5TH ANNUAL SANRC FYE CONFERENCE

22-24 May 2019
Garden Court Marine Parade, Durban

Be the Difference for South Africa’s Students: Contemporary Practice in SA’s FYE

CONFERENCE INFORMATION BOOKLET

Programme | Book of Abstracts | Social Events Guide

SUPPORTED BY:
Dear SANRC FYE Conference 2019 delegates

I am delighted to be welcoming you all to the annual SANRC FYE Conference 2019. 2019 marks the auspicious occasion of the fifth year of the hosting of this conference. It is a special moment for me as I joined the SANRC just as the inaugural conference was taking place in 2015. It was then that I first met my US-based colleagues, Drs Jennifer Keup and Dallin George Young, from The National Resource Centre for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition based at the University of South Carolina. It is, therefore, a special occasion to be hosting these two colleagues again. They will bring their internationalist experiences and perspective to a special session entitled ‘Global FYE Perspectives’.

This conference is organised around the central theme of ‘Be the Difference for South Africa’s Students: Contemporary Practice in South Africa’s First-Year Experience’. Our new National FYE Month initiative is in line with the theme of ‘Be the Difference for South Africa’s Students’. We ask all to support the national FYE through an online pledge as well as various acts of social activism in your institutions, workplaces and communities.

We also believe in making a difference through the practice-based knowledge we bring to you through the professional development workshops on offer at the conference. I will be presenting work done on a set of National Guidelines for Good Practice in Orientation. This represents important follow up from previous conferences in which we have convened orientation professionals from different universities in South Africa through platforms such as the Orientation Summit in 2017 and worked to understand how to improve current orientation practice.

Mrs Laura Drennan from the University of Free State (UFS) will help us understand how to use writing centres to academically empower first-year students. Mrs Drennan’s work places the role of writing centres in the national spotlight. Dr Shirlene Neerputh from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) will be conducting a follow-up workshop on best practice for libraries toward supporting the FYE. As chairperson of the Higher Education Librarians Interest Group (HELIG) of Library and Information Association of South Africa (LJASA), Dr Neerputh’s national perspective on innovative library strategies for first-year students is welcomed as an important contribution to this conference.

We have a rich and interesting line-up of papers and interactive workshops on offer at this conference. We have had a record number of responses to the conference and we thank you for the wholehearted support. We are also looking forward to showcasing the work of the SANRC, and in particular the newly-revamped website at http://www.sanrc.co.za. As per the founding vision of the SANRC to serve as a dedicated resource centre for the national FYE, the website hosts a growing number of resources for the benefit of South Africa’s FYE community. This includes the new SANRC FYE Thought Series, a publication series of thought-provoking papers and reports which are intended to strengthen the theory and practice of FYE. You will also see our Suggested Readings section on the website. This is a collection of FYE-related articles, books and reports which are recommended to enhance the work of any FYE scholar.

Of course, the most profound difference that we can make to the lives of South Africa’s students is that which comes through ourselves and the knowledge we bring to our work and practice. The annual SANRC FYE Conference is the unique space that we have carved out for FYE scholars and practitioners to keep up and strengthen the national FYE conversation. I urge you to make full use of this important space, and to enjoy the opportunity of mingling with like-minded colleagues.

Our delegates often tell us that every SANRC conference provides a personally transformative experience for them. It is an SANRC tradition to always go the extra mile for our delegates. Even a cursory glance through the photo galleries of previous conferences on the website bears testimony to the vibrant nature of the conference. Our social events are now legendary. We have a welcome event on 22 May 2019 which is ‘Proudly South African’ themed. On 23 May 2019 we host the conference gala dinner. We look forward to hosting you at the social events.

Again, we are honoured and excited to be working with all the amazing FYE colleagues we have now come to know and cherish as part of South Africa’s ever-growing FYE community. On behalf of the SANRC, I wish you a wonderful Conference experience.

All the best

Dr Annsilla Nyar
MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR
UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG (UJ): ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (ADC)

Dear FYE Colleagues

It is both a pleasure and an honour to be able to welcome you all to the 5th consecutive South African First-Year Experience (FYE) conference.

When the DHET kindly supported our proposal to establish a national centre for the First-Year Experience (FYE) in the form of the South African National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (SANRC), it was all only a dream. Now that dream is very much a reality. In the 5th year of the hosting of the annual SANRC FYE conference, we are now celebrating the establishment of the SANRC and that of a vibrant FYE academic community. To our delight, the national statistics are showing progress in terms of first to second year transition rates. The national FYE community and the SANRC has made all of this possible.

I would like to thank Dr Annsilla Nyar and the SANRC team for the sheer hard work and perseverance in getting us to this point (and for organising this wonderful event).

I take pleasure in welcoming two colleagues from the National Resource Centre in the United States who have been our partners and friends throughout this amazing journey. Lastly, I thank every one of our attendees for choosing to attend this conference and for the interesting and varied work being conducted to the benefit of our first-year students across the country.

Again-welcome! We look forward to a productive, scholarly and fun time with all of you.

Thank you

Dr Andre van Zyl

Dr Andre van Zyl
Director
Academic Development Centre (ADC) at University of Johannesburg (UJ)
MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG (UJ): ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT (ADS)

Dear FYE Colleagues

The importance of an effective transition, from secondary school to university life and learning cannot be underestimated. The gap between these two worlds is often considerable, both academically and in how one manages new freedoms and responsibilities. There is precious little time in which to adjust: the end-of-semester assessments are only four months away from the start date, and how one performs in those initial summative assessments has an inevitable ripple effect on how students perform during the rest of their studies. A relatively high proportion of our first-year students do not return in the second year, and many of those who do proceed carry the burden of uncompleted modules, thereby increasing the burden and possibly extending time-to-completion.

Support from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) for the establishment and continuation of the South African National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (SANRC) is greatly appreciated, and the University of Johannesburg is proud to host the Centre. The annual FYE national conference is a vital component of the Centre’s role in providing a hub for the energy, passion and academic rigor of all those professional and academic staff who understand the importance of the FYE.

I trust that the delegates at the conference enjoy all that is on offer at the conference, and take advantage of the opportunity to make new connections and relationships with others in the FYE academic community. A warm welcome is therefore extended.

All the best

Prof Rory Ryan
Warm greetings from the SANRC Conference Organising Committee, i.e. Ms Lebo Mosebua, Ms Celine Meyers and Mr Thapelo Cindi. We are pleased to assist you for the duration of the conference.

A registration desk will be set up in the foyer of the hotel. Delegates are welcome to collect their bag from 08:00 on 22 May 2019. This desk will also serve as the Help Desk for the duration of the conference. Please be reminded to (a) wear your name tag at all times and (b) safeguard your access card (see sample below). This card will be used to redeem meals, dinner and refreshments for the duration of the conference. It will also give you access to the social events of the conference. Daily notices will be communicated and posted on the notice board in the foyer.

Delegates are requested to be prepared for their session with a memory stick containing their presentations. It is important to have your presentation loaded beforehand on the laptop in the venue in which you are presenting so as to avoid delays in the sessions. The technical team and organising committee will be on standby to assist with any technical related issues in the venue. If you are interested in having your presentation uploaded on the SANRC website to be included in the conference e-book, kindly save your presentation on the laptop in the room.

A business centre is located next to the hotel help-desk for delegates’ own account. Wi-Fi is available to all delegates at no extra cost and the password will be made available to you in the conference venue. The hotel registration desk has additional information about services such as shuttles, kiosks and nearby amenities.

Please be reminded to complete your SANRC FYE conference evaluation form which will be sent to you via email. The link will also be available on the SANRC website after the conference (www.sanrc.co.za).

You can follow us on our social media platforms below:

You may also use our social media handles to tag us when posting and uploading images or statuses related to the conference. We would love to hear about National FYE Month activities, so please update us on social media whenever possible.

Best wishes,
Ms Lebo Mosebua, Ms Celine Meyers & Mr Thapelo Cindi
JOINT KEYNOTE SESSION

22 MAY 2019 | 09:00–10:15

DHS 1&2 CONFERENCE ROOM

Five Self-Reflective Insights about South Africa’s National FYE Conversation

Dr Annsilla Nyar, Director: South African National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (SANRC)

The Making of a Movement: Five FYE Trends and Issues from the American Context

Dr Jennifer Keup, Director: National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (NRC)
This session draws your attention to the book *Accessing Post-School Studies: A Student’s GPS to Successful Learning* published in 2017 by Sun Media. This book is written by UWC colleagues Dr Venicia McGhie and Ms Madge du Preez.

*Accessing Post-School Studies: A Student’s GPS to Successful Learning* is an empirically researched academic book, the primary aim of which is to “educate, empower, and emancipate high school learners on how to prepare themselves for post-school studies at a university or college”. This presentation will introduce the main themes and arguments of Dr McGhie and Ms du Preez’ co-authored book. The authors cite the book as an essential resource for learners and their families, schools and communities, life orientation educators and counsellors, as well as prospective university and college students, higher education institutions and education administrators, and education authorities. It is also aimed at students in terms of assisting students to adapt to the university environment in their first year of study.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP SESSION

Presented by: Mrs Laura Drennan,

Head: Write Site in the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL)
University of the Free State (UFS)

Supporting and Empowering First-Year Students Through Writing: A Writing Centre Perspective

22 MAY 2019 | 11:05 – 12:45
GLENWOOD/HILTON CONFERENCE ROOM

This workshop is designed to provide FYE practitioners and scholars with practical insights into how they can collaborate with writing centres to address first-year academic writing skills. The workshop will comprise a series of hands-on activities demonstrating various techniques and strategies that facilitate the development of students' writing skills. The workshop aims to 1) familiarise participants with typical writing issues faced by first-year students upon entering the higher education context; 2) establish the meaning and importance of common writing task terminology, and the need to standardise such terminology within and across disciplines; 3) teach participants to scaffold writing prompts and instructions to accommodate second-language students' language needs; 4) provide participants with strategies for integrating writing into large classes, and how to provide meaningful feedback in such contexts; as well as 5) provide examples of effective, collaborative approaches to discipline-specific writing initiatives. Participants are encouraged to bring sample assignment topics and any additional instructions to students (prompts), as well as assessment rubrics from their respective subject areas for application purposes, as well as to seek suggestions from fellow participants.

SUGGESTED READINGS:


This workshop represents the starting point for an important revitalisation and strengthening of the field of student orientation in South Africa. It is designed to engage with the SANRC’s campaign for good practice in student orientation and specifically, work being done to advance a set of national guidelines to guide good practice in orientation. Currently South Africa lacks a national framework for orientation; one which ensures standards and quality for orientation. Increasingly there is work being done toward this end as well as a national movement gathering momentum to set much-needed norms and standards for orientation such that a structured orientation strategy can be employed. An early step in this direction was the ‘Orientation Summit’ hosted at SANRC FYE Conference 2017 at which orientation professionals from South Africa’s different universities gathered to contribute their insights as to how orientation practice can be improved. Since the Orientation Summit in 2017, a draft set of national guidelines has been produced which will require discussion and debate by FYE scholars and practitioners in order to ensure that it adequately represents the challenges of orientation, and can be seen as broadly representative of the needs and concerns of those working in the field of student orientation in South Africa.

This workshop is intended to be a participatory session in which participants are encouraged to engage critically with the ‘National Guidelines for Good Practice in Orientation’ as presented by Dr Annsilla Nyar. The ‘National Guidelines for Good Practice in Orientation’ comprises 7 good practice strategies which are intended to form the foundation of an intentional, integrated and collaborative national orientation strategy. Participants are asked to engage with each Good Practice Strategy and add their own institutionally-based inputs in order to strengthen the empirical basis of each Good Practice Strategy.

Participants are also encouraged to bring along orientation materials and resources from their own institutions in order to help appraise other session participants of how orientation is structured at different institutions.

SUGGESTED READINGS:


PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP SESSION

Presented by: Dr Shirlene Neerputh,

Chairperson: LIASA Higher Education Libraries Interest Group (HELIG)
University of the Western Cape (UWC)

Focusing on the Role of the Library: How Academic Libraries Can Enrich the First-Year Experience (FYE) in South Africa in the Context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

22 MAY 2019 |11:05 -12:45
KEARSNEY CONFERENCE ROOM

This workshop speaks to the changing role of the academic library in the context of the 4th industrial revolution, the implications for South Africa’s universities and how they can accordingly promote academic learning for students through the library. It explores the various opportunities for stronger collaboration with different university stakeholders to provide for a focused and holistic development of the millennial student. Particular reference is made to such key stakeholders as faculties, teaching and learning centers, health and counselling departments including that of specialised HIV Aids centres, writing centres, international offices, student residences etc. Such key stakeholders interface strongly with students and provide an ideal platform to advance student-related interactions and relationships with the library. Within an interactive instructional framework, this workshop will outline and discuss the most effective library strategies to promote the First-Year Experience. Participants will be encouraged to think through the insights offered in relation to their own specific FYE programmes. The workshop will add value in ensuring a seamless, interactive partnership plan is designed for universities in the digital age.

Key objectives include:
- Better utilising the knowledge and resources of key university stakeholders toward a closer relationship with the library;
- Adopting and advancing an effective plan for universities to engage more closely with the library;
- Developing a framework for advancing student success through closer engagement with the library.

SUGGESTED READINGS:


The session ‘Key National FYE Resources’ is in line with one of the key objectives of the SANRC, i.e. the provision of resources to strengthen the work of South Africa’s FYE scholars and practitioners, as well as to encourage a culture of research in the field of FYE. The session highlights some key national FYE resources to which everyone in the national FYE community ought to be paying heed, such as important reading resources and interesting DHET reports.

We showcase the newly revamped SANRC website which aims to support the national FYE community with information and resources about the FYE. One page on the website, viz. FYE At My Institution, is certain to be of key interest to all national FYE scholars and practitioners. This page will allow institutions of higher education to showcase the work that they are doing. The page will also allow a broad view of all the FYE work being done nationally.

This session is a must for all in South Africa’s FYE community.

SUGGESTED READING:
As the First-Year Experience (FYE) movement evolved and gained traction in the United States, interest in this concept across the globe also grew. As a “leader among peers,” the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition in the United States has appreciated the vantage to support the development and activities of national networks dedicated to new student success and FYE in other regions, countries, and continents. This session will draw upon research data, international publications, national profiles, and guidelines for practice to identify the evolution of FYE and new student success as a movement across the globe, provide insight into comparisons and contrasts of new student needs across the globe, and highlight a variety of FYE issues and strategies. While country, culture, and context introduce important differences that must be honored, there also are many similarities in promoting first-year success and opportunities for shared learning from innovations in scholarship and practice.

Learning Objectives:
As a result of attending this session, participants will:
- enhance their awareness of FYE & student success as an issue of global significance as higher education internationalizes.
- gain a greater understanding of the range of issues critical to FYE & student success in other countries, contexts, and cultures.
- explore issues that are similar across an international context as well as those that are unique to certain countries, cultures, and contexts to enhance partnerships across similar spaces and learning across differences.
- identify needs and potential next steps toward internationalization of the FYE movement and collaboration across national networks.

SUGGESTED READINGS:


Invitational theory (Purkey, 1978; Novak, Purkey et al, 1996) is often used as an important part of the FYE literature. It provides an intriguing theoretical framework for the world of education and learning, as it calls upon us to be intentional about our interactions with students and to make learning a personally fulfilling experience for students. However, we rarely interrogate the practical application of invitational theory and how it can influence our personal and professional lives as well as the entire world of education and learning.

In this special session entitled ‘Invitational or Not?’, Dr Andre van Zyl from the University of Johannesburg helps us to better understand the conceptual foundations and practical implications of invitational theory. He deconstructs the so-called five ‘P’s’ of invitational theory: People, Places, Policies, Programmes and Processes. He challenges us to critically examine how we operate as FYE scholars and, whether our practices are in line with the fundamental tenets of invitational theory.

This is a thought-provoking session, which is not to be missed.

SUGGESTED READINGS


CONFERENCE SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Annsilla Nyar

Dr Annsilla Nyar, Director: South African National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (SANRC)

Dr Annsilla Nyar is Director of the South African National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (SANRC). The SANRC is an independent national centre based at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), South Africa. Prior to this, she held several senior management positions, including that of Senior Researcher at the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO), a partnership between Gauteng Provincial Government, UJ and the University of Witwatersrand (Wits); Research Manager at Higher Education South Africa (HESA), now Universities South Africa (USAF). Annsilla has over 20 years of experience in the world of academia. She holds a Master’s degree in Political Science from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and a PhD through the Department of Political Studies at Wits. Annsilla’s key academic interest is in social justice and the politics of transition and transformation in South Africa. She is particularly driven by questions of how civil society and government can work together to influence the national and global development trajectory. She has published academic articles in accredited journals such as Politikon - South African Journal of Political Studies, Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa and International Journal of Sociology Study.

Dr Andre van Zyl

Dr Andre van Zyl, Director: Academic Development Centre (ADC) at University of Johannesburg (UJ)

Dr Andre van Zyl has a Master’s Degree in Strategic Management and a PhD in Higher Education. His main research focus is in the area of student success with specific focus on first-year students. He has spoken at various national and international conferences. Dr van Zyl was responsible for initiating the First-Year Experience initiative at UJ and he has spearheaded the setting up a National Resource Centre for the FYE in South Africa. The SANRC is now fully functional and housed on the APB campuses of the UJ. He has been working at UJ since 2004 and has worked as a Learning Development facilitator, FYE coordinator and since late 2012 as the Director of the Academic Development Centre (ADC) at UJ.

Dr Jennifer Keup

Dr Jennifer Keup, Director: National Resource Centre for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (NRC)

Jennifer R. Keup, Ph.D. is the Director of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition where she provides leadership for all operational, strategic, and scholarly activities of the Center in pursuit of its mission “to support and advance efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education.” Jennifer also serves as an affiliated faculty member in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policies in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina. Jennifer’s research interests focus on two complementary areas of scholarship: 1) the first-year experience and students in transition and 2) high-impact practices and institutional interventions. Under the umbrella of this agenda, she has engaged in scholarly work, teaching, and service on many topics, including college student characteristics; student access, development, learning, and success; curriculum and student services; peer leadership; and leadership and institutional effectiveness. She is co-author of the book Designing and Sustaining Successful First-Year Programs: A Guide for Practitioners and has published several pieces in scholarly outlets such as Journal of College Orientation and Transition, Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, Journal of Higher Education, and the New Directions series by Wiley.
**Prof Venicia McGhie**

*Departmental Chair: Academic Development at University of Western Cape (UWC)*

Venicia McGhie is an Associate Professor and serves as Head of the Department (HOD) of the Academic Development Department in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Bellville, Cape Town. Venicia has more than thirty-four years’ experience in higher education – seventeen years as an administrator, and nineteen as an academic. With a PhD in Education from Stellenbosch University, her areas of specialisation are in Education, Linguistics and Literacy. The focus of her research interests is mainly in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, with a specific focus on the factors that influence student support, retention and successful learning. Supporting students is her passion, and enabling them to succeed in their academic careers is her personal mission. To this end, she founded a non-profit organisation that helps disadvantaged undergraduate students both financially and academically. Obtaining a Fulbright post-doctoral scholarship in 2014, she spent more than a year in the United States of America (USA) – first at the University of Missouri in St Louis and later at the at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, Kentucky.

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**Ms Madge du Preez**

*Former Senior Faculty Officer at University of Western Cape (UWC)*

Madge du Preez worked as a Senior Faculty Officer in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Bellville, Cape Town, from 1984 to 2014. She was awarded a Skills Enhancement Scholarship by the International Institute for Education (IIE) in New York in 1996, and spent a full semester at Jackson State University (JSU), Jackson, Mississippi, in the United States of America (USA). Her focus was on personal and student development. She completed the Professional Development Programme and spent one month at the University of Kansas City (UMKC), Missouri, USA, in 2004, to start off a collaborative project between EMS and UMKC. As a registered Life Skills and Skills Development Facilitator, Assessor, qualified Transformational Growth Coach, motivational speaker and published writer, it is her mission to change the heartbeat of our nation. Referring to herself as “The Sunflower”, her vision is to light human candles that can in turn light the world. Two of the poems in her anthology ‘Gemeng’ have been prescribed as Grade 9 reading texts. Her book, *The Light in the Dark*, was published in Singapore by Kingdom Books and is available on Amazon. Similar to Venicia, she now focuses on a project, called #JUSTONE, to assist financially needy students, and recently established a trust fund entitled the Madge Jeffery du Preez Student Bursary Trust Fund.

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**Mrs Laura Drennan**

*Head: Write Site in the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the University of Free State (UFS)*

Laura Drennan is the Head of the Write Site in the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the University of the Free State (UFS). She holds an MA in Applied Languages and is currently enrolled for a PhD, the focus of which is academic writing development. The work of the Write Site involves close collaboration with faculty members to develop students’ academic writing skills within the disciplines. Laura has more than 10 years’ ESL-related experience; areas of special interest include ESL academic writing development, ESL acquisition, ESL teacher training, course and materials development, and language testing.
Dr Shirlene Neerputh

Chairperson: LIASA Higher Education Libraries Interest Group (HELIG)

Dr Neerputh is the Director of Library Services at the University of Western Cape. Her career spans 30 years of higher education professional experience. Dr Neerputh envisages re-positioning the role of the Library in creating strategic partnerships which garners quality teaching, learning and research success in universities. She is the Chair-Elect for the Library and information Science (LIASA) National Higher Education Interest Group (HELIG) convener; Board member of the LIASA Professional Board 2016-2018; Board Member of SABINET; Council Member of the South African Society for the Blind 2016-2019; Committee of Higher Education Libraries South Africa (CHELSA); Member of International Association of Technologies in University Libraries (IATUL) and serves on various other committees. Shirlene completed the UNESCO Information Literacy Course; scholarship award-Training and Methodology Skills for Managers in India; Carnegie Library Leadership Programme (University of Pretoria), and participated in the European Erasmus Mundus Staff Mobility Scholarship Programme - University of Split, Croatia 2016.

Dr Dallin George Young

Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment: NRC

Dallin George Young, Ph.D. is the Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment at The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. He coordinates all the research and assessment endeavors of the National Resource Center and facilitates and disseminates three national surveys: National Survey of First-Year Seminars, National Survey on Sophomore-Year Initiatives, and the National Survey of Senior Seminars/Capstone Courses. He oversees a number of research collaborations and grant opportunities between the Center and the national and international higher education community as well as across the University of South Carolina (USC) campus. He coordinates the distribution of the Paul P. Fidler Research Grant, a competitive national grant that recognizes the development of research investigating the experiences of college students in transition. He is also an active member on the Planning, Assessment, and Innovation Council at USC. Dallin's research agenda has focused on professional preparation for practice in student affairs, student transition programs, and peer leadership. These topics have coalesced around a line of inquiry that focuses on how novices are trained, socialized, and educated as they move from the periphery to full participation in academic communities of practice. Dallin's research agenda has afforded him the opportunity to produce scholarly publications and presentations at national and international conferences.
**WEDNESDAY, 22 MAY 2019**

**GARDEN COURT MARINE PARADE, DURBAN**

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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| 08:00 – 09:00 | Conference Foyer  
Registration                                                      |
| 09:00 – 10:15 | Opening & Joint Keynote Address by Dr Annsilla Nyar (SANRC) and Dr Jennifer Keup (NRC)  
DHS Conference Room                               |
| 10:15 – 10:30 | Tea Break                                                                        |
| **FYE Book in the Spotlight Session**                 |
| 10:30 – 11:00 | DHS Conference Room  
Prof Venicia McGhie (UWC) and Ms Madge du Preez (Retired – Formerly of UWC)  
*Book: Accessing Post-School Studies: A Student’s GPS to Successful Learning* |
| **FYE Professional Development Workshop Sessions**   |
| 11:05 – 12:45 | Glenwood/Hilton Conference Room  
Mrs Laura Drennan (UFS)  
*Supporting and Empowering First-Year Students Through Writing: A Writing Centre Perspective* |
| | DHS Conference Room  
Dr Annsilla Nyar (SANRC)  
*National Guidelines for Good Practice in Orientation* |
| | Kearsney Conference Room  
Dr Shirlene Neerputh (UWC)  
*Focusing on the Role of the Library: How Academic Libraries Can Enrich the First-Year Experience (FYE) in South Africa in the Context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution* |
| 12:45 – 14:10 | Lunch: The Peppa Restaurant                                                      |
| **Breakaway Session**                                |
| 14:10 – 14:40 | Glenwood Conference Room  
Joy Petersen (SUN)  
The Impact of a Values-Driven Approach to Welcoming First-Year Students – a Stellenbosch University Case Study  |
| | Hilton Conference Room  
Rochelle Wessels (UNISA)  
Improving Student Retention at an ODeL Institution: The Case of the First-Year Experience MOOC |
| | Tsogo Academy Conference Room  
Nomfanelo Manaka, Karina Mostert and Carlien Kahl (NWU)  
Exploring the Demands and Resources of First-Year Students from the Perspectives of Support Structures at a Rural University Campus |
| | DHS 1 Conference Room  
Ana Naidoo (UP)  
Towards Developing a Curriculum for Advising at the University of Pretoria |
| | DHS 2 Conference Room  
Cheri Hugo and Amanda Morris (CPUT)  
Narratives of Disruption: Exploring Our Identities as Design Teachers |
## Breakaway Session

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Speaker(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14:45 – 15:15</td>
<td>Glenwood Conference Room</td>
<td><strong>Winston Middleton</strong> (UWC)</td>
<td>Managing a Mass First Time Entering Undergraduate Cohort Study at the University of the Western Cape — “A Jornada Continua”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hilton Conference Room</td>
<td><strong>Anniekie Ravhudzulo</strong> (UNISA)</td>
<td>The Gap between Expectations of Students and the Realities in Open Distance Learning Context</td>
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<td>Tsogo Academy Conference Room</td>
<td><strong>Mluleki Siguntu</strong> (VUT)</td>
<td>The Importance of Information Literacy for First-Year Students</td>
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<td>DHS 1 Conference Room</td>
<td><strong>Nosisana Mkonto</strong> (CPUT)</td>
<td>CPUT 101: Transition Hit or Miss</td>
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<td></td>
<td>DHS 2 Conference Room</td>
<td><strong>Claire Hamshire</strong> (MMU), <strong>Rachel Forsyth</strong> (MMU), <strong>Sue Caton</strong> (MMU), <strong>Danny Fontaine-Rainen</strong> (UCT), <strong>Leza Soldaat</strong> (UCT)</td>
<td>How Can We Make a Difference? Staff Discourses of First-Generation Students’ Experiences</td>
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<td>15:15 – 15:30</td>
<td>Tea break</td>
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<td>15:30 – 16:00</td>
<td>Glenwood Conference Room</td>
<td><strong>Jaroslaw Adamiak</strong> (UNISA)</td>
<td>Predicting First-Year ODL Student Retention with Data Mining Methods</td>
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<td>Hilton Conference Room</td>
<td><strong>Corinne Knowles</strong> (RU)</td>
<td>The Politics of Theory: Shaping Ideas about the First-Year Experience</td>
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<td>Tsogo Academy Conference Room</td>
<td><strong>Ashish Agrawal</strong>, <strong>Renee Smit</strong> (UCT), <strong>Margaret Blackie</strong> (SUN)</td>
<td>First-Year STEM Students’ Perceptions of University’s Responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DHS 1 Conference Room</td>
<td><strong>Felicity Harris</strong> (CPUT)</td>
<td>A University Survival Kit - Drawing from 1st Year Students’ Experience to Feed into a Pilot Mentor Programme for Engineering Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DHS 2 Conference Room</td>
<td><strong>Bianca Botha</strong> and <strong>Karina Mostert</strong> (NWU)</td>
<td>Exploring Indicators of Subjective Well-Being for First-Year University Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>END OF SESSIONS/CLOSE</td>
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## Welcome Event

**Kearsney Room**

All delegates are invited to join us at our welcome event, which is ‘Proudly South African-themed’. Please remember to bring your access card. A cash bar will be available as we only serve water and soft drinks.
WELCOME EVENT

22 MAY 2019|18:00

Venue: Garden Court Marine Parade-Durban
Kearsney Room

Time: 18:00-20:30

Theme: Proudly South African

Come dressed in your Proudly South African attire (remember to be comfortable) and bring along business cards for networking.
**THURSDAY, 23 MAY 2019**

**GARDEN COURT MARINE PARADE, DURBAN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08:00 – 08:50</td>
<td>Registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08:50 – 09:30</td>
<td><strong>Key National FYE Resources Session</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kearsney Conference Room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|               | Dr Annsilla Nyar, Director: South African National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (SANRC)  
  Dr Andre van Zyl, Director: Academic Development Centre (ADC) at University of Johannesburg (UJ) |
| 09:35 – 10:50 | **Global FYE Perspectives Session**                                     |
|               | Kearsney Conference Room                                                |
|               | Dr Jennifer Keup, Director: National Resource Centre for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (NRC)  
  Dr Dallin George Young: Assistant Director: National Resource Centre for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (NRC) |
| 10:50 – 11:05 | Tea Break                                                               |
| 11:05 – 11:35 | **Breakaway Session**                                                   |
|               | Glenwood Conference Room                                                |
|               | Mzikayise Binza (UNISA)                                                 |
|               | A No Significant Difference Paradigm for Effective First-Year Experience at a Distance |
|               | Hilton Conference Room                                                  |
|               | Emmanuel Ekale Esambe (CPUT)                                            |
|               | Teaching Research-Intensive Modules at First-Year in Work-Oriented Disciplines: Differing Gazes |
|               | Tsogo Academy Conference Room                                           |
|               | Tshegotafso Setilo and Chwaro Nelson Shuping (UFS)                      |
|               | “Our Students Matter, and We Care”                                      |
|               | Kearsney Conference Room                                                |
|               | Livingstone Makondo (DUT)                                               |
|               | Engaging the Student Voice: Critical Perspectives from Students          |
| 11:40 – 12:10 | **Breakaway Session**                                                   |
|               | Glenwood Conference Room                                                |
|               | Zuzeka Prudence Mkra (UNISA)                                            |
|               | First-Year Experience Project in an ODeL Institution: A Case of Mainstreaming Students with Disabilities in Student Success and Retention  
  Subethra Pather, Elizabeth Booi and Juliana Davids (UWC)  
  First-Year Students’ Expectations of University Transition and Academic Engagement |
|               | Hilton Conference Room                                                  |
|               | Mzwandile Khumalo, Cebokazi Luthuli, Wandlele Mvuna and Aphile Thwala (DUT)  
  First-Year Student Experience as a Supplementary Tool for Disciplinary Knowledge |
|               | Tsogo Academy Conference Room                                           |
|               | Elizabeth Ndofirepi (WITS)                                               |
|               | Small Group Approach to Skills Development for Academically Struggling Undergraduate Students: A Practitioner’s Reflections |
| 12:10 – 13:35 | Lunch: The Peppa Restaurant                                             |
## Interactive Workshop Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13:35 – 14:35</td>
<td>Glenwood Conference Room</td>
<td>Herkulaas Combrink (UFS)</td>
<td>Beyond Perception: Evaluating Content, Impact, and Teaching and Learning in First-Year Interventions – A UFS101 Case Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hilton Conference Room</td>
<td>Soraya Motsabi and Boitumelo Diale (UJ)</td>
<td>Strategies that Support Persistence of First-Generation African Students (FYFGAS) in Higher Education (HE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tsogo Academy Conference Room</td>
<td>Delecia Davids (SUN)</td>
<td>Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Instructional Design</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kearsney Conference Room</td>
<td>Rachel Forsyth (MMU), Claire Hamshire (MMU), Danny Fontaine-Rainen (UCT), Leza Soldaat (UCT)</td>
<td>The Expectations Gap: Resources to Support Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:35 – 14:55</td>
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<td>Tea Break</td>
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## Breakaway Session

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hilton Conference Room</td>
<td>Sekghoshi Alpheus Monyela (UNISA)</td>
<td>Staff as Support Systems for First-Year Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tsogo Academy Conference Room</td>
<td>Fritz Nganje (UJ)</td>
<td>Student Responsibility and the Demand Side of First-Year Experience Interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kearsney Conference Room</td>
<td>Annatjie Pretorius (UJ)</td>
<td>Engaging the Student Voice Beyond the Lecture and Tutorial: Blogs as Rhizomatic Space for Peer Assisted Meaning-Making During Transition</td>
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## Breakaway Session

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15:30 – 16:00</td>
<td>Glenwood Conference Room</td>
<td>Leza Soldaat (UCT)</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning: Lessons for the FYE from a High School Case Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hilton Conference Room</td>
<td>Kyle John Bester (UNISA)</td>
<td>The First-Year Experience Tale, and the One Being Told: Exploring the Factors of Attrition and Retention among Postgraduate Students at Unisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tsogo Academy Conference Room</td>
<td>Duncan Estrais (NMU)</td>
<td>The unheard voices revealed in data: Reflections of 2019 Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kearsney Conference Room</td>
<td>Lucy Sehloho and Codi Rogers (UFS)</td>
<td>First-Year Students in Transition: Experiences from the University of the Free State Gateway Orientation Programme</td>
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16:00 END OF SESSIONS/CLOSE

## Gala Dinner Event

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18:30 – 19:00</td>
<td>Conference Foyer</td>
<td>Welcome Refreshments &amp; Photo Booth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:00 – 22:00</td>
<td>DHS Conference Room</td>
<td>Formal Gala Dinner Proceedings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All delegates are invited to attend the ’Midnight in Durban’ -themed masquerade ball. Please remember to bring your access card. A cash bar will be available as we only serve soft drinks, wine and water.
**GALA DINNER**

**22 MAY 2019 | 18:30**

**Venue:** Garden Court Marine Parade
DHS 1 & 2

**Time:** 18:30-22:00

**Theme:** *Midnight in Durban*
Masquerade Ball (Black & Gold)

To celebrate the 5th year of the conference, we are hosting a masquerade ball.

Come dressed in your finest black and gold inspired attire and you could walk away with the 'FYE Style Icon' title for 2019.
# FRIDAY, 24 MAY 2019

**GARDEN COURT MARINE PARADE, DURBAN**

## Breakaway Session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
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</table>
| 09:00 – 09:30 | Glenwood Conference Room          | **Mokgadi Senyolo and Mzikayise Binza (UNISA)**  
**An Improved Quality Library Services for First-Year Experience in an Open, Distance e-Learning (ODeL) University** |
|            | Hilton Conference Room            | **Masabata Mosoeu (UFS)**  
**Positioning Academic Advising as One of the Primary Support Structures for First-Year Students** |
|            | Tsogo Academy Conference Room     | **Maipato Mmako (UJ)**  
**Educational Excursions for First-Year Students: A Tour to Africa by Bus Case Study** |

## Breakaway Session

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
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</table>
| 09:35 – 10:05 | Glenwood Conference Room          | **Vuyokazi Maliwa-Skosana (UNISA)**  
**Using Digital Communication to Support First-Time Entering Students Transition to an Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) Institution** |
|            | Hilton Conference Room            | **Annsilla Nyar (SANRC)**  
**The First-Year Experience (FYE) in South Africa: A National Perspective** |
|            | Tsogo Academy Conference Room     | **Ntombizodwa Madima and Mzikayise Binza (UNISA)**  
**Academic Skills for First-Time Entering Student’s Success and Retention in a Distance University** |

## Tea Break

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:05 – 10:20</td>
<td>Tea Break</td>
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## Special Session

**Invitational or Not?**

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 10:20 – 12:30 | DHS Conference Room               | **Dr Andre van Zyl, Director: Academic Development Centre (ADC) at University of Johannesburg (UJ)**  
In this special session entitled ‘Invitational or Not?’ Dr Andre van Zyl from the University of Johannesburg helps us to better understand the conceptual foundations and practical implications of invitational theory. |

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Lunch – See you in 2020</td>
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</table>
5TH ANNUAL SANRC FYE CONFERENCE 2019

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

22-24 May 2019

Garden Court Marine Parade, Durban

Be the Difference for South Africa's Students: Contemporary Practice in SA's FYE
Literature draws links between the initial experiences of first-year students and their subsequent adjustment, persistence, and academic success (Terenzini and Reason, 2005; 2010). It is worrying, therefore, that despite the progress made concerning the nature, scope, and content of Stellenbosch University’s official Welcoming Programme initiated in 2004, unacceptable practices still occur in the welcoming, adjustment, and integration of newcomer first-years. In fact, in general, the number of such incidents, some of which develop a racial connotation, have been on the increase at various universities around in the country. In this context, after the 2014 Welcoming Programme, Stellenbosch University (SU) commissioned a Task Team to investigate persistent unwelcoming practices that were contrary to the values espoused by the University, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. The Task Team deemed these occurrences ‘extremely disturbing,’ directly opposing the ethos of hospitality, friendliness, and dignity – referring to them as ‘unacceptable welcoming practices’ (SU Report, 2014). Guided by the Constitution and acknowledging the complexity and embeddedness of the unacceptable practices in the hierarchical power structures and identities of groups (Nuwer, 2004), SU undertook a systemic-holistic approach to weed out such practices. An institution wide values-driven leadership approach was pursued. Here, in essence, the values that have been promoted articulate what the organization cares about and aims to shape the institutional culture, and as such provides the building blocks for appropriate conduct, mindsets, and behavior; informing actions and decisions for all stakeholders. In accordance with these values, and with the ultimate goal of promoting student engagement and success, various stakeholders in the Student Affairs Division compiled an extensive revised Welcoming Programme – detailing how to enhance the reception and welcoming experience of newcomers. In this process, much energy and effort went into the planning and preparation of a variety of positive and constructive experiences and activities for first-year students, based on promoting friendship, hospitality, and dignity. This paper reflects on the newcomers’ experience of the SU Welcoming Programme following the switch to the values-driven training approach. Using data collected annually from the Welcoming Questionnaire and applying a descriptive statistical analysis we were able to summarize the trends and assess how the values-driven approach has, over time, shaped practices in SU communities. The role and importance of peer mentorship and leadership is illuminated in the findings as integral to establishing a sense of belonging. In particular it will be highlighted how the survey has evolved from an investigative tool to a conduit for connecting and integrating SU faculties, support services, and administration.

Student dropout and failure rates have pushed the higher education sector to find possible effective student success and retention strategies. This is largely due to students entering the sector who are not ready for the higher education landscape. The high dropout rate of students at the University of South Africa (Unisa) is a challenge to the success of the academic project; and studying at an Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) education institution, such as Unisa, presents its own set of challenges to first-year students. In this context, the Student Retention Unit (SRU) was established in May 2017 to increase student retention and success amongst those entering the institution. Navigating Unisa for the first time can be a challenging experience for students and therefore the SRU collaborates with various colleges and support departments to provide support to those entering an ODeL environment for the first time. Here, a variety of interventions have been designed to maximise student retention and success, notably: weekly emails; live broadcasts; college guides; and, the First-Year Experience (FYE) Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). This paper examines how the FYE MOOC has been developed and implemented to support first-time entering students at Unisa. The paper analyses how the FYE MOOC has been developed and implemented in four modules that provide students with crucial information that they require during their student life. The first MOOC is entitled ‘Is Unisa for me?’ It is required that this module be completed prior to application at Unisa. The second module is entitled ‘I am a first-year Unisa student,’ the third ‘Fundamental skills for success.’ These two modules are to be completed during the academic year so as to assist the student to acquire the various skills required for successful development. The fourth module is entitled ‘Student feedback,’ which is completed at the end of the first-year of study. Overall, the paper concludes that the FYE MOOC provides students with the information required to transition successfully into Unisa, to be a successful student, and to improve and enhance the quality of the student experience.
The purpose of this study was to explore first-year students’ experiences of their study demands and resources at a rural-based university in South Africa, as viewed from the perspectives of university support structures (staff and students working with first-year students). The current study forms part of a larger, mixed methods project, StudyWell, looking at student wellbeing and success. The qualitative study (reported here), allowed researchers to investigate the meanings that student support structures ascribe to the demands and challenges that first-year students experience when transitioning to university. These structures constructed their understandings of first-year students’ needs in the context of how these are being addressed (or not) with the relevant resources at a rural university campus. The participants (N=16) comprised staff members from psychological services, first-year lecturers, members of the student representative council, peer mentors, the university’s finance department, and hostel parents. Data were collected using open-ended, in-depth, individual and group interviews to understand participants experience in working with first-year students. Researchers gathered their insights about the challenges and difficulties students face when transitioning to university. Also, the participants explained what resources they considered first-year students have themselves, or have access to, that facilitated their adjustment to university life. Lastly, the interviews explored ways in which participants supported first-years’ adjustment processes. The data were analysed by two independent co-coders using thematic analysis in ATLAS.ti 8. The analysis relied on iterative strategies to inductively explore the meaning of data segments and create understandings from data patterns to determine themes. Five distinct themes were developed from the participants’ explanations; these included: (1) the complex lives of first-year students; (2) the nature of the academic environment; (3) the economic experiences of studying; (4) accommodation and facilities; and, (5) transition to university life (adjustments and expectations). Each theme encompassed supportive subthemes which will be presented in greater detail. It is revealed that the complexity of the first-year experience requires greater sensitivity from universities to address study demands timeously to ensure successful university transitions and success in later studies. In this context, this study aims to contribute to the effective design, implementation, and improvement of appropriate resources to support first-year students’ adjustment to university.

The University of Pretoria (UP) has nine faculties for its students at the Mamelodi campus. The concept of advising began in the Faculty of Education in 2012, with one Faculty Student Advisor (FSA) who monitored the progress of students who had not performed well in the June examination, by inviting them to consult with her. In 2013 three additional faculties appointed FSAs. The terms of reference for advising were developed informally with input from FSAs. By 2018, UP had 18 FSAs; some part-time, others on 40-hour contracts. The salaries of these FSAs were ad hoc, depending on the Faculty and Deputy Deans’ needs; so the job descriptions varied to some extent. FSAs met monthly as a Community of Practice under the leadership of the Deputy Director: Academic Support, where it was established that the varied nature of the jobs and the fact that only yearly contracts were offered to FSAs made the position uncertain. To begin this project of developing a curriculum for advising, the job description of a FSA was tightened and placed on the Human Resource system of the University. Concurrently the global definitions of advising were interrogated in view of what UP was establishing. An advocacy campaign involving the Deputy Vice Chancellor and Deputy Director: Academic Support was conducted to get buy-in from the various departments in the institution for the establishment of the concept of integrating advising. In tandem there was also a need to understand what FSAs at UP do, to support students. Between August and September 2018, a questionnaire was used to interview the FSAs on their current focus. Using design thinking the FSAs prioritised the topics to be covered in one-on-one sessions, as well as group workshops; their input on the sequencing of the various topics was noted. At the heart of the various activities was the need to integrate advising at the University of Pretoria. The data has also been used to get student input on advising by using the design thinking methodology. Altogether, the information gathered has resulted in a re-think of student advising at UP. This presentation will highlight the innovations that are being piloted over 2019 as a result of the data gathered thus far.
In the contemporary higher education setting of South Africa, decolonisation as a construct has become a significant consideration for all academics. The #FeesMustFall (#FMF) movement and student protests between 2015–2017, in particular, turned the spotlight on how particular types of knowledge, typically emanating from Western traditions, have come to dominate curricula at our universities, often at expense of those derived from Africa. The disciplinary field of Design and its curriculum construction has not been exempt from these critiques. While much debate and discussion about the nature of decolonisation as it might apply to the university, curriculum, and pedagogy has been entertained at most institutions, at the level of curriculum, actual change has been slow. In this reflective paper, supported by the affordances of the “decolonisation turn” (Vorster and Quinn, 2017) which have allowed us to review and reconsider both our identities and membership of the Design fraternity and its influence on our teaching practices, we present a critical self-reflection of some of the significant elements constructing our identities as Design teachers at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). Central to decolonisation theorization is the importance attached to resisting Eurocentric ideas and philosophies, while accepting the contributions of colonized communities and promoting social justice especially in post-colonial context across the global (Zembayas, 2017). Additionally, the notion of decoloniality (see, Quijano 1997; and 2000 in Zembayas, 2017) attempts to account for how colonial and especially European influences are still prized above other ways of knowing and doing. These ideas have offered a valuable reflective counterpoint from which to review and also reframe our teaching practice. While not overtly referenced in this paper, such ideas continue to offer a conceptual sounding board for our ongoing reflective enquiry activities. Critical review has allowed us to revisit our own learning pathways into the disciplinary field of Design and ask pertinent questions about how this journey continues to influence our teaching practices in certain ways. We are particularly interested in how our renewed and critical reconstruction of our Design identities, coupled with our location in the Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP) space, can be harnessed to disrupt the expected pathways into Design for our students. We have structured our reflective enquiry using a narrative research approach and through a dialogical conversation we attempt to account for our learning and academic journey to our current role and location as ECP lecturers at CPUT. This dialogical conversation provides the basis of our critical reflection and interrogation, which attempts to understand the various influences, which now informs our activities and practices as Design ECP lecturers.

This study builds on existing work based on the perceived success factors of high performing Matric learners. We have surveyed at least 50% of the first-time entering 2019 undergraduate cohort at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) with a view to compiling a credible and representative profile of our first-year students, through which we could explore the pre-entry attributes that facilitate and inhibit their adjustment to, and persistence with, tertiary studies. Assisting first-year students with their adjustment and preventing their premature exit from tertiary studies necessitates an informed understanding about their diverse individual and family backgrounds, high school experiences, what influenced their decision to study further, as well as their abilities, challenges, and attitudes. This broader understanding of our students and the impact of the First-Year Experience could, in turn, inform strategies aimed at enhancing student support and development services, enriching first-year experience programming, and safeguarding student success and retention. A future component of this research involves interviews in the second semester with a sample of the surveyed participants, in which we will enquire into the first semester academic and co-curricular experiences that influence their engagement with the campus. The study is rooted in an acknowledgement that UWC accepts students from a broad spectrum of society, but mostly from historically-disadvantaged contexts. Furthermore, this study thus aligns itself to an approach that acknowledges the responsibility of higher education institutions to go beyond traditional standards in meeting first-year students halfway – both in facilitating their assimilation to, and integration into, the structures of university life, as well as designing programmes that take into consideration factors relating to their basic education foundation, demographic dynamics, and life experiences. The presentation outlines the planning around the research proposal and resource management, as well as the research process. We describe the fieldwork, the considerations related to hard-copy data gathering tools, and how we used the institutional frameworks at UWC for achieving a participation rate exceeding 50%. It further explains the processes employed in administering the questionnaires, capturing the data and ensuring its unassailability. Exploring synergies between this data and that
of the Matric success factors will be an interesting exercise. The broad range of surveyed information makes for a dataset that should prove invaluable to a variety of First-Year Experience related studies in South Africa and comparable contexts.

Wednesday: Breakaway Session 2, 14:45-15:15, Hilton Conference Room

Author: Anniekie Ravhuzulo (UNISA)
Theme: Engaging the Student Voice: Critical Perspectives from Students
Format: Full Critical Academic Paper
Paper Title: The Gap between Expectations of Students and the Realities in an Open Distance Learning Context

Transition from high school to university can cause concern for many students. One central issue is the gap between expectations of students and the realities of an Open Distance Learning University (ODL) context. This can cause significant misery, poor academic performance, and increased dropout rates if not managed efficiently. The purpose of this paper is to determine the gap between expectations of students and the realities in an ODL context. In this paper, quantitative research is used to address the research objective, and 120 first-year students and 50 academic lecturers completed questionnaires. This paper revealed the main gaps between expectations students and the realities in an ODL context. This paper further offers recommendations on how to address the identified gaps. Lastly, future research implications on the topic are provided.

Wednesday: Breakaway Session 2, 14:45-15:15, Tsogo Academy Conference Room

Author: Muleki Siguntu (VUT)
Theme: First-Year Transitions in the Higher Education System
Format: Reflective Practitioner Paper
Paper Title: The Importance of Information Literacy for First-Year Students

Information Literacy is increasingly recognised as an important educational outcome for university students, graduates, and even academics. While it is also recognised as a societal need and a strategic issue for universities, higher education institutions in South Africa have been slow to restructure and transform to produce information literate graduates for the knowledge society. The information society calls for all people to become information literate; meaning they should not only be able to recognise when the information is needed, but also be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and use effectively the information needed for decision-making. Regardless of discipline, Information Literacy enables users to master the content and have a sense of being in control of their learning (Kuvuuya, 2003). This research paper seeks to create awareness on the importance of Information Literacy with particular emphasis on first-year university students. Studies have revealed that there is a large gap between high school education and tertiary education; this raises the need to facilitate Information Literacy for first-year students. The paper seeks to find out to what extent South African university libraries provide Information Literacy to first-year students; it focuses on selected university libraries’ Information Literacy practice – including the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) library, where the author works. The paper then proceeds to interrogate the concept of Information Literacy with regard to: its application; the forms of information literacy programmes offered; and, the challenges faced by academic libraries in carrying out Information Literacy programmes. This research paper is largely informed by those Information Literacy standards at higher education level that provide a framework for assessing an information literate individual; it is also grounded in a literature review of scholarly books, articles, Internet sources, and surveys pertaining to Library and Information departments and schools – and some academic libraries. The findings reveal that, whilst globally, all academic libraries provide Information Literacy programmes, it is the case that the facilitation of Information Literacy is not a true success story in developing countries.

Wednesday: Breakaway Session 2, 14:45-15:15, DHS1 Conference Room

Authors: Nosisana Mkonto (CPUT)
Theme: Case Studies in Good FYE Practice
Format: Full Critical Academic Paper
Paper Title: CPUT 101: Transition Hit or Miss

First-year student under-preparedness for higher education is an issue being debated internationally. In South Africa there is growing research on how higher education institutions support first-year students, and whether such support reflects adequate conceptualisation that considers the students, their contexts, and the social and political backgrounds that they are coming from (Schreiber, Luescher, & Moja, 2016). Universities more often than not ignore the institutional practices and historical factors that contribute to poor student retention that have been raised by Nzimande (1988) and Ndebele (1995). Consequently, Akoojee and Nkomo (2007) have proposed that higher education institutions should overhaul their student support systems if they want to make in-roads in the fight against poor throughput rates. It has, therefore, become critical for universities to create structures and systems that will not only enable first-year students to stay in the university and progress academically, but to also be able to thrive in their journey throughout the university. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), like many other universities across South Africa and beyond, initiated an institution-wide First-Year Experience (FYE) project in 2014 in order to provide holistic interventions and innovative support systems to first-year students in the institution (Mkonto, 2014). Through the FYE, CPUT 101, a programme meant to assist first-year students to find meaning and purpose in their university studies, was initiated; it being a programme
The challenges faced by first-generation students during the transition to university have been well documented in several countries (Hamshire, Forsyth, & Player, 2018; Laubscher-Kelly, Paxton, & Majombozi, 2018); and yet students from non-traditional backgrounds continue to report considerable difficulties in adapting to university life. Academic staff plays a key role in shaping the academic environment, particularly within the classroom, and thus are key players in creating spaces where all students feel welcome in their first year. First-generation students entering higher education encounter a culture where the values and beliefs are likely to be different from their previous experiences (Bryson, 2014); and we know that first-generation students often fail to progress in higher education to the same extent as their peers who have family experience of university life (Hamshire et al., 2018). The first year is of critical importance (Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2006), and we know that to improve student success educators need to understand our students’ learning; yet there has been limited research into how educators create an engaging environment for first-generation students. This paper reports on a collaborative project between researchers in the UK at Manchester Metropolitan University and South Africa at the University of Cape Town, exploring staff perceptions of first-generation students’ experiences. Despite the very different cultural contexts experienced by these students, the staff reported considerable similarities in the challenges they believed that students face in integrating into university life. Twenty members of staff volunteered to be included in the study at each of the participating institutions, and were invited to reflect on their perceptions and experiences, using semi-structured interviews. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently analysed using a thematic approach to identify staff perceptions. In this session, we will present the key themes from the thematic analysis and explore how inclusion is both facilitated and inhibited; as well as reflect on future developments and potential wider implications. We will also detail some of the challenges around first-generation students that were identified by the staff and make recommendations for curriculum design and delivery to meet student needs and enhance inclusivity in the first year.

Students of Open Distance Learning (ODL) institutions in South Africa drop out at high rates, particularly during their first year of study. In order to mitigate student attrition, universities have attempted to design programmes that aim to improve the chance of student success. These programmes typically comprise a set of various interventions such as face-to-face tutorials, one-to-one sessions, counselling, study methods workshops, or provision of various on-line materials and applications for the enhancement of the study experience. However, given that the ODL setting eliminates much of the normal student–institution interaction, it becomes imperative that students who are at-risk of not completing their first-year of study are personally enticed, at additional institutional cost, to attend support programmes. Since the period from student enrolment to potential dropout can be very short, it is important to identify at-risk students from the point of registration – so as to start the process of referring them to various supporting departments as soon as possible. In the case of the University of South Africa (Unisa), which welcomes around 80,000 new entrants each year, face-to-face evaluation mechanisms lack practicality precisely because of this huge number. Thus, the realistic alternative would seem to lie in data mining methods that attempt to infer at-risk status of students by analysing the demographics and previous academic data. Educational data mining (EDM) is a growing field at the intersection of computer science, statistics, and education. The power of EDM is revealed when one attempts to find patterns and make predictions that are related to learners’ behaviours and achievements. To take this process forward it was necessary to source the data from the Unisa database, perform the data cleaning, feature engineering, and run a few machine learning algorithms – all in the endeavour to find the most important set of predictors of the first-year students’ retention that would indicate the at-risk students. Subsequently, such information can be sent to the relevant departments in order to contact at-risk students and invoke the remediation process. The primary research questions can, then, be stated as follows: What demographic features indicate the potential loss of the first-year student? What previous levels of academic attainment indicate the potential loss of the first-year student? What is the optimal mathematical model for securing first-year student retention?
First-Year STEM Students’ Perceptions of University’s Responsibilities

Universities have been undergoing shifts in their purposes and focus in the recent times. Especially in the context of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, universities are charged with the responsibility of producing work-ready graduates able to contribute to social and economic growth in both developing and developed countries. The role of universities becomes even more important in a new democracy such as South Africa, where they are charged with not only producing graduates who are empowered to advance the socioeconomic situation of the country, but also as instilling in students the imperative to comply with the neo-liberalisation of the state and its institutions. Our rationalisations around class size, outsourcing versus tenured positions of academic staff, throughput rates, access, and even pedagogy, are deeply influenced by financial costs and benefits. In South Africa, this conjunction has occurred at a time when increasingly, and with state financial support, many first-year students in South Africa are poor and black. Some argue that poor black students are underprepared for the rigours of university, while others point to the under-preparedness of universities to the challenges and opportunities presented by such students. The student protests of 2015 and 2016 highlighted some of the ways in which students are frustrated with the slow rate of transformation in our universities, and called for the unproblematising of the poor black student, and the Africanisation of the curriculum. What kind of theories will best help to locate and contain the poor black first-year student as one who deserves to flourish in higher education, and following on from this what would be the implications of such theories for transforming and decolonising the university? This paper argues that African Feminism, Black Consciousness, and Critical Race Feminism – although not new theories – can best speak to poor black students own existential perspectives, and be drawn upon to guide our strategies, pedagogies, and programmes accordingly. African Feminism seeks to render visible those who have been silenced by colonialism and patriarchy, and by revealing the place of community in the strategies and activism of women. Black Consciousness speaks to the re-centering of blackness in how we locate the black young person. Critical Race Feminism pushes against a generalised notion of oppression, by emphasising intersectionality of race, class, and gender – among other identity markers. The paper highlights two main ways in which these theories can present an advance: through looking at the embodiment of knowledge, and by reminding us of our commitment to uphold universities as a public good.
Wednesday: Breakaway Session 3, 15:30-16:00, DHS 1 Conference Room  
Authors: Felicity Harris (CPUT)  
Theme: Case Studies in Good FYE Practice  
Format: Full Critical Academic Paper  
Paper Title: A University Survival Kit: Drawing from 1st Year Students’ Experience to Feed into a Pilot Mentor Programme for Engineering Students

The attrition rate for first-year engineering is very high and the throughput rate for engineering students from first year to second year is very low. This impacts both students’ success and well-being, as failure, particularly repeated failure, can result in low self-esteem and decreasing motivation to study (Holt and Fifer, 2016). Peer support is particularly important for students’ success and well-being in engineering (Colvin and Ashman, 2010). Such peer support “helps students to realize and envision their self-identity as STEM scholars with the potential to offer meaningful contributions to their disciplines” (Wilson et al., 2012, p. 154). In this context, the research question posed by this paper is: Who should be included in the conceptualisation and planning of an effective mentor programme? The paper uses qualitative research methods and draws from first-year engineering students’ reflective responses on what students need as support when entering higher education, and particularly when entering engineering as a field of study. The study took place in June of 2018. First-year Mechanical Engineering students at a University of Technology in Cape Town were asked to reflect on their experiences after being in higher education for six months, and to offer their advice to newly entering students in 2019. The advice offered showed a need for pastoral support in the form of self-management techniques, adjusting to the higher education environment, as well as advice on engineering career opportunities and general engineering trends. Students further went on to describe how they have managed, or did not manage, to overcome some of the challenges facing first-year students. Such reflections were crucial and instrumental to piloting a mentor programme in engineering. It is concluded that consultation with students, as a stakeholder in the institution, was crucial to achieving the buy-in needed for a mentor programme.

Wednesday: Breakaway Session 3, 15:30-16:00, DHS2 Conference Room  
Author: Bianca Botha and Karina Mostert (NWU)  
Theme: Engaging the Student Voice: Critical Perspectives from Students  
Format: Full Critical Academic Paper  
Paper Title: Exploring Indicators of Subjective Well-Being for First-Year University Students

There is a growing interest in psychological well-being and the benefit of such a construct for higher educational institutions (HEI). Amidst challenges to produce skilled graduates to meet growing economic needs in South Africa (SA), understanding and supporting first-year students entering the university environment emphasizes the need for HEIs in SA to invest in the well-being of their students. In this context, this study explored the subjective indicators that inform student well-being for first-year students at a local university in South Africa, as described through students’ own experiences of their first-year. This study is part of a larger project, the StudyWell project, which investigates student well-being and success. Participants were registered full-time first- and second-year students who provided insights about their well-being, and the indicators thereof that they perceived as significant during their first-year at university. Participants were recruited using purposeful snowball sampling. Data were collected in two phases. First, participants were invited in May 2017 to attend a Mmogo-method® group session to build a clay model to illustrate their experiences as students attending the university. Second, participants were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews to substantiate understandings from the first phase of data collection. This occurred in October 2017. Of the ten Mmogo-method® participants, three agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews, while one additional student volunteered for the semi-structured interview (thus N=11). Data were transcribed verbatim, and both photos of the models built (visual) and explanations from the Mmogo-method® models and additional semi-structured interviews (text) were analysed using thematic analysis by means of ATLAS.ti 8. Analysis of the results identified six main subjective indicators of student well-being. The first five indicators were labelled as dimensions of well-being: (1) emotional; (2) psychological; (3) social; (4) spiritual; and, (5) physical. The sixth factor was labelled influencers of well-being and included: structural resources such as hostels and accommodation; information provided by the university; motivation to complete studies; choice of academic course; lecturers and facilitators; and, career and course uncertainties. Findings provide insight into the facets of subjective well-being that university students consider as important for their first-year of study. Moreover, the study provides insights to improve the qualitative understanding of student well-being; through identifying possible indicators and their associated facets. An understanding of the facets of subjective well-being are considered important to students and can assist in increasing retention and graduation rates.
A no significant difference (NSD) paradigm has compelled those universities, all around the world, since the twentieth century, who offer education through a distance mode to ensure that their students learn the same way as they could in a contact university. The paradigm dictates that graduates passing through the curriculum of a university offering distance learning should have no significant difference to graduate attributes from a face-to-face tuition university. In this, the point of departure is to have the NSD phenomena mainstreamed in the curriculum, and to provide tuition and learner support at first-year level; to ensure that first-time entering students encounter no significant difference to enable them to succeed and complete their qualifications in record time. In the context of South Africa, only one university is a pure open distance e-learning (ODeL) institution (Unisa), although some contact universities do offer programmes through a distance e-learning mode. The main argument of this paper is that the ODeL university should use a NSD paradigm in providing scholarship of teaching and learning to their first-time entering students within the context of the First-Year Experience Project. A central claim is that given that first-time entering students have a history of more than twelve years of face-to-face learning at school, any sense of significant difference in their learning may have adverse impact on student success and retention. The paper suggests possible strategies to enable an ODeL university, namely Unisa, to mainstream the NSD paradigm into its curriculum, and tuition and learning support services – as well as in other forms of scholarship such as research and community engagement. The mainstreaming of NSD should be embraced by both the academic and professional support staff as if they are working for a face-to-face institution; which, if done effectively, would greatly reduce students’ complaints of poor service. It is concluded that an ODeL university could significantly improve its student’s success rates, throughput rates, and pass rates, as well as reduce the dropout rates drastically, if the NSD paradigm is mainstreamed in the First-Year Experience project.

In vocational-intensive universities in South Africa, there is often a disjuncture in the way research-intensive courses are framed, as well as latent opposition to teaching and assessments involving intensive academic writing. This situation is further supported by the widely-held assumption that students in vocational-intensive disciplines are more focused on entering the job market; and as such, other elements of the curriculum such as research and preparation for further studies are of less importance. In this context, this paper explores the role of workplace aspirations in the differing perceptions of research writing between lecturers and first-year students in a health sciences department at a university of technology in South Africa. The paper uses Maton’s (2014) notion of gaze within the domain of Specialisation in Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) to examine how research writing is being introduced in a health sciences class at a university of technology. Qualitative data was collected through focus group interviews with a small group of lecturers and students, written feedback on the students’ assignment drafts, as well as from referral notes from lecturers. Four lecturers and 25 first-year students were interviewed between March and June 2018. This data was coded with the aid of a Specialization translation device and mapped in terms of subjective and interactional relations. Evidence from the data shows that while students at undergraduate programmes in vocational-intensive disciplines have a dominantly subjective gaze of research-intensive modules, the gaze of the lecturers and academic support staff fluctuates from the epistemic plane to the interactional zone in the social plane. While this finding confirms the view that research writing is a social practice, it also highlights the importance of interrogating teaching and learning practices from a knowledge domain. In an epoch and setting where there is a widening gulf between training institutions and the world of work, there is an ever increasing need to ascertain why there is oppositional, and sometimes antagonistic, views between research-intensive modules and workplace-oriented modules.

The University Access Programme (UAP) caters for students who could not get university admission points and still want to pursue their studies in higher education and training. The programme provides prospective students with an opportunity to enjoy degree studies at higher-education institutions after successful completion of an access year. Learners from grade twelve are often, if not
most of the time, from an environment where the support was from their teachers who would prescribe what they had to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Embarking on a new academic journey and transitioning from the traditional way of a schooling system can lead to extreme stress, depression, and poor academic performance (Keeling, 2003). The first year of studies comes with challenges. A student has to identify their expectations of not only what a university is, but they also have to learn how to manage their workload (Bowles et al., 2014). In South Africa, a study conducted in a secondary school in the Eastern Cape found that school systems do not sufficiently prepare learners for the demands of higher education and this resulted in some students finding it difficult to adjust to the demands of higher education (Tanga & Maphosa, 2018). Consequently, such students require more academic advising and face-to-face assistance. As Meadows, Hensley, & Tharp (1998) state, academic advising provides the student with a contact person whom they know cares about their success and can help. The process is ongoing, multifaceted and it is both the student and the advisors’ responsibility; hence, it becomes a shared responsibility (Winston et al., 1982). At the University of the Free State academic advising is a developmental teaching and learning process that promotes student learning, development, and academic success together with the Gateway programme. Academic advising as the central point allows students to connect to the campus resources and institutional support services, providing them with an individualised success skill support pack (time management, goal setting, study methods, etc.) to meet the higher education expectations and successfully progress to mainstream studies and eventually graduate. Student centred academic support is necessary to help students meet challenging university expectations. Thus, this paper aims to share best practices for student support in the Access Programme, as well as the students’ evaluation of the academic advising and Gateway sessions.

Thursday: Breakaway Session 1, 11:05-11:35, Kearsney Conference Room
Author: Livingstone Makondo (DUT)
Theme: Case Studies in Good FYE Practice
Format: Full Critical Academic Paper
Paper Title: Engaging the Student Voice: Critical Perspectives from Students

The journey from high school into university is experienced differently by students. Some find the transition to be smooth while others require much time to get acclimatised to the academic and social rigour characteristic of the first year of university study. This paper seeks to establish how selected students currently in first, second, and third year experienced their first two months of their first year at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). Half of the 300 participating students were drawn from those who participated in the first-year experience activities (namely: seminars, tutorials, technology for learning, and residence educational programme sessions); while the other half did not so engage. This comparative approach was adopted so as to try to establish through student voices: how students experienced their first two months of their first year; what FYE offered them during their critical transition phase; their prevalent understanding of the first-year student experience; and, their assessment of the impact of the FYE programme towards their transition into the higher education context. The specific questions asked were: (1) How was your experience during the first two months as a first-year student at a university? Did you feel well prepared for the university life or not? (2) What coping mechanisms/programmes were provided for the first-year students by the university during these first two months? (3) Given an opportunity to design a FYE programme, what would you include in it so it can best serve the needs and expectations of the first-year students? (4) Would you recommend any other first-year student to attend the FYE? Provide a reason for your answer? This study comes at a time when DUT has adopted FYE through 35 Departments – that cover all six Faculties in the institution. It is argued that giving respect to student voices and foregrounding their concerns within the FYE at DUT is critical to the success of creating a student-centered institution whilst it also continues to design and implement an institution-wide FYE.

Thursday: Breakaway Session 2, 11:40-12:10, Glenwood Conference Room
Authors: Zuzeka Prudence Mkra (UNISA)
Theme: Case Studies in Good FYE Practice
Format: Work-in-Progress Reports or Proposals for Future Research
Paper Title: First-Year Experience Project in an ODeL Institution: A Case of Mainstreaming Students with Disabilities in Student Success and Retention

The purpose of this paper is to systematically examine and assess the impact of the support intervention strategies that the University of South Africa (Unisa) has put in place to retain first-time entering students, and how students with disabilities have been mainstreamed. Although Unisa, as an Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) institution, offers flexibility with freedom from the constraints of time and space, while also being cost-effective, it is the case that the majority of the first-time entering students, and especially students with disabilities, are in need of support services to succeed. Indeed, as this case study will show, student support is one of the most effective ways of reducing dropout; it can and does improve students’ engagement with their institution. It is, then, of great import that Unisa constantly review how it can improve support services to assist students with disabilities. In this context, the paper addresses two main questions. First: What is a safe and supportive environment for students with disabilities? Addressing this question helps clarify how Unisa can create a more comfortable environment, and helps point to how proactive support rests on open communication between students and the institution. Second: What are the common elements of effective support interventions for reducing student dropout rates or increasing completion rates? Here, focus is directed to the importance of infused student support; acknowledging that student support should not be a task that is directed at just one support department,
but should be an integrated process – not to be excluded from curriculum and assessment development processes throughout the institution.

### Thursday: Breakaway Session 2, 11:40-12:10, Hilton Conference Room

**Author:** Subethra Pather, Elizabeth Booi, and Juliana Davids (UWC)

**Theme:** First-Year Transitions in the Higher Education System

**Format:** Work-in-Progress Reports or Proposals for Future Research

**Paper Title:** First-Year Students’ Expectations of University Transition and Academic Engagement

Although the transition from school to university presents many opportunities for first-year students it also creates many challenges that students face during this adjustment period. In addition to students trying to fit into their new university environment, they simultaneously have to adapt to the academic rigour and responsibilities in their chosen course of study. Many first-year students are not prepared for such responsibilities and changes. They arrive at university with certain expectations of what university life is all about, however when these expectations are not fulfilled or recognized this could lead to first-year students becoming stressed and anxious. This behaviour could have a negative impact on first-year students’ academic performance and their decision to either stay or leave university. In this context, this study investigates first-year students’ prior university expectations with their actual university experience, at one institution in the Western Cape. The focus is twofold: first, to identify the gap between incoming students’ university expectations and their experience; and second, to investigate if students’ unmatched university expectations and experience may have an influence on their academic performance. Quantitative data was collected from a total sample of 187 first-year students that completed both surveys. The first-year pre-entry expectation survey was administered prior to students entering university, while the experience survey was completed at the end of the first year of study. Tinto’s student integration model together with gap analysis model guided the research process and provided for in-depth understanding of how students connect with their academic university environment. Students’ background characteristics, attitude, home and school environments play a crucial role in shaping students expectations and experience at university. Hence, the intensity of the expectation-experience gap could be influenced by students’ pre-entry attributes which could impact on their university engagement and academic performance. This study finds that first-year students have unrealistic expectations of university life. Over the four dimensions that were investigated: students’ resourcefulness, attitude towards university studies, academic support, and academic skills – students’ university expectation scores were higher than their actual university experience scores, indicating a negative gap. The results from this study supports the urgent need for universities to address the expectation-experience gap as early as possible so as to reduce the level of disconnect between the student and the university.

### Thursday: Breakaway Session 2, 11:40-12:10, Tsogo Academy Conference Room

**Author:** Mzwandile Khumalo, Cebokazi Luthuli, Wandile Mvuna, and Aphile Thwala (DUT)

**Theme:** Case Studies in Good FYE Practice

**Format:** Full Critical Academic Paper

**Paper Title:** First-Year Student Experience as a Supplementary Tool for Disciplinary Knowledge

The first year is an important transition point for cultivating the right frame of mind aimed at enhancing success and persistence in learning at tertiary education and beyond. Although there is a plethora of studies on the importance of the co-curriculum in the development of first-year students, research is inconclusive regarding the integration of supplementary intervention in disciplinary knowledge building and management (Barton and Hamilton, 2005; Lillis and Scott, 2007). This paper seeks to address this issue in the context of the first-year student experience at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). At DUT students acquire a set of skills referred to as graduate attributes throughout their academic journey. Here, the FYSE programme is used as a supplementary intervention, providing academic, psycho-social, and technological support – suitably modified – for each discipline. The paper describes the redesigned FYSE model employed at DUT as an integral part of academic content teaching within the discipline as a tool to channel and manage disciplinary knowledge building. The leitmotif of the paper being to share the FYSE model employed at the DUT to nurture and support first-year students in transitioning into the higher education, intertwined with specific discipline curriculum. The effectiveness of this model will be tested against the increased departmental/student participation in the FYSE through the class registers and also programme evaluations from the students and attendance registers.

### Thursday: Breakaway Session 2, 11:40-12:10, Kearsney Conference Room

**Author:** Elizabeth Ndofirepi (WITS)

**Theme:** FYE in the Classroom

**Format:** Reflective Practitioner Paper

**Paper Title:** Small Group Approach to Skills Development for Academically Struggling Undergraduate Students: A Practitioner’s Reflections

The problem of working with large classes in higher education has always been linked to university academic staff – those mandated with the teaching of content in the different programmes. With the current large university enrolments especially of first-year undergraduate students, the large class dilemma now spills into the student academic advisor portfolio. A large number of these
students fail formative assessments and seek help with, or are advised to get assistance at, the office of student academic advisor; prompting the office to put out fires before much damage is done. The question is: How best this can be addressed taking cognisance of the skeleton manpower in this office. This presentation is a personal reflection on experience with academically struggling undergraduate students. The paper provides a narrative of how the small-group-approach was applied to address the challenges which these groups of students face, so as to enable them to bounce back and continue learning effectively. Practitioners seldom share their experiences in terms of what they did, the challenges met, and how such challenges were overcome so that others critique and learn. Thus, this presentation seeks to unveil the seemingly unspeakable experiences with the aim of sharing ideas in order to learn and improve.

**Thursday: Interactive Workshop, 13:35-14:35, Glenwood Conference Room**

**Author:** Herkulaas Combrink  
**Theme:** Case Studies in Good FYE Practice  
**Format:** Interactive Workshop Session  
**Paper Title:** Beyond Perception: Evaluating Content, Impact, and Teaching and Learning in First-Year Interventions – A UFS101 Case Study

First-year modules have a pivotal function within institutions to not only create the academic foundation necessary in specific disciplines, but also to set the scene in terms of the academic competencies required within institutions of higher learning. In an attempt to cater to the needs of both the institution and the student, academic interventions aimed at addressing these needs are created in UFS101, the first-year seminar at the University of the Free State. Measuring the impact of these interventions within first-year modules, however, has proven challenging because the level of academic preparedness and the challenges that students face differ between disciplines and individuals. Furthermore, measuring the value of interventions specific to first-year students related to teaching and learning practices, and changes in the content presented, can also be challenging because of the complexity of the evaluation and types of inferences drawn. Therefore, in UFS101, the research cycle has been adapted to assess unique interventions within the module by embedding a mixed method research design into the module evaluation cycle. Included in these evaluations are research instruments that not only provide contextual feedback related to student perception about the module and its value, but that also identify areas that require improvement in terms of the teaching and learning practices, and the content presented. In addition to the qualitative inquiry, statistical analyses such as the Friedman test, Wilcoxon rank-sum test, and Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient form part of these investigations in order to show significance in the findings and to identify areas that require improvement. Within this interactive workshop, the research instruments – as well as how to incorporate them in other interventions specific to first-year modules – will be demonstrated and shared. Additionally, raw data will be provided to the participants. The focus of the workshop will be on the practical analysis and interpretation of the information, rather than an overview of how research is conducted within the first-year seminar at the University of the Free State. For an optimal workshop experience, a laptop is required, but paper-based material will be provided for those without one.

**Thursday: Interactive Workshop, 13:35-14:35, Hilton Conference Room**

**Author:** Soraya Motsabi and Boitumelo Diale (UJ)  
**Theme:** FYE Theory and Practice  
**Format:** Interactive Workshop Session  
**Paper Title:** Strategies that Support Persistence of First-Year First-Generation African Students (FYFGAS) in Higher Education (HE)

The increasing number of Black African students in higher education, is not yielding the desired results with regard to throughput and graduation rates. The distribution of graduates is still skewed along racial lines, with White students performing much better than other race groups and Black African students performing more poorly. Numerous reasons can be given for the poor performance of these students, such as financial problems, inability to adapt to higher education, lack of readiness, the articulation gap experienced by many students, and many other reasons. One of the major findings in numerous researches is that performance and persistence in higher education is related to parental education (Berger, 2000, Kuh, 2007; Engle, 2010; Tinto, 1987). This means that those students who are the first in their families or first-generation are at risk of either terminating their studies prematurely or not performing well. In a study conducted at one of the universities in Johannesburg, the researcher found that persistence of FYFGAS is influenced by multiple factors. The students’ pre-entry attributes, particularly, the students’ personal resilience attributes such as the students’ self-efficacy, internal locus of control, motivation, personal agency, problem solving and goal directedness help the students to be able to deal with adversity and risk that would threaten their persistence. Social support that the student receives from a variety of support systems including family, peers and their environment, helps them to navigate and adapt to the institution. A caring adult in a students’ life helps the student to persevere despite numerous risk factors. Lastly a supportive institution also contributes to persistence. This workshop aims at supporting first-year lecturers and other staff members working with first-year students to identify and develop practical strategies that could be applied in their own institutions to support and promote the persistence of FYFGAS. The longitudinal interactionist theory (Tinto 1975; 1993), the comprehensive model of
In the United States, the perspective of learning-centered higher education has become more accepted since the early 2000's. This concept holds the belief that institutions should not only focus on offering courses and granting degrees, but that they should also generate valuable kinds of learning and that it should be certified that those types of learning has been achieved (Fink, 2013: viii). This learning goes beyond content-knowledge and focuses on the individual becoming an engaged and responsible citizen. This perspective leads higher education professionals to question what students should be learning, how this learning can best be achieved, and more importantly, where this learning takes place. When fully integrated, the co-curriculum mirrors the institutional academic project’s principles of Teaching and Learning which both contribute and restrict the development of co-curriculum programmes. Models which have guided teaching and learning decisions such as Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956), do not give us the language necessary to communicate learning outcomes and goals in line with the competencies and graduate attributes amongst fellow practitioners and to students. Fink (2013: 3) strengthens this view and describes the shortcomings of HEI’s to be that “although faculty members want their students to achieve higher kinds of learning, they continue to use teaching practices that are not effective at promoting such learning.” The co-curriculum therefore requires an innovative approach which calls for active learning and educative assessment. Fink provides us with some of this new language in which to frame our co-curricular pursuits, calling for significant learning experiences, which is defined as “learning [that] requires there be some kind of lasting change that is important in terms of the learner’s life” (Fink, 2013: 34). Fink’s taxonomy and instructional design principles provide us with the tools to design these significant types of learning within the First-Year Experience. This interactive workshop will give a short overview of significant learning, giving examples of how this has been applied within the Stellenbosch University welcoming programme for first-year students. Participants will have the opportunity to collaboratively begin designing an activity for first-year students, using tools of instructional design as described by Fink such as the taxonomy of SLE, Educative Assessment, and Active Learning.

In this ever-changing world of technology, institutions are required to keep up with the speed of technology while continuing with their daily business. Durban University of Technology (DUT) in 2015 established a programme that quickly inducts first-year students on the use of educational technologies. The programme has grown over the years and it has proved to be profitable to students; contributing positively to their learning experience. This paper reflects on the impact that this programme has brought to academic departments since 2015. Towards the end of 2018, a preliminary survey was conducted with 56 first-year students who responded...
to establish the impact of this multi-award-winning programme with regard to both academics and students. The study found that the issue of slow adoption was one that recurs; one that contradicts the inherent speed of technology and its importance. To deepen understanding the paper turns to Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), which looks at epistemic relations and social relations to understand varying adoption patterns in different fields of study. Using Specialization in LCT, the study reveals that fields with greater technological aspects are more interactive in terms of technology usage, adoption, and prior knowledge as compared to fields that are not hands-on in digital aspect. Therefore, the programme is attempting to find an appropriate balance and to this end the programme is scaling-up and exploring better ways to service all DUT students holistically. Here, infrastructure issues remain one of the biggest problems – along with the issue of decentralising services to the faculties. Sadly, e-learning is still only an option at other educational higher institutions, even when countless research papers have shown that blended learning and the use of technology are complimentary components to best practice.

Thursday: Breakaway Session 3, 14:55-15:25, Hilton Conference Room
Author: Sekghoshi Alpheus Monyela (UNISA)
Theme: Staff as Support Systems for First-Year students
Format: Interactive Poster Sessions
Poster Title: Staff as Support Systems for First-Year Students
The first year of tertiary education is a vulnerable time for university students; drop-out rates tends to be much higher in the first year. This occurs due to the high stress which emanates from the changing lifestyle during the transition from living at home to campus life; a process that can generate feelings of insecurity, loneliness, and even a sense of helplessness for some students. Online students, including those who are disabled, are no exception to this since all experience high levels of stress. Students studying online may fear the use of technology (i.e. technophobia), suffer from a failure to keep up with the vast pace of online classes, or lack the ability to manage time between doing hobbies and devoting time for their studies. Some students have unrealistic expectations about university life and tend to experience a degree of culture shock upon entering the university environment. Here, self-doubt can lead to personal clashes (Brown, 2005). Against these realities, Articles 26 and 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly stipulate the right to education for all – including socialization to realize individual freedoms (United Nations, 1948). Similarly, Article 4(1) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities emphasizes the right to inclusive education so as to maximize individualized support (Maguvhe and Magano, 2015). Furthermore, Article 24 of the same Convention outlaws any form of discrimination and lays emphasis on the implementation of inclusive education at all levels for persons living with disabilities (United Nations 2006). Accordingly, disability experts on inclusivity advise that higher education should be flexible and accessible. It is argued, then, that as far as students with disabilities are concerned, higher education institutions should: ensure and encourage reasonable space to adapt the curriculum and assessment procedures; enable students with disabilities and those who have been injured while studying to study further rather than drop out whilst undergoing rehabilitation; and, crucially, to provide emotional support that promotes wellbeing and shields students from becoming depressed.

Thursday: Breakaway Session 3, 14:55-15:25, Tsogo Academy Conference Room
Author: Fritz Nganje (UJ)
Theme: Case Studies in Good FYE Practice
Format: Reflective Practitioner Paper
Paper Title: Student Responsibility and the Demand Side of First-Year Experience Interventions
This paper draws on a set of student-centred support interventions introduced progressively since 2018 to enhance the quality of the first-year (and undergraduate) experience in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Johannesburg, to reflect on the imperative for greater student responsibility for an enhanced first-year experience and beyond. From the vantage point of my experience as a first-year lecturer and undergraduate coordinator, the paper reflects on two related interventions, the study buddy programme and the mentoring programme; including their interface with the department’s tutorial programme and other institutional support structures. The study buddy programme is a peer-to-peer learning mechanism designed to provide academic support to students struggling with individual politics modules, while the mentoring programme makes use of senior students to provide mainly psychosocial support to new students as they make the transition from high school to university. Both programmes are designed to reinforce each other while also being integrated fully into the department’s tutorial programme. Preliminary assessments, based on online surveys of students participating in both programmes, as well as regular feedback from study buddy anchors and first-year mentors, suggest a great need for such interventions, and that students who have participated actively in the study buddy programme have performed relatively well in their courses. Despite these positive prospects, both programmes and the broader support system are faced with the challenge of poor student uptake. The paper argues that this challenge is reinforced by the absence of dedicated and consistent efforts to create a university environment that socialises first-year students into taking responsibility for their learning.
This presentation illustrates how the classic lecture/tutorial format of an essentially skills-based module for first-year extended degree students, which focuses on transition to higher education, and that offers generic strategies for transitioning, can be supplemented by tapping into students' personal narratives by utilising on-line platforms. The use of complimentary designated Blogs on BlackBoard provides an informal, dynamic space for student narratives and balances out the epistemic asymmetry in the classical expert-centred lecture/tutorial format by allowing the student a more equitable space where he/she is the maker of meaning and the co-constructors of artefacts without predetermined outcomes and without the pressure of assessment. Careful consideration of this pedagogical strategy and strategic management of the Blog as rhizomatic learning space allows the student access into a non-hierarchal zone for personalized transition. Here, the notion of rhizomatic pedagogy has been derived from a botanical metaphor, originally used by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). In botanical terms, a rhizome is a network of sub-surface stems which grow from an original plant and the growth takes place horizontally rather than vertically. In this regard, the presentation focuses on the creation of a rhizomatic learning space which invites the first-year student into extended, “vertical” exploration of transitional issues beyond the lecture and tutorial and often beyond the prescribed curriculum. Designated blogs as well as “open” blog space allow students to co-construct artefacts for their own development during transition to higher education. In such learning spaces, the curriculum and growth is rather unpredictable; as Cormier (2008) puts it, the process is “not driven by predefined inputs from experts; it is constructed and negotiated in real time by the contributions of those engaged in the learning process. This community (which occupies the learning space) acts as the curriculum, spontaneously shaping, constructing, and reconstructing itself and the subject of its learning.” Consequently, the paper contextualizes the pedagogical strategy of using Blogs for peer assisted learning in terms of contemporary pedagogy. The presentation will further explore critical considerations in the use and management of Blogs as a platform for engaging the student voice in a way that allow peers to support, critique, and reframe each other’s narratives. Moreover, the presentation will illustrate how the lecturer and other support staff can network by tapping into the student narratives for improvement of future practice and FYE initiatives.

Teaching is considered a caring occupation due to the nature of the interaction between teachers and learners (Hocschild, 1983). Care-giving can be a demanding task, but emotional labour invested in the occupation – with regards to their relationships with learners – contributes to job satisfaction, commitment, and can be emotionally rewarding. The proximity or distance of such relationships are dependent on five emotional geographies, namely: socio-cultural; moral; professional; physical; and, political relatability (Hargreaves, 2001). In this context, this paper draws on a case study, conducted during 2016 and 2017, of teachers at a former Model C high-school located in Worcester, South Africa, to examine the formation and development of relationships formed between the teacher and learner. The paper suggests that teachers adopt three additional roles outside that of teaching. These roles – the coach, counsellor, and parental figure – foster emotional understanding between the teacher and learners (Denzin, 1984), that creates a positive classroom climate. These roles are deemed necessary for the fulfilment of successful relationships with learners. There are, though, challenges which teachers face when attempting to develop these bonds with learners – these include a negative classroom climate, socio-cultural distance, and sexual harassment of women teachers. Overall, the paper provides an understanding of the relationships formed between teachers and learners and how this can contribute to a successful and effective teaching and learning experience. Although the research was conducted at a former Model C high-school, a recent presentation at a symposium at the University of Cape Town, highlighted valuable points which staff at tertiary institutions could implement in the classroom (especially with regards to First-in-Family students) for effective teaching and learning.

The Open Distance E-Learning (ODeL) environment is unique in many aspects, and is one not short of challenges. The landscape of open distance learning has seen a dramatic shift in the last decade with the advancement of technology, particularly with the
introduction of learning taking place through cyberspace. It can be noted that the number of students registered into postgraduate programmes are increasing gradually. Thus, focus must be shifted to the factors that dictate retention and attrition among postgraduate honours students. This study contributes to the notion that postgraduate honours students should be considered as part of the umbrella term First-Year Experience (FYE), as there is a point of transition involved. The demands placed on first-time entering students are significantly different from those that have progressed to a postgraduate level in the same institution. Central to making this argument is the need to recognize that to date there has been limited research that focuses on the nature of postgraduate honours student retention within a South African context. It is therefore important, as with the FYE for undergraduates, to understand the challenges associated with the retention and throughput at the level of postgraduate students.

In spite of the clear value that postgraduate students contribute toward the workforce globally, there is still limited insight into those factors that promote the retention of postgraduate students. This study seeks to address this lacuna by exploring the voices of postgraduate honours and postgraduate certificate students with the aim to understand how they can succeed. This study employs a non-probability sampling technique to select participants that are currently enrolled through Unisa in an honours qualifications and a postgraduate certificate qualification. A questionnaire (Postgraduate Student Retention Questionnaire, PGSRQ) was designed in order to reach students within this ODeL context. The questionnaire was developed on the premise that there is a need to uplift the voice of postgraduate students and explore the factors that increase retention and drop-out. One hundred students have been randomly selected to participate in the current piloting of the questionnaire; and the research progress with regard to which will be reported. The current study can be described as cross-sectional and aligns itself to the mixed-methods research design. It is envisaged that the final findings of this study will come to directly enhance the support services offered by Unisa at postgraduate level—and indirectly in other ODL contexts.

### Thursday: Breakaway Session 4, 15:30-16:00, Tsogo Academy Conference Room

**Authors:** Duncan Estrais (NMU)

**Theme:** Engaging the Student Voice: Critical Perspectives from Students

**Paper Title:** Unheard Voices Revealed in Data: Reflections of 2019 Orientation

This paper focuses on the current Orientation programme at Nelson Mandela University. Orientation programmes are designed by adults who may be distanced from current generational realities and needs. These programmes have focused on adolescent groups entering higher education for the first time. In view of fees must fall and the resultant free education the student demographic has changed. A more matured student, with work experience is entering the space. Our University attracts 73% of its students from the Eastern Cape, the second poorest province in the country. This type of student voice has not influenced Orientation programmes. In our country, the voices of the youth, Black and female, have been silenced From the position of being a new employee in the Student Counselling, Career and Development Centre, with a view to include the silenced and therefore unheard voices, the inquiry set out to explore the qualitative themes emerging from an online student and staff survey. The findings of the 333 first-year students, 130 peer leaders, and 16 staff members from Student Counselling, Career Development Centre will be used to inform future recommendations. This paper will reflect on the strengths of the current operating model, areas for improvement, and guidelines for developing future projects.

### Thursday: Breakaway Session 4, 15:30-16:00, Kearsney Conference Room

**Authors:** Lucy Sehloho and Codi Rogers (UFS)

**Theme:** First-Year Transitions in the Higher Education System

**Paper Title:** First-Year Students in Transition: Experiences from the University of the Free State Gateway Orientation Programme

The annual Gateway Orientation Programme at the University of the Free State (UFS) is a dynamic programme aimed at supporting approximately 6,000 first-year students in their transition to a vibrant, diverse, and active Higher Education community. Reflections on the 2018 programme revealed that the initiative (which is, in and of itself, a High-Impact Practice) provides an intensive and strategic First-Year Experience consisting of: academic advising sessions; stimulating student life engagements; awareness of student support services; a B-Safe campaign advocating safety on and across all three UFS campuses (Bloemfontein, South, and QwaQwa); service learning sessions; and, a library information session and tour. Data captured via validated self-report measures indicated that in each session, more than 80% of participating students rated their experience of each of the six sessions positively across dimensions related to the relevance, engagement, content, and impact of the respective session. In each case, more than 80% of participating students indicated that: their expectations of the sessions had been met; that they will make use of the service or resource they have been made aware of; that the sessions inspired them to get involved in the University community; and, that the sessions contributed to, and further developed, their capacity to succeed in their Higher Education journey. The programme has proved to be a success largely through the use of a ‘Gateway Buddy System’ in which a select group of senior undergraduate students – who are well-trained and equipped to mentor first-year students – promote a sense of community for a large and diverse sample of first-year students including on and off campus students, first-generation students, and students from various cultural backgrounds. The Gateway Buddies also provide hands-on guidance with navigating the Bloemfontein Campus, and assisting with
general recommendations and advice, as first-year students adjust to the demands and expectations of an often new and unfamiliar environment. Taking the contact sessions combined, 63% of the students indicated they were ‘satisfied’ with the developmental impact of sessions; whilst 28% indicated they were ‘highly satisfied.’ As a result of taking these findings into due consideration, the Gateway Orientation Programme was again successfully rolled-out in 2019. Moreover, the developmental impact of the sessions and the 2019 first-year students’ overall process of transition to Higher Education are ongoing, while simultaneously being analysed and reflected upon as the year progresses.
Friday: Breakaway Session 1, 09:00-09:30, Glenwood Conference Room
Authors: Mokgadi Senyolo and Mzikayise Binza (UNISA)
Theme: Staff as Support Systems for First-Year Students
Format: Reflective Practitioner Paper
Paper Title: Improved Quality Library Services for First-Year Experience in an Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) University

Since the official launch of the First-Year Experience Project (FYEP) five years ago, many South African universities have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning within academic departments and tuition support services. In this process, support and professional departments have found that teaching and learning has to be delivered in a coordinated manner if they are to ensure the success and retention of first-time entering students. For the University of South Africa (Unisa), as the only dedicated open distance and e-learning (ODeL) university in Southern Africa, this has necessitated a focus on improving the quality of library services. In fact, the delivery of such services, in an incrementally effective and efficient manner, become more apparent when the FYEP was compacted between Unisa and the Department of Higher Education and Training. The paper uses a qualitative research methodology where the authors have directly observed and participated in the development of the FYE massive open online course (MOOC) Library Services Unit as well as getting students to participate in the pilot of the Library Services Unit. This paper uses a case study research methodology to social scientifically explain how the Library Service Unit of the First-Year experience MOOC has been designed and proven beneficial to the success and retention of first-time entering students at Unisa. The paper concludes that a collegial, professional, and coordinated support structure by the support and professional departments is necessary for the success of the academic enterprise – as well as the success and sustainability of the FYE in an ODeL university.

Friday: Breakaway Session 1, 09:00-09:30, Hilton Conference Room
Authors: Masabata Mosoeu (UFS)
Theme: First-Year Transitions in the Higher Education System
Format: Full Critical Academic Paper
Paper Title: Positioning Academic Advising as One of the Primary Support Structures for First-Year Students

The transition from high school to university can be daunting, particularly when carrying pressures such as being a first-generation student. Feelings of anxiety, limited knowledge, and experience of changes associated with university, create a need for a connection to at least one representative who is knowledgeable about the institution and is able to provide a continuum of student support from first year until graduation. One such support structure where students are able to connect with someone early on in their first year, is through academic advising. Academic advising is a contributing factor to predictions of academic achievement, and therefore plays a vital role in students’ success. However, due to limited research in understanding how advising practices help students succeed, there is limited support and encouragement for using such resources. At the University of the Free State (UFS), students in their first academic year are allocated an advisor following their recruitment through the Student Recruitment Services (SRS) – Star of Stars. The establishment of a relationship is initiated by the Central Academic Advising Office (CAAO), which addresses any entry-level needs students might have during their transition and progression from school to university. The relationship continues throughout the students’ first academic year as a registered UFS student. Part of the informational and conceptual cornerstones of this relationship is to promote a stronger relationship between the student and their institution. Academic advising at the UFS is seen as a developmental process through which the student’s life goals are established in alignment with their educational plans. It is a decision-making process in which students are supported to conceptualise and realise their maximum educational potential through communication. This process is ongoing, multifaceted, and is the responsibility of both student and advisor. The feedback from students, through channels such as the ASQ (Advising Stars Questionnaire), helps us understand how advising impacts on students’ choices and experiences. Moreover, such feedback is vital in the process of professionalising academic advising to best support first-year students. In so doing, institutions can encourage students to connect with an advisor early on in their academic careers and empower them to achieve their personal, academic, and career aspirations.

Friday: Breakaway Session 1, 09:00-09:30, Tsogo Academy Conference Room
Authors: Maipato Mmako (UJ)
Theme: Case Studies in Good FYE Practice
Format: Student Papers: Research Done by Students
Paper Title: Educational Excursions for First-Year Students: A Tour to Africa by Bus Case Study

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of educational excursions for first-year university students; and how such excursions can be used as a tool to demonstrate integration between classroom concepts and real-life experiences outside the classroom. It will be argued that learning through informal excursions increases students’ motivation, knowledge, and interest beyond what was covered in class. The specific focus of the paper is the Tour Africa by Bus; a series of trips to various countries, introduced in 2017 by the University of Johannesburg, and aimed at exposing University of Johannesburg students to different
Southern African countries, thus expanding their knowledge of the rest of the African continent and their conceptual understanding of cultural immersion and diversity. During a recent Mozambique tour, 149 students learned a few Portuguese words through conversation with local people. The students also had the opportunity to visit three islands off Mozambique, each island offering a different learning experience; and they toured around the capital city of Maputo, learning about its history. The trip was linked to the first year BA extended degree module Managing Academic and Professional Skills (MAPS) student research project and it entailed data collection and work for this project. Themes covered in MAPS were incorporated within the students’ research project; themes such as “diversity” and “time management” were linked to the students’ research projects and a visit to Universidade Eduardo Mondlane gave students an opportunity to interact with students from that university. In sum, students were able to find links between concepts and real-life experiences; and this was clearly reflected in their research project reflection section. The reflections indicated that students better understood the relevant concepts and had mastered the application of these concepts in real-life settings.

Friday: Breakaway Session 2, 09:35-10:05, Glenwood Conference Room
Author: Vuyokazi Maliwa-Skosana (UNISA)
Theme: Case Studies in Good FYE Practice
Format: Reflective Practitioner Paper
Paper Title: Using Digital Communication to Support First-Time Entering Students Transition to an ODeL Institution
As the internet becomes more important in our society, the significance of digital communication is also becoming quite evident. Digital communication plays a huge role in bringing people, society, businesses, educational institutions, and the world closer together. Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) is a type of education wherein lecturers and students do not need to be present either at the same place or same time, and is flexible in regard to timing of teaching and learning. ODeL is more dependent on information and communication technology (ICT), and ICT plays an important role in the delivery of strategies. With the advancement in technology, ODeL education has introduced a variety of new techniques for students, academics, and support staff to enhance knowledge. Educational technologies are increasingly replacing direct teacher–student interaction. The Student Retention Unit (SRU) at the University of South Africa (Unisa) was established in 2017 to conceptualise and effectively implement the First-Year Experience (FYE) project in an ODeL environment. The FYE is for the benefit of first-time entering students; seeking to ensure that they are provided with the tuition and learning support services necessary to transition and succeed in their studies. Here, various forms of communication had to be re-tailored to support first-time entering students. And this paper is focused upon how digital communication methods have been re-packaged and utilised to effectively support the tuition and learning of approximately 160,000 first-time entering students in the FYE project over 2018–2019. This is addressed through a qualitative research project that reveals the centrality of four main approaches used in digital communication, namely: weekly emails; the FYE mailbox; live broadcasts; and, the FYE website. The paper comes to conclude that these four approaches could be used to more effectively promote the scholarship of teaching and learning for all students in an ODeL environment.

Friday: Breakaway Session 2, 09:35-10:05, Hilton Conference Room
Authors: Annsilla Nyar (SANRC)
Theme: First-Year Transitions in the Higher Education System
Format: Full Critical Academic Paper
Paper Title: The First-Year Experience (FYE) in South Africa: A National Perspective
This paper is offered as a contribution to the larger task of providing a comprehensive study of the First-Year Experience (FYE) in South Africa; i.e., how it is constituted nationally and how it operates in different institutions of higher education across the country. It is a response to the lack of knowledge about the FYE in a national context. Accordingly, the paper looks to fill this particular gap in knowledge about how South Africa is responding nationally to the needs of first-year students. Given that the field of FYE is very new and that little sound or evidence-based knowledge about the field exists, this paper is based on exploratory research, including that of an initial email-based survey administered in 2016. It contains a number of insights, both descriptive and critical, about the FYE in South Africa as it currently operates. It also offers a prognosis for future development of the FYE in South Africa.

Friday: Breakaway Session 2, 09:35-10:05, Tsogo Academy Conference Room
Authors: Ntombizodwa Madima and Mzikayise Binza (UNISA)
Theme: Staff as Support Systems for First-Year students
Format: Reflective Practitioner Paper
Paper Title: Academic Skills for First-Time-Entering Student’s Success and Retention in a Distance University
Creating an enabling and empowering environment for first-year students to study for transitioning well into university life is important. However, what skills and practices students acquire for effective study in an open distance e-learning (ODeL) university remains a challenge. The question as to how often first-time-entering students get trained and equipped in these skills, as well as to whether there are other alternative methods that can be utilized by the university to instill discipline and determination for students to study on their own to succeed, are vital matters that this paper is concerned to address. A case study approach was adopted to investigate and provide possible answers to the above questions, and to explain the effective skills required for first-
time entering students for transiting well and succeed in their studies in an ODeL university. The case study is about the Academic Skills chapter in the First-Year Experience (FYE) massive open online course (MOOC) module which was developed and piloted from 2018-2019 in various regions of Unisa. The paper will critically share the feedback from participants during the pilot period. From the findings, the paper concludes that academic skills have proven to be fundamental for student success and retention. In particular, this is shown with regard to how academic skills have been developed and packaged as part of the FYE MOOC 103: Fundamental Skills for Success.