investigate the processes of programme implementation, including the role of the educator as a personal support agent to students, to develop a facilitation strategy that could bring about optimal learning in the teaching of science at university level. This study explores the practice of teaching and learning taking place in first year science learning programmes and investigates the possibility of improving the students' academic performance by manipulating the learning processes to develop a learning support system based on positive understanding and interactions between students and lecturers. The study examines three first year science learning programmes of the Science Faculty in one of the South African universities. The three programmes differ in assessment and contact time opportunities and experiences, presence/absence of mentor sessions, class sizes and the structure and length of modules. The case study approach of investigation is then followed to scrutinise and analyse the processes involved and the associated evidence is integrated to develop the relevant comprehensive curriculum strategy. The investigation revealed that the case whereby students have more contact time with lecturers/tutors/peers and extra face-to-face talk opportunities with the members of staff as mentors, where class sizes are smaller and modules are extended over the whole year as compared to the semester modules tended to yield better results in terms of students performance. In conclusion, this research postulates that humanising the teaching and learning processes on different levels can positively enhance the success rate of first year students. Results of this study indicate that humanising interventions in the form of personal face-to-face contact and implementation of humanised management systems could have a definite positive effect on the success rates of first year students. Through the effective conditioning of time and subject content and activities, of assessment and promotion, personal involvement, support and guidance, the educator is able to create an environment conducive to learning.



**JAMA, MPHO (UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE);  
BEYLEFELD, ADRI; MAPESELA, MABOKANG**

#### **THE ROLE OF AN ACADEMIC IN STUDENT SUPPORT: IS THIS BEING AN ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONER, AN ACADEMIC ADVISOR OR AN ACADEMIC CONSULTANT?**

Many academics find themselves in a position of having to provide academic support for students, with different titles such as 'academic development practitioner', 'academic advisor' and 'academic consultant' being used to describe the roles in this position. Bodies such as for example, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and the National ACademic ADvising Association (NACADA) describe the meaning of the terms student academic development, student support and academic advising. The term consultation has usually been used in the fields of health profession, business and management, but is now prevalent in the higher education environment. The question is – Which role does or should an academic fulfill in student support...An academic development practitioner, academic advisor or academic consultant? This aim of this paper is to:

- Describe the terms (i) student academic development practitioner, (ii) academic advisor and (iii) student academic consultant.
- Describe the various roles of the authors as academics responsible for the academic support and development of first year students in the Division Health Sciences Education at the University of the Free State.
- Discuss the various methods used by the authors to fulfill these roles in the period 2000-2008.



**JANSEN, ADA ISOBEL (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY);  
SMIT, CARINA; BURGOYNE, MEGAN-LEIGH**

**WHAT MAKES A 'GOOD' TUTOR? AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS  
INFLUENCING TUTOR BEHAVIOUR IN ECONOMICS**

The role of the tutor in undergraduate courses is undisputed. Tutors are crucial to the success of first-year students in their attempt to familiarize themselves with a different education environment. This is particularly the case in Economics. First-year Economics students generally perceive it to be a difficult and abstract discipline. Tutors therefore play a vital role in providing these students with opportunities to explore the discipline within a comfortable setting, receiving more personalised attention as opposed to the large lecture environment. To achieve these objectives, it is essential to appoint tutors that are academically strong, have the appropriate communication and presentation skills and are committed to the programme's success. However, this also depends on other factors influencing the behaviour of the tutor. Holden (1990) discusses various factors that influence the motivation of the tutor. Reference is made to external motivation such as the working environment and working conditions. Internal motivation refers to experiencing the task itself as rewarding. The Economics department at Stellenbosch University has a first-year tutorial programme which currently employs 23 tutors. These include both final year Economics students as well as postgraduate students. The tutors are all appointed on the basis of their academic results, and communication and presentation skills tested during an initial interview. Tutors receive training prior to the commencement of tutorial classes and ongoing workshops are also part of the continuous monitoring of the programme. The objective of this study is to investigate what motivates the Economics tutor. Working conditions, financial remuneration and departmental support are some of the factors that will be explored. A qualitative analysis will use data collected from a survey among the tutors and the first-year student evaluation.



**KAFAR, ZUHAYR (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY);  
LE ROUX, JADE; VAN DER MERWE, ELANZA**

**THE PSYCHOLOGY FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE AT STELLENBOSCH: LEARNING STRATEGIES AND  
THE FIRST YEAR TUTORIAL PROGRAMME**

In 2007 first year registrations for Psychology had increased to 1046 students which resulted in class sizes of approximately 350 students. Studies conducted elsewhere in South Africa concluded that large classes such as these lead to the students feeling isolated, decreases student-lecturer interaction, and diminishes the learning experience of students (Kiguwa & Silva, 2007). This thus forces many students to adopt a surface learning approach and a narrow target, rote-type learning strategy, as opposed to optimal deep and motivated learning strategies (Biggs, Kember & Leung, 2001). In 2007 the Department of Psychology embarked on implementing tutorials for first year students in an attempt to rectify the above-mentioned situation. An additional aim of the tutorial programme is to teach optimal learning strategies and ultimately make the transition between high school and university easier. This proposal for a panel discussion is based on the experiences of the implementation of the tutorial programme from all role-players' point of view. The first topic of the panel discussion will be a contextualisation of the First Year Psychology experience within the Department, Faculty and University. During this presentation, current first-year psychology students will share their experiences of the psychology formal lectures as well as the tutorial classes. Students representative of the different groups (e.g. gender, type of high school attended, first language, etc.) will speak about their adaptation to first year Psychology. The second presentation will discuss the research component of the tutorial programme. Research questionnaires which assessed learning strategies were handed out at the beginning of the first semester to all first year psychology students, to identify the learning approaches of these students at baseline using the Revised Study Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F) of Biggs, et al (2001). The third presentation will describe the planning and logistics behind the creation and implementation of the tutorial program. During this presentation the pre- and post data of the research questionnaires will also be elaborated on. In conclusion, a tutor will share his/her experiences as a member of the teaching staff. In the final presentation the speaker will discuss the results of the post-tutorial survey and whether the differences seen at baseline still existed at the end of the first semester tutorial programme. Further plans for the tutorials programme as well as the departmental plans for the second semester tutorial programme will also be discussed. In conclusion, the overarching theme of the presentation indicates how the tutorial programme has the potential to effectively enhance the first year learning experience of psychology students.



**KALAKE, THABANG ROSA (WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY)**

**INTEGRATING PSYCHO-SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT INTO THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE AT WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY**

First year students, in their course of development also have to adjust to being university students. According to Chickering's Seven Factors theory suggest that socio-cultural and environmental influences have an impact on the students' developmental status. A significant part of the success of first year lies in their adjustment to the new environment. This paper discusses the role of the Walter Sisulu University Counselling Unit in ensuring the students' smooth transition into the university life. In particular, programs that are designed to encourage the growth of students whilst enrolled in the university are explored. In addition, major challenges facing new students are highlighted with a view to developing intervention strategies to be used by counselors. Implications of the theory and further research are provided



**KANE, SANDRA (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG)**

**READING AND WRITING IN THE FIRST YEAR: ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR SUCCESS**

In response to a request for academic support for first year radiography students in the Faculty of Health Sciences on the Doornfontein Campus of the University of Johannesburg, a needs analysis of eighty-nine first year students was conducted by the Academic Development Division in February, 2008. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify difficulties and perceived needs in reading and writing as students enter their first year of tertiary study. Much has been written about the role of language in academic study (Elder 1993, Graham 1987, Ferguson & White 1993). Research indicates that the language skills required for success at university vary from one discipline to another. Studies have also shown that language proficiency is only one of many factors contributing to student success. However, there seems to be agreement that there is a "threshold of proficiency" below which students cannot perform and still be successful (Graham 1987). This paper examines responses to the needs analysis questionnaire, highlighting the perceived needs of first year radiography students in terms of language proficiency which if not addressed in a timely fashion are likely to continue and could detract from student success. Students express ambivalent feelings about writing. Many indicate that they enjoy writing when the topic is meaningful to them and when they have an opportunity to express themselves creatively. Positive feedback motivates students to do well. On the other hand, students view writing negatively and become discouraged when guidelines are not clear or when they do not understand what to do. They also experience difficulty expressing themselves clearly, using vocabulary appropriately and engaging in the writing process. Many students find it difficult to summarize and paraphrase information while others continue to struggle with spelling, grammar and punctuation. Responses to statements about reading reveal problems as well, although there is some awareness of reading strategies. Nearly 64% think it is necessary to read every word in a text, and 68% think it is essential to know the meaning of every word. Seventy-five per cent do not know if they have developed strategies for reading different kinds of texts or not. A large majority, 85%, rate themselves as good or excellent readers while at the same time express a desire for workshops on reading with understanding and understanding test and exam questions. It is apparent from the questionnaire responses that many students would benefit from additional language support to reach the "threshold of proficiency" as soon as possible in order to maximise success and minimise failure.



**KARA, MOHAMMED (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG); OOSTHUIZEN, THEUNS; GREYLING, FRANCILENE**

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**GETTING WIRED: THE EXPERIENCE OF A COURSE DEVELOPMENT TEAM AND LEARNERS IN A MULTIMODAL TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The all-pervasive developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have changed the face of higher education. The debate is no longer whether or not technologies should be integrated in course offerings, but how to use technology to enrich the learning environment. The University of Johannesburg (South Africa) follows a multimodal teaching and learning strategy, which aims to create an optimal blend of contact tuition and the use of technologies. Crafting multimodal courses is often a collaborative effort involving inputs from the lecturer as subject matter expert and facilitator, and the instructional designer who assists with the construction of the integrated learning environment. This paper will discuss the construction of a first year course and the blend of technologies: face-to-face tuition, paper-based materials and an online learning environment (WebCT). The focus is on the online environment and specifically on the use of communication and assessment tools. The experiences of the course facilitator and students will be recorded, with specific reference to usefulness of the selected web tools. The following will be highlighted: ways in which the multimodal environment added value to the teaching and learning experience and obstacles that emerged by following the new teaching and learning strategy. Recommendations for future implementation will be made.



**KASULE, DANIEL (UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA)**

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**PROFILING THE PROCESS AS REFLECTED BY NOVICE WRITERS IN YEAR ONE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA**

Tracking the process novice ESL writers follow in producing a text of academic writing is necessary in diagnosing problems and planning instructional intervention. Using a questionnaire, the study documented the steps first-year ESL students take to produce a written text. As expected, the writing profiles were diverse implying diverse instructional procedures. By typing a random selection of respondents' handwritten paragraphs thereafter, the study determined how the product reflected the responses to the questionnaire. The typing also showed how these writers could benefit from the range of assistance from word processors. In the typed data analyzed, the word processor spotted the following: sentence fragments, number disagreement, misspelling of hyphenated and split compound words (always problematic), abnormal sentence length, wordiness, subject-verb disagreement (always problematic), non-words (or 'words not in dictionary'), and misuse of commas. These findings indicate that in terms of grammar and spelling, the computer can provide the first essential step in self-editing, and imply increased provision for basic computer skills development. Although, because of the inconsistencies in the suggestions of various versions of Word, ESL students must be dissuaded from developing a 'blind faith' in self-editing via computer word processors, some of the errors spotted can form the basis for a remedial programme that promotes grammatical consciousness-raising in students. It is also hoped that the frequency of errors that were identical across a number of scripts can form the basis for developing an instructional programme for academic writing.



## KLOPPERS, PIETER WILLEM (UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH)

### RESIDENTIAL EDUCATION: CREATING SANDBOXES FOR STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

It is now understood that out of classroom learning and in classroom learning are concepts that make it easier for university staff to talk about students and to organize administrative functions, but it is of little use to describe the development of students. If the University experience consists of all that happens to a student then it leaves the University staff with a dilemma. How do we facilitate the learning if it happens on so many places at the same time? We need to consider: The influence of structure on behaviour; To understand that the biggest influence on student development is the peer influence of other students; How to build a campus where there is a healthy student-lecturer interaction; a peer influence supportive of academic excellence and where the intrinsic motivation of students is used. In the published texts of those that research student learning it is overwhelmingly clear that the single most significant influence on student development is the peer influence. Pascarella and Terenzini in their 1991 book *How College Affects Students* name amongst others that a campus that is successful in student learning has the characteristics of frequent student-lecturer interaction; makes use of the intrinsic motivation of students and has a peer influence where on campus friendships are conducive to academic success. The systems theory teaches us that you can change the way 14 000 students behave with an email. The story of the end of year *Henne* and *Hane* dinner at the University of Stellenbosch (Cocks and Hens dinner). Dialogue changed the way of thinking for student leadership in Stellenbosch more than any other instrument we have tried up to this point. In a sandbox little time is wasted on introduction and explanation. A sandbox creates a space and a time for student to be inspired by a lecturer and a lecturer to be inspired by students. Stellenbosch embarked on an endeavour to create sandboxes for student development. Stellenbosch created clusters where the first-years are helped to make a successful transition from school to university and where the first years can be submerged into a culture that promotes academic success through senior student mentors and academic coaches. We took the concept of sandboxes a little further in the development of living and learning communities for senior students. Such a living and learning community consists of 8 students diverse in respect of gender, faculties represented and race groups. Student development and learning cannot be switched on or off. Students learn all the time in and out of class. They only have a university experience and not an in class and out of class experience. Creating the structures to be deliberate and intentional about the learning that takes place in university housing is an ongoing challenge.



## KRUGER, MARLENA (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG); BROERE, IZAK

### PREPARING FIRST YEARS TO USE A LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: DOES IT ADD VALUE?

The Centre for Technology Assisted Learning (CenTAL) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) has the brief, since its inception in 2002, to promote and support technology-assisted learning (TAL) at UJ through a blended learning and teaching approach. For this, an integrated web-learning environment, called Edulink, housing the Learning Management System (LMS) has been deployed. This LMS is driven since January 2007 by The Blackboard Learning System™ for which the University has a Vista Enterprise License. According to several renowned authors and experts a large group of our present student population can be depicted as “digital natives” and is part of the net generation. Whether or not we agree with the descriptions and perceptions of digital natives, especially for the South African student population, it is important to take note of some of these and keep it in mind when planning and implementing learning and teaching strategies. CenTAL has been involved with computer orientation and Edulink training sessions of many first year students since 2003. Three similar surveys have been done in 2003, 2004 and 2005. In 2006 and 2007, a shortened version of the surveys that covered the orientation sessions was completed by the first years, while the rest of the questionnaire was done with the purpose of profiling first year students and identifying at risk students. An overview, including a critical reflection, of the different first year groups’ feedback on CenTAL’s sessions will be given. Three extra questions were added to the first part of the 2008 survey, focusing on what technology means to them and how they rate some aspects for successful learning:

1. The lecturer’s experience and knowledge in their field of expertise.
2. The lecturer’s ability to enhance the learning experience for students using the current educational technologies available at UJ.
3. The lecturer’s ability to professionally convey the main points of themes during lectures using contemporary software packages for example Power Point.

The third additional question focused on their preference for the level of interactivity in the learning environment, with various forms of technology used to enable interactivity: 100% lecturing; 75% lecturing and 25% interactive; 50% lecturing and 50% interactive and 100% interactive. By integrating and comparing some of the feedback from the first years on the computer and Edulink orientation sessions and their expectations and perceptions on the role of lecturers integrating technology in the learning environment, valuable insights can be gained for planning for the future, keeping in mind the expectations of the present and future net generation students.





**KRUGER, ZIEN JOHANNA (UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA);  
PETERSEN-WAUGHTAL, MARIANA**

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**LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICES (SAPS) AND UNISA IN  
FRONT OF THE CAMERAS**

Reinventing the university (University of South Africa - Unisa) “classroom”, has led to some interesting lessons being learnt. Unisa is a huge distance education institution with over 250 000 students enrolled in formal and non-formal higher education modules from first year through to doctoral degrees. As an Open and Distance Learning Institution the majority of Unisa teaching and learning takes place via the medium of print and is supported by, amongst others, tutorials, satellite delivery and the use of multi-media. Since the start of this Millennium Unisa has moved to a more blended approach of teaching and learning. To facilitate this, Unisa has put resources in place to make components of the learning experience available in multi-media format, such as DVD. This paper will present a case study of how a first year module (English Practical Policing) at Unisa was developed in partnership with South African Police Services (SAPS). It will illustrate various lessons learnt in implementing a blended mode of teaching and learning comprising of printed materials and a strong multi-media component. Lessons learnt include:

- The importance of partnerships across institutions to promote contextual learning for students
- How to address different perceptions of team members regarding the purpose, use and value of multi-media when developing a module
- How can multi-media be implemented to add value to the learning experiences of distance students?
- Student experiences. Our journey on the road of reinventing the Unisa classroom and learning experience has shown us that addressing student and industry demands and needs, that our teaching practices must be informed by sound scholarly educational principles and experiences.



**KUMAR, KRISHAN LALL (UNIVERSITY OF BOSTWANA)**

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**TUNING THEM IN!**

Students entering a faculty are fresh and eager to discover if they are at the right place and they are inquisitive to know what the faculty has to offer. They have some expectations and hopes. They are looking forward to learn about the new environment, which looks so different from the closed-door scenario at the schools. Despite other ways of welcoming and addressing them, teaching and learning at the earliest stage can either turn them on to realise their dreams or frustrate them for ever! The paper focuses on the attempt to tune the students into the faculty by way of teaching an entry level core course *DTB 210: Elements of Design* to a class of 25 students. They enter with a good pass in each of Physics, Chemistry and Maths, which they learn in the Faculty of Science, with over 150 students sitting and listening to the lectures. The author employed electronic media, overhead projection and whiteboard together with lead lectures, discussion and tutorial sessions. Students were assessed through several assignments and class tests. The author noticed that the students have been quick to be tuned to the emerging instructional technologies, e.g., WebCT/Blackboard, Power Point, Internet Search and interactive presentations in a smart class room, assigning one computer per student, with Internet connectivity. Students devote all possible time to learn from the available resources and perform very well in their assignments and class tests resulting in very high pass rate. It was felt that the course succeeds in laying the intended foundation and hooks them on to the world of design! It also makes them expect more and different from being taught by design and technology professionals rather than science teachers. They imbibe significant level of enthusiasm and drive during the course, which is an important outcome of the teaching-learning process. They expect more and better every time! They also begin to feel a part of the system, greeting the teacher wherever they meet.



**LEIBOWITZ, BRENDA (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); HERMAN, NICOLINE;  
VAN DER MERWE, ANTOINETTE; VAN SCHALKWYK, SUSAN; YOUNG, GERT**

#### **WHAT MAKES A "GOOD" FIRST-YEAR LECTURER?**

The first year is an important stepping stone in the career of the undergraduate student. Lecturers of first-year students play an important role in guiding students into this new phase of their lives. Much research has focused on the challenges facing new students, especially those who are struggling, or non-traditional students. To our knowledge little has been written about the attributes of lecturers who actively promote the learning of successful learners at this level. Our research has focused on the following question: How do “good” lecturers of top performing first-year students describe their lecturing practices and their attitudes towards lecturing? The research project is an outcome of the work of Stellenbosch University’s First-year Academy. It is based on a sub-activity of the initiative aiming to encourage the academic achievement of first-year students and to acknowledge the work of lecturers of first-year students. The contribution that lecturers of first-year students make has tended to be downplayed, especially at “research-led” universities, which is how Stellenbosch University views itself. The activity involved inviting the 30 top performing students across the university to a dinner hosted by the University’s Rector. These students each nominated the lecturer who, in their view, made the most significant contribution to their academic success. The research project utilised the following data sources: The written descriptions of their lecturers of 30 students from nine faculties; transcribed audio recorded interviews with a sample of lecturers, chosen according to predetermined criteria, out of a total of 25 lecturers who were nominated by the students. Key features for successful lecturers of academically high achieving first year students, as suggested by a group of students and lecturers at Stellenbosch University, include the following: Love of the discipline; Interest in the students as individuals and as learners; Ability to make a connection with students in a large lecture situation; Sense of vocation. The results are discussed in relation to key research findings in the literature on successful teaching and on professional development. Some key findings are confirmed, for example the ability to reflect in action and on action (Schön, 1987), whereas others, for example of the scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990), were not seen to feature prominently in the accounts of either the students or the lecturers. A concept which proved particularly useful in the discussion of the data, is that of a “community of practice”. The lecturers were described as able to provide support for the learners to enter the academic community, to facilitate their identification and their participation (Wenger, 1998).



**LEMMENS, JUAN-CLAUDE (UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA); NAGEL, LYNETTE;  
KOTZE, GAIL; DU PLESSIS, GERHARD; DUBE, MOTHEO; KRIEK, HELENA**

#### **EXPLORING STUDENTS' LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

The Dean of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) commissioned an investigation into the learning experience of first year students at the University of Pretoria. In an attempt to understand the students’ learning experience the Department for Education Innovation: Unit for Higher Education Research and Innovation conducted focus group discussions with students from the Faculty of EMS. Focus group discussions were used first of all to explore the range of factors associated with students’ learning experiences and secondly to develop a valid questionnaire/s that will address the most important issues in the students’ learning experience. For the purpose of the qualitative study, a convenient sample was drawn from the Human Resources Department (Faculty of EMS). A total of 31 students, from first to third year, participated in the focus group interviews. A total of five focus groups were held within a period of one week. There were two first year and two third year groups and one second year group. All three year groups were sampled to make sure that issues are not missed and to get a bigger picture by addressing recurring issues from one academic year to another in an undergraduate programme before administering the questionnaire/s to first year students. During the focus group discussions the moderators made use of a discussion guide to facilitate the interviews. The discussion guide was divided into four sections, namely: Academic experience, Student life & Social networking, Student support and Motivation. The results of the study indicated that students are in general satisfied with their academic experience but have some issues of concern. Analysis of the focus groups indicated a difference in learning experience between first, second and third year groups. The results further indicated that we have to broaden our perspective of the factors that influence the learning experience of first year students. Both the literature and the results of the qualitative study informed the development of the Academic Readiness Questionnaire and a learning experience questionnaire. The Academic Readiness Questionnaire was administered to first year students of the faculty of EMS during two of the sessions of the 2008 student orientation programme. A learning experience questionnaire will be implemented later in August 2008. To widen the scope of feedback on students’ learning experience further, exit interviews will be conducted with students who have withdrawn from an academic programme in 2008 in the Faculty of EMS. Based on the research findings the Faculty of EMS can make inform management decision regarding teaching and learning practices, address student retention and contribute to students’ learning experience.



LOUW, ALWYN (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); BEZUIDENHOUT, JUANITA;  
VAN HEUSDEN, MARTIE; VAN HEERDEN, BEN

**PERSPECTIVES OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS ON THE NEW FOUNDATION PHASE FOR HEALTH SCIENCE STUDENTS AT THE FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY**

In 2002 the MB,ChB programme committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences at Stellenbosch University embarked on a process of curriculum revision. During the preliminary phase of curricular review, it became clear that substantial changes to the first year of the programme needed to be instituted. Traditionally the first semester was devoted to the learning of the natural sciences, often in a non-contextualised fashion. During the further development of the new first semester (called the "Foundation Phase") we found that it should be possible to follow an interdisciplinary teaching and learning approach. A starting point was to contextualise the natural science content as far as possible within the health science disciplines. Challenges were to include the relevant components of the original first semester into either the new Foundation Phase or the rest of the curriculum, as well as to give more support to first year students by teaching crucial generic skills. It was further necessary to ensure that the goals and outcomes of these modules were in line with the exit outcomes of the different programmes.

**Methodology:** A longitudinal research project over a period of three years, started at the beginning of 2008. A number of focus group discussions with students, as well as individual in depth interviews with different lecturers involved in the Foundation Phase as well as later phases, were held and will be held over the next three years. In the discussions, the interdisciplinary approach as well as the generic skills aspects were and will - inter alia - be highlighted. Early feedback (after the first semester of the Foundation Phase) highlighted positive aspects as well as areas that need to be revisited. Some of these could possibly be addressed by changes in the management of the Foundation Phase or the pedagogical approach.

**Conclusion:** A new interdisciplinary first semester was successfully implemented in 2008 for students of our undergraduate health sciences programmes. Curricular change is, however, an ongoing process and it is therefore necessary to carefully monitor the implementation in a scientific manner. Obtaining planned feedback will enable us to intervene timeously to change and further improve the curriculum.



LUTZ, MARIETJIE (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); ADENDORFF, HANELIE

**TOWARDS A MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING-DIRECTED ASSESSMENT IN FIRST YEAR CHEMISTRY**

There is substantial evidence that assessment plays a significant role in determining students' learning strategies, approaches and activities. Many authors have cited the central importance of assessment, and its power to affect student learning for good or bad. In South Africa, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) emphasizes the importance of student assessment by calling it a "key indicator of the health of teaching and learning in Higher Education institutions". This is echoed in the words of Boud: "[S]tudents can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition, if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment." This study aimed to take an in-depth look at the overall assessment strategy of the first year introductory course to General Chemistry at Stellenbosch University. This assessment strategy includes the methods employed during assessment, the paradigms prevalent amongst the lecturers teaching the specific course, the approach followed by students in order to prepare for the assessment opportunities, and the results obtained in the assessment of first year General Chemistry. This research project used a case study approach and an adapted action research methodology. Different methods were used in order to collect the necessary data from the students and the lecturers: A large pool of quantitative data was collected by way of three paper based student questionnaires which was completed anonymously by all the students attending three (of the four) tutorial sessions. The results of these questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with self-selected small groups (3 – 6 students per group) of first year General Chemistry students. Semi-structured interviews were held with each one of the lecturers involved with first year General Chemistry at the start of the course as well as after the final assessment results were obtained. Informal discussions with the lecturing team were also carried out during the course of the teaching semester at meetings, during the structuring of various assessment opportunities and via e-mail. This paper reports that research not only revealed a greater understanding of the factors informing the way students approach their learning in first year General Chemistry, but also emphasized the importance of assessment as motivation for learning in general. An enhanced awareness among the lecturers of the important role of assessment in student learning in first year General Chemistry was also found. Proposals could therefore be made in which the research outcomes were used in order to direct and enhance student learning in first year General Chemistry.



**LYNER-CLEOPHAS, MARCIA (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); BELL, DIANE;  
POPPELSTONE, REINETTE; ABRAHAMS, EVADNE**

**EVOLVING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES IN THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA -  
EMBRACING DIFFERENCES**

According to Howell and Lazarus (2004:171), one of the primary challenges for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is to actively seek to admit learners with disabilities who have historically been marginalised, providing them with opportunities to receive the education and training required to enter a variety of job markets. Although, according to the Higher Education Monitor (CHE 2005), 75% of HEIs have a Disability Policy and 75% of HEIs provide teaching and learning support to students with disabilities, challenges still exist on campuses when addressing individual needs. In South Africa, a disability is defined as "...the loss or elimination of opportunities to take part in the life of the community, equitably with others that is encountered by persons having physical, sensory, psychological, developmental, learning, neurological or other impairments..." (Social Services Cluster Committee of Cabinet, approved in 2005. Recently (2007), South Africa signed their commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities within the context of striving towards meeting set millennium development goals. The World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that 10 percent of the world's population is disabled and 80% of people with disabilities live in developing countries. According to the CASE Survey completed in 1999, it is estimated that some 10% of the South African population is disabled in some way and that between 3.8% and 4.1% of the population in the Western Cape have some form of disability. Recently the four HEIs (Disability Units) in the Western Cape decided to collaborate by sharing information and exchanging best practices in order to address the various challenges faced in supporting students with disabilities. This engagement is an outflow of the recently established Higher Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA), which is a national forum, providing support related to students with disabilities in higher education.

This panel discussion aims to challenge the audience in the following ways:

1. Knowledge of legislation regarding disabilities
2. Awareness of activities, nationally and regionally, within higher education.
3. Exposing the audience to various models of best practice for first-year students with disabilities
4. Exposing the audience to ways in which we collaborate
5. Investigating the role of lecturer, department and faculties in providing academic support for students with disabilities
6. Investigating the various channels of support per institution
7. Examining alternative assessment and teaching methodologies for students with special learning needs (disabilities)



**MACHIKA, PAULINE (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG)**

**STUDENT – STAFF MENTOR RELATIONSHIPS – A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TOWARDS THE  
ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS IN THE EXTENDED CURRICULUM AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG!**

Since the implementation of the extended curriculum programmes in the management field centrally managed by the Academic Development Division at the University of Johannesburg in 2005, it has become vital for the programme administrators to investigate if the programme utilises appropriate student and staff mentoring relationships to address the concerns of the Faculty of Management (prepare the students for standard curriculum through foundational provisioning), university (broadening access, improve retention, success rate and throughput) and the Department of Education (provide the opportunity of higher education to socially and educationally disadvantaged learners who have the potential to succeed). Students, having completed their Grade 12 certificate, are motivated to enter the higher education environment but often find that as a result of their South African legacy, are equipped with inadequate education and personal development skills needed to experience academic success. However, it has been found that students register for various programmes and courses but experience extreme difficulty in completing their studies and graduating and, in many cases, do not complete their studies at all. In line with broadening access into higher education for South African students, it has become imperative that universities implement an integrated and accredited academic development programme. Boughey (2007:2) defines academic development as "an open set of practices concerned with improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education". Monitoring and analysis of results is very important in the extended national diplomas in the management by the Academic Development Division because it informs the academic success of first year students. In the extended curriculum, a wide range of teaching and learning interventions have been employed to ensure the academic success of first year students. In essence the paper focuses on how the student and staff mentoring relationship within the extended curriculum can contribute to the academic success of first year students. The study is a qualitative study and the data will be collected through interviews with lecturers, lectures observation, student questionnaires, student interviews, and mentor interviews. The findings of the study will be used to establish the role student and staff mentoring can play in ensuring the academic success of first year students studying in the extended national diplomas in management field.



**MADUEKWE, ANTHONIA NGOZIKA (UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS)**

**FIRST -YEAR TEACHER TRAINEES' APATHY TO EXTENSIVE READING: IMPERATIVES FOR FUTURE ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND SOUND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE**

Research suggests that one of the best ways to help students acquire as high remarkable increase in language use, language knowledge, motivation, positive attitude, high academic performance and skills empowerment in learning is to encourage them to read extensively. The effects of extensive reading are thus both cognitive as well as affective in the long term basis. Considering the above, it is germane that extensive reading should be an indispensable dimension in pursuing a course of study in teacher education at the first-year degree program. However, the general concern is that the average Nigerian first-year undergraduate lacks extensive reading culture, sustained independent reading habits, has a poor command of English, the principal mode of communication, and is largely academically unfocused. This descriptive case study was thus aimed at studying, in-depth, the reasons contributory to the first- year teacher trainees' apathy towards extensive reading. It was also aimed at determining the first- year teacher trainees' attitude towards reading as well as their perceptions of extensive reading. The popular adage goes that the child is the father of the man. Hence, if the reasons for the trainees' apathy towards academic reading are not identified and addressed at the grassroots 100 level, they will eventually become educational misfits, unfit for the classroom, the labour market and by extension the society at large. With a stratified randomized sampling technique, a survey was conducted on 150 trainees selected from six different departmental groupings (Adult, Arts & Social Sciences, Science & Technology, Educational Administration, Educational foundations, Human Kinetics & Health Education) all in the Faculty of Education, in University of Lagos, and Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria. Students & teachers' questionnaires (STO) & (TRO) and an interview scheduled were employed to poll the teachers and respondents' views and reflections on extensive reading, materials read, and challenges faced in reading during the first year. The responses were collated and analysed using frequency distribution and simple percentages. The results revealed many challenges responsible for the trainees' apathy to reading. Prominent amongst them are: poor academic background, lack of reading culture, surfing the internet, social distractions, time, lack of intrinsic motivation, mobility, job demand, difficulty in evaluating meaning, poor grammatical knowledge in textbooks, and inability to establish relationships in expression. The imperatives of the findings towards enhancing academic support and success, sound pedagogical practices and literacy on life long basis are discussed.



**MAKOLA, SOLOMON (CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY); VAN DEN BERG, HENRIËTTE**

**THE ROLE OF A SENSE OF MEANING IN THE ADJUSTMENT OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

The current research study aims to demonstrate the role that can be played by a sense of meaning in the adjustment of first-year students at university. Its overarching objective is to determine whether students with a high sense of meaning adjust much better than those with a low sense of meaning, irrespective of the stressors they are exposed to. A stratified sample of two groups, 10 students with high PIL-scores and 10 students with low PIL-scores, was selected from 101 participants. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information. A computer software package (NUD\*IST) was used to analyse the interviews. The results of the current study revealed that participants with higher Purpose in life (PIL) scores employed more effective coping strategies in dealing with their stressors than those who achieved low PIL scores. What is distinctive about participants with higher Purpose in Life Test (PIL) scores is that they harbour positive attitudes, seem to be well adjusted, see meaning in the service they will provide, are intrinsically motivated and that they persevere despite being exposed to stressors. At the end it can be concluded that, first-year students with a high sense of meaning presented with effective coping skills, which enabled them to adjust much better at varsity, irrespective of the stressors they are exposed to. The outcomes of the research could have relevance to other universities. For example, university personnel could assess all students in the beginning of their study course with the Purpose in Life Test (PIL) and try to identify those with low PIL scores, to participate in programs or interventions aimed at promoting their resources or coping skills.



**MALAN, SHARON BRENDA (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); ENGELBRECHT, PETRA**

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING APPROACH IN A FOUNDATION PROGRAMME AT THE UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH**

This three-year study (2005 – 2007) examined the merits of introducing Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as a tool for curriculum reform into a foundational programme which supports students as self-directed, independent learners. PBL which is regarded as a valuable attempt to improve the quality of higher education is a different philosophical approach to the whole notion of teaching and learning. The principal idea behind PBL is that the starting point for learning should be a problem that the learner wishes to solve. Learners then work cooperatively in groups to seek solutions to real world problems. The SciMathUS programme (The Science and Mathematics Programme at the University of Stellenbosch) which is geared towards disadvantaged and under-prepared students therefore embarked on a process to introduce PBL into its existing curriculum in order to enhance the students' chances of success in higher education. An adapted shorter version of PBL for the specific group of students or a Hybrid PBL approach (also referred to as transitional semi-problem-based curricula) was therefore needed which would gradually make PBL an integral part of the existing conventional curriculum with two subjects namely Mathematics and Physical Science in collaboration. This interpretive-constructivist study was broadly termed evaluation research. A mixed-method approach that involved collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data was chosen. Evaluation findings indicated that introducing students to a Hybrid PBL approach promoted more meaningful self-directed learning patterns. Findings also revealed that the Hybrid PBL approach contributed to overall programme improvement by promoting understanding in Mathematics and Physical Science and improving staff relationships.



**MARSHALL, DELIA (UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE); SCHROEDER, IAN; MADJOE, REGINALD; MACLONS, ROHAN**

**LEARNING AS ACCESSING A DISCIPLINARY DISCOURSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DESIGN OF AN EXTENDED CURRICULUM PROGRAMME (ECP) IN PHYSICS**

Much research on the first-year experience over the past few decades has been framed by the theoretical notion of 'approaches to learning', where students' approaches to learning are seen to be strongly influenced by their perceptions of the educational context (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983). More recently, critique has arisen of this research field, suggesting that it offers a narrow cognitive conceptualisation of the student, without taking sufficient account of socio-cultural aspects of learning (for example, Haggis, 2003; Malcolm & Zukas, 2001; Webb, 1997). A useful perspective on learning which takes a more socio-cultural angle may be found in the field of 'academic literacies' research (also termed New Literacy Studies), which emphasises the specific literacy practices in particular disciplines, and the difficulties that students have in accessing these often tacit aspects of the disciplinary discourse (Gee, 1990, 1998; Street, 1993; Lea & Street, 1998). In this paper, we will describe how these perspectives on learning - as a process of accessing the disciplinary discourse and as a process of identity formation through participation in a community - have influenced the curriculum design of an introductory Physics course, which forms part of the B.Sc. Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP) at the University of the Western Cape. This course was introduced in 2007, with a class of approximately 100 students. Our presentation will briefly describe some of the key features of this course, which include: Infusion of science academic literacy/foundational skills into the Physics content. A central focus of the course was on making the discourse of Physics more explicit for students. This was achieved through a collaborative partnership between an academic development practitioner and the Physics lecturers (cf. Jacobs, 2007). This partnership supported an infused focus on the tacit dimensions of the discipline, including understanding the nature of physics, accessing science texts, using different genres of science communication, and approaches to learning Physics. There was also a strong focus on making explicit for students the different verbal, pictorial, physical, graphical and mathematical representations that comprise the disciplinary discourse of physics. The course also focussed on developing students' identities as scientists through participation in experimental activities that were located in (quasi)-'authentic' real-life and industry contexts. The academic development practitioner was integral to the design of these experimental activities, in helping to highlight the tacit dimensions of experimental work that needed to be made explicit. We will discuss some of the challenges we have faced in implementing this ECP and some preliminary results from our evaluation of the Physics ECP course.



## **MATTHEE, TAHIRIH (UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE)**

### **KEEPING THE FINGER ON THE PULSE IN THE DIGITAL ACADEMIC LITERACY COURSE FOR NURSING FOUNDATION STUDENTS AT UWC**

The Digital Academic Literacy (DAL) course has been designed in such a way that novice users of digital media become empowered within one semester to effectively use the technology at their disposal within the institution for academic purposes. The designers of the course have also enriched it with creative content on HIV/AIDS, resulting in valuable feedback from students who share their learning through the questionnaires used in the course. Individual and small group discussions also give insights into the experiences and learning that have emerged during the course. The “Your Moves” cd, produced by Higher Education AIDS (HEAIDS) and very brief videos which attempt to capture a range of social and cultural issues pertaining to HIV/AIDS in an African context form a pivotal resource of the DAL course. The scenarios in the videos are thought provoking and raise important issues which relate to gender and sexual practices. HIV/AIDS content is infused in a range of assessments throughout the course with the intent that learning takes place through the processes of evaluation as well. With this approach it is hoped that the focus is not too much on the final grades achieved at the end of the course but on an entire process of learning, understanding and gradual success in the ability to demonstrate a range of newly acquired e-learning skills and a wealth of information on HIV/AIDS. Given the shortage of nurses in South Africa, this group of Nursing students forms part of a strategy to overcome the shortage through a different admissions process in which a Foundation year has been initiated prior to the actual Degree courses. The Digital Academic Literacy team in consultation with the Nursing department implemented a number of interventions in the course to create the necessary support environment for students who under different circumstances may not have been learning in a university setting. This paper attempts to demonstrate the value of relevant skill and content as necessary aspects in support programmes for institutions such as UWC, where students of diverse and under-prepared schooling environments enroll in degree programmes. The focus is on Nursing Foundation students as they prepare to be enrolled in the BCur courses. Student responses in the various course assessments, questionnaires on HIV/AIDS, group discussions and the evaluations at the end of the semester course form the basis of enquiry in an attempt to better understand the needs of the first year student, and which approaches to use in the teaching and learning environments such as computer laboratories and e-learning consultation facilities. Key findings in this adapted approach of support with Nursing Foundation students may also become useful in the review of the module descriptor of the Digital Academic Literacy course delivered across faculties at UWC.



## **MBAMBO, NONCEBA PRISCILLA (UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND); ROTHBERG, ALAN**

### **FACTORS PREDICTING SUCCESS IN PHYSIOTHERAPY**

There are several issues that are involved in the success or lack thereof in attaining a degree. Although it is seen as every student's responsibility to succeed at university, other role players such as the institution in its policies and ethos, the lecturers in their teaching, mentoring and nurturing role and parents are just as responsible. Understanding the factors that assist students to succeed in their endeavours at university is poorly understood in general and in physiotherapy particularly. Many studies have been about what the students do wrong that makes them not to succeed but the approach of this research was about what the students do right to make them succeed. A retrospective survey using a question with both open-ended and closed-ended questions was undertaken. Questionnaires were sent to 310 graduates of 1998 - 2005. The quantitative data were described using frequencies and then analyzed for relationship with success using correlation co-efficient and p-values. A stepwise logistic regression was done to establish predictability of the variables. The qualitative data from the open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis. The results showed that sharing a room at university residence (odds ratio of 5.913;  $p = 0.013$ ) and having friends who shared information on support systems within the university (odds ratio of 25.772;  $p = 0.006$ ) was related to success. Most of the students who felt integrated with their classmates were successful in completing physiotherapy. There was no relationship between matric aggregate symbol and success ( $r = 0.038$ ;  $p = 0.7693$ ). Maths had a positive relationship with success for white students only ( $r = 0.3912$ ;  $p = 0.0017$ ).

All South African universities that train physiotherapists use matriculation results as the major criterion for selection into physiotherapy. The universities have been debating the introduction of the National Senior Certificate and its implication to selection criteria. The results from this study show that the debate should rather be about supportive systems that should be put in place to assist students in their transition from high school to university and from their home environments to foreign university environment. Aggregate symbol obtained at the end of matric, symbols obtained for the different subjects and grades in which those subjects were taken are not predictors of success for black students studying physiotherapy. Supportive environment is a predictor of success.



## **MCKAY, TRACEY JILL MORTON (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG)**

### **USING PTEEP SCORES TO RESTRUCTURE AN EXTENDED DEGREE PROGRAMME**

A science extended degree programme at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) was structured to substantially increase epistemic access by using the Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes (PTEEP) scores as a baseline assessment tool. A previous study, in 2007, using students of the same social profile (multi-racial, multi-ethnic and mixed gender), demonstrated that the PTEEP was a valid predictor of success for Geography, especially for students who attended schools with English as the mode of instruction. Their PTEEP scores indicated “underpreparedness” for successful university study, thus students also attended an academic literacies module (LFS). Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to document student progress. Significant academic success for the most severely disadvantaged students, namely black students hailing from poorly resourced schools with a poor command of written English, was recorded. The PTEEP, if used as a baseline assessment tool, can also shape the formal academic intervention. This was then undertaken in the 2008 academic year. The Geography course was substantially redesigned to provide the literacy and language skills required for academic success by filling “the gaps” identified by PTEEP. These gaps include essay writing and reading skills. Many of the interventions built on the extensive collaboration between Geography, LFS and the UJ Writing Centre, to allow for joint planning and implementation. The LFS course was reworked to overtly support the Geography curriculum in terms of skills and content. Finally, the Geography course was reworked to include more contact time (two tutorials) and to dovetail with LFS, in particular, the teaching of academic literacy was made more overt. A constructivist view of learning was adopted, whereby students are actively motivated to make meaning, increase their conceptual understanding and interact with each other, and more able peers (such as the writing consultant, tutors and lecturers) around learning tasks (CHE, 2003). Analysis of student results for the end of Term 1, 2008 reveal that the restructuring had a positive effect. Sixty five percent of the 2008 class outperformed their PTEEP score, compared to 24 percent of the 2007 cohort. A pass rate of 67 percent was recorded compared to 31 percent for 2007. Importantly, the 2008 students with the lowest PTEEP scores (below 40%), improved by an average of 19 percent. However, not all are achieving a pass mark (of 50%), indicating that continued scaffolded support is required. Additionally, using PTEEP as a baseline indicator of potential student achievement helped identify students who require non-academic support. This is particularly true for students who performed well in PTEEP, as poor tertiary performance indicated that non-academic factors were at play. Thus, PTEEP helped to identify such, enabling interventions around class attendance, study skills, motivation and emotional support requirements.



## **MENTZ, MELODY (UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE); STRYDOM, J. FRANCOIS**

### **WEAVING THE INVISIBLE TAPESTRY: MANAGING DIVERSITY THROUGH ORIENTATION INNOVATION**

The establishment of a Ministerial Committee on “Progress towards Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions” by Minister Naledi Pandor has highlighted the need to explore new ways of managing diversity and to combat racism on university campuses. Increased diversity hold benefits for individuals, institutions and society at large. Research indicates there are cognitive, affective and interpersonal gains for individuals who experience high-quality diversity experiences at University. Institutions who fail to prepare their students for the diverse world of work (locally and globally) run the risk of failing to empower students with necessary skills for success. Research has linked increased diversity to specific higher education outcomes such as critical thinking. Students who have more diversity experiences report more progress in personal and educational growth; more involvement in active learning and higher levels of satisfaction with their higher education experience. On an institutional level, a commitment to diversity will inevitably lead to greater diversity in curricular offerings, staff composition and ultimately organizational flexibility and problem-solving strategies. On a societal level, lack of diversity is counterproductive to economic growth and development in the South African economy, whereas learning to effectively work with and in diverse groups, leads to higher levels of citizenry and greater striving for equality in society. However, various studies suggest racial attitudes remain resistant to change and students in different contexts shy away from “deep level” integration. In order to overcome these hurdles, Universities should focus both on structural institutional elements and practical skills development amongst students. The question is thus raised “How can orientation programmes in South Africa be a vehicle to promote increased racial understanding and tolerance?” In order for the most effective skills development programme to be designed and implemented, it is important to investigate what attitudes students enter into the higher education environment with, and how these attitudes change over time. This study aimed to provide a baseline description of the social attitudes of residential first year students at the University of the Free State in the beginning of 2008. Measures used for the research project were a social distance scale and a social dominance orientation scale. In light of these results the paper compares various international intervention programmes aimed at addressing social and racial attitudes and explores ways in which it can be integrated into orientation programme innovation. Finally, the relationship between orientation innovation and the institutional environment is reflected upon.





**MILLAR, BERNIE (CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY)**

**WHAT ABOUT THE LECTURER'S PERSONAL EPISTEMOLOGY & DISCOURSES IN A COMMUNITY OF CO-LEARNING?**

In seeking to address the many issues that surround the growing diversification of the student body within Higher Education, the research focus is usually on the students as shown by the huge body of literature on the subject. In contrast, this paper takes the approach of looking at what a lecturer brings to the diverse classroom, namely personal epistemology (Clancy, Fazey & Lawson, 2007) and personal discourse (Gee, 1996) and how these may impact upon the teaching and learning situation and the learning community. The paper is contextualized within the appreciative pedagogy action research project in a first year Information Literacy course and its mode of delivery, namely a version of Team-based learning (Michaelsen, Baumann Knight & Fink, 2004) adapted to appreciative pedagogy in a South African context. This paper has come about because of two main reasons:

- My own move away from a model of deficit in designing the curriculum of a new Information Literacy Course towards a model of appreciative pedagogy (Yballe & O'Connor, 2000; Varona, 2005), and the impact this has had on my teaching and learning.
- The personal reflections, insights, challenges and changes I am experiencing in the process of running an appreciative pedagogy first year action research project in the Information Literacy class of a South African University of Technology. In this process I have come to see how my personal epistemology and my own personal discourses have impacted on me as a teacher and on my teaching and learning situation. This seeing has caused me to move from seeing myself as a teacher to regarding myself as a co-learner (a term used by Jacobs & Farrel in 2001) with my students within a community of co-learning. This co-learning is akin to Gravett's "collective inquiry" which she describes as: "Through engaging in collective inquiry, the students and the teacher work towards a powerful shared understanding of the object of learning that is being explored. In this process a "community of inquiry and interpretation" is established" (Gravett, 2004:29). Therefore, this paper seeks to extrapolate from this appreciative pedagogy action research and its findings some tenets that may be further explored so as to contribute to the process of creating communities of co-learning in South African classrooms. This paper argues strongly for the necessity for a teacher to undertake critical self-examination of the personal epistemological paradigms and discourses that she or he brings to the classroom situation in order to understand the tension between the different discourses at work in the classroom and how to use this tension in creative pedagogy. The argument is further developed by considering how this critical self-interrogation by a teacher can lead to better teaching and learning by appreciation of the multiplicity of strengths present in a diverse co-learning community.



**MTYAPI, NDAFIKA KING (WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY)**

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLASS SIZE AND STUDENT THROUGHPUT**

This paper investigates the relationship between class size and student throughput. Among other topics this paper provides a background of the research/study, definition of terms, advantages of large classes, methodology, and challenges of dealing with large classes as well as the findings of the study. In view of the fact that there are a considerable number of obstacles faced by students undertaking their studies in South African Institutions of Higher learning that negatively impact on the throughput rate in South African Tertiary Institutions. These obstacles have been reported by the lecturers concerned as well as through observation by the researcher. It is against this background that the researcher has seen it necessary to conduct a study on an investigation of the relationship between class size and student throughput. In this regard the researcher has chosen Walter Sisulu University (Zamukulungisa Campus) as an area in which to conduct his study. The University has been faced with a challenge of a limited number of classrooms to accommodate students whereas on the other hand the same University continues to admit huge amounts of students to its programmes. Questionnaires were distributed among affected stakeholders as well as the reading of relevant books on how to handle large classes have been used as form of collecting information. A facilitator of teaching and learning, referred to as the lecturer in this study tends to spend more time as a "preacher" in the classroom and this leads to student boredom and high failure and drop out rate. However, teaching large classes has its advantages and disadvantages. In advocating the former, Susan and others (2007:12) indicate that large student numbers can, through facilitation of peer collaboration learning, produce desirable results. The challenges that face a lecturer in teaching large classes are among others the difficulty of evaluating large amounts of written work, managing the classroom as well as teaching with limited resources. Organising large classes into groups as well as the provision of electronic learning for students - makes teaching and learning in large classrooms easier and manageable (Gray 2005:107). A lecturer who chooses group facilitation method as a teaching aid tends to enjoy the benefits of teaching large classes. Students learn to develop strategies for helping themselves and their classmates through peer-teaching and collaboration. Through the latter, an atmosphere of cooperation is facilitated within the classroom environment. When the lecturer develops an understanding of students through interaction and appreciating student participation in class., it becomes possible to coordinate and manage large classes. The paper concludes that teachers would prefer to teach a class of 18 or less students who have reading material and willing to participate in classroom. The students should show a desire to learn as this would also make teaching large classes an enjoyable journey.



## **MUNRO, MICHELLE (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY)**

### **RESPONDING TO THE HIV CRISIS: DEVELOPING A GENERIC HIV E-LEARNING COURSE**

As HIV continues to spread a sense of urgency has developed regarding the need to stop the pandemic. Education is regarded key to change knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, there is however a shortage of programs targeting youths between the ages of 18 – 24, including those enrolled in Higher Education Institutions. During 2007 an institutional needs analysis was performed by Stellenbosch University's HIV Program. The study aimed to identify the gaps within the University's response in addressing the HIV crisis and to develop and implement programs to fill these gaps. Within this study qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were employed and the research instruments used included structured interviews based on questionnaires. The findings of the research study clearly indicated that Stellenbosch University urgently needed to address HIV curriculum integration at an institutional level. Through the HIV Program's plan for institutional curriculum development, based within the theoretical framework of Positive Psychology and specifically Wellness theory an attempt was made to improve academic wellness by empowering students to improve and maintain their own physical wellness. The levels of implementation progress from the basic knowledge level - through behaviour change at the personal level - towards behaviour change and applying knowledge and skills at the professional level, which in turn should increase the employability of graduates. The HIV curriculum development plan was thus designed in three phases (a generic HIV e-learning course, based within WebCT (compulsory for all first-year students), First-year Academy Lifeskills-initiatives hosted within ResEd's and HIV curriculum integration within faculties). This presentation will showcase the institutional curriculum development progress made by Stellenbosch University with specific reference to the E-learning course, as the foundation for further HIV integration and training. Captivate Software was used to develop the course which allows it to be innovative, creative, colourful and interactive. The course covers the basic facts of HIV in a 40min time frame and includes music, a voice-over narrative and interactive quizzes ensuring an interesting and student-friendly learning experience. The course further includes details of all HIV related support services on campus. The aim of the course is to create awareness and inform all first-year students of the basics of HIV, as well as to familiarize them with the University's HIV related support services. The course will also be available for faculties to use as the knowledge foundation for their HIV modules or programs and will in future be revised to be used for staff induction. This presentation will include a short preview of the actual E-learning course.



## **NEL, CARISMA; NEL, CHARL (NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY)**

### **ACCESS WITH SUCCESS: A 3-TIER MODEL FOR SUPPORTING READING-TO-LEARN**

Increased participation in the higher education sector in South Africa brings with it challenges regarding access to, and success in, the higher education sector. Questions of access to, and success in, higher education become really important when it is realised that many students now seeking participation in the sector do not necessarily come from backgrounds that have adequately prepared them for this participation. One of the biggest problems in higher education, but one which is often not fully recognised by either students or lecturers until some way into academic courses, is the problem of reading, perhaps because reading in itself is not assessed. However, the results or output from reading are assessed. Reading is not simply an additional tool that students need at university; it constitutes the very process whereby learning occurs. Lecturers often complain that there is a lack of critical discussion in essays and that evidence of reading for essays manifests mainly in descriptive passages, with little evaluation, comment or criticism of what has been read. Critical reading skills are thus essential to successful study within the South African Higher Education sector. Since reading tends to be a means to an end in the South African academic context - a piece of writing (i.e., the key assessment tool) or a discussion or seminar exercise- it seems reasonable to focus on reading ability. This paper, therefore, focuses on reading as a central touchstone to academic study. In the crucial area of academic reading there is often only fragmented and limited provision of support at tertiary level. Regardless of student needs, most universities provide bolt-on generic skills course(s) offered by academic support units, language departments/schools or study skills centres. Research indicates that generic skills courses are not effective and students tend to avoid them because they regard them as irrelevant to their disciplines. Academic reading and writing are complex skills that require subject knowledge and above all, an understanding of the nature of knowledge in the specific discipline. Reading- and writing-to-learn at university requires a systematic and comprehensive approach to supporting students. Institutions should not leave reading and writing development to chance. Structures need to be put in place to ensure the consistent and gradual development of reading- and writing-to-learn skills for all students. The purpose of this paper is to present a 3-tier model for specifically reading-to-learn at university. The aim of the model is preventative and seeks to facilitate success for all students as well as fulfilling government requirements of quality student outcomes and timely completion and throughput rates. Each tier of the model focuses on core curricula, adjunct/integrated reading curricula, teaching staff, instructional delivery, resources, instructional methods/strategies, support, assessment and partnerships.



## NEL, CELESTE (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY)

### THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL: A UNIVERSITY'S ROLE IN PRE-ENTRY

The South African school system is increasingly producing students who do not make the grade in higher education. Universities are concerned about the quality of the students who register as first-years at higher education institutions. The findings of various studies have clearly shown that more and more students are inadequately prepared and therefore not ready for higher education. In South Africa the problems resulting from the gap between school and university have been exacerbated by the inequalities that exist in the secondary school system, and which are still part of the legacy of apartheid. Within the context of learners' increasing unpreparedness for university studies, their difficult transition from school to university and the concomitant high drop-out figures in higher education, this study investigated the extent to which universities – with Stellenbosch University as a case in point – can contribute towards preparing students for university studies from as early as school level, and thus facilitate their transition from school to university. Taking this research question into account, the researcher investigated the extent to which specific variables played a part both in the pre-university phase and after admission. In addition, the study also focused on the extent to which students' school background (previously disadvantaged or privileged school) influences students' preparedness, and to what extent academic standards (amongst others final examination results) are related to success in the first year at university. The research design was a case study of black newcomer first-year students who participated in a Stellenbosch University bursary project (the Merit Bursary project) in their Grade 12 year. The data generation consisted of two phases, namely a quantitative approach in the pre-university phase and a qualitative approach, after admission, in the transitional phase. The research findings have revealed that the inequalities in the South African schooling system influence the transition from school to university. The classification of schools (previously disadvantaged or privileged school) plays a crucial role in students' preparedness and how they handle the transition from school to university. There are various academic, social, emotional, cultural and financial factors that impact on this transition. However, the factors are interdependent – no one factor can be regarded as being more important than another. Universities must adopt a holistic approach to the transition that newcomer students are required to make. It was concluded in the study that universities have a responsibility to ensure that the diminishing pool of potential students in higher education be expanded. Universities should also contribute towards preparing prospective students more effectively so that the transition process will be less challenging. It is believed that this will also improve the throughput rate. In this regard the study proposes a theoretical framework for a pre university intervention.



## NEL, CORNE (UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA); EKSTEEN, CARINA

### DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A PEER-MENTORSHIP PROGRAM FOR UNDERGRADUATE PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS AT UP

In 2005 a need was recognized by the Physiotherapy Department for a program that will address the emotional/personal wellbeing of students, especially first year students. It was decided that a peer mentorship program might address the facilitation of integration of personal development as well as academic support. A mentorship program was launched at the start of the academic year 2006. A name for the mentorship program that reflects the characteristics of a mentorship program for was created by the researcher. Objectives of the Mentorship Program: Supportive environment; Positive role models; Framework for positive interaction between students, mentors and staff;models; Help junior students to understand and manage the challenges of life members; Facilitate the development of practical interpersonal skills in the mentors so that they can facilitate the development of these skills in their mentees; Have a positive impact on the attrition rates of the first-year students; Give every Physiotherapy student the opportunity to develop into a well-balanced (H.A.P.P.Y) student and citizen! PILOT PROGRAM: February to November of 2006; Introduction and invitation to the third and fourth year students to be trained as peer mentors; Participation was voluntary, no academic benefit; The time spent on training and mentee meetings will be in their own free time; Potential peer mentors had to apply to act as mentors; Coordinator interviewed potential peer mentors - the contents and aims of the program were explained. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY: To determine the perceptions of physiotherapy students of the H.A.P.P.Y Mentorship program; Is there a need for a mentorship program?; To what extent were the objectives the program met?; To identify aspects of the H.A.P.P.Y. mentorship program that can and/or should be adapted. RESEARCH APPROACH: Qualitative, descriptive, program evaluation research. Data was collected by using focus group discussions as well as self-report questionnaires completed by all students that volunteered to participate in the study. Data was analyzed and coded and will be discussed under the following headings: Positive experiences; Negative experiences and Suggestions. All participants (90 % of all students in the Department of Physiotherapy) agreed that the program must continue with the suggested changes. Based on the pilot study most of the objectives were reached in cases where there was adequate contact and communication between the mentor and mentee. A valid conclusion on the effect of the mentor program on student attrition rates and whether it helped students to develop into well-balanced citizens could not be made based on the pilot study.



**NGCOBO, SANDISO (MANGOSUTHU UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY)**

**LECTURERS AND STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON A DUAL LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION PILOT COURSE ON ACADEMIC LITERACY**

The delay in the implementation of the language in education policies has been partly due to generally negative and ambiguous attitudes of various stakeholders towards the intended use of indigenous African languages in education and a general lack of resources. In this paper I report on endeavours that are directed towards contributing towards policy implementation, the recognition and development of African languages as suitable media for instruction and learning in the academia. The argument and research contribution made by this paper is that attitudes towards mother tongue instruction are different when based on first-hand experience as opposed to perceptions that are based on history. To test this theory I developed a learning guide for a pilot course that uses both English and isiZulu in its presentation of content for the academic literacy module. The participants in the study are the Extended Curriculum Programme in Engineering first-year students and eleven lecturers some of whom are not isiZulu mother-tongue speakers. At the end of a semester I administered a course evaluation questionnaire to gauge the lecturers and learners' perceptions on the use of an African language in teaching English additional language and literacy. The analysis of the lecturers and learners' reflections on their experience with a dual language instruction pilot course reveals growing positive attitudes towards the use of African languages in education and benefits in bi-/multilingualism and biliteracy.



**NIVEN, PENELOPE MARY (UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL)**

**RAISING 1ST YEAR STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF ASSESSMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE: DOES IT HELP THEM BECOME BETTER WRITERS?**

This paper reports on the third phase in an ongoing critical action research project which is exploring different aspects of the use of formative assessment in an academic writing course for 1st year Social Science students. In this phase the lecturers deliberately teach some of the basic theory of criterion-based assessment and the differences between formative and summative assessment at a stage in the course just prior to the submission of the students first major writing assignment of the academic year. Using a peer assessment strategy, the students drew up a set of criteria for the assignment and then formatively assessed the first draft of each other's assignments. Records of their written comments on each other's assignment were recorded and analysed and the whole process was extensively reviewed and evaluated at the end. This paper concludes that there were a number of benefits accruing from the foregrounding of assessment issues: students became more goal-driven as writers, were made more conscious of the nature of academic writing as a ongoing, recursive process rather than as a final product by which they were to be judged. However, there was also some evidence that the use of peer assessment as a means of delivering useable formative feedback was a partial failure at this stage in the course.



**NTSHINGA, WONGA (TSHWANE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY); MAKITLA, ISHMAEL**

#### **(VIRTUAL) MENTORSHIP AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE LEARNER SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The concept of mentorship is well-known and information regarding this is readily available by pressing a button. It is widely implemented in the management and education environments. In South Africa (SA), mentoring the designated groups is noted on the transformation agendas. Mentoring has a long tradition in higher education (HE), although it does not necessarily feature in the policies and procedures of South African HE institutions. Our view is that mentorship has the special ability to give participants the opportunity to share knowledge, develop skills, and to grow. A success story regarding a peer mentorship programme (TAMP), using an online booking system (<http://tamp.tut.ac.za>), will be shared. This success story will additionally demonstrate how policy, technology, and skills-management can help in implementing educational programmes aimed at improving learners' performance and promote interactive learning. The Technical Applications Mentorship Programme (TAMP) is a cost-free programme dedicated to assisting registered learners in the Faculty of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at TUT. TAMP mentors are trained senior learners, who assist junior learners (mentees) with programming languages like COBOL; C++; VB.NET; and JAVA. The Student Development and Support (SDS) Directorate coaches our mentors every semester on the following modules: mentor guidelines; mentoring with emotional intelligence; career mentoring; academic mentoring & training; and mentoring in a learning community. After a year of service TAMP mentors are awarded an SDS Merit Certificate. The use of technology, and hence the development of the TAMP mentorship website, has given the programme the advantage of having a self-service setting with learners being able to diarise mentorship sessions, provide feedback, and also to plan their activities effectively. The website is also used to analyze topics such as those listed below: what is the pass rate per semester? Which topic/module/subject is booked most by mentees? Which mentor is booked most frequently? Which mentor is most highly rated by mentees? How many bookings occur per semester? What is the overall pass rate of TAMP? Collectively, these features enable the facilitator to identify grey areas within each programming module. Virtual mentorship is achieved by having learners come into contact with some of the senior mentors who are currently working in the IT industry through forums and email communications. Virtual mentorship offers advisors to the learners, as well as to their fellow mentors still on campus. More importantly, virtual mentors add their industry [programming] experience to the process of supporting the overall quality objectives of the programme.



**OLIVIER, ALETTA PETRONELLA (UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE)**

#### **CURBING PLAGIARISM BY TEACHING TEXT TRANSFORMATION SKILLS TO FIRST YEAR STUDENTS**

Plagiarism has been stigmatised as “the problem that won’t go away” or the problem “that is growing bigger” (Chris Park, 2003). It also remains an “elusive concept” (Shelley Angéllil-Carter, 2000). Pecorari (2003) identifies the absence of a uniform and distinctive definition of plagiarism as the core of the problem. Admitting these findings by writing teachers and researchers, we are confronted with two choices: either the plagiarism *policing* route (Peter Levin, 2006), or the more challenging pro-active route of *pedagogy*. In their struggle to bridge the gap between secondary and tertiary education, and to become part of the academic discourse community, first year students often plagiarise inadvertently. Even if not falling prey to inadvertent plagiarism, most first year students lack adequate academic writing skills. In March 2006 the Royal Literary Fund (RLF) published a report which unequivocally states that among UK first year students there is a “preponderance of students who are afflicted to a disabling degree by inadequate writing skills”. According to Angéllil-Carter plagiarism occurs not only due to a lack of knowledge regarding student learning problems, but also because of the absence of a clear pedagogy. I share her view that “plagiarism is much more a problem of academic literacy than academic dishonesty”. Today undergraduate writing receives considerable attention in academic institutions and research. Analyses of first year academic writing (see various articles analysing first year essays in different disciplines in Ravelli and Ellis, 2004), as well as numerous online advertisements on “Academic Skills Workshops” for first years, point towards the fact that teaching academic skills is just as important as subject specific content (Roz Ivanič, 1998). This paper argues for a pro-active pedagogical approach to academic writing in and across disciplines. The method used is example analyses from which writing principles are gleaned and demonstrated. By way of analyses of example texts the transformational approach to text construction, formulated by Van Dijk (1971) will be explained. Van Dijk distinguishes five transformational types: deletion, addition, ordering, repetition, and substitution. In a course on the foundations of academic writing presented at the University of the Free State, these transformational types were explained and applied to examples in first year academic writing courses. These types, however, have been supplemented by adding transformations such as cumulation, reasoning, questioning, contrasting, narrating and dialoguing (Mikhail Bakhtin, 1981). This paper reports on the process and illustrates the method further. The transformational approach in tertiary education empowers student-writers in becoming skilled in academic writing. It further complements technological detection programmes. In both regards the transformational approach channels energies surrounding plagiarism towards a pedagogical goal.



**OLOJEDE, KEHINDE TUNDE (FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, TECHNICAL);  
MADUEKWE, ANTHONIA NGOZIKA; ADEOSUN, OYENIKE ADE**

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**AN APPRAISAL OF THE WRITTEN ENGLISH OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS OF A NIGERIAN  
UNIVERSITY :IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND FUTURE LEADERSHIP**

English language is the medium of instruction in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Thus proficiency in the use of the language has critical implications for the academic success of any student pursuing higher education. Written English is particularly crucial for first year students as virtually all academic teaching/learning between students and lecturers are conducted in writing. As new entrants into the university, first year students are expected to possess a relatively good command of the grammar and mechanics of the language necessary to write effectively in English. However, in spite of the assumed language competence of these first year students based on their performance in the Senior School Certificate and Matriculation Examinations, there has been a general outcry from lecturers and other stakeholders in higher education about the poor command of English of the first year students. This study examines in depth the features of the written English of sampled first year students of a Nigerian university. An essay test was administered on 200 first year students drawn from different disciplines and an error analysis was done on their writing. The results confirm a serious deficiency in the students' written English and an urgent need for continuous remediation beyond the current one-year Communication Skills courses being offered in the first year of tertiary education. The implications of this finding for the students' academic success and future leadership are also discussed.



**PAPAGEORGE, BASIL (MIDRAND GRADUATE INSTITUTE)**

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**THE IMPACT OF INTENSIVE EXPERIENTIAL BASED LEARNING AT FIRST YEAR LEVEL AT A  
PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDER IN SOUTH AFRICA**

A substantial amount of research on student learning in higher education has shown that students develop qualitatively different understandings of the material they are studying, and that this variation in understanding relates to the variation in the way they approach their studies. The variation in the way they approach their studies has been described in terms of surface and deep approaches. A surface approach is one in which the students intend to reproduce material they are studying in order to meet externally imposed demands. In the process, they adopt strategies focused on, for example, rote memorisation. A deep approach, on the other hand, is one in which the students' intention is to understand the material they are studying. They adopt strategies aimed at seeking meaning in that material. Research in student learning in several fields of study has shown that the former approach results in low quality learning outcomes, while the latter results in higher quality outcomes. This paper aims to report the outcome of an extended study focused on qualifying the impact of intensive experiential based learning at first year level at a Private Higher Education provider in South Africa. The purpose of the study was to determine whether an intensive practical project exposing marketing students to commercial practice would deepen and reinforce their learning through to second year. This paper focuses on knowledge retention and ability to use practical experience to show comprehension of theory one year later. 100 students who participated in a practical marketing project in 2007 were asked to answer a series of questions to test subject matter recall and further to determine whether their practical experience helped them in explaining theory. A mixed quantitative - qualitative methodology was used to test recall of theory related to the project and gain the perceptions of students with regards their ability to understand and explain marketing practice. Indications at this stage of the study are that students show improvement in theory recall and an improved ability to explain principles, as compared with students who do not participate. It is envisaged that these indications will reflect strongly in the final results, thereby confirming that this mode of learning increases student confidence, and facilitates the critical mindshift required if first years are to remain confident and determined to succeed at second and third year levels. The paper is of value because there is considerable interest in enhancing throughput rates by intensifying experiences to achieve increased recall, and stronger comprehension, which stays with students for the duration of their studies. Since private institutions are not entitled to state subsidies, methods of improving throughput cost effectively are welcomed. No such research exists in the Private Higher Education sector in South Africa.



PERMALL, LAETITIA (UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE)

#### HOW DOES ROLE MODELLING IMPACT THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF CONCEPT IN FIRST YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS?

Higher Education in South Africa faces many challenges to redress the inequalities of the past and to respond to the diverse needs of tertiary students and society. White Paper 3 (1997) identifies one of the roles of higher education as “human resource development: the mobilization of human talent and potential through lifelong learning to contribute to the social, economic, cultural and intellectual life of a rapidly changing society. One of the objectives of the National Plan for Higher Education (2001) is “to provide access to higher education to all irrespective of race, gender, age, creed, class or disability and to produce graduates with the skills and competencies necessary to meet the human resource needs of the country.” In the context of limited financial resources to address the diverse needs of students adequately within HE institutions, as well as the diminishing family roles and community resources, mentoring is increasingly being used as an intervention strategy to facilitate the personal, academic and social development of tertiary students. Mentoring facilitates the transition of first year students from secondary to tertiary education. Mentoring has a range of definitions and is implemented within different contexts with different objectives. Factors which underpin the effectiveness of mentoring include social support to increase coping, active involvement in learning and shared learning communities and attachment to peers and the faculty. These factors are all thought to have a positive impact on academic functioning. Ubiquitous to all definitions of mentoring is “role modelling”. The role model, like a mirror, helps the beholder to see the self. Mentees develop a positive identity with the mentor which, when internalized, impacts on the sense of self and the mentee’s internal motivation. The question is, “Why does it work?” This paper aims to explore how effective role modelling within the mentoring relationship is and its impact on the development of the self. The Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) will be used as a basis for this study. Social identity theory proposes that the membership of social groups and categories forms an important part of our self concept. Role modelling through mentoring will provide the student with a positive experience of the other; create a sense of belonging and impact on the student’s self esteem. This paper further aims to encourage monitored mentoring for first year students in higher education. There is a concern around the proliferation of mentoring without the in-depth understanding of its process. The findings of this paper will further lend weight to the role that underpins the effectiveness of its process.



PERSON, PAMELA F (UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI); LEWIS, MARIANNE; ESCOE, GISELA

#### CURRICULUM INNOVATION FROM CONVOCATION THROUGH COMMENCEMENT: FYE AS A CATALYST FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The proposed panel session will explore how a comprehensive First-year Experience (FYE) program can serve as the foundation for effecting institutional change. More specifically, a flexible, campus-wide approach to FYE enabled an integrative undergraduate strategy for fostering learning and engaging student scholars. The panellists will provide alternative perspectives on the role of FYE in this initiative and change process. The model and methods shared will be directly relevant to any college or university that would benefit from employing a holistic educational approach that incorporates current studies of student success while embracing an institution’s unique characteristics. The FYE initiative at the University of Cincinnati, called “Great Beginnings,” is a comprehensive, ambitious, and yet achievable approach to enhancing the first-year at a large, research university. At the institution level the initiative is credited with substantially increasing student success as measured by first-to-second year retention and student engagement rates. The Great Beginnings initiative grew incrementally yet purposefully, moving from early adopters to mainstream faculty and from small and focused professional colleges to the large, liberal arts core of the university. Further, this effort developed a large cadre of professors and administrators who came to recognize how the ideas embraced by our FYE initiative could be expanded to create a well-designed undergraduate strategy that combines curricular, co-curricular, and life experiences. Our session will include three panellists who played influential yet different roles in the Great Beginnings initiative and in effecting wider, institutional change: The Director of the University Center for First-year Experience and Learning Communities will contribute insights into the day-to-day work of growing and managing an effective and influential FYE initiative. A College of Business faculty member, who served as Associate Dean of her college during the initiative, will share experiences of adapting the effort to specific programs and leveraging opportunities for experiential learning. The Vice Provost for Assessment and Student Learning will share her expertise with regard to institutional planning, implementation and assessment. By providing these three very different perspectives, the panellists will engage participants in a guided discussion of the key attributes of a well-designed FYE program and its broader potential for effecting institutional improvements. Addressed issues will include those of administrative and financial support, communications, governance, and faculty buy-in. We will also discuss how institutions might use FYE as a launching point for broader curricular reform at mid-collegiate and senior-year touch points.



PETERSEN, IL-HAAM (HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL); LOUW, JOHANN; DUMONT, KITTY

#### ADJUSTMENT TO UNIVERSITY AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

South African universities, like most universities globally, are faced with the challenging task of managing the increasing diversity of the student population, which presents further challenges in retaining and graduating their student intake. Research shows that economically and educationally disadvantaged students are particularly vulnerable to adjustment difficulties in making the transition from secondary school to university. The existing literature on the determinants of academic performance among disadvantaged students shows that psychosocial factors (e.g. motivation, personality, etc.) play an important role in predicting the academic performance of these students. It is now well-recognised that cognitive factors on their own are not appropriate for determining the academic performance of disadvantaged students. The paper proposes a model which posits that adjustment plays a key role in determining academic performance among disadvantaged students. The model explores the expectation that the effects of students' personal attributes (i.e. self-esteem and academic motivation), their appraisal of their ability to cope with various demands (i.e. levels of perceived stress and perceived academic workload) and their interaction with the various sources of support provided by the university *on their academic performance*, are mediated by the quality of their adjustment to university. One hundred and ninety four first-year students on need-based financial aid at a South African university completed a questionnaire measuring these psychosocial variables. The questionnaire included existing standard measures of self-esteem, academic motivation, perceived stress, perceived academic workload and adjustment. The students' final first-year academic results were obtained via the university's records office. Path analyses showed that adjustment did not function as a pure mediator on academic performance as a dependent variable. Furthermore, the psychosocial factors explained much (59%) of the variance in the students' adjustment and 20 percent of the variance in their academic performance. Hence, the psychosocial variables better explained the students' adjustment to university than they did their academic performance. The students' adjustment, extrinsic regulation (i.e. the most extrinsic motivational orientation) and academic workload had a significant impact on their academic performance. The results may provide useful information for the development of interventions assisting students in making the transition from secondary school to university.



PIENAAR, ANTON (UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE); BAUER, CONSTANCE

#### INVESTIGATING AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL FACE TO FACE TUTORIAL SESSIONS BY USING ASYNCHRONOUS TOOLS TO FACILITATE PEER COLLABORATION IN LARGE 1ST YEAR GROUPS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

Recently, the University of the Free State, specifically the Department Political Science has seen a deluge of student number increases in the first year courses. This increase in student numbers can be attributed largely to a change in curriculum and program planning. In the past this department has relied heavily on the traditional tutorial system to facilitate teaching, assessment and learning. In this case the traditional system can be described as the scheduled face to face contact session timetabled by venue and compulsory participation. It has become apparent that the traditional tutorial system in this department is facing many challenges. Mainly the challenges comprise: availability of venue; ability of students to attend all tutorial classes; quality of tutorial session and valuable student contributions. The department is investigating an alternative to the traditional tutorial method, by which the tutorial sessions will be presented in an asynchronous mode by using educational systems technologies or more specifically a Learning Management System (LMS). This poster/paper will present to the audience the action research process and findings of the change in tutorial methodology. It is proposed that the first year group be divided randomly into smaller groups by the LMS. These groups will then take part in an online asynchronous discussion forum. The tutor will maintain and monitor the groups online and will be given a rubric according to which he must evaluate and assess the responses. Additionally, the groups will be expected to participate in a wiki, which will comprise the group assignment. The tutor will also be expected to closely monitor the participation log of each group and student. The facilitator and Tutor will plan interventions should the online participation rate not be sufficient. The findings and experiences of using this methodology will comprise feedback of the experiences from all stake holders in this research. The feedback of the experience will be from the students using the asynchronous tutorial model, the tutors managing the online tutorial groups and the main facilitator/lecturer. This research project should ultimately determine the future of all tutorial session presented by the Department Political Science at the University of the Free State.





PYM, JUNE (UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN); FOURIE, CARLA; PAXTON, MORAGH; CONRADIE, BEATRICE

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**IS ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT (COMMERCE) AT UCT WORTH IT? AN OVERVIEW OF SOME ISSUES REGARDING STRUCTURE, PEDAGOGY, INTEGRATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT AT UCT**

Academic Development (AD)(Commerce) has been designed to allow students to complete a Bachelor of Commerce degree over a three or four-year period and offers a range of interventions. The focus is on the 'articulation gap' between school and university, and allows for the development of key skills and graduate competencies. There are approximately 450 students in the programme, and interventions occur at different stages throughout the degree. The topics cover a range of different aspects related to the programme:

*Structure and integration:* The structure and curriculum design continues to change in response to student needs and the ever changing landscape of the incoming student cohorts. The particular focus of AD Commerce is collecting various narratives and student profiles to better understand the student learning experience, engaging with the factors that impact on the learning experience, exploration of teaching pedagogies and structures, integration of skills and using formative evaluation to inform the direction of the learning experience.

We present the learning imperatives and issues that impact on the structure, curriculum design, changes and interventions in the programme.

*Developing a teaching environment:* We explore developing academic development students in their role as tutors with a tutor review process. A lecturer teaching Accounting to first year AD students shares her insights in focusing on the tutorial as a place of development and valuing the intrinsic and important role of the tutorial as a learning structure.

*Integrating literacy:* At the University of Cape Town we have found that the "language problem" is often not resolved by add-on courses. We focus on the development of an integrated approach to teaching, by drawing on the experiences over the last 10 years. In the AD interventions, teaching has a variety of language skills embedded in an academic course. Our understanding of linguistic competence particularly illuminates that any competencies cannot be separated from the cognitive demands of the task (Cummins 1984, 1996).

*Student-reported determinants of academic success:* The literature on multivariate regressions of factors explaining student performance is limited by these models' inability to explain the bulk of the variance in performance with typical transcript data. We present quantitative data for 127 first and second year students in academic development (Commerce) at UCT on what they experience as the main reasons for their success in the programme.



RAMBHAROS, SHUBNAM (DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY); JONES, BRONWYN

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**ACHIEVING LEARNER SUCCESS AT DUT THROUGH EXTENDED CURRICULUM PROGRAMMES**

In an attempt to address the poor throughput rates evident across the Higher Education landscape, the Department of Education (DoE) made funds available for Foundation Provision to offer student academic support. DUT secured DoE funding for Foundation provision in the 2004/05 – 2006/07 triennium as well as the next which ends in 2010. The number of Foundation Provisions approved by DoE has increased from twelve diplomas funded in 2004/05 – 2006/07 triennium to twenty two diploma programmes funded in the 2007/08 – 2009/10 triennium across all six faculties. The focus of these provisions is structuring student academic development, integrated into the overall curriculum rather than as add-on interventions. The provisions are intended for long-term learner success and graduation, and not to just address access. The underlying curriculum structure of these provisions is to curriculate for knowledge, values and skills that are embedded in educational programmes that are traditionally problematic. Within the Foundation Provisions, projects/modules are designed to address the core-practices embedded within high-risk subjects, eg. Academic Literacy, Information Literacy. This paper reports on:

- Strategies used to integrate academic development into the curriculum,
- The success rates per subject of the ECPs.
- The perceptions of the learners towards their ECPs and their subsequent assimilation into the mainstream.
- Challenges linked to being in an ECP that have been highlighted by ECP learners.
- Psychosocial issues experienced by ECP learners.
- Innovative strategies implemented by ECP lecturers to provide a supportive environment for learners to acquire and critique practices expected of them.



RATHILAL, SHOBA; CHITANAND, NALINI; RAMBHAROS, SHUBNAM  
(DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY); REDDY, GAYNE

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#### CAN THE USE OF ENTRANCE TESTS HELP TO ENHANCE THE FIRST YEAR ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE?

For various reasons the gap between higher education and secondary education is increasing thereby making the first year experience of the learners more demanding. The most common map route to higher education is through secondary education. Therefore entrance requirements at higher education institutions have been based on symbols in the school leaving examination. However school leaving examinations are designed to assess whether learners have met outcomes of the secondary education phase. This does not necessarily imply that the learners are suitably competent to enter higher education. It is therefore necessary to use more than one instrument in the selection of learners to a program. One such instrument that can be used is the entrance or placement tests. These tests can be used to appropriately select learners for a particular qualification and also then place learners either within the mainstream or Extended Curriculum program (ECP). Depending on the tests used, further analysis can generate diagnostic information about the strengths and weaknesses of particular cohorts of students. This information is valuable in understanding the gap between what is expected by higher education and the actual competencies of students entering higher education at a national level, an institutional level, a program level and a classroom level. At the Durban University of Technology (DUT) many departments have complemented their entrance requirements by using the Standardised Assessment Tests for Access and Placement (SATAP). The Access project team within the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) have analysed the SATAP tests and created reports on performance of students who have been accepted into programs at DUT. These reports contribute to the development of an academic student profile for groups of students that can be used to inform the program design, design of material, teaching styles etc. The paper will focus on the following: 1. The appropriate use of entrance or placement tests. 2. The Implication of Test Analysis on Program Design. 3. The use of the tests to inform staff development initiatives. 4. The Bigger Picture which includes for example decisions around admission criteria at an institutional level and creating liaisons between higher education and secondary education.



RAUBENHEIMER, ERIKA (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG)

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#### ELECTRONIC ASSESSMENTS AND FIRST-YEAR STUDENT SUCCESS IN THE FACULTY OF SCIENCE AT UJ

In 2005, two institutions across five campuses (within a 50 km radius) were merged to form the new *University of Johannesburg* – a first of its kind in South Africa. The *University of Johannesburg (UJ)* is a residential university in the city of Johannesburg, South Africa. Undergraduate as well as postgraduate courses are offered on a full time and part-time basis. Although many of today's students are more technology literate and -orientated than before, we still have a very diverse group of students to cater for. Because of their different backgrounds, they are not on the same level with regard to skills in using certain technology. Bearing this in mind it was decided to incorporate technology in the form of a Learning Management System (*Blackboard Learning Systems Vista Enterprise 4*), which has been used effectively at the University for close to ten years, as an additional (and enhancing) tool in the teaching of first-year Chemistry and Geology. Employed as an Instructional Designer at the Centre for Technology Assisted Learning (CenTAL) at UJ, one of my duties is to support lecturers in the Faculty of Science in the use of technology as part of their teaching and learning environment. It is in this capacity that I got involved in assisting the first year Chemistry and Geology lecturers to use electronic assessment as part of their assessment methodology. In my presentation I aim to show how **electronic assessments** conducted in a Learning Management System can be used in various ways to get the students engaged with the learning material and to study on a continuous basis. I will present evidence on how students need to take part in different activities to help them study the relevant material and be better prepared for tests and exams. In **Chemistry 1**, a combination of electronic and paper-based assessments were used in different forms. We currently have 342 students enrolled for Chemistry 1. In **Geology 1**, students had to complete numerous open book assessments in Blackboard that amounted to 10% of their semester marks – i.e. the marks that would give them access to the final assessment (examination) at the end of the semester. For the semester test a combination of multiple choice, true/false and paragraph questions were used – also conducted in Blackboard. 136 students are enrolled for Geology 1. One of many conclusions: A huge advantage of using an electronic platform in which assessment are conducted, is that students with problems relating to specific areas in the curriculum or within the subject in general, could be identified early in the semester and be contacted and assisted by a lecturer to increase their chances of performing better.



**RIEKER, MARK IVAN (UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL)**

**ECHOES FROM THE COALFACE: THE PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE OF AUGMENTED TEACHING OF ACCESS STUDENTS**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal is in the process of implementing an augmented curriculum which provides tutorial support for access students encountering selected Humanities mainstream disciplines for the first time and those in the early stages of their degree. This paper provides a reflective account of the difficulties and successes of a narrowly defined aspect of this nascent programme. As a materials developer and subsequent tutor in the programme, the author will examine the intersect between the pedagogical pushes and the practical pulls encountered in attempting to develop and teach a series of learning materials that both respond to the aims of the discipline and address the needs of the students. A still-unfolding narrative of the usefulness and limitations of the tutorials will be told through both a quantitative account of the impact of the programme on class assessments and a qualitative thematic reflection on the experiences of the students. The interface of considered action and the necessity for improvisation and flexibility will be explored through illustrative reference to the constantly evolving material development task. Although working within a particular discipline (Sociology), the author will provide comparative data from other disciplines to highlight the difficulty of standardisation of materials and approaches between what are often incommensurable social scientific discourses. Importance will be given to the relationship between learners and tutors with a mind to reframe the role of tutor into one of mentor. Lastly, the inter- and intra-relationships of access and non-access students will be examined in terms of the impact of these forms on learning identity and culture. The paper hopes to encourage debate around these issues and share ideas within what is both an exciting and often perplexing area of praxis.



**RUITERS, JOHN (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); BLUM-MALLEY, SUZANNE**

**RESEARCHING ONLINE WRITING IN A BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM: THE SHARING CULTURES PROJECT EXPERIENCE**

Six years ago, as a result of an initial Fulbright Alumni Initiative Award, Columbia College Chicago, USA (CCC) and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa (NMMU) entered into a relationship through the Sharing Cultures project, an educational effort to connect developmental writing and first-year experience classrooms at each institution through online interaction. The idea was to leverage the Internet and digital technology to create two, interconnected, international writing and research exchanges, one between students at each institution and one between a teaching team of faculty at each institution. We have been successful in achieving and measuring success for our basic learning outcomes for students and accomplishing a certain amount of collaborative research and scholarship as faculty members. Nevertheless, sustaining institutional support and recognition for this type of classroom collaboration as well as creating a level of acceptance and understanding of our "research" in dramatically different institutional and scholarly cultures has been daunting. In this presentation, we share some of the research and writing that comes out of this collaborative project itself. Specifically we focus on student writing within two sections of the discussion board, namely "Introductions" and "Hot Topics". We analyze here the ludic and serio-ludic discourses using Huizinga's (1970) *Homo ludens* as a lens. We present the results of this analysis showing the development of literacy skills and highlight aspects that teachers / lecturers should take note of when planning for online writing instruction in blended learning programmes. We emphasise how hospitality, rather than divide provides a way to frame and ultimately support this kind of writing research.



## SCHREIBER, BIRGIT (UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE)

### CHALLENGES FOR THE DESIGN OF EFFECTIVE 1ST YEAR INTERVENTIONS: USING PRESENTING CONCERNS TO ADDRESS ABSENT CONCERNS

This paper explores how a newly formed Center for Student Support Services can best provide appropriate responses to the 1<sup>st</sup> year student population in line with national (NPHE, 1997; DoE gazette, 2007) and institutional strategic demands and challenges (UWC IOP, 2007), in line with broad and special needs of the 1<sup>st</sup> year student population, appropriate to the developmental stage of the student population, and develop a service response which is informed by relevant theory and research (Bennett, 1999; Mandew, 2003; Robertson, 1988; Stone, 1990). Our challenges are shared by other HE Student Development and Support Services (Clanchy, 1995; Lawrence, 2002; Mandew, 2003; NPHE, 1997; Pascarella, 2008) and comprise:

- a broadening range of presenting concerns due to wider access of students with varying levels of preparedness;
- an increase demand on our services due to an increase of presentation of psychological problems in broader society, due to popular knowledge around psychological conditions and due to an increased willingness to reveal and discuss these conditions, (Stone, 1990, pg 544);
- a recognition by students and institutions that normal developmental concerns or clinical presentations can be significant inhibitors of functioning;
- a decrease in resources across development services in HE.

To explore these issues, an anonymous questionnaire was gathered from first time presenting students at the Center for Student Support Services. By way of a checklist, the questionnaire gathers information on demographics and on presenting concerns. The instrument was previously used in South Africa (Nicholas, 2001; Schreiber, 2007) and itemizes symptomatic aspects based on Axis 1 and V-codes as per DSM-IV diagnoses. The paper reports and discusses the emerging trends of student profile and presenting concerns and relates these to the interventions of the CSSS. Using this data, the author sketches the theoretical background and philosophical orientation which informs our service provision. In addition, it is valuable to investigate what is missing: the silences, the taboos and the absent voices. The paper will illuminate how one might use institutional voices to identify and target underserved groups of students and in particular the most vulnerable group of students: the 1<sup>st</sup> year group (Barnes, 2004; Candy, 1995; Coetzee, 2008). The paper will report on some of our interventions which aim to reach these underrepresented and absent concerns. In the light of the above challenges and using the results of our research we attempt to argue that there is a shift in what constitutes a meaningful response to servicing students (CHET, 2004).



## SCHREINER, LAURIE (AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY)

### STUDENTS AT RISK: BUILDING ON STRENGTHS TO PROMOTE SUCCESS

Across the globe, increased access to higher education has resulted in a wider variety of students in the classroom. While the diversity of life experiences and perspectives enriches the learning of all students, the diversity of educational preparation and skills can place some students at risk to not achieve their goals. For first-year students to have the greatest likelihood of success, their initial university experiences need to provide a strong foundation for that success. Many first-year programs focus on skills development and academic literacy, but operate from a perspective of deficit remediation; that is, the belief that identifying students' deficits and spending much of the first year attempting to remediate those deficits has the greatest potential for equipping students to succeed. However, this approach fails to recognize the important role of motivation in student success. Spending most of one's time in areas of weakness actually reduces the motivation to succeed. Recent research in a variety of disciplines has demonstrated that far better results accrue when people build on their talents. Students' levels of motivation and engagement are demonstrably higher when they are taught how to build on their existing talents to overcome the obstacles and challenges they face. In this paper, a three-step process is outlined for helping at-risk students identify and develop their talents in order to experience success in their university experiences. The first step of this approach is to identify the talents that students bring to the learning environment. Online instruments such as the *Clifton StrengthsFinder* have been shown to be valid ways of assessing the areas of students' greatest talents. The second step is to help students become more aware of their talents and how they can be combined with skills and knowledge to produce strengths that will enable them to succeed. By emphasizing the role that effort plays in developing strengths, students are encouraged to invest time and energy in building on their talents to produce success. In the process, students are connected to university resources that can help them further develop their talents into strengths in very specific ways. The third step of the strengths-based educational process is to teach students to apply their strengths to new situations and to the challenges they face in university. The ability to transfer and apply talents from one area of their life to new challenges and opportunities is one of the best ways of equipping students to succeed in areas where they may be at risk. Research demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach is presented, along with examples of how to incorporate the approach into existing first-year courses and into academic skills development programs.



**SCHREINER, LAURIE (AZUSA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY); HULME, EILEEN**

#### **ASSESSMENT OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' STRENGTHS: THE FIRST STEP TO SUCCESS**

Based upon research which indicates that university student success is strongly related to students' experiences during their first year, intentionally shaping this experience to promote a successful transition has become an increasingly high priority within higher education. This paper focuses on the implementation of a strengths-based approach to the first-year experience, an approach that has been utilized successfully within a variety of postsecondary institutions in the United States and Canada. The premise of strengths-based approaches to education is that awareness of one's strengths, along with the knowledge to apply those strengths to new situations or to overcome obstacles, gives students a foundation for succeeding in university. This foundation is both affective and cognitive; that is, strengths awareness has motivational properties that can lead to increased engagement with the academic environment and thus result in student success, but it also has the cognitive capacity to increase a student's range of intellectual behaviors that can be applied to the academic arena. Because first-year students often enter university with a wide range of skills and ability levels, assessment is a critical component of any first-year program. Too often, however, this assessment process highlights students' deficiencies while ignoring areas of potential strength. When only deficiencies are emphasized, student motivation to invest effort to achieve suffers. By beginning the first-year experience with an assessment of student strengths, a foundation is laid for student motivation that can form the basis for further achievement. The premise of a strengths-based approach to the first-year experience is that the key to achieving at levels of personal excellence lies in teaching students to identify and capitalize on their greatest areas of talent. This process begins with assessing students' talents at entry to university, so that each student has a foundational sense of the assets they bring to the learning process. The *Clifton StrengthsFinder* is an online instrument that can be used to help students identify their areas of greatest talent. Once students are aware of their talents, they are taught how to develop them into strengths that produce both academic success and psychosocial health. Recent research utilizing controlled experiments with university students in the United States has demonstrated that incorporating an awareness and application of students' talents into the first-year curriculum has specific outcomes that contribute to student success: (1) students are more engaged in their learning; (2) students have higher levels of perceived academic control in their new environment; (3) exam performance is higher; (4) students' satisfaction with their university experience is significantly higher; and (5) student retention from the first to the second year is significantly higher. This paper describes those research results and highlights the practices that led to the positive outcomes across a variety of institutions.



**SHANDLER, MAXINE (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG)**

#### **FOUNDATIONAL PROVISION IN MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT: IMPEDIMENT OR ADVANCEMENT FOR FACULTY LECTURERS**

The Academic Development Division of the University of Johannesburg offers alternate access programmes, for example, extended national diplomas and degrees to students who do not meet the minimum entry requirements for mainstream study. The Department of Education stipulates that extended programmes must incorporate significant foundational provisioning in addition to the prescribed coursework for the regular programme. As a result of the requirements the Academic Development Division embarked on a materials development process in 2004. This ongoing process has led to the institution of collaborative partnerships between faculties offering extended national diplomas and the Academic Development Division. Faculty lecturers, who voluntarily became involved in materials development, have been exposed to the positive effect that academic development interventions and strategies have had on their teaching and learning. Numerous faculty lecturers involved in the materials development process have remarked about the positive influence this process has had on their teaching, but no research has been conducted on the contribution that the materials development process has made to the teaching and learning in the faculties. This paper aims to illustrate how material development partnerships, between the discipline specialist from faculty and the Academic Development Division mentor who has foundational provisioning expertise, have led to lecturers becoming far more aware of students needs and competencies. This awareness has influenced the lecturer's teaching methodology and had a positive effect on student learning and classroom interaction. This will be a qualitative study in which interviews will be conducted with two lecturers from each of the Engineering, Management and Humanities faculties who were involved in the materials development process to determine what lecturers perceive to be the benefits that they have derived from the materials development process. The paper will attempt to substantiate the lecturers' opinion that their teaching in the extended diplomas has improved as a result of their interaction with and guidance from the Academic Development Division mentor during the process. These first year students are encouraged to actively participate in the lesson due to the interactive nature of the materials which no longer portray the "chalk and talk" methodology previously employed in higher education. In conclusion, material development partnerships, between discipline specialists from faculty and mentors from the Academic Development Division with foundational provisioning expertise should be promoted in those faculties and departments that do not offer extended national diplomas. These partnerships would have a positive impact on student learning and classroom interaction and should be considered as a valuable development tool for lecturers.



**SIBANDA, KHULUMANI (UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE); MABANZA, NTIMA**

**SEPARATION, TRANSITION AND INCORPORATION AS A FUNCTION OF PERSISTENCE AMONG FIRST YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES: A CASE OF FORT HARE**

Most universities make concerted efforts to vigorously enrol students to boost institutions' financial positions and leverage their infrastructural developments. While this may sound palatable in economies of scale, most of them still linger behind in setting up structures that support quality education which stimulate the growth of the entire student being- cognitively, physically and socially. The entire student growth is inversely proportional to a set of beliefs acquired by the student during his or her first year at the institution. Those beliefs contribute immensely as motivational constructs towards student's development and persistence. The premise to all this, is the improvement of student's acclimation into the learning environment. This calls for an understanding of student's first involvement in a university set up. Astin's Involvement Theory, states that 'students learn and develop when they become active in the collegiate experience.' Involvement is responsible for improving persistence and has an impact on student attitudes, behaviour and personality towards learning. In this paper we make an investigation on separation, transition and incorporation of underprivileged students as variables of a function of persistence. We discuss these three variables as observed at the University of Fort Hare, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Recommendations are also made as to how underprivileged students can be supported to facilitate their integration to new learning environment, giving birth to self efficacy and persistence.



**SMITH, LIESL (NELSON MANDELA METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY);  
SNYDERS, SARIE; PLAATJES, RONELLE**

**KEYS TO SUCCESS: HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENTAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) piloted its Keys to Success programme (KEYS) in 2006. KEYS is housed in Higher Education Access and Development Services (HEADS) and is offered alongside formal qualifications in an effort to market a coherent set of developmental learning opportunities to students.

The Keys to Success programme has three aims. Firstly, KEYS aims to provide a space for cross-cutting teams within HEADS to collaborate on certain areas of expertise due to challenges that were faced based on overlap between some of the student development activities presented by the various units. This overlap is due to the fact that historically operated independently pre-merger. Students therefore benefit from a wider base of expertise and less confusion is created by the elimination of duplication. Secondly, the programme was piloted in support of the development of the six NMMU Graduate Qualities, namely that a graduate of NMMU "has an effective scholarly body of knowledge; is prepared for lifelong learning; is an effective problem solver; can work autonomously and collaboratively; is committed to ethical and social responsibility; communicates effectively". It is important to encourage the development of these qualities in our graduates already from first-year. Finally, the programme is aimed towards the incorporation of some of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Critical Cross-field and Developmental Outcomes (SAQA, 1997). Although the KEYS programme is separate from a formal qualification, students are expected to meet certain attendance and/or assessment requirements. Work is currently being done to ensure that when a student has successfully participated in a set of KEYS that this will be recorded and form part of a student's record. This will facilitate research into the impact that various KEYS have on academic success and student retention. Furthermore, as they are reflected on their student record, students can use the KEYS to market the skills that they have developed during their co-curricular activities when they seek employment to hopefully give them a competitive edge in the workplace. The KEYS are predominantly offered in the form of workshops, but the format depends greatly on the context and is driven by student needs. KEYS offer student learning and development opportunities in a holistic way by including academic success, leadership development, personal growth, career development and employment readiness. Each "KEY" has a very specific focus. An e-learning version of the programme is planned in certain focus areas towards the end of 2008. This poster presentation will provide more information on the aims and practices of each of the focus areas within KEYS and examples of the provisional results obtained via qualitative feedback. It will also reflect on the degree to which the KEYS pilot has been successful in achieving its aims.



SMITH, LINDA DENISE (WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY)

## I<sup>2</sup>: INTEGRATED, INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

At the university at which the presenter is employed students have historically dropped out of or failed to qualify to write more than one in three of the subjects for which they have registered. The following interventions have been applied: foundation provision, curriculum development, staff development, life skills programmes, supplemental instruction (SI) and tutorials. However, apart from SI, no formal research has been conducted into the effect of these interventions on throughput, pass rate or retention. Current programmes are lacking in the following ways:

1. *Late identification of problems*: Students who are not coping academically are usually only identified at the end of the first formal test cycle.
2. *Lack of integration*: Interventions that are in place tend to work in isolation.
- 3 *Lack of individual attention*: Existing interventions focus more on programmes than on individuals.

What is needed is an *integrated* programme that provides an *early-warning* system for *individual* intervention. The research described below proposes the adoption of an integrated support system for first-year students and allows for testing the efficacy of the system and its components. Participants are divided into 4 groups. All students in the project receive Life Skills classes, which cover essential academic and study skills as well as instruction in various aspects of life management. Condition 2 provides SI, a student-driven support programme that emphasizes process as well as content. In condition 4 monitoring teams consisting of SI leaders and lecturers meet monthly to discuss progress of individual students and identify potential problems, be these academic or of a social/behavioural nature. A specific intervention for each “flagged” individual is drawn up, implemented during the following month, and reported on at the next meeting. Condition 3 is similar, except that SI is not included. All four of these programmes will continue for the whole of 2008. At the end of 2008 the following data will be gathered: Final examination results; Drop-out rate; A measure of student satisfaction and personal well-being. Statistical analyses will identify any significant differences among student groups for each of the conditions. Students, lecturers and SI leaders will also complete open-ended questionnaires to provide evaluative data. A longitudinal component will be the number of years the students take to graduate. The presentation for this conference will be a description of work in progress, with a report on preliminary results and lessons learned.



STACEY, JENNIFER DAVIDA (UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND)

## A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF STUDENT-WRITERS' CHOICES AND STRATEGIES IN A FOUNDATION COURSE IN LITERATURE

In this report on research I look at extracts from the essays of three students in the Foundation Course in Literature (FCL) taught by the English and African literature Departments at the University of the Witwatersrand. This year-long course aimed to help students develop the reading and writing skills and disciplinary literacy that would enable them to succeed in the study of literary texts in subsequent study within the English or African Literature departments. Many practitioners and theorists of academic literacy have described the challenges and dilemmas students face in becoming academically literate in a discipline. Adding to the challenge of learning to think like a member of the discipline in an interpretive discipline like the study of literature, is that it means, amongst other things, learning to use appropriate and relevant ‘interpretive frames’. But the choices made and strategies used by the student writers in response to these challenges and dilemmas are not always understood or recognized by their tutors because, as Mary Louise Pratt has commented, ‘...legitimacy is defined from the point of view of the party in authority – regardless of what the other parties might see themselves as doing’ (1991:38). I argue that an understanding of just what the students consider themselves to be doing in their writing in the FCL is deepened by seeing these students as postcolonial writers writing within a postcolonial context. A number of articles on student writing (Gavaskar, Moreno, Olson, van Slyck, Williams) have applied postcolonial theory as a frame for the writing class – metaphorically seen as a ‘contact zone’ – as well as a tool for understanding power relations and influences at work inside and outside the classroom. But for our students postcoloniality is not metaphorical – they are living the dilemmas - and the advantages -highlighted by postcolonial theory and how this might be influencing their writing is what is discussed in this paper. In this study, the sixty-eight students in the FCL all completed biographical questionnaires on the basis of which twenty-five students were selected and asked to submit for analysis the eight essays they had written during the year. After the essay analysis a number of these students were interviewed at the end of their year in the FCL and again at the end of their fourth year of study. In this paper, the essays of three of these FCL students are analysed using selected elements of postcolonial theory that allows us to see how the student-writers make choices and select strategies that enable them to represent themselves, construct writer identities and position their readers in relation to groupings and discourses within (or perceived to be within) their writing context. Data from the essay analysis is supplemented with information from biographical questionnaires and student interviews.



STEENKAMP, LEON PIETER (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); BAARD, ROELOF STEPHANUS; FRICK, BEATRICE LIEZEL

#### STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING SUCCESS IN FIRST-YEAR ACCOUNTING AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

Financial Accounting 188 is a compulsory subject for all BComm degrees at Stellenbosch University (South Africa) with approximately 1300 registered students annually of whom approximately 40% have no Accounting background. The throughput rate for the subject has traditionally been below 70%. Accounting lecturers' assumed that students struggle to perform in this course for various reasons, including not having any English tuition, and low class attendance by students. A lack of adequate preparation at school level and many students not having had any background in Accounting were also traditionally blamed. These assumptions have not been empirically investigated before. This unsatisfactory success rate prompted the responsible lecturers to consider the possible causes for student failure. A transdisciplinary team investigated possible causes with the **purpose** of promoting learning and eventual student success. This paper forms part of a more comprehensive study. The **research problem** was thus: Why do students under-perform in Financial Accounting 188? The **objectives** of the study include an investigation into students' perceptions of factors influencing their success in the particular module, and possible causal factors related to student background and current study records. This paper will focus on the first objective. A **study** using a **questionnaire** was used to investigate student perceptions of factors influencing their success in Financial Accounting 188. A response rate in excess of 80% was achieved in response to a detailed questionnaire, containing both quantitative and qualitative elements. Some of the possible factors were also statistically tested. The results indicated that poor class attendance, inadequate preparation, insufficient time and a lack of English tuition are the main factors leading to poor performance. The reasons for poor class attendance consist mostly of students prioritising other subjects or events (e.g. upcoming tests) higher than class attendance, the fact that classes are in Afrikaans, or the students' misperceptions of the difficulty of the subject. The majority of respondents indicated that hard work and practise supported their success. A variety of supplementary success factors also play a role.

The findings of the study provide insight into what students themselves perceive as factors that influence their success. This insight may facilitate a more learner-centered ethos through the development of student support systems and teaching practices based on an empirically founded notion of student needs. The results of the study are indeed currently being used to implement changes in the Financial Accounting 188 module. The results provide valuable empirical insight into the attitudes and perceptions of first year students within the particular module.



STOLTENKAMP, JULIET (UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE); KIES, CAROLYNNE CHRISTELL

#### FIRST-YEAR E-LEARNING EXPERIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

E-Learning is increasingly being used in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa, challenging them to meet users' expectations of high-quality face-to-face contact integrated with online learning. E-Learning has taken root at the University of the Western Cape as in many South African higher education institutions which realise that no institution can be more competitive and deliver services to a diverse and greater number of learners by ignoring the reality and challenges eLearning brings. However there are many factors that may influence the success of eLearning initiatives. One of these may well be the support of these initiatives and related factors. The E-Learning Development and Support Unit (EDSU) endeavoured to develop a blended training programme for first-year students that would empower them to take control and ownership of their eLearning experiences as well as enhance their computer literacy skills. Students are encouraged to engage effectively with the eLearning tools to deliver on their core teaching-and-learning activities and community engagement. The authors reflect on the different focus areas of the first-year online training programme. These can be categorised as access; socialisation and familiarisation; information exchange; maintaining substantive communication and develop as a knowledge builder. In conclusion the paper offers some recommendations such as the suggestion that HEIs consider the commitment to an integrated support structure whilst striving for the successful implementation of eLearning initiatives for first-year courses.





**TAYLOR, SUSANNE (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG)**

**"TODAY IS THE DAY YOU BEGIN WRITING YOUR CV!": AN ORIENTATION REFRAIN?**

Orientation of first year students is accepted good practice at higher education institutions and is but one of many aspects in the First Year Experience programme. Whilst the format of such programmes differ, their intention is the same. Much focus is placed on getting to know the campus and hearing more about the variety of activities, societies and support services available. Getting to know each other and fun activities are highlights on such programmes. In my role as Cooperative Education practitioner and thus accepting institutional responsibility for the work integrated learning aspect of academic programmes, I have identified what I consider a glaring omission in most orientation programmes offered. It is the contention of the author that every first year student should be focused on the end goal – the finishing line of his/her studies - from the first day onwards. Thus the phrase “Today is the day you begin writing your CV” should be an underlying refrain echoing through all orientation programmes and one that should be reinforced during the student’s years at the institution. Too often students miss wonderful opportunities that would not only have allowed them to gain valuable and important life skills, but that would also have reflected well on a CV because they are unaware of the importance of such. Whilst having a good academic track record is important, companies also look for team players, confident and articulate entry-level staff with excellent communication and interpersonal skills. The importance of keeping a portfolio of achievements is also seldom stressed. How often do final year students not look at one blankly when asked about where and when they’ve previously worked part-time, who their supervisors were and what they learnt in the workplace? Indeed, often they are unable to identify a lecturer who will know them well enough to serve as a reference. Opportunities will have been inadvertently missed instead of being grabbed with both hands and capitalized on. “Today is the day you begin writing your CV!” An orientation refrain? You decide!



**THOMAS, ANITTA (UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA); LIANG, HSUAN LORRAINE**

**EVALUATING PYTHON AS AN INTRODUCTORY PROGRAMMING LANGUAGE**

Despite various aspects and fields of computing, programming remains one of the core components in the Computer Science curriculum. It is also valuable in other streams, such as Physics, Engineering, and for students wanting to pursue careers in IT-related fields. In light of its significance, universities throughout Southern Africa generally introduce programming in the first year of undergraduate studies to form part of the basic concepts of computing. The main goal of introductory programming is to teach students to analyse and solve problems, and to express the solutions using some programming language. Ideally, an introductory programming module is to teach the building blocks of programming concepts and logical thinking with little focus on the programming language itself. Learning to program is not an easy task. This can be attributed to the multifaceted process in programming such as analysing the given problem, solving the problem, translating the solution into a programming language, and evaluating the implemented solution. Irrespective of the approach (e.g. algorithm first – implementation later) undertaken to teach introductory programming, learning the syntax and structure of a programming language can be a difficult task in its own right. In the context of distance education, the learning process is steeper than in traditional education due to the lack of formal lectures, supervised tutorials, and frequent interaction with peers. In recent years, Python, an object-oriented scripting language, has received much attention in the programming community. While many universities use C++ or Java as the introductory programming language, there are at least two South African universities that make use of Python in their introductory programming modules. In this paper, the suitability of Python as a programming language for such a module at UNISA - a distance education university - is explored and evaluated. The focus of the evaluation is to determine how well Python can be adapted to the existing curriculum and whether and how Python can reduce the learning curve associated with learning a programming language in comparison with one of the currently used introductory programming languages, namely C++.

The evaluation is focussed on two main aspects: the syntax and structure of the language and its development environment. The evaluation is performed under the assumption that undergraduate students at the first-year level may not have any prior programming exposure. The findings of the evaluation are grouped into three categories in the light of the main features of Python: features that will improve ease of learning; features that may not improve ease of learning; and features that may be problematic in comparison with C++.



THOMAS, HERBERT ERNEST (UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE); THOMAS, KAREN; MASSYN, LIEZEL

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**PROBLEM-BASED ADVENTURE LEARNING: ADDRESSING THE CONUNDRUM OF INACCESSIBLE UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS**

One of the biggest challenges faced by South African higher education institutions is the provision of adequate and effective support to underprepared first year students. The essence of the problem lies in the provision of such support against a backdrop of limited resources and decreasing government funding of higher education institutions. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that support initiatives, addressing the absence of a wide variety of academic, social, emotional and generic skills, have to be implemented in an environment where these initiatives run concurrently with the very programmes that are to benefit from their outcomes. This paper will argue that the identification, and subsequent support, of underprepared students at the beginning of the academic programme precludes the possibility of meaningful gains from such support initiatives. Both sophisticated initiatives that are capable of identifying and classifying underprepared students (on the basis of well-researched heuristics) before they enter higher education, as well as initiatives that encourage partnerships between secondary school pupils and undergraduate and postgraduate students in problem-based collaborative environments, have to be established. As partial response to the identified problem, the paper further proposes the development of collaborative problem-based adventure learning environments in which such partnerships can be formed. It is envisaged these environments will be hybrid in nature, incorporating the strengths of face-to-face and online social learning. It is further envisaged that connectivity and accessibility challenges may be addressed, partly, by secondary school partnerships between adjacent well-resourced and under-resourced schools. Such an approach could, potentially, address issues such as traditional literacy, computer literacy, academic literacy and numeracy. In this way the 'underpreparedness' of students is not taken as a given, but is proactively addressed before they embark on their first year of academic study at higher education institutions.



TSHETLO, PATRICIA NEO (NORTH WEST UNIVERSITY)

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**THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNICATION AND SUCCESS STRATEGIES COURSE IN THE EXTENDED PROGRAMMES OF THE NORTH WEST UNIVERSITY**

This paper is a discussion of the role that is carried out by the Communication and Success Strategies course (commonly known as CSS). This course was piloted in 1999, with the aim of providing a support service for the Science Foundation (now referred to as the Foundation Provision) of the North West University's Mafikeng Campus. At its inception in 1999, the then Science Foundation was initially tasked with the responsibility of providing an entry route for Natural Science students whose Matriculation results rendered them ineligible for University entry. In 2001, as a response to the prevalent need, Commerce students were also accepted. The Foundation Provision of the Extended Programme is presently dual-pronged, with B.Sc and B.Com extended degrees. The initial purpose of the CSS course was to equip entry-level students with study skills that would assist them to cope with the rigours of tertiary academic studies. Since the Foundation Provision was established as a means of providing access with success it was realised that there was a need to expand the purpose of the course so that it would position students for a successful passage through the journey of their tertiary studies. With this in mind, it was decided to shift the focus from study skills to a wider range of communication skills and success strategies that students could use to maximise their academic potential. The entry-level student cohort that the Foundation Provision of the Extended Programme caters for is comprised largely of students who are from neighbouring towns and villages as well as from other parts of the African continent. Despite this heterogeneity, the students are predominantly L2 speakers of English who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The curriculum of the course was, therefore, developed with the view of addressing the needs that are a concomitant feature of the nature of the cohort. The course is thus designed to provide a support service for the Foundation Provision courses by, inter alia, facilitating the acquisition of receptive and productive communication skills for academic success. It is also geared towards sensitising students about the need for holistically maintaining a learning environment that will be conducive for life-long learning. It should be pointed out, however, that the course does not claim to provide a panacea for all the entry level students' myriad learning challenges. It does, however, present them with useful strategies that will help them to cope with the Year 1 university experience with subsequent positive implications for the throughput rate.



VAHED, ANISA (DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY); KHALILI, PARIVASH

#### "MUSCLE MANIA" MULTI MEDIA GAME: EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THIS LEARNING INTERVENTION

Understanding the structural and functional anatomy of the muscles of mastication and facial expression are said to be one of the more challenging oral anatomy content areas for first year Dental Technology learners. Traditional didactic delivery of this information does not appear to facilitate learner understanding of the content nor does it challenge students to think actively. Innovative strategies aimed at engaging and empowering learners to minimise rote learning have been employed. One such intervention, the "Muscle Mania" Multi Media game (MMG) was developed for first year learners studying towards a diploma in Dental Technology. The MMG was designed to promote comprehension by reinforcing anatomical concepts and retaining an understanding of the content area related to muscles of mastication and facial expression. The primary component of the MMG is how the high graphical presentation has enriched the abstract decontextualised content and learners entering this micro computer world are cognitively stimulated to become active in knowledge acquisition. Whilst educational gaming is gaining popularity, there appears to be no substantive evidence on using computerised educational games in Dental Technology and there is little empirical evidence on the extent of use in higher education. This study assesses whether the use of the Muscle Mania MMG facilitates students learning abstract decontextualised content by actively stimulating their thinking towards achieving autonomous learning. Data gathered by means of questionnaire surveys in the past year of tutoring first year Dental Technology learners were used as a diagnostic tool to determine whether the MMG made learning the abstract decontextualised content more effective. Test scores were further used to statistically determine whether incorporating the MMG improved learners' performance in tests. Learners reported that multimedia graphics which is scripted in the content of the game enriches learning as it cognitively engages learners with the anatomical content. Consequently, the immersive nature of the MMG enhanced memory, which encouraged the use of this learning intervention. Test analysis further revealed that learners performed better with this learning intervention than those who did not receive it previously. The results of this study further motivated the lecturer in testing the MMG in other health programmes within the faculty where academic synergies existed of which the outcome remained exceedingly positive. This report may be of value to dental educators, who wish to support traditional lectures by designing pedagogically meaningful computer games for specific contexts to enrich student learning. Inevitably this will allow such educators to keep astride with the global educational trends in terms of technological advancements occurring in teaching and learning.



VAN DER WESTHUIZEN, LEROUX (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY); DU PLOOY, DONNA; LOTZ, LESLIE

#### CONCEPTUALISING AND EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE PEER-BASED MENTOR SYSTEM OF STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY AS A MEANS OF IMPROVING THE 1ST YEAR'S "WHOLE STUDENT" EXPERIENCE ON CAMPUS

This paper aims to introduce the rationale and describe the structure of the mentor programme - a peer-helper programme of Stellenbosch University campus, hosted by the Centre for Student Counselling and Development and the Division for Student Affairs. The programme aims to contribute to the "whole student" experience of an increasingly diverse body of first-year students. In the belief that an effective system of mentoring on campus may improve first-year student success, we aim to stimulate constructive discourse during this presentation about the students we work with and the support we provide to facilitate their social and academic adjustment to university. In the context of the recently developed First Years Academy and the focus on increased throughput rates at Universities, the growing need to assist first years to effectively adapt to the university context becomes more relevant. The mentor system aims to do exactly this: to assist first year students in their academic as well as personal/social/emotional functioning on campus via the use of a well-developed peer-support programme running both in residences and in private accommodation sectors on campus. Two specific recent initiatives aimed to enhance the effectiveness of the system - (1) individual *motivational interviews* between each first year student and his or her mentor before the start of the official welcoming programme, and (2) the development of a *manual* for mentors - will also be highlighted in particular. This overview of our current system will be placed within important theoretical guidelines regarding peer-helper programmes, the holistic wellness approach and the first year experience, and as such, verifying it as both locally suited to a Southern African University context and internationally on standard. Furthermore, questionnaires and focus groups aimed at evaluating the experience of the various parties involved in the mentor programme, were administered. First year students, their mentors, the residence heads as well as the parents of the first years gave feedback of their experience of the programme. The data was summarised and statistically analysed to provide conclusions regarding the core areas useful and applicable to our context. These contributions, indicating the way forward, as well as certain limitations, will be presented in this paper. We hope that this presentation would be able to highlight certain considerations that are universal in providing first year students with a worth while programme of support.



**VAN ZYL, ANDRÉ (UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG)**

**IMPLEMENTING EXTENDED ACADEMIC ORIENTATION PROGRAMS AIMED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG**

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) is one of two Comprehensive Universities in South Africa and came about by way of merging a traditional style University (RAU) and a Technikon (TWR). Mergers create environments in which most systems and methods are in flux. This creates a window of opportunity during which it is possible to rethink a lot of what was previously done as part of the routine activity. The need for a re-think has become more important with the change in the demographic makeup of the student population at UJ and the increased national emphasis on student retention and success in Higher Education. Vince Tinto's longitudinal interactionist model of student retention provides a good starting point for planning new interventions and adapting existing practice. In the terms of Tinto's model, orientation programs happen during the separation phase of the student's university experience during which the student integrates into the university environment by making and strengthen Academic and Institutional commitments. An orientation program provides the ideal platform for providing students with opportunities to form and strengthening the needed commitments early on in their academic careers. Programs aimed at orientating first year students in a specific institution and/or campus have traditionally been part of normal activities at most Universities. Orientation programs typically include a wide variety of topics and are aimed at assisting students in adapting to the different aspects of University life. As part of the re-thinking process of the academic orientation at UJ two pilot orientation programs were implemented in two different faculties during January 2008. These projects were designed to provide first year students with discrete opportunities to develop and strengthen the commitments that lead to increased student persistence. The content and structure of the two pilot projects were negotiated between the Academic Development Unit and the respective faculties to ensure a high level of buy-in and integration of AD and academic content. This presentation will report back on the planning, implementation and results of the two programs. This will include feedback on the student experience of the orientation program and results of the academic tracking of the students during the first quarter of 2008 (analysis of first quarter results). The differences between the two pilot programs will be evaluated critically. The presentation will be ended by referring to lessons learnt during the process and by suggesting a way forward.



**VENKAT, HAMSA (UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND);  
OSMAN, RUKSANA; BOOTH, SHIRLEY**

**PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF RESEARCH**

In this paper we present findings from a qualitative study examining the understandings of research among first year B Ed students in an urban historically advantaged higher education institution in South Africa. Twelve students were selected for interview, to maximise diversity along gender, race and intended education specialisation within the B Ed course. Our aim was to examine students' understandings of research within the initial teacher training course in a context of national pressures to increase diversity and throughput rates within these programmes and amidst national changes to teacher education calling for a focus on integrating research as a means for making teaching a practice involving ongoing inquiry. The international literature base in teacher education provides broad consensus on the usefulness of both using and doing research in teacher education programmes, as tools for developing the notion of 'inquiry' which is viewed as a central feature of the productive, critical and reflective teaching – in turn seen as a process of lifelong learning. This view has been interpreted into both the national Norms and Standards for Educators (Government Gazette, 2000 [1], which has been a powerful influence on change within initial teacher education programmes in South Africa, and into the institutional B Ed course programme. We use activity theory (Engeström, 1987) to examine and compare the goals of, and tools for, integrating research in the international literature with the understandings of research of the students within our study. We used semi-structured interviews to probe the aspects that figured within what constituted research activity for these students and how they understood this activity. Our findings pointed to differences in the nature and degree of students' understandings of research. At one extreme, some students reflected an enthusiasm for an inquiry orientation and related their research activity to several facets of the other roles listed in the Norms and Standards document, and to their own experiences of learning. At the other extreme, our analysis revealed some students who displayed understandings of research simply as an institutional requirement, in which neither the content of research reading nor the activities associated with research, were viewed as tools with which to understand or examine their own experiences of teaching and learning. We suggest that existing frameworks need broadening if they are to accommodate the diversity of student understandings that we encountered within our data, and that expansion to a more holistic practice-based view of research activity as a tool for developing inquiry and reflection in and on teaching and learning experiences may be required to address this diversity.

[1] More recent changes are underway under the auspices of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework, which has called for a strengthening of the disciplinary focus within teacher education programmes.



WALLACE, PETRONELLA KAREN (UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE);  
DAVIDOWITZ, BETTE; ROLLNICK, MARISSA

#### BUILDING A COMMUNITY IN THE FIRST-YEAR CHEMISTRY LABORATORY

At most tertiary institutions chemistry students may spend as much as half their contact time on practical activities in the laboratory. Since first-year laboratory classes tend to be large, it is customary for students to be arranged into smaller groups during practical sessions, and for each group to be collectively assisted by a senior (most often postgraduate) chemistry student. The involvement of postgraduate students in this way is recognised by many institutions of higher education as a compulsory (albeit non-credit bearing) component of postgraduates' professional training [1]. While the laboratory learning experience is planned, controlled and coordinated by course lecturers, the senior student in the role of part time teaching assistant (*demonstrator* is the term most often used at South African institutions) is at the coal face, often having more student contact than the lecturer in charge. The focus of our research namely demonstrator learning may seem atypical when a primary outcome of the majority of academic programs in higher education is student achievement. However, when one considers that demonstrators are the primary facilitators of learning in the laboratory, it makes sense to explore *their* participation when considering ways to improve the quality of the laboratory experience for students. A social theory of learning views learners as active participants in the practices of social communities [2]. Through their participation and engagement in authentic activities their identities are transformed in relation to these communities. This perspective is useful for exploring demonstrator learning in the first-year laboratory. We argue that demonstrators' engagement in student facilitation and other teaching activities over time gains them access to ways of knowing that contribute to their transformation into chemistry practitioners. This paper describes the gradual transformation of a demonstrator community at a South African over a period of 3 years. We will discuss how several measures; including the introduction of a formalised demonstrator training program may have contributed to changes in the community, and in first-year students' experience of the laboratory course.

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KOTZE, ANNEMARE; YOUNG, GERT (STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY)

#### FROM FOREIGNERS TO CITIZENS: A CASE STUDY OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS ENTERING INTO A DISCIPLINARY COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

At Stellenbosch University modules in Greek (Biblical/Hellenistic) are compulsory for students enrolled for certain undergraduate programmes in Theology. In this context questions regarding the motivation of students are regularly heard. Students often view these modules simply as an obstacle that is to be overcome as soon as possible without really ever considering comprehensive and extended involvement in the discipline. It is hypothesized that this has an influence on student performance in these modules. As part of a broader NRF sponsored initiative, the "Critical Professionalism Project", a sub-project was designed to involve first-year students enrolled for the module Greek 178 in the disciplinary community of practice. The project is based on the suggestions that learning happens in communities (Lave & Wenger 2002) and that learning happens through participation (Hansman 2001; Smith Sheppard, Johnson and Johnson 2005). The project attempts to introduce students to the existing community of practice in the discipline by offering, as part of the curriculum, innovative activities where students and practitioners interact with each other addressing issues within the discipline. Current as well as retired lecturers and practitioners in the field were drawn into the project as established members of this community of practice. The hypothesis is that if students can be initiated into the existing community of practice, their motivation will be influenced as well as their intentions to continue their involvement in the discipline. This, in turn, will positively influence students' participation and performance. The project follows the same development trajectory as suggested by Lave & Wenger (2002). Students are considered to begin as peripheral participants that, through carefully planned interaction with the existing community, gradually move closer to the centre of the community. This paper offers some preliminary findings from the project, focusing on student experiences, the influence that participation in a community of practice has had on their perceptions regarding the discipline and the influence that participation has had on lecturers' perceptions. Using arguments from social-psychological theories on the phenomena of inclusion and exclusion (Abrams, Hogg & Marques 2005), the paper finally argues for a paradigmatic shift in the perception of lecturers from viewing students as outsiders that first have to qualify (through assessment and success) for entry into the community of practice to viewing students as legitimate, albeit peripheral, co-participants in communities of practice.

