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**SOUTH AFRICA**

**THE IDENTIFICATION OF PSYCHO-  
EDUCATIONAL FACTORS  
THAT INHIBIT FIRST YEAR STUDENT  
PERFORMANCE**

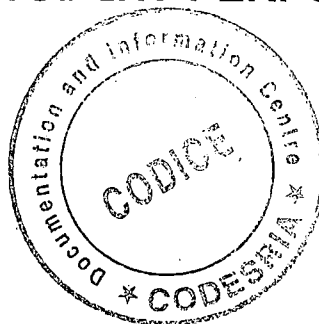
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**JUNE 2003**

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**THE IDENTIFICATION OF PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL FACTORS  
THAT INHIBIT FIRST YEAR STUDENT PERFORMANCE**

by



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EXN  
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submitted in accordance with the requirements  
for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

in the subject

**PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATION**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**JUNE 2003**

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I declare that

**THE IDENTIFICATION OF PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL FACTORS THAT INHIBIT FIRST YEAR STUDENT PERFORMANCE** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

  
.....

SIGNATURE  
(Mrs R J EXNER)

..30.. June ..2003

DATE

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## SUMMARY

### THE IDENTIFICATION OF PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL FACTORS THAT INHIBIT FIRST YEAR STUDENT PERFORMANCE

BY: R.J. EXNER

DEGREE: DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

SUBJECT: PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATION

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Each new student arriving at the university or college brings an assortment of expectations, different types and levels of academic competency, different levels of psychological well-being, a variety of attitudes, values and divergent life experiences. Each adjusts at his or her own rate and experiences life as a student in unique ways.

The focus of this study is on the problems that are encountered by the first year student on arrival at the institution and throughout the course of his or her first year studies. Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods that include work-shopping many issues, a questionnaire and focus group interviews, this triangulation of data-collection techniques has helped to provide a rich and deep exploration of the perceived problem areas.

The study examines various factors that are perceived as limiting the potential performance and achievement of the student, specifically academic aspects and those factors and circumstances that affect psychological well-being. The psycho-educational issues found to be perceived as problematic by both students and staff members are a lack of preparation and insufficient

academic competencies that are necessary for successful tertiary education. Of critical concern with the resultant necessity of immediate intervention, are the lack of accountability and a fear of failure with concomitant anxiety.

Issues other than psycho-educational problem areas are highlighted such as economic and social variables. Although not part of the study, issues such as lack of finance and the impact of HIV/AIDS cannot be ignored as they may have a possible detrimental effect on first year student achievement.

As academic competency development and psychological well-being are but two areas of concern within the *gestalt* of student development, the study is conducted from a theoretical stance that embraces holistic student development. It is in this light of developing the student as a totality that an intervention programme is suggested, affording the new student many opportunities to develop all facets of his being.

## **KEY TERMS**

Academic achievement; Academic failure; College freshman; Dropout; Higher education; Psycho-educational; Psycho-social; Student adjustment; Student development; Underachievement.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Students are not an homogenous group. They have a range of experiences, concerns and aspirations. The attachments they have are sometimes shared and sometimes incredibly distinct. But they all study and have a belief in education. They are also concerned about the quality and relevance of their educational experience.

Owain James (in Ketteridge et al 2002)

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

*I am a young single mother, battling to study as well as look after my baby son. I am studying to become a human resource manager and am finding the course work time consuming and difficult. My day has too few hours and I am always tired. Results at the end of last year were not good. Examination time for me is scary and I have started to experience anxiety attacks. In fact, I had one during a test yesterday and it really frightened me. I do not want to be another scared student. For the sake of my baby and for me, I want to be one of the best management practitioners to qualify from this institution. How do I get there? Please help me!*

September 2001

This cry from a desperate young student has sparked a journey for the researcher into student development, achievement, attrition rate and throughput. What began as the offering of a helping hand to a needy individual, has developed into an intriguing study of a multi-faceted topic as seen below.

Why is it that students get scared, fail tests, develop a poor self-image and sometimes drop right out of the system?

What is it that de-motivates the student and causes him or her to lose interest in achieving?

Should the student years not rank amongst the most exhilarating of ones life?

Many students fail to settle in their first year. Faculty staff and students alike speculate as to the causes of attrition and dropout. Some students see themselves as victims of the

system whereby they feel that they were not adequately equipped by secondary education for tertiary studies. There may be those who view the problem as one of cognitive inadequacy.

This study looks at the various psychological and educational factors that are perceived to inhibit optimum performance of the first year student. As the psychology of education is the researcher's field of expertise, the study will be limited to the examination of the psychological and educational or academic factors that impede performance. Undoubtedly, socio-economic, historical, socio-political and cultural factors will emerge from the study that will be taken into account when devising a therapeutic model for implementation by the institution.

The aspects and circumstances that affect the student's psychological well-being are those areas of concern that may impinge upon his or her state of mind and result in undesirable attitudes and behaviour. Coping with life, feeling happy and content, free of unnecessary worries and anxiety, being motivated and exhibiting a favourable attitude to academic work, all help to provide the student with a sound basis from which he or she can confidently navigate his or her path through his or her study years.

Academic well-being encompasses the ability to discover and develop competencies that will foster successful tertiary study. Amongst others, these are critical thinking and knowledge application skills, adequate language management, comprehension skills and strong reading and writing competencies.

The factors are the perceived determinants, the items or points for consideration or any other aspect that may impact negatively upon first year student achievement. The term "*performance*", often used interchangeably with "*achievement*", for the purpose of this investigation, will refer both to the student's academic accomplishment as well as sound psychological well-being. It will denote the state of being able to function at optimum level, remembering that these two areas do not exist alone but are part of a much larger *gestalt*. This then focuses the attention on the holistic development of the student, which is the ultimate goal in tertiary education.

## 1.2 AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM AND THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The researcher has been inundated with first year technikon students in need of counselling and help, presenting with anxiety, de-motivation, complacent disengagement, lack of self-esteem, depressive episodes and panic attacks during examination periods and academic failure.

Also problematic for many students is language management. While some are fully conversant in English, there are others for whom it is a third or fourth language. The ability to fully comprehend the material of the lecture, while grasping the technical detail of the subject matter is seen by both lecturers and students as problematic. Whether or not the student is able to write a sound academic paper, answer examination questions fully as well as being to converse comfortably in English as a first language, for many, remains questionable. Reading speed and reading ability with insight that can be applied, for some, is below par.

Due to the fact that the above has become problematic for both students and faculty staff, the researcher has attempted, with the help of colleagues, to breach the gap by providing group sessions, on a weekly basis during lecture periods, for a number of courses. During these classroom sessions, the students have slowly opened up and have started to discuss their perceptions as to why many are not achieving. Both academic and psychological help has been afforded to the students. However, these opportunities to work closely with the students, though welcome, do not address the root cause or causes of the problems experienced. That is, what has in part, prompted this research study.

A second aspect of the topic under scrutiny came in the form of five workshops held during the previous year. Faculty staff and students had a chance to voice their opinions as to how they each viewed the problem of student performance and student failure. The researcher aided the initiative as facilitator. The perceptions that were held by many individuals and aired during those sessions sparked off a number of questions, to which the researcher and co-facilitators could not provide answers. The investigation was thus ignited. Fueling the need to find viable answers was the data that emerged from the workshops. Having analysed the data, the areas of concern or trends common to all groups were the student, the lecturer and the institution.

Regarding the student, there were problems with academic issues, such as schooling, learning, examinations, study skills, course selection, language, time management, attitude, accountability and self-discipline. Financial constraints and transport issues were hotly debated. On the faculty front, issues such as teaching methodologies were pinpointed, as well as student attitude towards courses being offered, class size, staff workload, examinations and academic support. With regard to the institution as a whole, issues such as educational media, student financial aid, administrative and technical support services, student access to tertiary education and equity were addressed.

The raw data captured during the sessions was used as the basis of a survey used to ascertain student performance perceptions. What was notable during the workshops was the emphasis placed on the areas where students were found to be lacking academic skills. Although socioeconomic factors were identified to have had some influence on performance, or the lack thereof, not much emphasis was placed on the psychological well-being of the student. No one has thought to question whether or not the student is content, satisfied or fulfilled.

It is felt by many academics in the institution that too many students are falling through gaps in the system have to repeat courses or year work, or worse still, leave the institution before completing their examinations as they cannot cope. By so doing, they are unable to fulfill their potential and forfeit an opportunity to become economically independent in the future and play a meaningful role in the community. Many of these students want a meaningful tertiary education, but come unprepared to cope with the demands placed upon them. They therefore fail to perform at an optimum level on the academic, social and psychological fronts and thus fall through the gaps in the system.

Although there are some support programmes in operation, there is a great need for a holistic approach, whereby performance-inhibiting factors are illuminated, whereupon a therapeutic model can be drawn up to address the relevant issues, which includes all the relevant stakeholders. The main aim would be to afford the student optimum potential development. The research could be of value in the construction of viable programmes, which have as their specific aim the mentoring of skilled and competent young adults who are empowered to take their place and make their mark in society.

This study stated as a problem, is a plan to determine the various perceived psychological and educational factors that may inhibit optimum performance by first year students at a tertiary institution. The goal of the study is to compile a viable therapeutic model, in which all institutional stakeholders have a role to play in the success of the student. Hopefully the model will address the psychological and academic distress that may be caused by a variety of factors and thereby help to avoid course failure or course withdrawal.

The core problem of this research can be stated as follows:

**Determining those factors that are seen to constrain the first year student from performing at optimum level.**

The main research question is:

**Is there a relationship between first year student underachievement and perceived psychological and educational deterrents?**

A number of questions need to be addressed in the course of this study namely:

- What main causes are perceived as being related to performance inhibition?
- Are the problems mainly in the academic arena?
- Does academic underachievement have any effect on psychological well-being?
- How does non-performance impact on the student?
- What factors are important to each gender?
- Do the perceived factors differ from course to course?
- What are the most common academic problems?
- What are the most common psychological factors?

Throughout the course of this study, one will have to bear the following in mind:

- many of the emerging factors are perceptions rather than fact;
- not all the perceptions have been captured for the purpose of the survey;

- as the study uncovers problem areas, the researcher will have to simultaneously initiate remediation plans and drive these programmes;
- an efficient method of identifying the “at risk” student is needed;
- these factors have a real effect on the student;
- the institution may not be addressing the total development of the student;
- not all academic and administrative staff are aware of student development theory, which has an impact on their understanding and handling of students;
- the institution is in need of a far-reaching therapeutic programme in order to address the full development of the student.

Emerging from these statements above are the following hypotheses:

- **first year student performance is affected by academic constraints on the student;**
- **psychological factors restrain the first-year student from performing adequately.**

## 1.2 DEMARCATION OF THE RESEARCH TERRAIN

The investigation is being conducted in a higher education institution of 15 000 technikon students, 8 000 of whom are concentrated in the faculty of business management, in which the investigation has taken place. Ideally, results should have been obtained from the other faculties, but the logistics of time and accessibility deny such an inquiry as the students are located on other campuses, some distance from the current investigation.

The study is limited to first year students, those who are registered for the first time as well as those who are repeating first year courses. About 6 500 students are currently registered for 52 different courses in first year disciplines on one of the four campuses of the technikon. The sample group will be obtained from these students.

In order for the sample to be valid, as large a sample group as possible was obtained. The target for sampling was a number of classes to which the researcher had access as group work with these students was being undertaken. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:93) point out that the danger in using a large sample group is that it may not be truly representative, could be too unwieldy, as well as difficult to manage. Thus, the sample



group was limited to 700 students in different courses, which proved to be fairly representative of the first year student body as it included both males and females, first time registered students, repeating students, those living in residences and those living at home. Included are those who achieve and those who do not.

### **1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of the study is the compilation of a viable therapeutic model that could be implemented by the tertiary institution; one that addresses the factors perceived to be problematic in first year student performance.

The objectives of the research study are to:

- conduct a literature study on holistic student development;
- conduct a literature study on student failure, maladjustment, achievement and performance;
- analysis of the data obtained from the throughput workshops;
- construction of a questionnaire using the analysed data from the workshops and the subsequent administration of the survey;
- facilitation and monitoring of a number of focus groups in order to explore the data gleaned from the survey;
- utilisation of the analysed data acquired from the survey and focus groups, and thereupon construct the therapeutic model;
- fostering awareness amongst all stakeholders as to the urgency and necessity of implementing such a model.

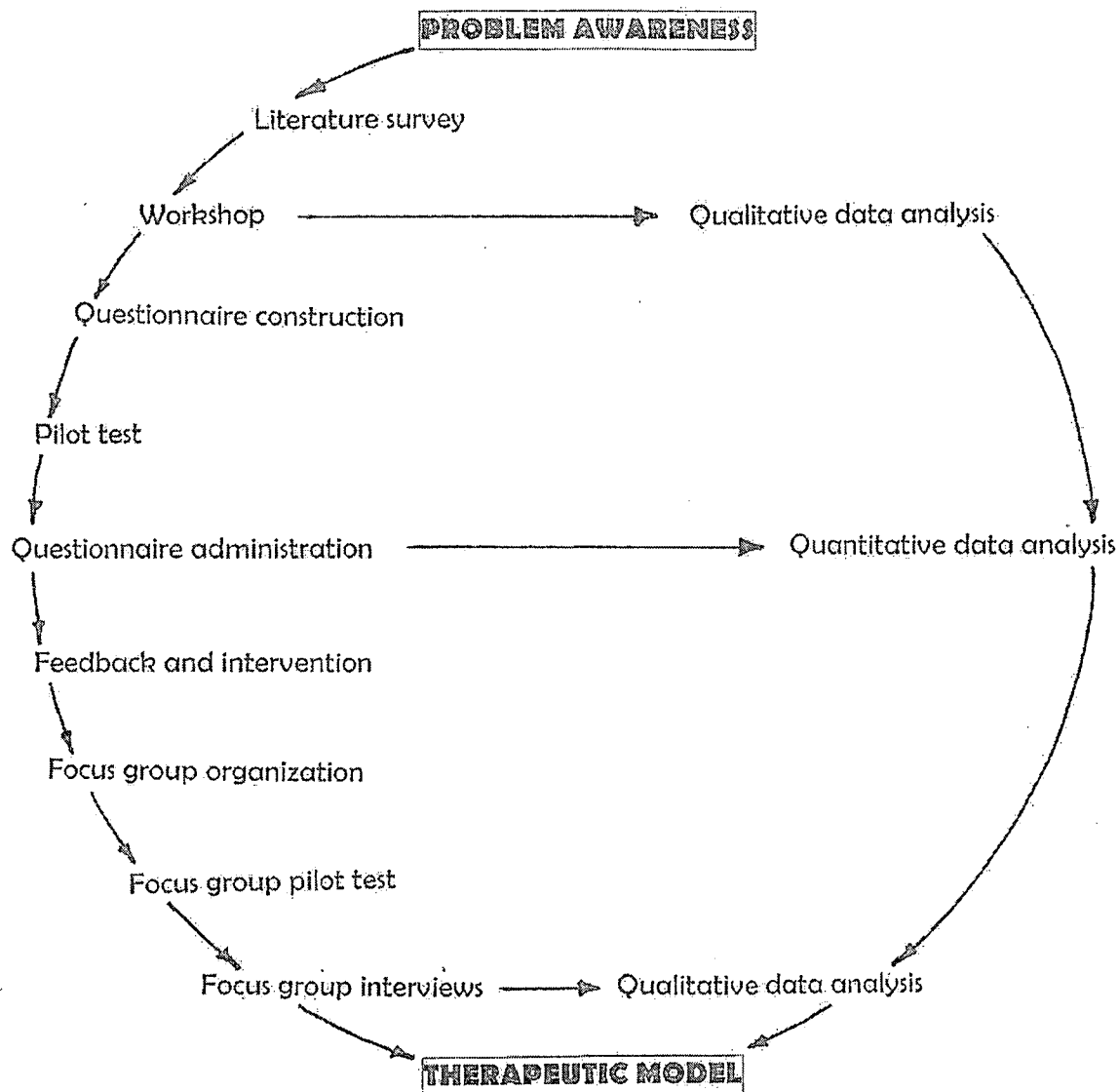
### **1.4 METHOD OF INVESTIGATION**

In this study, each step is dependent upon the one that precedes it. With the goal of creating a therapeutic model in mind, ideas, questions, hypotheses and solutions will be generated as the study proceeds.

Although, in theory, each phase is dependent on the preceding one, in practice the implementation of the questionnaire and the focus group interview could take place

concurrently. In Figure 1.1 that follows, the path of investigation is summarised. A discussion of this figure will follow in Chapter Four.

**Figure 1.1 The investigation process**



### 1.4.1 Literature study

The literature survey is extensive due to the fact that the study of student achievement, non-achievement and attrition is well examined. For the sake of brevity and clarity, the extent of the survey is presented in tabular format in this chapter. Chapters Two and Three deal with these topics under scrutiny in more detail. In Table 1.1 below, specific developmental theories are highlighted. A few older sources have been used because student

development research goes back some fifty years, with these theories having provided the groundwork upon which much of the contemporary research is based.

<b>Table 1.1 Student development theories</b>	
Pascarella & Terenzin (1991) King (1994) Wimbish, Bumphus & Helfgot (1995) Komives & Woodard (1996) Arnold & King (1997)	All present a comprehensive overview of different developmental theories that study the psychosocial tasks of young adulthood characterising the student experience.
Chickering (1981) Thomas & Chickering (1984) Chickering & Reisser (1993)	Deal with the relationship between the intellect and personal growth, highlighting the need to develop emotional potential.
Erikson (1980) Josselson (1982) Buczynski (1991) Bruess & Pearson (2000)	Each considers specific factors that relate to identity development in the student.
Higbee & Dwinell (1998)	Discuss critical thinking skills that need to be fostered in student development.

In Table 1.2, a summary of the literature that surveys achievement is recorded. What is highlighted in the literature are the themes of learning and academic performance, as well as predictors of academic success.

<b>Table 1.2 Academic achievement</b>	
Britt & Kim (1996) McKenzie & Schweitzer (2001)	Look at collections of factors that predict academic performance such as academic, psychosocial, cognitive and demographic indicators.
Mukhopadhyay & Basu (1997) Shin & Kim (1999) Donaldson & Graham (1999)	Examine clusters of key elements that affect learning indicating intellectual and non-intellectual elements, such as educational adjustment, personality integration, motivation and persistence and general well-being.
Archer & Cantwell (1999) Braten & Olaussen (2000) Tremblay, Gardner & Heipel (2000)	Consider achievement motivation in students and look at the variables that come into play, such as confidence, anxiety and self-belief. They emphasise the interplay among psychological and environmental factors.
Rau & Durand (2000)	Examine the relationship between study efforts and

Knezevic & Ovsenik (2001) Perry, Hladkyj & Pekrun (2001)	academic performance. They find a correlation between attitude to study and performance.
Holder et al (1999) Saumell, Hughes & Lopate (1999) Taraban, Rynearson & Kerr (2000)	Review academic literacy skills and the relationship to progress in college. Reading and comprehending make demands on the cognitive processes due to load, variety and range of topics.
Ting, Grant & Plenert (2000) Drysdale, Ross & Schultz (2001) Meyer & Shanahan (2001) Ng (2000)	All consider the connections between the various elements of learning and academic performance. Study habits, study locale, learning style(s) and available academic support are considered.

Table 1.3 summarises non-achievement of first year students, addresses the tertiary pass rate in South Africa and looks at the correlation between failure and inhibiting factors.

Table 1.3 Performance, failure and retention	
Delvare (1995)	Discusses the tertiary pass rate in South Africa, highlighting the inequalities and numerous problem areas.
Johnson & Buck (1995) Johnson (1996)	Provide insight into the numerous factors identified as contributing to student attrition, such as demography, finance, academic performance and employment, with student psychological states critically related to withdrawal.
Chen (1987) Donaldson & Graham (1999) Van Laar (2000)	Address the issue of self-esteem and failure linked to motivation as a key element that affects student learning. Self-esteem, confidence and motivation are inter-linked with other elements.
Dickson, Fleet & Watt (2000) Meyer & Shanahan (2001)	Consider how the student engages with the learning process, highlighting previous knowledge and the ways in which the student learns as contributory factors to either success or failure.
Rau & Durand (2000) Tao & Hong (2000) Knezevic & Osvenik (2001)	Investigate the correlation between academic achievement, or lack thereof, and attitude to study with motivation seen as a contributing element.
Delvare (1995)	Considers the relationship between academic literacy skills and progress in the academic system. Findings show that many lack the language resources to cope with tertiary education.

Table 1.4 summarises the psychological adjustment issues that confront the new student when he or she makes the transition from high school to the tertiary institution. The nature of these adjustments affects his or her successful psycho-educational outcomes.

Table 1.4 Psychological adjustment	
Peterson (2000) Van Laar (2000) Cross & Vick (2000)	Take stock of self-concept and self-esteem with relation to academic success, all addressing the topic from different angles.
Hickman, Bartholomae & McHenry (2000) Yorke (2000) Pitkethly & Prosser (2001)	Consider numerous adjustment issues that students face when making the transition from school to tertiary education. Factors such as family relationships and wellness contribute to the initial experience.
Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering (1989) Bradley & Graham (2000) Rice & Darke (2000)	Hold the view that the level of student involvement will have an effect on the college outcome. A sense of belonging is necessary for successful academic and social outcomes.
Frydenberg & Lewis (1999) Trockel, Barnes & Egget (2000) Backels & Wheeler (2001)	Consider general health and wellness as well as the coping mechanisms of dealing with student life as playing a role in the academic achievement of the student.
Perrine (1999) Tremblay, Gardner & Heipel (2000) Svanum & Zody (2001)	Study specific disorders that are encountered by first year students, namely stress, anxiety and depression.

Table 1.5 summarises various intervention programmes that could contribute towards retaining students and ensuring improved achievement levels.

Table 1.5 Intervention programmes	
Belch, Gebel & Maas (2001)	Cite the use of a recreational programme as contributing to academic achievement.
Fashola & Slavin (1998) Ting, Grant & Plenert (2000)	Investigate programmes that are designed to encourage involvement and nurture leadership potential. These outcomes are related to positive achievement.
Earwaker (1992) Chickering & Reisser (1993) Jones & Drury (1999)	All suggest the implementation of holistic programmes to ensure generic skills and lifelong learning.
Salem et al (1997)	Examine the relationship between academic achievement

Topping (1997) Dixson & Gudan (2000) Graham & Gisi (2000)	and academic support. The support is offered via peer tutoring, academic advising and faculty feedback.
Coomes (1992) Errico et al (2000)	Consider the establishment of viable financial aid programmes to support student retention.

#### 1.4.2 Workshops

The study commenced with informal full day workshops, conducted with the academic staff in four faculties, as well as with support personnel. After the initial orientation phase, each workshop divided into three or four working groups in which discussion took place. No more than eight people comprised one group. Once each group had committed thoughts to paper, there was a report back session where a representative from each group had the chance to present his or her group's perceptions concerning student performance and attrition. At the conclusion of these discussions, the raw data was captured. The data was carefully analysed, looking for merging trends or main focus areas.

Academic staff, representative of the entire continuum as well as students representative of various courses within their faculties, attended their own specific workshops. The rationale behind using separate workshops for students and staff was to glean the general perceptions of both academic staff members and students as to how each group views the retention, dropout and failure rate, as well as to uncover what factors are ascribed to mal-performance amongst peers. These perceptions were captured and trends in thinking were identified in order to present a consistent, coherent picture. The workshop data was used to generate a questionnaire that was applied in the form of a survey.

#### 1.4.3 The questionnaire

The questionnaire, based on the results from the workshops will address current student behaviour, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, feelings, expectations, self-classification and level of involvement and will generate quantitative results.

The questionnaire, drawn up as a result of the literature study and the attrition rate workshops, was given to first year students only. This was drawn up and administered as soon as possible after completion of the workshops. In order to obtain demographics that might have be useful at a later stage in the study, the biographic details of the student were

obtained in the form of a matrix type question. It included age, course, module repetition or subject repetition as well as home language. The questionnaire proper comprised a number of statements, with options offered on a semantic scale and was scored manually.

#### **1.4.4 Pilot testing**

The questionnaire once constructed, was administered to a small pilot group of 24 students. It was executed in the same manner as was planned for the main investigation. On completion of the questionnaire, comments and criticism were invited from the experts and the participants by the researcher as to the layout, language usage, possible ambiguity, clear instructions and the length of questionnaire. The questionnaire was refined according to comments received from the participants and experts, and was then ready for application in the different courses.

#### **1.4.5 Questionnaire feedback**

The questionnaire was administered across eight different courses within the faculty of business management, with group numbers ranging from 25 to 160. A sample population of seven hundred students exists in these eight courses. Once each course group had completed the questionnaire, and it has been scored, it was returned to the students in that particular group. The researcher explained each item in the questionnaire, and the students drew their individual profiles. Problem areas were easily identifiable and discussion of the items followed. Those who are at risk were able to pinpoint problem areas because the aim of the profile was to be user-friendly, visibly clear and easy to understand.

#### **1.4.6 Individual therapy and/or group counselling**

Having drawn up and examined his or her profile, any student identifying the need for remediation was invited to become involved in group counselling sessions that addressed specific academic problems. In the event that the student experienced personal difficulties that were of a sensitive nature, he or she was made aware of the offer of individual therapeutic intervention. This section of the study will not be included in the research report.

### **1.4.7 Focus group interviews**

Data captured from the questionnaire led to the establishment of between four and six focus groups. Each group comprised between six and eight students with similar backgrounds and interests. These small groups afforded students, in a variety of disciplines, the opportunity to share individual insights with regard to performance factors that have been highlighted by the survey or from their own experience.

Purposive discussion, using open-ended questions that allowed participants to answer freely, encouraging the interplay of opinions and perceptions, stimulated further interaction. In this way, the participants created meaning amongst themselves, shaping and reshaping opinion. Both verbal and non-verbal communication was noted. The focus groups, with prior permission obtained, were taped in order that no data be either missed or misrepresented. This data was transcribed and analysed. Alongside the audio-taping, use was made of reflective field notes in order for the researcher to:

- comment on the research methodology, its design and possible arising problems;
- check the frame of mind and current attitudes in order to eliminate possible bias;
- pick up on various points that may require later clarification;
- speculate about what is being seen, heard and learnt.

### **1.4.8 Analysis of data**

Each task in the research plan was fully dependent upon the stage that superseded it. Analysis of data took place throughout the study, commencing with the information obtained by means of the workshops.

#### **1.4.8.1 *The workshops***

The qualitative results from the workshops demonstrated classified aspects that shared common elements. The analysis of these trends generated the compilation of the questionnaire.



### 1.4.8.2 *The questionnaire*

The survey conducted on first year sample groups disclosed quantitative data. The data was generated as a statistical analysis of a multivariate nature. Results will be shown in a visual format in this study, making use of graphs to illustrate the relationships between variables.

### 1.4.8.3 *The focus group interview*

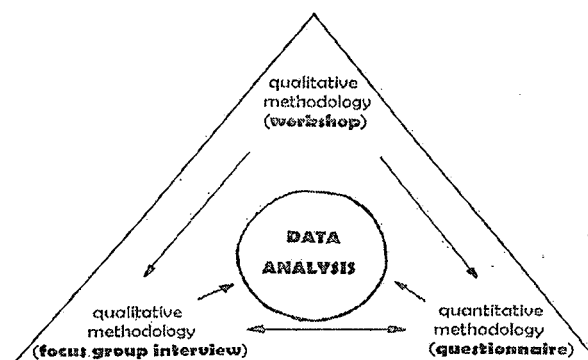
Here the data was of a qualitative nature, having being recorded and transcribed. General trends emerged, as well as specific elements within those trends. These enjoyed further analysis.

### 1.4.8.4 *Combined quantitative and qualitative approach*

Triangulation can be defined as the combination of the quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Duffy (in De Vos 2001:358) offers guidelines as to the use of the term. This study will make use of methodological triangulation based on Creswell's (1994:176) mixed methodology design model. The manner in which the quantitative and qualitative research methods were combined is illustrated in Figure 1.2.

No single paradigm is more dominant than the other. The triangulation is sequential in that the results from one phase are essential in planning and executing the following phase. The result emerging from this method was used to compile the therapeutic programme for the institution.

**Figure 1.2 The triangulation method**

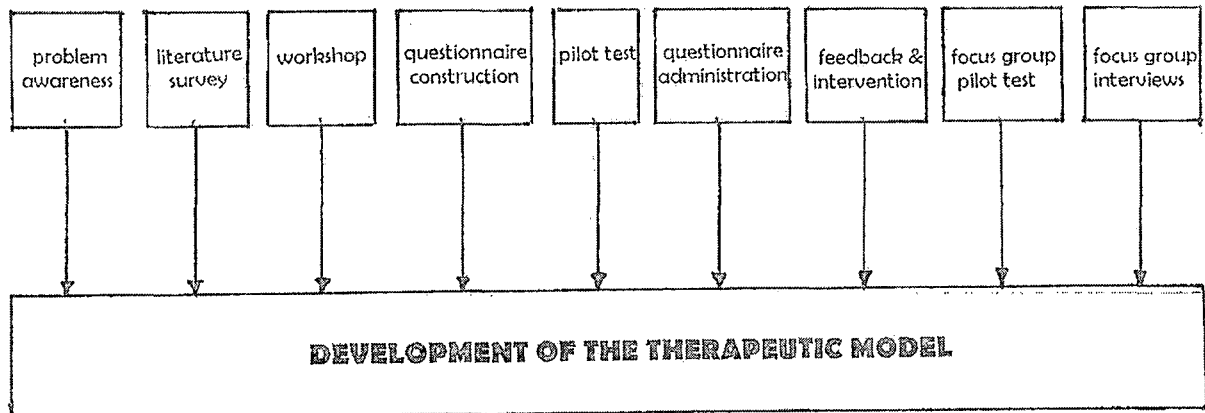


### 1.4.9 Development of the therapeutic model

Although the main aim of the study is the generation of a therapeutic model, the therapeutic model will not be the final product of the investigation. The therapeutic model has been in a constant state of creation, from the very beginning when the researcher first became aware of the problem. Encountering students wrestling with individual problems in adjusting to academic and residential life, it was soon realised that their dilemmas could not go unchecked. As each started to open up and discuss what was going wrong, plans of action were put into place. Remediation sessions and/or individual therapy sessions have been utilised with these students in order to assist them in coping with their difficulties.

Conversing with some of the lecturing staff has made the researcher realise that others too are aware that interventions are needed. It is thus imperative that programmes to address certain problematic areas be initiated as soon as possible. Figure 1.3 illustrates the ongoing development of the therapeutic model that will contain programmes that will address the various areas in holistic student development.

**Figure 1.3 Development of the therapeutic model**



### 1.5 EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED

In this study, a number of specific concepts are referred to at frequent intervals. In the next section, these concepts are briefly defined.

### **1.5.1 First year student**

The term will be used to denote all students registered for first year courses, whether or not they are first time registrations or students that are repeating courses or modules. Not to be confused with the American term “*student*”, which can also refer to a high school learner, the student referred to in the current research study attends an institution of higher learning such as a university or college where there is no specific age group.

### **1.5.2 Student development theory**

In order to better understand the new student, the tertiary institution, in creating the optimum learning environment, must know how the student learns, socialises, motivates him or herself, becomes competent, skilled and is able to hold his or her own in the world as an effective citizen.

Chickering’s view (1981, 1993) is that an understanding is necessary of how the student meets his or her life cycle challenges, and in the process, grows intellectually, morally, spiritually, socially and professionally. The tertiary institution would be better equipped to look at the potential that each discipline offers the student, how best to prepare him or her for the workplace by adapting and adjusting teaching methods, programmes and practices.

A great deal of research has been done in this field (Graham & Gisi 2000; Donaldson & Graham 1999; Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBruto 1998; Haselgrove 1994; King 1994; Chickering & Reisser 1993; Tinto 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991). Chickering’s (1993:38) approach to development using seven vectors is the theoretical baseline from which the researcher is working. In this study, student development and the theory that underpins that development will denote an holistic approach, involving all aspects of the growth of the young adult.

### **1.5.3 Psychological**

A general definition of “*psychological*” is referred to as relating to the mind or mental activity or affecting the mind (McLeod & Hanks 1985:918). For the purposes of this study, psychological factors will refer to those aspects that cause emotional turmoil, eroding the individual’s ability to cope with daily life. These factors will also include those elements that are stressful, unpleasant or unnerving, which may be short lived, but are experienced as a

disturbance to the mental and emotional equilibrium of the individual. The factors to be investigated are those that emerge from the results of the survey and discussion in the focus groups, as seen to be debilitating to the student.

#### **1.5.4 Educational**

The general concept "*educational*" refers to the process of the systematic training and development of the intellectual, as well as moral faculties in the overall growth of character (Hayward & Sparks 1976:360). For the purpose of this study, the term "*educational*" will refer to the academic factors that are seen as determinants of success in the classroom. These include thinking skills, reading, writing and comprehension skills, motivation and concentration, study skills, academic support, and the ability to write tests and examinations. In other words, they comprise all the competencies that are deemed necessary for academic achievement.

Till (2000:2) and Yorke (2000:35) both comment on the under-preparedness of many new students in that they do not have all the tools that are required to be academically successful. What has been noted is the lack of academic support, different teaching styles, lack of appropriate study skills and the failure to make sufficient academic progress due to a number of factors.

Thus, for the purpose of this study, "*educational*" will refer to the competencies that are necessary for the student to acquire and master in order to cope with the world of learning.

#### **1.6.5 Psycho-educational**

The scientific meaning of "*psycho-educational*" is the field of the two adjectives highlighted above, combined in a unified whole. It refers to the coming together of the psychological and the educational arenas, where each has an effect on the other.

#### **1.6.6 Factors**

The dictionary explanation (Hayward & Sparks 1976:407), in mathematical terms, is seen as one of the quantities that, multiplied together, comprise a given number or expression. It can also refer to any circumstance, fact or influence that contributes to a result. In the

current study it will refer to all of the perceived influences that may impact upon the well-being of the student.

### **1.6.7 Inhibit**

The thesaurus (McLeod 1985:355) lists a number of synonyms, such as bridle, check, curb, discourage, frustrate, impede, obstruct and restrain. All these are applicable in the study. The negative connotation implies that the student will be held back and not able to reach set goals.

### **1.6.8 Performance**

Hayward and Sparks (1976:10) noted that the word "*performance*" is often used interchangeably with the word "*achievement*", and may be used to denote academic prowess or success (Delvare 1995:31). However, the literature may have a more restricted usage. Traditionally, the word appears to mean how well an individual will succeed according to set criteria. Smit (in Delvare 1995:28) notes that student performance at tertiary institutions is internationally monitored by the length of time taken to earn the qualification. Performance is equated with academic success.

Although tertiary success is typically measured by rank and aggregate, as well as obtaining the qualification within the minimum time allowance, Willingham (1985:33) as well as Chickering and Reisser (1993:xii) identify it as encompassing a far broader field, that of the development of the whole person.

Delvare (1995:32) notes that the national qualifications framework document asserts that knowledge, plus understanding, plus skills, values and attitudes equal performance. All these components are indivisible and operate together in performance.

The terms "*performance*", "*achievement*" and "*success*" will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three. For the sake of this study, each will refer to a wider application, as the researcher views student performance as the acquisition and application of knowledge, the honing of a variety of competencies, attitude and value development within a state of psychic wellness. The holistic development is the desired achievement.

### **1.6.9 Therapeutic model**

In this study, Hayward and Sparks' (1976:1169) explanation of the word "*therapeutic*" is most apt in describing the creation of the model that is the ultimate aim of the study. In medical terms, "*therapeutic*" pertains to the action of remedial agents in dealing with both health and disease. Therapy deals with the disease from both curative and preventative angles. In the current case, the desire is to formulate a plan of action that will become the exemplar for attending to student "*dis-ease*" on the academic and psychological fronts. The therapeutic model will include other facets of student development in order to facilitate holistic growth and opportunity.

## **1.7 PLANNING THE STUDY**

The research study will be divided into the following chapters:

### **1.7.1 Chapter Two**

Chapter Two will form a literature survey of, and theoretical background to, student development as a prerequisite for optimum performance.

### **1.7.2 Chapter Three**

Chapter Three comprises a literature survey of the theoretical background to academic performance and achievement, as well as the psychological aspects that are related to the adjustment of the first year student, these serving to address the academic, social, emotional, physical and psychic aspects of holistic well-being.

### **1.7.3 Chapter Four**

The research design and research methodology with regards to the workshops, the questionnaire and the focus groups will be discussed in Chapter Four.

### **1.7.4 Chapter Five**

Chapter Five will centre on the empirical study. The data obtained from the workshops, the questionnaire, and the focus group interviews, will be noted and compared.

### **1.7.5 Chapter Six**

In the light of the proposed therapeutic model, the findings of the workshops, the questionnaire and the focus group interviews will be examined and discussed in Chapter Six.

### **1.7.6 Chapter Seven**

Chapter Seven serves as a conclusion to the study, incorporating significant literature findings as well as the empirical study findings. The intervention model to be drawn up through the research should be a viable proposition that will address the areas of institutional and personal concern. The model should be of such a nature that it invites stakeholder buy-in and a willingness to participate in any applicable execution thereof. Recommendations for further investigation will then be posited.

## **1.8 CONCLUSION**

The researcher wishes to gain a greater understanding of a unique and particular situation, symptomatic of underlying problems that are worrisome and distressing for the student, and vexing for current institutional management.

In the chapter that follows, a close study will be made of the theory of student development and how it relates to the holistic development or the development of the student as a totality. One cannot ascribe real success, achievement or optimum performance only to the meeting of academic or cognitive goals. One has to examine other factors and competencies that need to be addressed when fostering and developing human potential.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE THEORY OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

If you work with students at all, you know they change. They grow up. They think and behave differently. And you wonder why and how it happens. Students will tell you that you made a difference. College made a difference. Deep down you hope it's true.

Gary Hanson (1982)

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

No one specific student development theory is going to explain all behaviour. Behaviour is complex, and the theory of student development will serve as a guide as and when the challenges of the research study are encountered. The theory of student development will also provide a valuable backdrop against which a therapeutic model can be prepared for the students in the research study. The institution that is preparing the student for his or her future role in the world of work, and in society in general, could benefit from this model as it would serve as a solid foundation upon which future projects could be undertaken by the student development professional. For the sake of convenience and brevity, the term *he* and *his* will be used when referring to the student while denoting both male and female genders throughout the rest of this thesis.

#### 2.2 THE TERM "STUDENT DEVELOPMENT"

The term "*student development*" has many connotations for many people. Moore (1990:87) uses the term to describe a set of goals identified by the educational institution. Rodgers (in Creamer 1990:27) uses the term "*student development*" to refer to a movement and a theoretical perspective, while denoting role description. The term, according to Rodgers, can also denote a philosophy. Rodgers uses the term to categorise the theory and research of late adolescent and adult behaviour, involving the process whereby the student is enabled to develop his capabilities within the higher education institution. Within this context, "*student development*" refers to the development of the whole person.

Sanford (1969:47), an early student development researcher who provided a solid foundation for current development theory, sees student development as an extremely



complex positive growth process. This process is one in which the student is able to act upon the many influences and experiences that he may encounter and integrate.

Knefelkamp, Wideck and Parker (in Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito 1998:4) expand Sanford's explanation by asking four simple questions that direct attention to specific aspects, and request that one examines factors that influence those occurrences:

- What interpersonal and intrapersonal changes occur while the student is in college?
- What factors lead to this development?
- What aspects of the college environment encourage or retard growth?
- What development outcomes should we strive to achieve in college?

All of the information gained from answering the above questions serves as a guide as to addressing student needs through the development of specific programmes, policies and environments, which will encourage positive development in the student.

Due to the fact that the student grows intellectually, emotionally and behaviourally while in college, Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito (1998:5) assert that all student development professionals, from student services to faculty members, should work together to improve student learning and maximize positive outcomes for the student.

Moore (1990:87) comments that when using the term "*student development*", one must view education as a process that incorporates reciprocation between interpersonal and intellectual competence.

From the consideration above, all theory assisting one to understand how students achieve goals, both behaviourally and developmentally, should thus be seen as student development theory.

In the following section, a brief overview will be provided with regard to the main development theories, one of which will be selected to provide the backdrop against which the research study will be conducted.

### 2.3 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

Developmental theories have been the basis for the student affairs professional since the 1960's. The first student developmental models were psychological-stage theories, with empirical findings based on limited student populations. Subsequent theories have relied on sociological as well as psychological perspectives, obtained from divergent undergraduate populations (Arnold & King 1997:ix).

There appear to be two groups of theories and models. The first addresses the processes, structure and nature of intra-individual human growth, while the other focuses more on the sociological or environmental origins of student change, often termed "*college impact models*" (Pascarella & Terenzini 1991:17). A number of developmental taxonomies or models are on offer. The researcher has chosen to highlight the four-family structure proposed by Rodgers (1990:27). The four clusters of theories are:

- psychosocial theories;
- cognitive-structural theories;
- typological models and;
- person-environment interaction models.

The last-mentioned group is not developmental in the true sense of the word as it does not address the process or nature of student change. It does, however, address human behaviour and guides thinking with respect to the impact that higher education has on the student, and how he changes as a result thereof.

For the sake of both clarity and brevity, these clusters are unpacked in tabular form.

Table 2.1 Four taxonomies of student development theory	
1 Psychosocial theorists	Theory and main principle
Erikson (1980)	<b>Identity development theory</b> Proposes an eight-stage life journey of identity development, with each stage distinguished by a psychosocial crisis that has to be resolved by balancing the internal self and the external environment.
Chickering (1969)	<b>Seven vector theory</b> Proposes vectors or psychosocial tasks that contribute to the

	formation of identity. The vectors build on one another, leading to greater complexity, stability and integration. These deal with the whole person.
<b>Josselson (1982)</b>	<b>Theory of identity development in women</b> Proposes that women shift through four identity statuses, being diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement as they accommodate changes that are associated with the life cycle.
<b>Schlossberg (1981, 1989)</b>	<b>Theory of mattering and marginality</b> Proposes that student success depends upon the degree to which the Student feels that he matters enough to others to become involved.
<b>Marcia (1970, 1976)</b>	<b>Theory of ego development status</b> Proposes that identity formation is a dynamic process dependent on the resolution of two psychosocial tasks, namely crisis and commitment.
<b>Cross (1978)</b>	<b>Model of black identity formation</b> Proposes that the individual passes through five stages as the personal black identity takes shape, namely pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, interpersonalisation and internalisation and commitment.
<b>Cass (1979)</b>	<b>Homosexuality identity formation theory</b> Proposes a six-stage development formation process, based on the individual's perception of his or her own behaviour in relation to recognising the self as a homosexual, including identity confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride and synthesis.
<b>Heath (1976, 1977)</b>	<b>Maturation model</b> Proposes development in four maturational dimensions, including cognitive, values, self-concept and interpersonal relation systems, moving towards self-expression, other-centredness, integration, stability and autonomy.
<b>2 Cognitive-structural theorists</b>	
<b>Perry (1981)</b>	<b>Scheme of intellectual and ethical development</b> Proposes a static nine-position (point of view) developmental sequence by which the student makes sense of his world. Cognitive and ethical development takes place during the transitions between positions, and not in the specific positions <i>per se</i> .
<b>Kohlberg (1969)</b>	<b>Theory of moral development</b> Proposes that moral judgment and action evolve from the way in which the individual "knows" a situation that requires moral choice.

	Moral development occurs when the individual is able to take another person's perspective, needs and rights and balance them with his own by means of detachment and accuracy.
<b>Gilligan (1977)</b>	<b>Theory of connectedness and relationships</b> Proposes a two-level, three-transitions process of women's moral development that proceeds through the transitions, with each one representing a more sophisticated understanding between responsibility and selfishness. Care and responsibility is the moral compass by which females make meaning of their world.
<b>Baxter-Magolda (1987)</b>	<b>Epistemological judgment model</b> Proposes a four-stage process with gender-related patterns in the first three stages of absolute knowing, transitional knowing and independent knowing. Men and women learn differently. In the fourth and final stage, contextual knowing requires backup from supporting evidence, but this is rarely seen in the undergraduate.
<b>Kitchener &amp; King (1981)</b>	<b>Model of reflective judgment</b> Proposes a seven-stage model of post-adolescent reasoning styles with reflective judgment as the most advanced. It shows how the individual's ideas about knowledge, the nature of reality and how he justifies his beliefs, change with age and/or educational levels.
<b>Loevinger (1985)</b>	<b>Ego development model</b> Proposes the ego as a general organising framework by which individuals view themselves and their world. The dynamic, unified individuals pass through nine stages that represent qualitative differences in the way in which each view the world.
<b>Kegan (1980)</b>	<b>Model of adult development</b> Describes how one differentiates the <i>self</i> from the <i>other</i> , and then integrates the two as the ego develops throughout life. This subject-object relation theory explains how previously fixed ways of assembling the self, relationships, values and beliefs become themselves the object contemplation.
<b>3 Typological theorists</b>	
<b>Kolb (1981)</b>	<b>Theory of learning styles</b> Explores how one learns, as this determines personal development. The three stages of acquisition, specialisation and integration contain a four-phase cycle of feeling, watching, thinking and doing. One has preferred ways of defining meaning, and the non-dominant areas need to be developed.

<p><b>Holland (1958, 1961, (1996)</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Career-choice personality typologies theory</b></p> <p>Proposes a hexagonal model of six personality types and vocational environments. Although controversial, it nevertheless aids in career decision-making as it helps one to understand individual behaviour and interpersonal interactions in a variety of settings.</p>
<p><b>Myers (1980)</b></p>	<p><b>Theory of personality type theory</b></p> <p>Identifies individual differences through the ways in which people prefer to absorb and process information concerning their environments and how they make judgments and assumptions regarding that information.</p>
<p><b>Kiersey (1984)</b></p>	<p><b>Temperament theory</b></p> <p>Postulates that the individual is a systemic, self-adjusting whole. Personality has an innate tendency towards certain behaviours and the complete system is termed "<i>temperament</i>". The social environment does not create the pattern, but merely facilitates its genesis and growth. If this does not occur, pathologies will emerge.</p>
<p><b>4 Person-environment theorists</b></p>	
<p><b>Bronfenbrenner (1986, 1997)</b></p>	<p><b>Ecology of cognitive development theory</b></p> <p>Proposes that development is an evolving function of the person-environment interaction. It is necessary that this interaction takes place in a face-to-face setting. The personal characteristics that affect subsequent psychological growth in the individual are those that either encourage or inhibit the dynamic management of the immediate environment.</p>
<p><b>Astin (1984)</b></p>	<p><b>Student involvement theory</b></p> <p>Focuses on the behavioural mechanisms that encourage student development. This theory refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the individual pledges to the academic experience. Although motivation is an important component, the amount of student development taking place in a programme is directly related to the quality and quantity of student involvement.</p>
<p><b>Stern (1970)</b></p>	<p><b>The needs-press model</b></p> <p>Indicates a combination of psychological needs and environmental press. The needs appear to be those tendencies that drive the individual's behaviour. The environmental press is situational coercion to behave in a certain way. The press may help or hinder need gratification.</p>
<p><b>Moos (1975, 1979)</b></p>	<p><b>Theory of social climate</b></p>

	Posits three dimensions, these being relationships, goal orientation and system maintenance and change. The greatest level of student achievement occurs when all three dimensions are addressed namely supportive relationships and emphasis on specific academic tasks within a structured and organised order.
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## 2.4 THE PURPOSE OF USING A SPECIFIC THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THIS STUDY

For the purposes of this research project, the specific theory to be used is Chickering and Reisser's (1993:265) revision of Chickering's original 1969 Seven Vectors Theory of Development. Along with the vectors, Chickering also covers key aspects that the educational institution can address in order to encourage human development in the seven key areas. The seven vectors theory deals in depth with emotions and relationships and provides a model for the effective education of the whole student through a holistic approach that is fundamental to the institution.

In his original proposal, Chickering (1969:8) uses the term "*vectors of development*" specifically to indicate direction and magnitude, rather than stages of development. The student may develop in more than one of the seven areas at the same time (Higbee & Dwinell 1998:94). Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBruto (1998:38) comment that Chickering views these vectors as being able to interact with each other, with students returning to associated issues and moving through these vectors at different rates.

The theoretical psychosocial basis used in this research project examines the content of development, the many issues students face in their lives, how they define themselves and their relationships, as well as what they ultimately do with their lives. In the following section the seven vectors of development used as the psychosocial basis for the research project will be discussed in detail.

## 2.5 CHICKERING'S SEVEN VECTOR THEORY OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

Arthur Chickering has spent many decades researching student development, the important changes taking place, how students see themselves, how they cope with intellectual tasks and relate to peers as well as the world of work (Kitchener 1982:17).

The seven vectors of development model has been used by many institutions to understand the student, and the implementation of programmes that enhance holistic development. The table below provides a summary of Chickering's (1993:38) theory.

<b>Table 2.2 The seven vectors: general developmental directions</b>	
<b>FROM</b>	<b>TO</b>
<b><i>Developing competence</i></b>	
Low level of competence (intellectual, physical, interpersonal). Lack of confidence in one's abilities.	High level of competence in each area.  Strong sense of competence.
<b><i>Managing emotions</i></b>	
Little control over disruptive emotions (fear, anxiety, anger leading to aggression, depression, guilt and shame, and dysfunctional sexual or romantic attraction). Little awareness of feelings.  Inability to integrate feelings with actions.	Flexible control and appropriate expression.  Increasing awareness and acceptance of emotions.  Ability to integrate feelings with responsible actions.
<b><i>Moving through autonomy towards interdependence</i></b>	
Emotional dependence.  Poor self-direction or ability to solve problems; little freedom or confidence to be mobile.  Independence.	Freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance.  Instrumental independence (inner direction, persistence and mobility).  Recognition and acceptance of the importance of interdependence.
<b><i>Developing mature interpersonal relationships</i></b>	
Lack of awareness of differences; intolerance of differences.  Non-existent, short-term or unhealthy intimate relationships.	Tolerance and appreciation of differences.  Capacity for intimacy that is enduring and nurturing.
<b><i>Establishing identity</i></b>	
Discomfort with body and appearance. Discomfort with gender and sexual orientation. Lack of clarity about heritage and social/cultural identity roots.	Comfort with body and appearance. Comfort with gender and sexual orientation. Sense of self in a social, historical and cultural context.

Confusion about "who I am" and experimentation with roles and lifestyles. Lack of clarity about others' evaluation.  Dissatisfaction with self. Unstable, fragmented personality.	Clarification of self-concept through roles and lifestyle.  Sense of self in response to feedback from valued others.  Self-acceptance and self-esteem.  Personal stability and integration.
<b><i>Developing purpose</i></b>	
Unclear vocational goals. Shallow, scattered personal interests. Few meaningful interpersonal commitments.	Clear vocational goals. More sustained, focused, rewarding activities. Strong interpersonal and family commitments.
<b><i>Developing integrity</i></b>	
Dualistic thinking and rigid beliefs. Unclear or untested personal values and beliefs. Self-interest. Discrepancies between values and actions.	Humanising values. Personalizing (clarifying and affirming) values while respecting others' beliefs. Social responsibility. Congruence and authenticity.

(Chickering 1993:38)

The table above affords a brief overview of Chickering's theory at a glance. It demonstrates the baseline from where the student starts the development process, as well as the level to which he will aspire. Several vectors can develop simultaneously, while they are capable of interacting with each other. This movement allows the student to return to previous issues and work through them at different rates.

The section that follows provides a discussion of each vector on its own in detail so as to elucidate student development in all its facets as a holistic approach.

### **2.5.1 Vector One: Developing competence**

Competence, in the general sense of the term is regarded by Chickering and Reisser (1993:53) as the sense that comes from confidence in knowing that one can cope with whatever crosses one's path and achieve goals in a successful manner. This comes about by the successful learning and connecting of behaviours.

#### **2.5.1.1 Intellectual competence**



Intellectual competence is the ability to use one's mind in order to acquire knowledge and skills, and by so doing, master subject content. The skills to be honed are concentration, comprehension, reflection, analysis, synthesis and interpretation (Higbee & Dwinell 1998:94). Increased skills in critical thinking and reasoning ability, which includes problem solving, weighing evidence, active learning and original thinking skills, need to be developed. Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989:19) refer to the development of intellectual competence as influencing the learner's professional and vocational choice. Intellectual competence also includes the development of aesthetic and cultural interests, as well as the development of values.

#### **2.5.1.2 *Physical and manual competence***

Physical and manual competence refers to the stamina that one needs in order to live one's life, and comes about through sporting and recreational activities, involvement in artistic and manual activities, as well as paying attention to general wellness and healthy living.

#### **2.5.1.3 *Interpersonal competence***

Interpersonal competence is necessary for the development of leadership skills. The ability to work within various groups, to co-operate, to synergise and work effectively with others in order to achieve life's tasks, is of great importance. It involves effective communication skill development, whereby one learns what to say, when to say it, how to say it and to whom it can and should be said. The refining of the art of listening, asking questions, reflection on feelings, disclosing of self, providing feedback in order to engage in conversation that is both insightful and enjoyable is the underlying aim of interpersonal competence.

The delicate art of timing questions or comments, knowing how to respond, both verbally and non-verbally, knowing how to construct the message in order for it to be fully understood by all, needs to be honed in order to build friendships that are successful, as well as relationships that are intimate and lasting. Besides relationships and family life, these skills are necessary in the world of work and the carrying out of duties as an accountable citizen.

When intellectual, physical and social competencies increase there is greater readiness on the part of the student to expend energy in learning and development. There is a willingness to risk and try new endeavours (Chickering & Reisser 1993:79).

Although there are students who feel secure in the knowledge that they are coping and show competence, there are those who have little sense of their strengths and weaknesses as there is insufficient feedback from others. These students feel that no matter how hard they try the results are never good enough. There may also be students who have been previously disadvantaged or experienced discrimination. They may not have had much support or recognition, although they may display high levels of competence.

Chickering and Reisser (1993:82) feel that the institution needs to offer various opportunities for thorough, all round development of competencies, which will give the student confidence to stand tall amongst his peers as an imperfect, yet respectable developing adult.

## **2.5.2 Vector Two: Managing emotions**

All students arrive on campus with emotional baggage. This vector concentrates on how the student able to recognise and control these emotions before they start to control the life of the student.

### **2.5.2.1 *Recognition and acceptance of emotions***

There are certain emotions that can spell trouble for the student. These have a habit of interfering with the daily pattern of living, recognition of which may help towards better management of the emotional life. These specific emotions are noted by Chickering and Reisser (1993:90), and are briefly discussed hereafter.

#### **a Anxiety and fear**

A certain amount of anxiety and tension are necessary before an important event. This can help the student to perform at an elevated level. However, a high level of anxiety can have the opposite effect and serve to paralyse the individual, or adversely affect performance. Students experience worry and fear, as well as hopefulness and eagerness before an

examination. Disgust, disappointment, relief and happiness are present after results become known.

Earwaker (1992:10) reports that anxiety about academic potential is an important issue. Students wonder whether or not they have the capabilities of meeting the high standards that have been set for them. The specific anxiety may be partly due to the reaching out of higher education institutions into communities that have no history of educational success. Anxiety may further be due to calculated enrolment of under-prepared students. Students will show anxiety in a myriad of different settings, at different times, and with different causes. What one has to do is to get the student to recognise when anxiety becomes apparent.

Anxiety can interfere with the cognitive process, just as untreated depression can (Backels & Wheeler 2001:173). However, recent studies indicate a weak and varied connection between psychopathologies and academic achievement (Svanum & Zody 2001:75). It is felt that the meshing of academic success and emotional and behavioural maladjustment is far too complex, and further investigation is needed.

#### **b Anger leading to aggression**

When anxiety and frustration build up, there is a potentially explosive situation. Aggression can sometimes result from the student meeting with factors that block where he wishes to go, people with very different outlooks on life, his struggling to come to terms with his newfound independence, or the continuation of displaying aggressive behaviour learned in childhood.

#### **c Depression, guilt and shame**

Many students encountered by student affairs practitioners are depressed. Some are severely affected, so much so that psychiatric intervention is sought and medication is necessary. Chickering and Reisser (1993:94) view depression as a cluster of feelings and behaviours, which may or may not appear together. These are negative emotions such as sadness, feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness and haplessness, failure, disappointment and pessimism. Behavioural patterns, such as social withdrawal, problems with decision making, concentration and motivation, as well as being irritable and passive

are identified. Physical problems such as eating and sleeping disturbances, as well as headaches and stomachaches are seen.

Backels and Wheeler (2001:173) comment that the negative effects of certain mental health issues can impact severely on academic performance. Depression, for example, if left untreated, can weaken extended cognitive capacity. Svanum and Zody (2001:72) pinpoint a large epidemiological study completed by Kessler and Associates in 1995, examining the effect of preexisting psychiatric disorders, such as anxiety and depression, on academic attainment. Kessler identifies these psychopathologies as significant predictors of failure, especially in the first year at college; and it is unfortunate that most studies do not catch the diminished performance that runs concurrent with the above-mentioned illnesses.

#### **d Dysfunctional sexual or romantic attraction**

When emotions arise within this context, they are dealt with by repression, channeling or obsession of the gratification thereof. The balancing of these is termed successful integration, whereby the individual is able to balance the need for intimacy, nurturing and unconditional acceptance, with the desire to nurture, to respect and to provide affection.

#### **e Recognising positive emotions**

Emotions such as caring, optimism and inspiration, awe, wonder and worship need to be identified and appreciated. So often, these positive emotions are virtually ignored by researchers as the negative ones tend to dominate literature and counselling sessions.

#### **2.5.2.2 *Becoming more aware of and expressing emotions***

When the student is able to recognise and accept his feelings as being part and parcel of everyday reactions to life, understand long held perceptions that may worsen negative feelings, then he will start to increase his emotional awareness. Skill development in interpersonal and sexual behaviour, as well as learning how to stand up for one's self, all help to make the student more aware. Exploration of messages received during childhood can help an individual deal with self-defeating habits or behaviour patterns.

“Awareness” means learning the language of feelings, understanding the variety of intensity and where each lies on the emotional continuum. For example a student may comment that he feels upset. Once he is able to separate irritation from disappointment or devastation, he is free to explore that feeling, and is thus better equipped to deal with it. Awareness improves when the student is free from denying a particular feeling. It may have taken many years of consolidating his defense mechanisms, while these emotions have to be rather intense before they are noticed.

Chickering and Reisser (1993:105) point out that one essential step in the formation of one’s identity is the ability to recognise and accept one’s own feelings as being real and valid. Taking ownership can often prove painful, but freeing.

### **2.5.2.3 *Exercising flexible emotional control***

Integrating emotions is a journey, aided by mentors and counselors, relevant literature and painful experience. It means acknowledging that feelings are present, identifying them and working with them, not allowing them to rule one’s life, but rather choosing when and how to express them. It is the ability to judge the intensity, and to regulate it.

Becoming academically competent is one way of building up a reservoir of positive feelings. Knowing how to control test anxiety, as well as controlling the self when it comes to study skills should have a positive outcome. Accepting and taking responsibility for emotions, and then actively choosing how, when and where to express them, places the student well on his way to emotional integration. He needs to be able to channel certain emotions in constructive directions, using the energy in a positive way.

There are many opportunities in the institution for this. One only has to study the arts and sciences to experience wonder, awe and inspiration. Opportunities may be found in community work, participating in the many clubs and societies an institution may offer, experiential learning, volunteer work, church youth work, or helping to mentor peers. Opportunities to celebrate student and staff diversity are manifold and should be maximised. Celebrations of one’s common humanity should not be overlooked. These occasions can afford the student the opportunity to experience inspiration, hope and courage and by so doing, feel that he is part of something greater than himself.

### **2.5.3 Vector Three: Moving through Autonomy towards Interdependence**

This vector sees the movement from a dependent emotional state to one of independence and interdependence. This occurs in three directions.

#### **2.5.3.1 Emotional independence**

Emotional independence implies freedom from the need of constant reassurance, affection or approval from parents, peers and others (Chickering & Reisser 1993:117). For the student, this will involve movement and a degree of separation from the caregiver or parent, through affirmation and support from other sources, such as peers and role model, towards being comfortable with oneself. During this phase the student is able to start trusting his own feelings, insights and choices without needing extrinsic validation. Covey (1989:49) refers to emotional dependence as the paradigm of *You – you take care of me, I blame you*. Moving to the state of independence, the *I* replaces the *you*, as in *I can choose, I am responsible, I can do it*.

There are parents who start the process of autonomy while the student is still in the parental home. These parents encourage the young adult to develop the necessary skills to deal with emotions such as anxiety, as well as to make appropriate choices. However, there are parents who are not supportive and start to disengage from their offspring when they feel that they have fulfilled their duty. Devaluation from both sides may occur (Chickering & Reisser 1993:124). There are also those parents who try to protect and control their young adults.

Growing in the confidence of own decision-making and goal setting should result in more focused action rather than haphazard attempts. It should ultimately replace anxiety with quiet assurance. The increased ability to move both emotionally and physically places the student firmly on the road to responsible, accountable independent adult behaviour (Pascarella & Terenzini 1991:215). This emotional movement will necessitate freedom from emotional and behavioural patterns that may have previously hampered progress.

#### **2.5.3.2 Instrumental independence**

Instrumental independence is the ability to act and cope with life without being helped, as well as the freedom to move around in the pursuit of opportunity. Instrumental

independence is referred to as self-direction, and having problem solving abilities and mobility (Pascarella & Terenzini 1991:117).

### **2.5.3.3 Interdependence**

Interdependence is an awareness of the fact that each is connected to the other. For every action, there is a reaction. As the student matures, he learns that no matter whether his behaviour is passive, retiring, aggressive or assertive, it will affect others.

Chickering and Reisser (1993:142) refer to courteous co-operation with others, and learning how to interact with others as the primary principle of autonomy. When the individual starts perceiving that he is a part of a much greater whole, he begins to see patterns of giving and taking in his behaviour. These patterns develop as he balances the need for independence with the need to be part of the greater whole.

Moving further along the autonomy continuum will take the student to the paradigm of interdependence, where the *I* is replaced by *we*, as in *we can do it, we can co-operate, we can combine our talents in order to create something great*. Schlossberg (1989:11) terms this marginality and mattering. The need to be wanted and included is strong. Finding that one matters to others, that others care about one, on the one hand, encourages involvement, while conversely on the other hand, the student can experience instances where he feels marginalised, out of place and does not appear to matter to others.

The movement towards interdependence is marked by a change in attitude. The young adolescent, very often, goes through a rebellious stage wherein he finds fault with everything and everybody. As he matures, disgruntled feelings and attitudes can be replaced by feelings of warmth and understanding.

There is also the student who, although well on his journey towards autonomy, has not developed sensitivity to situations and people. Very often this is the student who feels that he is entitled to certain services by staff and will make unreasonable demands. He may even address people in an unpleasant manner.

During this research study, the researcher had one such student present, who displayed strong feelings of anger and frustration, upsetting staff and students wherever he went. The

strong feeling of entitlement underscored each and every interpersonal encounter in which he engaged. He has had to come to terms with these feelings and learn to cope with situations in a different manner. Experience with a student at the other end of the assertiveness scale exposed a very lonely person, having spent two or three of his student years on his own, with very little interaction with others. He too has to come to terms with his feelings and has learned to cope.

There is also great concern for the student in the quest for autonomy, who is struggling with this aspect of development without anyone being aware of his struggle. This is the student who is in danger of slipping through the system unnoticed.

#### **2.5.4 Vector Four: Developing mature interpersonal relationships**

Following the interdependence vector is the fourth vector of developing tolerance and appreciation of others, irrespective of similarities and differences. Developing mature interpersonal relationships is aided by skills learned from the first three vectors, namely competence development, emotional management and movement through autonomy to interdependence. The student is led towards prospective healthy relationship building by learning effective communication skills, how best to manage emotions, to connect with others on a deeper level, to resolve differences amicably and the realisation that his behaviour ultimately will affect others.

Two tasks need to be undertaken so that this vector, wherein mature interpersonal relationships are created and maintained, can be successfully navigated. The tasks are those of tolerance and difference appreciation and the building of intimacy.

##### **2.5.4.1 *Tolerance and difference appreciation***

Tolerance can be defined as patience with others who differ from one, of bearing with others, not seeking to coerce others, to permit by not preventing or forbidding. It is the art of understanding others and situations that are vastly different from the known, without condemning, judging or ignoring. Reisser (1995:509) notes that interpersonal tolerance is the appreciation of commonalities. Cultural diversity is the art of feeling comfortable with all kinds of people. The student learns not to jump to hasty conclusions that may result from a lack of empathy, ignorance or stereotyping.



Feelings for others, altruism, should ultimately replace interest in the self. It is caring for both friend and stranger alike. Many opportunities to promote empathic caring will be afforded the student in a variety of situations, should he care to make use of them. Volunteer work, orientation programmes for students, fundraising, community outreach projects and campaigning for student office are but a few examples of opportunities whereby this vector can be established. However, one must not forget that there is always the student who battles to cope on an academic plane and who will thus not spare any thought for empathy or tolerance (Chickering & Reisser 1993:159).

#### **2.5.4.2 *Establishing intimacy***

Intimacy is the establishment and development of healthy and lasting relationships with a partner as well as with close friends. Deeper trust, independence and individuality, as opposed to stereotyping, should occur during this period (Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering 1989:19). The student learns that he can be his authentic self, without having to struggle for power, play games or hide behind various masks.

Greeley and Tinsley (1988:518) see autonomy, sex role attitudes and sex as the best predictors of intimacy. The ability to view oneself as independent or separate, aids the individual in establishing an open, trusting, intimate relationship with another person.

Rodgers (in Creamer 1990:40) mentions that keeping intimacy alive requires a strong sense of self, self-confidence, spontaneity, communication and support. It leads to closeness. Intimacy should be strong enough to risk rejection. It makes one vulnerable through greater disclosure than before. Intimacy rests on openness, with a clear picture of who the other is and the ability to care for and love unconditionally.

The development of healthy intimacy lessens the need for control, to depend on others for one's happiness, and the state of being aware that one is not projecting baggage or unfinished business on friends and loved ones. Chickering and Reisser (1993:172) indicate that the growing ability to become intimate with others involves honesty, responsibility and respect. It is not always easy to communicate one's feelings honestly. When emotionally aroused, one needs to take responsibility for one's own actions and respond in a way that indicates a healthy respect for the other person.

As the student develops along the vector of maturing interpersonal relationships and the development of intimacy, he learns how to balance interaction on an intimate level with a partner and friends, as well as the need to be alone at times. The ideal intimate relationship is stable, trusting and open. Both partners enjoy spending time with each other. Each will take the initiative in making new friends, while holding close and nurturing relationships already made. Douvan and Adelson (1966:203) point out that, generally speaking, men have more difficulty in making friends than women do. This must be borne in mind when attending to student development issues and developing programmes that address the issues.

### **2.5.5 Vector Five: Establishing Identity**

Building upon the four preceding vectors is the establishment of identity. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991:21) see this vector as a pivotal one. The development of moral reasoning and relationship development are both closely allied to identity development (Bruess & Pearson 2000:67). The establishment of relationships is extremely important in the development of identity. Competencies begin to develop, emotions are better managed and tolerance, openness and intimate relationships are established by bonding with others. These skills strongly define the self. Bruess and Pearson (2000:68) point out that identity development and moral development are parallel processes, while the student needs opportunities and exposure to situations in which development can take place.

An interesting study completed by Buczinski (1991:213) refers to previous research done, where one particular study found that students entering first year with low identity scores tended to be academic overachievers. However, a second study found the converse to be apparent. Here the student with a higher academic status also tended to have a higher identity level. These results may be due to the fact that the higher level of cognitive development makes the student more aware of his environment and him self, and therefore the ability to question these areas and his identity level would be low. The student with a lower sense of identity may be myopic in his approach to his new academic world, and thus would not be so critical of him self (Buczinski 1991:222).

Erikson (1980:55) cites the resolution of inner conflicts as stages of personality or identity development. As the individual grows, he encounters this series of stages, each one a potential crisis as he changes drastically in perspective. Marcia and Friedman (1970:250),

using Erikson's theory of identity formation as a basis, propose four ways of coping in a linear fashion with identity resolution.

The first is identity diffusion that occurs in the pre-identity crisis period. Here there is no particular belief system or vocational path therefore there are no commitments. The second is foreclosure. Although still in a pre-crisis period, the individual conforms to parental or societal norms and there is evidence of the beginnings of a commitment to a belief system. The third stage is a moratorium period, wherein the commitment and conscious search continues, with minimal understanding and exploration. The last stage is that of identity achievement, wherein the identity crisis is survived and meaningful commitments have been made.

Josselson (1982:295) together with Pascarelli and Terenzini (1991:164) used Marcia's model to develop their own model of identity establishment, seen as a sequence of crises and challenges that require resolution. During this period, various ego strengths develop. Hazards may appear to jeopardise successful completion, and the individual revisits a previous crisis in order to regain equilibrium. There does not appear to be total agreement as to when ego development gains are made, as Pascarelli and Terenzini (1991:170) assert that there is insufficient evidence to show that reliable ego development takes place during student years.

When the student is able to integrate the social world as a student, he is afforded internal integration that helps him to relate to the world in general. The process of internal integration, and being able to relate to the world, is identity development and appears to be ongoing throughout life as the identity issues tackled during this period are not limited to the years of study, but are also encountered in other lifecycle periods (Thomas & Chickering 1984:395).

Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989:19) refer to identity establishment as the ability to recognise one's physical needs, establish comfort with one's physical appearance, sexual identity and gender roles, as well as becoming confident in the knowledge that others perceive one as unchanging over time.

In the section that follows, various facets of identity development are discussed, the successful development of each being necessary for the establishment of a healthy personal identity.

#### **2.5.5.1 *Comfort with body and appearance***

The student needs to realise that the body has its limitations. Although it is a vehicle for expression and enjoyment, it must be cared for and nurtured. Most students live on a very limited budget, and thus belonging to a health club would be beyond their limits. However, the institution has facilities to aid the student in fitness and wellness, although it is found that not many students make use of such facilities.

Due to a variety of factors, the student may overeat or eat the wrong foods. The student may starve himself at the expense of looking good, and this feeling of not looking good can lead to a lowering of self-esteem. Many are obsessed by dress and appearance, but as identity begins to develop, this obsession should fade.

#### **2.5.5.2 *Comfort with gender and sexual orientation***

Identity development means finding out what it really means to be a man or a woman, and coming to terms with that sexuality (Chickering in Arnold & King 1997:49). The opportunities to experiment with dress, behaviour and roles are probably at their greatest during the college years. Homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual identity develops through the processes of awareness, exploration and acceptance.

Chickering and Reisser (1993:184) feel that the institution can go a long way in helping the student feel comfortable with his gender by re-examining current values and attitudes. Comments concerning gender and sexual orientation made by Sanford (1966:269), supported by Chickering (1969:90), mention that with a variety of experiences and roles, with freedom from anxiety, as well as achievement that is meaningful to the individual, development of identity can be nurtured. The college years can afford the student the opportunities in which he is best able to test dress code, behaviours and roles.

### **2.5.5.3 *Sense of self in a social, historical and cultural context***

Developing one's identity includes finding one's place in the family, identifying with one's ethnic origins, locating the self within the social and historical milieu, as well as defining the self within a cultural and religious context. Knowing who he is and where he comes from helps to contextualise the student in appreciating what he has inherited from those roots. Simultaneously, he is enabled to appreciate the context of others, as well as their differing values and attributes.

### **2.5.5.4 *Clarification of self-concept through roles and lifestyles***

In defining identity, the individual needs to find roles and styles at work, home and play. Identifying a suitable life-style that will enable him to really express himself, will aid in the further definition of his identity. Chickering (1993:195), however, is mindful of the fact that identifying strongly with only one role or life-style limits self development as it is confined to one area only. One needs to create opportunities in which the individual is free to take on the challenges of more demanding perspectives and find roles to fit those challenges.

### **2.5.5.5 *Sense of self in response to feedback from valued others***

How others view the individual helps to shape the identity. He needs to know that he is seen in a positive light, that he is listened to, appreciated and belongs. During his years of study, the student will pick up information about how he is doing from family members, friends, test results, lecturers, coaches and classmates. They all contribute towards the picture of how he sees himself. One function of this vector is the ability to update his self-concept based on how others see him. A sense of sufficiency, accomplishment and affirmation will emanate only when the feedback is regular and accordant with where the student is headed and how he can improve on that journey (Chickering 1993:199).

### **2.5.5.6 *Self-acceptance and self-esteem***

The way the student feels about himself, how he perceives himself and the level of personal value that he ascribes to himself, all integrate to form self-acceptance and self-esteem. As he develops, he comes to realise that he does not have to be perfect. He does not have to

be so harsh on himself, always looking for the mistakes and dwelling on them. Instead, he begins to appreciate the fact that he has positive attributes that can contribute to a worthwhile life, and he comes to terms with his inner self, thus moving towards stability and integration.

#### **2.5.5.7 *Personal stability and integration***

Students in time gone by were guided towards socialisation, this fact appearing to have been the main task of education. It was assumed that identity was not a problem. Common values, beliefs and roles were assumed to be the norm. The individual simply tried to fit in to society. Chickering (1969:92, 1981:208) equates this aspect to a symphony where all that was necessary from the individual member was to learn to play a specific instrument and understand the rhythm and the theme. Everything was established and the member just had to learn the how, the when and the where of fitting in.

Today, symphony building is the aim, not of socialisation, but of identity formation. The student will learn to play a number of instruments, and find different rhythms within divergent musical genres. With a secure sense of self, he will not necessarily be part of the large orchestra of society. He may prefer to hone his talents in a small four-piece ensemble, a duo or may perhaps feel comfortable playing alone at times.

Buford (1995:31) argues that in helping students develop, the modern college is teaching content and method, and ignoring the provision of help that would enable students to work through the developmental tasks that form a moral and satisfying life. Ignoring the provision of help for students who need such in their developmental quest, is, in effect, depriving them of the richest possible identity.

#### **2.5.6 Vector Six: Developing purpose**

Vector six provides answers to questions relating to the student's identity and purpose. It is during this time that he establishes clear vocational goals, makes commitments to personal goals and people who should be meaningful to him. He learns that when he decides on something, he should see it through.

### **2.5.6.1 Vocational plans and dreams**

The term “*vocation*” is broad, and includes both paid and unpaid work. The individual finds his vocation by unearthing interests, looking at the things that he loves to do, situations that challenge and fulfill, while making use of skills and generating opportunities to discover and develop new talents.

Passion is the driving force, the motivating energy that moves one towards a goal. Few people are, however, able to make a living by following their passion. If the student is able to channel his talents and abilities, practise new skills and follow a career that energises and fulfills him, he could well be on his way to excellence.

Some students have vague ideas about a career path and enroll in courses because they are popular, easier to handle than others, recommended by someone, or are seen as desirable as the prospect of healthy earnings is a focal point, without recognising or understanding the connection between academic work and a career (Noel, Levitz & Saluri 1985:129). The student may begin to question his choice, failing to see the relevance or connection if the field of study involves generic courses or broad foundation studies (Earwaker 1992:18). The undecided student needs an organised approach to career exploration. He needs both academic and occupational information, as well as self-assessment where interests, values, possible dreams and goals can be identified.

Some vocational courses carry a professional qualification or recognition and are oriented towards a specific career right from the start. Here, the student feels part of the occupational or professional field from the beginning and may assume that there could be a job waiting after graduation.

Some enter tertiary education with a vaguely defined goal of, for example, helping people, curing disease, designing dwellings or creating art. Although vague, this dream may seem idealistic, but is worth nurturing. For some students, the true purpose or calling is fairly well defined, while others may take many years on a post-tertiary level to develop and define their purpose.

### **2.5.6.2 *Personal interests***

Knowing where he is going and what he is aspiring to, vocation-wise, is for the student, an empowering tool. It helps to ground him, as well as to spur him on to explore other possibilities (Chickering & Reisser 1993:225). When the choice that he makes takes on significant meaning, commitment to studies is increased and more time is spent on them. Roles that are played and activities that are enjoyed undergo reassessment in the light of developing involvement.

For example, as the final examinations loom ahead, the student may feel that he needs to spend more time in the library rather than be part of the debating team. Conversely, there is the student who is not willing to give up his place in the debating team, even as examinations loom. As recreational and other non-academic activities provide satisfaction and stimulation, this student will try to juggle all of these activities and remain or become involved in as many as is possible. He would, due to divergent interests, find it most difficult to concentrate on only one area.

Besides academic development, the student can find purpose by developing an interest in socialising, meaningful relationships, sport, extracurricular or elective courses, broad reading, travel, humanitarian causes, community outreach, hobbies and crafts, and spiritual priorities. As he develops purpose, the student moves away from numerous shallow and scattered personal interests to a level where interests become focused and pursued as they are found to be rewarding. The tertiary institution is an ideal place to try out new interests, and the one skill that should thus be honed by the time of graduation is the ability to prioritise successfully in order to balance all interests and activities.

### **2.5.6.3 *Interpersonal and family commitments***

Development of purpose sees the student moving from a level of engagement in a few meaningful interpersonal relationships, to a level where interpersonal relationships and family commitments become strong.



The period approaching graduation can be difficult as the student may make a number of big decisions concerning a number of different issues, including: should he further his studies; does he wish to travel; where is he going to work; should he settle with a partner; when should he start to pay off his student loan? He needs to balance his lifestyle with career aspirations and other interests and commitments. Clear values should make this task easier and if the student has developed the ability to think with purpose, this transition period should run fairly smoothly.

Chickering and Reisser (1993:231) comment on this period of transition, pre- and post-graduation, as one of defining one's purpose, one's direction, what one needs and what one can do without. Unfortunately, there are those students who put off making these decisions, while others spend many years looking for the answers.

#### **2.5.6.4 *Intentionality***

A strong belief and value system can give direction to the development of purpose. Buford (1995:139) sees the task of the student as defining who he is by creatively finding or learning a calling. Commitment is what gives moral depth and vitality to his life. This provides a solid referential framework that helps to anchor the sense of purpose. It lends context to what the student does.

The individual who develops the ability to set goals is usually able to select those that are most meaningful to him, thus motivating and energising him into seeing the fruition of those objectives. If the student believes that it is important to be authentic, understanding, honest, patient and hardworking, he will embody those values that give quality to purpose. Developing real purpose is the ability to move beyond one's interests and to look for principles and beliefs that underscore all that is good and meaningful. This is what gives the individual his sense of belonging, as important to the whole (Chickering & Reisser 1993:234).

#### **2.5.7 Vector Seven:            Developing integrity**

Integrity, the state of high principle, completeness and genuineness, is closely connected to the development of identity and purpose. Integrity develops as the student looks at his own

value system in an environment that may question his beliefs and assumptions. He will be faced with dilemmas that require him to think critically, reassess his referential framework and find ways to interpret complex situations. He may even have to rework his value system.

Chickering and Reisser (1993:264) note that the tertiary institution is an ideal setting for this experimentation and discovery. It plays an important role in initiating intellectual, cultural and social experiences, teaching principled moral thinking, aiding the discovery of truth, goodness and quality and encouraging the actualisation of personal ideals.

The new student arrives at the institution armed with a set of beliefs and basic values, assimilated from various quarters and life experiences with which he has had to deal. These form his resource base and referential framework. As he matures, he weighs up belief and behaviour, word and action, right and wrong. He is able to balance behaviour and belief, word and action, learning that each of his actions will affect others. In whatever he says and does, he has a responsibility to both himself and to others, remembering that all that he says and does should be ethically sound.

Integrity develops as his ideals, based on faith, reason or intuition, take on meaning for him. The adjusted value system will be his guide through the rough passages of life as well as good times, while keeping him cognisant of the fact that whatever he is striving for in life should contribute to the lives of those around him.

The vector of integrity development has three intertwined and overlapping phases that are explained below.

#### **2.5.7.1 *Humanising values***

The student needs to be open to alternative viewpoints, to consider them, make up his own mind and then act on those considerations. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991:271) established that there is a movement by the student during the tertiary education period towards greater social responsibility, altruism and humanitarianism, greater social, ethnic and racial tolerance. He is enabled to tune in to what is happening around him, within context.

Chickering (1993:245), in referring to Perry's theory of ethical development, views this rigid thinking as a dichotomous worldview that attributes meaning, either in right or wrong, good or bad mode. This is referred to as *dualism*. The student's thinking becomes insightful when he realises that previously held assumptions do not reflect the whole picture, and his thinking has to be adjusted in order to broaden the human experience. He realises that other people also have opinions and they may differ from his.

The humanising process may involve spiritual exploration, focused on the search for personal meaning. Confronted by dilemmas of conscience, he may emerge with either having discarded previously held dogmatic beliefs, or with a fresh realisation that his faith comes from within and not from an external authority. This process is on track when the student is able to move away from rigid thinking, is free to say what he feels, wants and sees, while concurrently showing care and concern for others. The humanising process indicates a balance or equilibrium between own interests and those of others.

#### **2.5.7.2 Personalising values**

Moving from a position of preconventional obedience to rules, conventional moral development sees the individual conforming to personal and social expectations. As he matures, he is involved in trying to fit a moral view with his own life experiences. He is constantly reassessing and redefining moral values or principles apart from the group or authority that upholds them. In what Kohlberg and Kramer (1969:101) refer to as post-conventional reasoning, the individual affirms the views and by making them his own, they become part of who he is. They are self-chosen, abstract, ethical principles upon which he bases his life.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991:343) suggest that there is a great deal of evidence to infer that the greatest change in a student's life is the movement from preconventional moral reasoning towards postconventional principled reasoning, where the rights and well-being of others become a consideration.

### **2.5.7.3 *Developing congruence***

When behaviour matches personalised values, congruence is achieved. Rogers (1961:339) sees this as the apex of personhood, where awareness and communication match experience. Erikson (1980:143) finds that integrity is the acceptance of people significant in one's life, for who they really are, and not for what one would like them to be. It is the realisation that one is responsible for one's own life and cannot lay the blame for any situation at another's feet. No one else can shoulder responsibility or take the blame for the way in which each of us chooses to function in life. Although the wish may be that life could have been different, the individual ultimately plots his own course and is the only one responsible for that course.

There are times when the student, knowing well what action should be taken in a situation, if inappropriate action is taken, incongruence will follow. Behaviour that is easier, more comfortable or self-protective is reverted to, followed by a hammering of conscience until the correct action is taken and equilibrium is restored. This requires courage as the conflict between what is done and what should be done can be difficult and risky.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991:365) see the tertiary institution as having a responsibility to provide a large range of social, intellectual and cultural experiences that will afford the student opportunities to develop principled, moral reasoning. They see the establishment of relationships with a great variety of divergent people as ideal arenas in which the student can affirm core values and beliefs, and thus develop congruence. It is thus within relationships that one has to make difficult decisions, where one is often faced with moral dilemmas and has to learn to balance one's own needs with those of another person.

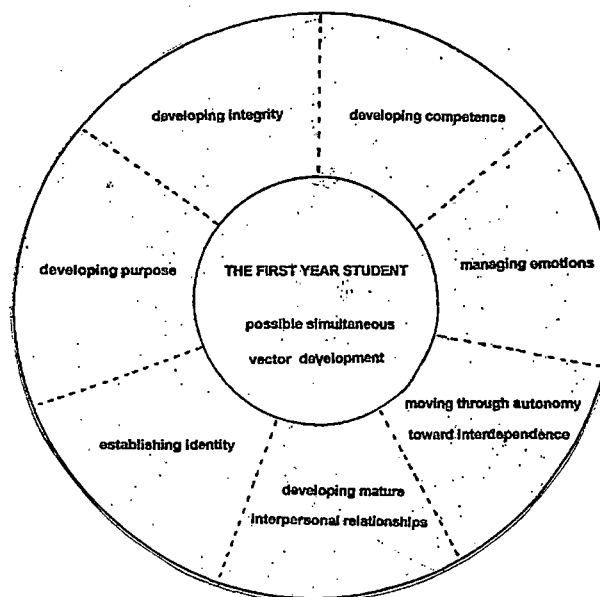
Achieving congruence and integrity is an ongoing process throughout life. It is one of constantly reworking what one believes and how one acts on those beliefs. This process can be arduous. Previously held assumptions and perceptions disintegrate when they are challenged by adverse times. Old support systems may disappear along the way and the individual has to seek and develop new sources.

In the pursuit of integrity, the student adjusts his own rigid viewpoints, becomes aware of how others interpret those beliefs, and is able to make a set of well thought out core values his own. These will serve as a springboard from which he will make his life decisions, on route to self-actualization, where these values contribute to the good of all and support him in difficult times.

In figure 2.1 the new student's development in all areas is illustrated. It shows that in order for the student to develop as a whole total being, all seven aspects of development need attention. These developmental vectors surround the student with no single vector being more important than the other. Movement along these vectors may occur simultaneously or at different times. The student is free to return and revisit any of the vectors at any time.

Development will continue through life and is not restricted to the college years. However, it is during the college or university years that the student may find the best opportunities for development if these opportunities are created and offered by the institution. It will be up to the student to decide whether or not to make full use of these opportunities, should a wide array be on offer. It must be borne in mind that in the ideal higher learning institution, these opportunities for holistic development would be part and parcel of various curricula, affording the student multiple occasions to become involved and engaged in the process of self-actualisation.

**Figure 2.1 The holistic development of the student**



## 2.6 CONCLUSION

Having examined the theory of student development that underlies the current research study, the chapter that follows concentrates on the different issues with which the new student must deal on reaching the institution of higher learning. What is examined are the issues encountered during the adjustment phase on entering the institution, the issues that promote performance and achievement, as well as those hindrances that encourage under achievement, failure and withdrawal and how they impact on the student as a holistic being.

Development of the whole student is more complex than one theory or even a cluster of theories can explain. We can only know in hindsight how our history will shape the future of student development, but for the sake of our students, we must help the academy recognize the value of the whole person concept.

Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito (1998)

## CHAPTER THREE

### ADJUSTMENT, PERFORMANCE AND UNDERACHIEVEMENT ISSUES

**Facing the challenge of living in a world of shrinking natural resources, we must maximise our human resources by focusing on the development of human potential in order to prepare our students to live effectively in a society of global and international social and economic interdependence.**

**Patricia King (1994)**

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The process of starting student life is a significant one, impacting on every sphere of existence. The experience may be positive or negative. Much of it is up to the student, while elements over which he has no control may surface. Many aspects of institutional life seem confusing. Learning to deal with the confusion, and getting used to a different pace, are all part of the adjustment process.

For the first year student who has recently completed high school, the transition from school to university or college is highly complex, a situation fraught with changes for which no one is really fully prepared. Gibbs (1992:15) looks at this transition in a positive light, commenting that although it is not the open door to a better life, it provides the student with the chance to learn and grow. This takes place within an environment that shelters, cares for and nurtures the student, while providing the opportunity to acquire knowledge.

Gibbs (1992:15) also warns that the individual needs to understand that he is back on the bottom rung of the ladder, having scaled the heights on leaving high school. He needs to be able to cope sufficiently with this position, as change and newness are going to be faced often during his lifetime. By becoming familiar with all the newness around him, he will manage to deal with, and the experience can prove to be a most fulfilling one.

In the following section, this adjustment phase will be examined in the light of the seven vectors of development in order to highlight the specific vectors that are problematic to student life as well as to illuminate other adjustment problems that have to be faced by the student.

## **3.2 FIRST YEAR STUDENT ADJUSTMENT ISSUES**

### **3.2.1 Introduction**

The first year of study is seen as a crucial one, one that rarely runs smoothly (Gibbs 1992:20; Erickson & Strommer 1991:24). It is a year of fun and excitement, yet also one of extreme academic, social and peer pressure. It is the year where ideas, lasting attitudes and values are established. It is the start of opportunities for growth as the student faces complex situations without the support and assistance of parents and family.

The student may find himself in a new home, surrounded by new responsibilities and new people, having to take decisions on his own without family support. He has to face life on his own. The newfound freedom that he suddenly has at his disposal can pose problems. Making the adjustment to university or college life is exciting but tough. Gibbs (1992:19) stresses the student's responsibility and accountability in that he will not be spoon-fed, but rather left to his own devices when in the classroom. It is the responsibility of the student to get down to his studies on his own.

He needs to realise that he does not have to be perfect. In whatever he sets out to accomplish, the pleasure will come from knowing that he had done his best. Striving for excellence is a sound academic principle, which requires persistence and determination.

The changes that the student faces during this adjustment phase concern the student, as well as other people. Earwaker (1992:26) comments that the parent has to learn to relinquish control. As the student becomes independent, the academic community and the social communities need to be aware of this transition, and allow him rite of passage by providing opportunities wherein he feels that he belongs, and is therefore willing to participate (Schlossberg 1989:11).

Some of the most important adjustment issues will be discussed in the section that follows. The issues will be discussed in light of the seven vectors of development, where applicable.

### **3.2.2 Competency issues (Vector 1)**

A large number of problems that confront the new student are those that belong in the



academic arena, where thinking, writing and study competencies are developed and honed. Raaheim (1991:53) comments that the new student usually takes some time before settling into the academic arena and begin his studies.

In a study completed at the University Cape Town some twenty years ago, Honikman (1982:248) revealed problem areas to be study skills, subject-specific perceptions and communication skills that included language competence. In the classroom, learning to cope with various teaching styles and learning procedures can be highly problematic. Lecturer contact is vastly different to high school teacher contact in that the teacher is far more involved in the life of the learner, and may be the one to extrinsically motivate the learner. At university however, the student has to get used to the fact that intense personal involvement on the part of the educator will no longer be the case. What is to be noted is that many of the problems examined more than twenty years ago in South Africa, may, through the current research study, be revealed to be present still.

### **3.2.2.1 *Time management***

The ability to balance activities, or structure the right balance of activities, is crucial for the new student. Managing time is probably the most difficult task faced by the first year student. Compared to high school, there appears to be an inordinate amount of free time. (Gibbs 1992:15; Erickson & Strommer 1991:35) How the student uses that time is tantamount to successful integration and academic involvement. The large amount of work, with projects and essays to be handed in, can be highly problematic. No longer being paced and checked by the high school teacher, the student is left on his own, having to learn how to pace his reading, writing of essays and time in and out of class. Lack of time management results in panic, late nights, continuous tiredness and ill health.

### **3.2.2.2 *Teaching style as an aid to understanding***

The style of instruction that occurs at university can differ vastly from that which was familiar in high school. The new student arrives at the institution of higher learning having spent at least twelve years in classrooms where his teachers have assisted him in the comprehension of subject matter in a fairly personal way. At university, he will be lectured to, and Honikman (1982:250) reports that some academic staff members were at a loss as to how to improve their teaching methodologies when problems surfaced in their

classrooms. Fieldwork data showed that even experienced academics were unaware of basic educational principles and communication skills. What was also seen was inadequate preparation for lectures, poor feedback to students, much time taken to mark assignments, and a lack of caring. All of the aforementioned may play havoc with the way in which the student understands the learning material, these factors affecting his overall academic outcome.

### **3.2.2.3 Language**

Honikman (1982:251) identified a lack of confidence in those students whose mother tongue was not English, where English was the medium of instruction. These students were often scared to ask questions in class and afraid to join group discussions. Some resorted to staying away from class and tried to work on their own. The issue of language is of extreme interest in the current research study as, although the medium of teaching is English, it is certainly not the mother tongue or even a second language of the greater majority of the student body.

### **3.2.2.4 Poor course and institution choice**

Choosing the right course at the right institution may turn out to be a major headache. Many students have scant knowledge of the field that has been selected. Other students have virtually no knowledge, supported by the most fragile of reasons for having chosen a specific direction of study. Most students, by the time they get into their fifth or sixth week of study, will have a fairly good idea as to whether or not they are happy at the institution of their choice and the course of their choosing. Many take a much longer period of time to decide whether or not the choice of course is what they hoped it would be (Jones, Siraj-Blatchford & Ashcroft 1997:57; Erickson & Strommer 1991:32). For some, it may mean dropping out, or transferring to another institution. For others, it may mean staying in the course without any real commitment or interest.

Many arrive at the institution with great expectations, including such that life will be exciting, challenging and rewarding, only to find that these expectations are not all met (Erickson & Strommer 1991:30). Academic life may turn out to be predictable, routine and boring. The student needs help in developing realistic and appropriate expectations. The bigger the gap between what is expected and what actually occurs, the more stress can be expected.

### **3.2.2.5 Study habits**

The advice from numerous student development practitioners for the student is to develop sound study habits right from the start of the first term. Researchers point out that the establishment of sound study habits is the forerunner of academic success (Classen 1987: 22; Jewler & Gardner 1987:77; Al-Hilawani & Sartawi 1997:557; Ting, Grant & Plenert 2000: 356; McKenzie & Schweitzer 2001: 22).

### **3.2.3 Emotional issues (Vector 2)**

Paul and Brier (2001:77) and Rana (2000:68) note that the movement away from home, and by consequence being separated from one's family, often triggers feelings of homesickness that cover a range of experiences. These feelings have been found to correlate with poor academic achievement, depression and anxiety (Fisher & Hood in Paul & Brier 2001:78).

The student may feel anxious when he senses that faculty members are not concerned about him (Raaheim, Wankowski & Radford 1991:49). This may be real or imagined, but the effect is the same. He feels that he is not seen as a person, that he is just a number on a class list and that the lecturer is not interested in him as a person, or in his development. This may lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety and helplessness. The advice from numerous student development practitioners for the student is to develop sound study habits right from the start of the first term. A number of students feel alienated on campus, cut off from lecturers, administration and fellow students (Honikman 1982:258). They report lack of motivation, loneliness and depression.

Wintre and Yaffe (2000:31) stress the importance of maintaining student psychological well-being. They note that the new student is at risk of negative reactions to stress, as well as depressive symptomology that could prove injurious to academic performance and general well-being.

### **3.2.4 Independence issues (Vector 3)**

Greeley and Tinsley (1988:519) found that separation from parents, management of the anxiety of being alone, and making independent decisions were the biggest problems faced by the new student. As mentioned earlier, leaving home and all the relationships of one's

childhood can be traumatic for many (Erickson & Strommer 1991:34). Homesickness can be extremely painful. In a recent study, Paul and Brier (2001:84) suggest that starting life at university is, for many students, a major social network upheaval. Although new friendships are made, those old ones will never be the same, and distress is felt in the form of loss. The student grieves and experience what Paul and Brier aptly refer to as "*friendsickness*".

Resulting from this state of *friendsickness* are feelings of loneliness, a decreased sense of competence as a friend, an inability to make and retain trustworthy friends, and distress as a result of unrealistic expectations of the transition phase. This can be a huge testing period for the new student as he comes to terms with his new social and academic positions.

### **3.2.5 Interpersonal and relationship issues (Vector 4)**

Earwaker (1992:28) makes the point that the new student experience is primarily a psychosocial one, one that is shared within a subgroup and either facilitated or hindered by that group. The student may experience loneliness, which could be exacerbated by the fact that he is in a group that is constantly looking over its shoulder and comparing itself with the way in which others are coping. This can make matters either better or worse for the individual student.

The student also needs to accept that not everyone will like him or find him fascinating, yet there are students on campus who will be ready to make friends and accept him for who he is. Often risks have to be taken in order to make new acquaintances, and these risks can add value to the educational and development experience (Gibbs 1992:25).

Social adjustment requires that the student be able to move in and out of social situations, knowing what is required in order to continue in those situations and to make them successful. Earwaker (1992:30) explains that successful social adjustment is the ability to accurately assess what is required in order to continue a situation, what has to be done to prolong it, thereby turning the student into the kind of individual that the situation demands. The manner in which students adjust and relate to each other, and to the various institutional organisations has a great influence on their general well-being (Honikman 1982:254). The peer group has the ability to influence independence, support or impede

academic achievement, change or reinforce values and provide emotional support (Upcraft, Finney & Garland 1984:10).

For the student having to live away from home, life in a residence that provides a ready-made community of peers. Residential life may affect the student in a number of ways. Chickering and Reisser (1993:399) point out that most of the changes in the student's attitudes, values, intellectual pursuits and career plans take place between registration and the end of the second year. This is the period when new referential groups and relationships are found. This is echoed by Astin (1984:302), who recognises that the student, fortunate in gaining a place in a residence, has a far better chance at identifying with, and attaching to, student life than does the commuting student.

For the student who is not as fortunate, suitable accommodation or lack thereof may bring troubles of its own (Jones, Siraj-Blatchford & Ashcroft 1997:48). In the study completed by Honikman (1982:245), students without fixed living accommodation were found to be sleeping on railway platforms and slipping into university classrooms after hours. Shortage of accommodation, with all its concomitant problems, is still present today.

Feelings of loneliness and alienation were reported by students in the University of Cape Town study living in environments that were unsupportive of optimum development thereby possibly affecting academic performance (Honikman 1982:247). Students living far from the institution may experience financial problems in obtaining transport to and from the institution. A great deal of time is spent in commuting, reducing the possibility of establishing a wide network of relationships with peers, as well as involvement in institutional activities.

### **3.2.6 Identity issues (Vector 5)**

Upcraft, Finney and Garland (1984:13) and Arnold and King (1997) attribute transition adjustment to dealing with the problem of obtaining a clearer identity. The student needs to develop a better sense of who he is, and where he fits in. The institutional environment in which the new student finds himself will affect his student identity as he attempts to integrate fully into both the academic and social systems. The movement can be assisted by the student understanding himself within a cultural and historic context, and by gaining

access to culturally specific activities, groups and knowledge, as well as to opportunities to develop in those spheres.

Kuh (1993:26) notes that every campus offers cultural properties that will either inhibit or encourage student involvement. De Sousa and Kuh (1996:264) find that black students in America have a better chance of adjusting and graduating if they attend a traditionally black university. They interpret this phenomenon as being due to an environment that is supportive, and which fosters persistence and success.

Also considering racial identity, Neville, Heppner and Wang (1997:304) examining the relations amongst black racial identity attitudes, stressors and coping styles, find that a greater comfortableness with one's racial identity is related to lower identification of stressors. Of note, however, is increased recognition of racial insensitivity, a heightened awareness of one's race and culture, which can be viewed as stressful, especially for the new student who may be encountering these issues for the first time (Neville, Heppner & Wang 1997:309).

Healthy gender identity is another facet of adjustment with which the new student has to deal. Good and Wood (1995:72) found that male students with high levels of male gender role conflict were at an increased risk of depression and were unwilling to find help. Trying to live up to unattainable expectations of traditional gender roles may harm psychological wellness.

Being able to identify oneself as gay, lesbian or bisexual within the social matrix of an institution where heterosexuality is the norm, can be a most distressing period for a student (Cass 1979:220; Erikson & Strommer 1991:40)). Hostility and homophobic behaviour may be directed at him. The gay student needs to develop an integrated, positive homosexual identity where the need to disclose and affiliate oneself to a community that will value and appreciate him, is tantamount for psychological wellness and successful academic involvement.

### **3.2.7 Goal and commitment issues (Vectors 6 and 7)**

Stark, Shaw and Lowther (1989:40) note that the new student often arrives at college with very poorly defined goals because he lacks focused self-knowledge. Conversely, Raaheim,

et al (1991:17) found that the new student with a clear picture of his future career will adapt better and is more likely to be successful. As the student settles down and adjusts to the new environment, he has to be assisted in establishing effective goals, while learning to commit to them. In the classroom the student may find that goals are imposed by staff members while parents or peers may impose demands on other fronts.

Magen (1998:55) remarks that the adolescent will define a goal for himself that he considers to be worthy, and for which he will strive, a goal worthy of his further exploration. The adjustment that he needs to make is setting his own goals that, although consistent with societal norms, will show his individuality. Alongside identity adjustment and development, the new student has to learn to commit himself to his goals for study, his future occupation or a relationship. Unfortunately, not all students arrive at the institution with clear, well thought out goals to which they ultimately can, will or wish to commit.

### **3.2.8 Institutional issues**

Some other issues have been identified as being problematic for the new student that although they do not fit into the seven vector model of student development as do the above mentioned points, affect the different developmental directions in which the student will move, and will therefore be briefly discussed in the section that follows.

#### **3.2.8.1 *Institutional policy***

The twenty-year old study that examined problems encountered by first year South African university students, cites institutional policy as being problematic (Honikman 1982:241). The entrance requirement of a matriculation exemption certificate, the only available measure of academic readiness, was found to be highly inadequate. Although the student certified as having attained a certain level of academic prowess was in reality found to be ill-prepared for academic engagement at tertiary level. Failure and dropout thus ensued.

Current policies of selection testing and placement at some South African institutions of higher learning can currently be viewed in a similar light. Today, all tertiary education institutions in South Africa are open to all prospective students. Where selection testing takes place, the student who is fortunate enough to be selected may be seen by some people as the direct result of using a tool that is restrictive and discriminatory. This tool can

be manipulated to select only those students who reflect a certain profile, thus capturing one learner at the expense of another, who, although he may be underprepared for tertiary education, and may not have English as his mother tongue, should be afforded an opportunity to realise his potential.

### **3.2.8.2 Bureaucratic red tape**

Another area that causes concern for many students is the mountain of bureaucratic red tape at the start of the academic year. Weak interdepartmental co-ordination results in students not knowing whether bursaries have been awarded until well into the year. The lack of smooth running and inter-departmental co-ordination is seen to cause anxiety and insecurity (Earwaker 1992:9; Jones, Siraj-Blatchford & Ashcroft 1997:55).

Upcraft et al (1984:10) suggest that not all students are affected by the transition phase. Some students are more susceptible, while others are resilient or immune to the new environment. It should be borne in mind that not only is the student affected by the environment, but that the student can change the environment.

## **3.3 PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT**

### **3.3.1 Introduction**

The word "*performance*" is usually associated with accomplishment or achievement. In the educational world, it can refer to the execution, carrying out or completion of academic tasks that are necessary in order to meet the criteria for obtaining a qualification (Delvare 1995:31). One of the meanings of the word "*performance*" offered by McLeod and Hanks (1985:841) is "*the manner or quality of functioning*".

In the light of the theoretical approach to this study, the researcher looks at performance interchangeably with achievement, noting that it is not only applicable to academic functioning, but is applied to a wider context. The development of the student as a holistic entity must include all facets, namely academic, social, relational, emotional, spiritual and physical.



Looking at all the adjustments that the new student has to make, the being focused upon is that of academic adjustment. From experience, the researcher notes that although it is academic achievement that is highly desired by students, in reality, what is continually requested, are academic survival tools.

McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001:22) comment that the growing diversity in the student population brings with it the challenge to cater for the various needs and academic potential of the dynamic and heterogeneous group that typifies higher education. With the differences in cultural and social backgrounds, and varying educational levels and requirements, comes the call to afford each student an equal chance of success by offering support and help.

A great deal of research has been completed on this front for many decades, especially in the area of achievement prediction and enhancement. What follows is an examination of what can predict academic success, and what variables can enhance achievement. Both academic variables and non-academic variables will be studied.

### **3.3.2 Academic variables in performance and achievement**

A great deal of research has gone into examining academic performance or achievement, and the specific factors that can enhance academic success. The attainment of academic competency is part of the first vector of development, and a number of honed skills are necessary if success is to be sought. Jewler and Gardner (1987:182) comment that academic excellence is more than the sum of innate intelligence and hard work. It encompasses a host of factors that contribute to success, some of which will be discussed in the section that follows.

#### **3.3.2.1 Previous performance and selection tests**

The traditional academic predictors of success appear to be grade average and high school ranking, as well as admissions tests (Holder & Wankowski 1980:70; Willingham 1985:81,175; Mouw & Khanna 1993:333). Willingham points to the positive correlation between accomplishment at high school and that of higher education. Good writing and creative talent in high school predicts good grades in higher education (Holland 1961:146). High school physical achievement predicts physical achievement in college, while

leadership at school and within the community is systematically related to success of leadership in college. He sums it up by using the maxim: *"Past behaviour best predicts future behaviour"*.

Research demonstrates that the high school student's end-of-school assessment score used to predict university performance at first year level correlates favourably with achievement at that level, depending on the direction of study (Classen 1987:180; Dickson, Fleet & Watt 2000:60; Rau & Durand 2000:23). A good predictor of success is seen in the end-of-school scores, and those students who enter science and engineering courses. A weaker link is identified between end-of-school scores and those following law, the social sciences and the humanities.

### **3.3.2.2 Study habits and cognitive abilities**

A number of researchers point out that study habits and skills have been found to influence academic performance (Classen 1987:22; Jewler & Gardner 1987:77; Al-Hilawani & Sartawi 1997:537; Ting, Grant & Plenert 2000:353; McKenzie & Schweitzer 2001:22).

There does not seem to be one set of study procedures that will ensure success. Rather than looking at the different components of sound study habits, the pattern of learning appears to be the key to success. Habits and skills that are necessary are those that are the "knowing, how to know and what to know" practices (Classen 1987:23; Erickson & Strommer 1991:31, 205; Al-Hilawani & Sartawi 1997:543; Wood, Motz & Willoughby 1998:698). Fortunate is the student who has been taught at high school to look at the intention of the learning material, which is deep level learning, rather than rote learning or surface learning.

In a study that integrated study skills and non-cognitive variables such as psychological, social and cultural factors as determinants of academic success, various groups were organised to focus on themes that made use of structured exercises, readings, homework assignments and contracts (Ting, Grant & Plenert 2000:353). These students were identified as displaying improved study skills, while their academic performance levels also improved. This study was successfully replicated in further settings with comparable results.

Al-Hilawani and Sartawi (1997:537) identify two sets of tasks that comprise study habits. One is the short-range task set, which includes working regularly on a daily basis, reviewing class notes, finishing assignments, checking for understanding and preparing for classes in advance. The second is the long-range task set, which includes writing essays and assignments and preparing for tests and examinations.

The conclusion reached from the above research study is that the students who had high grade scores, had better study habits. The researchers conclude that the student's grade point average is therefore a good indicator of academic success (Al-Hilawani & Sartawi 1997:542). However, it may be that the academically successful student makes use of study skills in an extemporaneous and adept fashion. The competencies necessary for optimum learning are:

- the acquisition of information;
- recording appropriate responses to that information;
- identifying central issues and assumptions in arguments;
- recognising important relationships;
- making correct inferences from data;
- deducing and interpreting conclusions (Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella & Nora 1995:24);
- locating the required information, organising and managing activities efficiently;
- synthesising information to create meaningful patterns of responses;
- memorising and retrieving information on demand (Hoover in Al-Hilawani & Sartawi 1997:543; Mukhopadhyay & Basu 1997:42).

### **3.3.2.3 Reading ability**

There is evidence, gathered through studies of adult readers, which suggests that an individual's perception of how he reads will affect his reading behaviour (Smith 1990:50). Reading fluency, speed and comprehension play a vital role in the life of each student. His academic success is dependent upon his ability to find the main idea and to use his analytical skills in order to improve study efficiency (Saumell, Hughes & Lopate 1999:131).

Bintz (1997:13) comments on the 1994 National Assessment of Education Process findings in the USA, which investigated reading problems experienced at high school level, and the

consequent impact on the student when he reaches tertiary education level. Some of these problems are:

- interest in books decreases as students advance through school;
- a slight decline in reading skills of 12<sup>th</sup> graders;
- more than 33 % of 12<sup>th</sup> graders scores only proficient level;
- fewer than 5 % of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reach an advanced reading level;
- at least 30 % of 12<sup>th</sup> graders fail to reach a basic reading skills level.

Achievement can be enhanced when the student becomes aware of his attitude towards learning in general, and realises that he can change both his attitude and behaviour. Mealey (1990:599) recognises that motivation to learn, or to read more effectively, can be increased when the student exerts a certain amount of quality effort and energy, and persists with the task when he tastes success and when he believes in his ability to cope with a particular situation. Motivation is seen as a key predictor of academic performance.

Thus, the student needs to know how to read effectively in order to learn successfully, as well as being able to use metacognitive strategies in any academic situation. Metacognitive capabilities enable the student to understand how to control his own learning and achievement. It entails self-monitoring his comprehension as he proceeds, and to become aware of when he is experiencing difficulty with academic material, while knowing what action to use in order to remedy the situation (Mealey 1990:600; Pressley 1995:207; Boekaerts 1997:165). When shown how to improve achievement, the student feels that any effort that he may make will make a difference, and that he has control over his learning and that the learning situation does not control him.

#### **3.3.2.4 *Time management***

Knowing how to manage time efficiently as a student is tantamount to success (Astin 1984:301; Jewler & Gardner 1987:78; Britton & Tesser 1991:405; Grayson & Meilman 1992:25; Al-Hilawani & Sartawi 1997:539). As a predictor of academic success, the amount of physical and psychological time that is expended is very important (Astin 1984:297). The student will invest time in two ways. Firstly, he will invest in highly specific objects such as daily preparation or preparation for an examination. Secondly, he will invest in a general object such as the whole student experience. Both will require efficient time utilisation. No

two students will invest the same amount of time in the same objects or processes at the same time. Involvement therefore occurs along a continuum.

The involvement in his studies, for example, is both quantitative (number of hours spent studying) and qualitative (is learning taking place at a deep level?). The quality and the quantity of involvement by the student are directly proportional to the amount of learning and personal development that takes place. It makes good sense for the institution to concentrate on student involvement and quality time spent on academic pursuits in order to aid academic success (Astin 1985:136).

Of note is the highly involved, successful student who expends a good deal of energy studying efficiently, the student who will spend a lot of time on campus in student organisations and frequently interacting with faculty. His overall level of satisfaction with his studies and the institution will be positive, except for student friendships (Astin 1984:304). Although getting to class is viewed as a sound work ethic, class attendance is viewed by Al-Hilawani and Sartawi (1997:538) as involving the sound management of time.

### **3.3.2.5 *Learning and teaching style***

The goal of the educational institution should be to facilitate student success, and one way is to understand the different ways in which the student processes information. Learning style is an undeviating manner of responding to and the uses of behaviours. It is this set of behaviours that comprises the individual's learning style, varying from student to student and regulating individual learning in higher education (Vermunt 1996:45).

Learning styles research shows that individual differences impact on academic achievement and appear to be important factors when predicting academic achievement (Ting, Grant & Plenert 2000:353). These differences can be explained in terms of biological, personal, cultural and emotional factors and learning style is used in recognising these individual differences (Drysdale, Ross & Schulz 2001:273). If the student is aware of his learning preferences, and finds that he is taught in another style, he can then stretch his preference and learn to operate within an unnatural learning style mode in order to succeed at the task (Drysdale, Ross & Schulz 2001:287).

Learning conditions in high school differ from those at university. Success will depend not only on the student's individual characteristics, as well as on the teaching effectiveness of lecturers, but also on how the material is presented and the manner in which the student is able to process it. Lecturers who develop their teaching skills and show organisation, preparation, instructional skill and clarity will have a positive effect on their students (Feldman 1989:583; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn & Braxton 1996:8; Braxton, Bray & Berger 2000:222).

Also commenting on teaching methodology, Astin (1985:163) and Wankowski (in Raaheim, Wankowski & Radford 1991:119) both remark that, generally speaking, faculty members have very little pedagogical and mentorship training. It is generally assumed that they know how to teach. Upgrading and refining those skills could result in their being able to teach students with more confidence and effect.

Kuh (1992:357) remarks that learning-centred faculty members view the student as a companion rather than an empty vessel to be filled. They have high expectations for the performance of all of their students, not just a selected few. They expect the students to use other learning resources, to use library texts to augment their class notes, to integrate classroom learning with out-of-class experiences, and are willing to invest themselves in the development of their students.

#### **3.3.2.6. *Student-faculty interaction***

Schlossberg's (1989:11) theory of mattering and marginality comes into play when she refers to the student as being more willing to become involved and focused on learning when he feels that he is of consequence to someone, such as a staff member who takes a personal interest in him.

Astin (1985:162) feels that there are other factors that affect academic excellence. He shows that the design and implementation of curricula that are both relevant and interesting to the student will engage and involve him in academic pursuit. The best way to involve the student in learning and campus life is to make the most of student-faculty contact. It is of utmost importance to develop sound student-staff relationships, both in and out of the classroom (Astin 1984:304; Terenzini, Theophilides & Lorang 1984:634; O'Keefe & Berger 1993:269).

In a study conducted by Isroff and Sodato (in Brown, Armstrong & Thompson 1998:79) a group in an intensive, residential summer school programme had continuous contact with academic staff. They were immersed in an extremely demanding academic programme, and by consequence were afforded a great deal of staff attention. The results were very pleasing, showing that these students were self-motivated most of the time and less reliant on staff than before. This had a strong enabling effect on the student.

### **3.3.2.7 Academic climate, setting and ethic**

For the student, involvement in the campus environment and out-of-class experiences correlate positively with both academic and affective growth (Pascarella & Terenzini 1980:72; Astin 1996:126). Studies (Erickson & Strommer 1991:44; Graham & Gisi 2000:279) have shown that a college climate supportive of learning fosters both intellectual and personal development. The closer the demands of the educational situation fit the values of the student, the more likely it is that the student will live up to his potential.

From the point of the current study, educating the whole person is both desirable and necessary. The aim should be to promote increased self-understanding, expand personal, cultural, social and intellectual horizons, develop ethical and moral standards and prepare the student to take his place in the world of work and in society (Pascarella & Terenzini 1991:620).

The social environment or *milieu* in which the student finds himself is of great importance according to France and Beaty (in Brown, Armstrong & Thompson, 1998:119). The student comes to the university or college with his own orientations. He meets with peer group pressure within the educational environment of the institution, and within the context of yet a wider socio-political climate. For education to be truly meaningful, it should afford the student a chance to achieve success, while taking his orientations and the present contextual layers within which he must operate, into consideration.

A significant and meaningful relationship exists between methodical, disciplined study and academic performance. Rau and Durand (2000:30) investigated student academic ethic by identifying a coherent set of behaviours, differentiating diligent students who see academic work as a calling, from those who do not. It appears from their findings, that the students

with a strong academic locus of control, who stay sober and work in a disciplined fashion every day, are far more likely to be successful than those who do not possess these traits.

Rau and Durand (2000:24) posit that the academic ethic is not a natural one as few achieve this level. They feel that the academic ethic is a learned behaviour, most frequently found in students from families with a strong work ethic as well as strong religious or ethical values. Strong work ethic and spiritual values findings is backed by Kuh, Schuh & Whitt (1991:50) and Kuh (1995:142). Parents, teachers and peers are the socialising agents for the academic ethic, the resulting behaviours of which help to produce attitudes, norms and habits that support these behaviours. It is only through daily practice that the student becomes good at being able to study successfully, thus ensuring academic success.

### **3.3.3 Psychosocial variables that affect performance and achievement**

Various psychological or social factors come into play, which influence the student's performance and achievement. What follows is a discussion of some of these factors, which either influence or impede performance and achievement.

#### **3.3.3.1 *Motivation***

Numerous researchers (Pascarella & Terenzini 1991:624; Pintrich, Smith, Garcia & McKeachie 1993:812; Pintrich & Garcia 1994:121) note that personal motivation has an implication for academic success.

Tremblay, Gardner and Heipel (2000:40), in a study investigating a number of variables that are thought to influence first year undergraduate academic achievement, attitudes towards courses, anxiety levels and motivational intensity, were measured. Previous academic performance measures in two related courses were also taken into account. What was found was that motivation develops and influences achievement. The student's attitude towards the professor had a positive influence on motivational intensity, which, in its turn, had a positive effect on achievement in the final examination. The person doing the teaching can make a difference in that he or she can influence feelings and attitudes towards a specific subject, thus changing motivational levels for the good. The lecturer can thus be the external or extrinsic motivational force.



While external motivation, possibly spurring the student on to success, is important, the factor that contributes far more positively to academic success is the intrinsic motivational force labeled "*persistence*" by Mukhopadhyay and Basu (1997:43). They see perseverance as ongoing motivation to engage in the educational task, even when external incentives have been removed. The student may encounter frustration along the way, yet frustration *per se* will not deter him. He may experience frustration for some length of time, but will keep moving towards his goal, albeit slowly.

Mealey (1990:598), Ames (1992:262) and Grayson and Meilman (1992:25) echo the above sentiment. Success breeds success. The student who tastes it will be driven to repeat the experience. By breaking the tasks down into small manageable pieces, first tackling one aspect and completing it will then lessen frustration. The mark of a successful student is:

- one who is prepared to persist when confronted by obstacles;
- one who has chosen his own course of study, not through family pressure;
- one who has confidence in himself and his abilities;
- one who is able to recognise other factors that may be problematic.

Lindgren (1969:5) and Braten and Olaussen (2000:178) note that there are many students who are not intrinsically motivated, and yet they are highly successful. The success that is experienced is successful completion of requirements and the ultimate process of graduation. The student should see his current studies as instrumental in attaining desirable consequences, such as approval and praise, or avoidance of criticism from the self or others.

Lindgren (1969:5) comments that in working mainly to please others comes at a heavy psychological cost in that work done to satisfy others is much more banal and frustrating than work done to satisfy one's own motives. The student who is intrinsically motivated will work on tasks because he finds them interesting, exciting and enjoyable (Braten & Olaussen 2000:178).

Erickson and Strommer (1991:33) point out that academic life can be predictable, boring and often dull. The accompanying feelings of frustration that are not always apparent will emerge at some stage in the form of physical complaints. These could present as

depression and irritability, restlessness and tension, as well as deteriorating relations with friends and family.

### **3.3.3.2 Goal-setting**

The ability to set goals, and to then follow through, is an important antecedent of academic achievement. Goal setting has been mentioned in detail in section 3.2.7 and has been examined by numerous researchers (Lindgren 1969:5; Raaheim et al 1991:59; Harackiewicz & Elliot 1993:904; O'Keefe & Berger 1993:264; Archer 1994:443; Schutz 1994:150; Zimmerman & Risemberg 1994:252; Harackiewicz, Barron & Tauer 2000:316).

Academic success is not the automatic result of the ability to set goals, although it does provide direction. Achievement will result if the student sets goals and then develops strategies, plans and self-efficacy beliefs, and is afforded the opportunity to work within a facilitatory setting (Schutz 1994:150).

In a study investigating the long-term effect of achievement goals on academic performance, Harackiewicz et al (2000:328) provide evidence that mastery and performance goals have positive and complimentary consequences for motivation and performance in college courses, both in the short and long term. Mastery goals are self-referential and focus on learning and developing skills. As an indicator of success, mastery goals can predict interest in introductory courses, but do not predict successful performance. Performance goals are normative in nature and focus on demonstrating competence. These goals are found to predict successful performance in introductory courses, but do not predict interest. The positive potential of both types of achievement goals in predicting successful academic outcomes is noteworthy.

Pintrich and Garcia (1994:121) feel that the student who makes use of some deep-processing strategies such as elaboration and organisation, and is, academically speaking, controlling behaviour and cognition by means of thorough planning, monitoring and regulating the strategies, more likely to perform better.

The student has to choose a path along which to move in order to reach the set goal. Along the way, various skills and experiences are absorbed that enhance the student's chances of

goal attainment. Jewler and Gardner (1987:183) list McHolland's criteria for worthwhile goal setting. The student needs the following:

- to make sure that the goal is achievable, and that he has the necessary resources, skills and abilities to ensure success;
- to ensure that the goal is realistic and believable;
- to want to achieve it, as satisfaction and pleasure are positive outcomes;
- to focus on the goal that has its own clear focus, and to stick to the decision taken;
- to ensure that no person will be injured in the process;
- to motivate himself to achieve the goal;
- to understand that the goal fits his personal value system and that goal-attainment will make a difference;
- to set a target date for achievement.

### **3.3.3.3 Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy refers to the belief that the student has concerning his capabilities to learn and behave at specific levels. The role of self-efficacy in achievement is supported by much research. The idea that it has the power to affect actions that are related to achievement, self-efficacy is the driving force behind task initiation, its direction, determination to complete the task and its outcome. A number of studies underscore the fact that self-efficacy can influence academic motivation, learning and achievement (Zimmerman & Risemberg 1994:252; Bandura 1993:117; Bandura 1997:11; McKenzie & Schweitzer 2001:23; Pintrich & Zusho 2001:250; Schunk & Pajares 2002:15).

Grounded in social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is influenced by conditions and actions affecting the student's behaviours and the environments with which he interacts. Bandura (1993:83) explains that self-efficacy therefore affects the choice of task, the amount of effort invested in the task, the ability to persist with the task, thus affecting the ultimate achievement. Mastery of a difficult task has the capacity of sending new efficacy messages to the student, which heightens belief in his own capabilities.

Achievement or accomplishment is never affected by one factor alone. Performance factors facilitating or impeding achievement occur within a group, and include the circumstance

within which the performance takes place, people who are able to assist, adequate resources or apparatus, as well as situational hindrances.

Schunk and Pajares, (2002:22) illustrate the above-mentioned concept in Table 3.1. The table shows that the individual student arrives at an activity with his own level of self-efficacy due to previous experiences, his own abilities and disposition, as well as support and resources available from others.

	Pre-task	Task engagement	Post-task
Personal qualities		Personal influences	Motivation
Prior experience	Self-efficacy		
Social support		Situational influences	Self-efficacy

Schunk and Pajares in Wigfield and Eccles (2002:22)

As the student moves through the task, he will be affected by his own personal influences, such as the way in which he sets goals and is able to process information. He will also be affected by situational influences, such as marks, comments and lecturer feedback (Schunk & Pajares 2002:23). Both the personal and situational influences give him an idea of how well he is performing. Motivation and self-efficacy are heightened when he gets the message that he is performing well, or a skill is in the process of becoming well-honed, underscoring the adage that "*success breeds success*".

#### 3.3.3.4 Wellness

In a study conducted by Mukhopadhyay and Basu (1997:41), predictors of achievement at university were investigated. Five clusters emerged, which comprised the intellectual factor, educational adjustment, personality integration, persistence and good health. Although the academic element emerged as the strongest predictor of academic achievement, Mukhopadhyay and Basu (1997:43) noted that good mental health, as well as physical health, emerged as predictors of academic success. A sound mind residing in a sound body is required for knowledge acquisition and output.

Wankowski et al (1991:60) looked into students' learning habits, attitude towards the teaching situation, and earlier levels of formal education with the object of relating the

various factors to academic achievement. The basic assumptions at the start of the study were that academic achievement is fostered when:

- the student brings efficient learning habits acquired in high school to the university context;
- the learning and teaching conditions are as satisfying as those he encountered at high school;
- the conditions of learning and teaching are similar, familiar, clear and more or less meet his expectations;
- the student is able to adopt new and efficacious ways of dealing with university teaching conditions.

The general inferences drawn from a survey (Raaheim et al 1991:61) suggest that success may tend to be associated with psychological wellness, as seen in the following factors:

- personal confidence and a feeling of competence in learning;
- hopeful but realistic projection into roles within the world of work and society;
- emotional stability;
- a temperament that tends towards introversion;
- relative autonomy from teaching staff;
- an understanding and acceptance of the demands that will be placed on him by both the curricula and self study activities.

Trockel, Barnes and Egget (2000:129), in a study analysing the effect of various health behaviours and health-related variables, found that the only variable seen to have a significant relationship to higher grade point average achievement was sleep habits. Other variables in the study need further investigation, but are useful in promoting a holistic approach to student wellness in terms of academic achievement. To be promoted is the use of a time management planner, such as a daily diary or timetable, the practice of eating breakfast on a daily basis and the changing of behaviour that could be potentially harmful to the general well-being of the student, such as the consumption of a great deal of alcohol and/or coffee.

There are a number of other factors that contribute to performance achievement that, for the sake of brevity in the study, will only be listed:

- academic self-concept (White & Sedlacek 1986; Britt & Kim 1996);
- attitude and ambition (Holder & Wankowski 1980; Mukhophyay & Basu 1997);
- financial situation (Britt & Kim 1996);
- employment (Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling 1996; McKenzie & Schweitzer 2001);
- personality (Lathey 1991; Rothstein, Paunonen, Rush & King 1994; Wolfe & Johnson 1995; Sanchez, Rejano & Rodriguez 2001);
- living arrangements (Moos & Otto 1975; Moos & Lee 1979);
- career orientation (McKenzie & Schweitzer 2001);
- attitude (Raaheim et al 1991; Tremblay, Gardner & Heipel 2000).

If these are some of the factors that may influence performance and achievement, what are those factors that are seen to influence underachievement? A discussion follows that examines those factors that are thought to affect under achievement, failure and withdrawal.

### **3.4 UNDERACHIEVEMENT, FAILURE AND WITHDRAWAL**

#### **3.4.1 Introduction**

Widespread student attrition has been a cause for concern for the past eighty odd years, and thus the topic under discussion is not new. Neither is it peculiar to one country. Bean (1980:155), researching the topic some twenty years ago, comments that significant dropout rates have been reported in the United States of America, Canada, Great Britain and Australia. These research findings are still of value today, although the student profile may have changed somewhat. Institutional surveys and attrition review studies reveal that between 40 % and 50 % of students do not obtain their degrees, and are not enrolled four years after matriculation (Hatcher, Kryter, Prus & Fitzgerald 1992:1273).

The student profile with which the researcher is currently working is very different to that of ten or twenty years ago in South Africa. Institutions of higher learning are now open to all and the student demographic profile has changed. The predominantly black, under-prepared first generation, academically and somewhat socially disadvantaged student is the subject of investigation.

The under-prepared student is one who, through historical disadvantage, did not have access to schools that were well equipped with teaching resources, strong pedagogic ethics, committed staff members and many other facets that are commonplace in schools that are funded and supported by various concerned and committed bodies. These students may have the added disadvantage of very little economic power, limited domestic and social resources and support. They may be the first in the community or family to be attending an institution of higher learning, and first generation students face all the problems that other entering students face, with the added problem of cultural transition, besides that of academic and social integration (Thompson & Fretz 1991:440; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora 1996:2). If all these factors are added together, the sum equates to extremely limited opportunities to develop and reach potential, and puts great strain on the new student as he attempts to cope with his new environment, both academically and socially.

Under-prepared students remain a problem in the South African tertiary education arena. Approaches must be adapted in order to admit, cope with and support these students. This is an important facet that is of grave concern to the researcher, and which has in part, been responsible for the research initiative. Till (2000:2) comments on the long-awaited equalisation of education and learning standards in the new South African democracy. It brings with it the hope of eventual prevention of social and academic disadvantages for the student. While quality education remains mandatory, real equity is required in that quality education should be available to all.

It is of interest to note that not only are educationally disadvantaged students at risk, but also at risk are some students from academically and socially advantaged environments. These under-prepared students bring with them their own set of problems. With learning skills that are not well developed, difficulty is experienced in the comprehension of material. Reading becomes a laborious exercise, the student gets bored, discouraged, feels alienated and will eventually disengage or drop out of the system (Astin 1985:164).

Delvare (1995:34) points out that many South African students fail to adapt successfully to tertiary education, resulting in problems with passing all the necessary courses. These findings are applicable to both black and white students. Many of these problems are associated with historically disadvantaged schooling, while other problems are relevant to specific institutions. Delvare points to the tremendous economic cost that has to be borne

by the taxpayer. Just ten years ago, in 1992, an amount in excess of R580 million accounted for 30 % of university failures.

The tertiary sector needs to produce graduates at a far greater pace than at present if the necessary contribution to the country's economic growth is to be met. These graduates are also necessary to help meet the country's social needs. However, this will not happen if institutions continue to admit students who are under-prepared, without academic and other support mechanisms in place to deal with such discrepancies.

### **3.4.2 Variables associated with underperformance and withdrawal**

There appear to be a number of variables thought to impede performance and end in the likelihood of withdrawal. However, before discussing these, one should point out that there are warning signals sent out long before the student actually fails any grades. These are:

- failure to attend lectures;
- failure to complete and hand in assignments and projects;
- failure to write tests and examinations.

These signals of distress are very often are ignored by peers and lecturers as they are involved with their own problems (Lindgren 1969:127). Classes are much larger than in the high school context, and the level of interaction between lecturer and student is also very different. Missing classes in high school is far more noticeable than at university. If assignments are not handed in on time, no marks result.

However, it is the committed lecturer who has a passion for his subject matter as well as a passion for working with young people who will notice when students are missing, work is not handed in on time, what with certain students having difficulty expressing themselves in an adequate manner. Jones and Watson (1990:73) add to the warning signals list whereby the lecturer can be alerted to the possibility that certain students could well be experiencing academic, and consequent psychological distress. Further warning signals are:

- relatively low grade average;
- problems in basic composition;
- deficient note-taking.

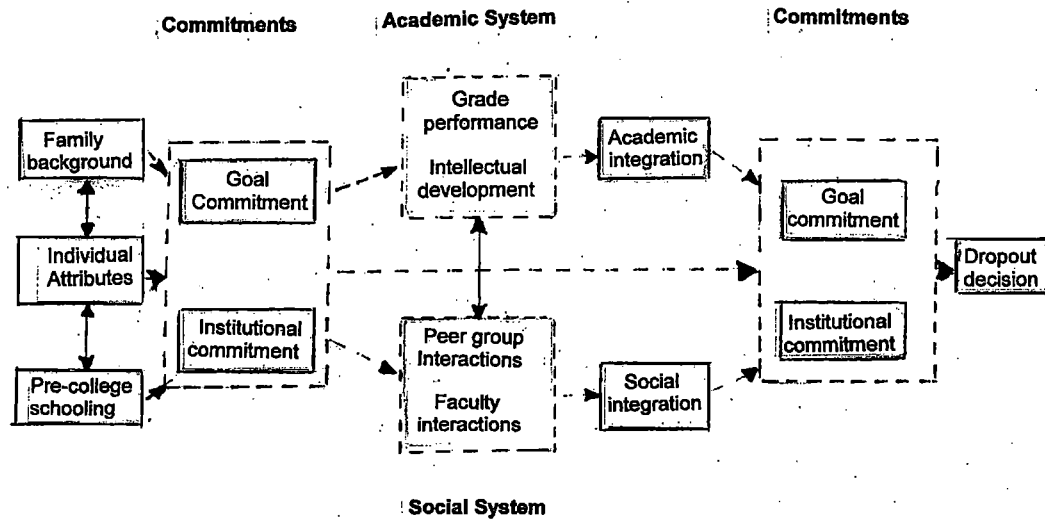


Jones and Watson (1990:55) point out that although academic under-preparedness is a major attritional cause, it is itself a combination of personal, systemic and institutional factors that interact with each other. The tertiary institution is a social structure, with its own value and social structures. If a student is unable to integrate sufficiently and successfully into the social fabric of the university or experiences incongruence with institutional values, this may be a reason for a student not committing to his studies, and ultimately withdrawing from a particular educational system.

Tinto's (1975:91) extensive research into student withdrawal was based on a modification of Durkheim's theory of suicide, where suicide is seen as more likely to occur when the individual experiences insufficient moral (value) integration, as well as insufficient social (collective) integration. Applying Durkheim's theory to the institutional setting could provide a reason for student attrition after failing to integrate well enough into the academic and social environments.

Tinto (1975:95) drew a causation model, highlighting a number of variables that are thought to affect attrition. The student's commitment to both his own goals, and to the institution of higher learning, will be influenced by numerous factors. These factors include his family background, his individual attributes, as well as pre-university scholastic background. His intellectual development, his performance, his interactions with both faculty and his peer group will determine his academic and social integration. If integration does not occur, goals and commitments will not be met, and the student will subsequently decide to withdraw from the institution. Figure 3.2 below illustrates the above-mentioned description.

**Figure 3.1 Tinto's attrition causation model**



Tinto (1975:95)

Pantages and Creedon (1978:57), Bean (1980:158), Pascarella and Terenzini (1980:60) and Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella and Nora (1996:1) all underscore the comment made by Tinto (1975:95) that when examining the interactions of the student within the environment of the higher education institution, the background characteristics of each student should be borne in mind. What follows is a broader discussion concerning Tinto's causation model as viewed in Figure 3.1.

### 3.4.2.1 *Individual dispositions*

#### **a Intention**

Tinto (1993:43) refers to the individual student's level of commitment to personal educational and vocational goals. It underscores the student's willingness to work towards meeting those goals that he has set for himself. Naturally, one must take into account the student's ability level, as well as his family background, social position and level of prior educational experience (Tinto 1975:103). Referring to Figure 3.2, it is suggested that goal commitment, placed after family background and prior educational experiences, mirrors the interaction of the student, his family and his schooling.

## **b Commitment**

Institutional commitment (Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle 1986:155) is the level of commitment that the student has towards his institution. It comes about in a number of different ways. For some students, it may mean attending the same institution as a parent or another family member. It comes from peer pressure to attend a certain institution, or from the image that a specific institution has within society, through the fact that graduating from that institution would greatly enhance the student's chances of gaining employment.

Institutional commitment underscores the willingness that the student displays in working towards attaining his goals within a specific institutional environment. The stronger the student's level of social and academic integration, the greater his commitment will be to the institution, as well as the overall goal of course completion.

If this commitment level is low, the student's chance of successfully completing his studies is thought to be slim. Conversely, if institutional commitment is high, a student would be able to put up with unsatisfactory circumstances and persevere, as graduating from a particular institution brings immense benefits for the individual (Jones & Watson 1990:70; Tinto 1993:44).

Jones and Watson (1990:69) view institutional commitment as the level to which an institution will go in order to help retain its students. Remarking on successful efforts to retain disadvantaged students, they list six common institutional characteristics:

- strong academic support and preparation programmes;
- great emphasis on pre-enrollment programmes;
- emphasis on multicultural environments;
- successful removal of the stigma attached to disadvantaged student support programmes;
- development of strong proactive approaches to financial aid; and
- provision for students to live on campus.

### **3.4.2.2 Institutional experiences**

#### **a Adjustment to the institution**

As previously mentioned, adjusting to student life is difficult for most individuals. Getting used to new situations, people, subject material and living arrangements can be both daunting and exciting, while facing new intellectual and social challenges can be both exhausting yet energising (Raaheim, Wankowski & Radford 1991:71). Most students adjust within the first semester, but there are always those few who find it too traumatic and withdraw from the institution.

The individual student's goals and level of commitment will either help or hinder him in this transition period. Having a strong commitment to his studies, and/or having lofty goals is seen by Tinto (1993:46) as an enabling force that can make the student persist under the most adverse conditions. Likewise, the student who holds modest goals and/or weak commitments may find that he does not wish to continue with his studies. His lack of sufficient commitment to the goal of higher education, or to the institution, makes him unwilling to put up with the stress of transition, and he consequently withdraws.

The student's past experiences will help him to cope with these new pressures. Who the student is as a person, as well as opportunities to test coping skills in the past, will stand him in good stead when it comes to the transition phase. Having acquired some fundamental study, problem solving and reading skills, the student should find that he is better equipped to cope with the variety of adjustment issues.

#### **b Difficulty in meeting academic standards**

Managing to stay in college is more than simply adjusting to and coping with the changes and challenges. It necessitates the meeting of certain minimum academic performance requirements (Voorhees 1987:118). The disadvantaged student arrives with a history of poor high school preparation for tertiary education, with poor study habits and inadequate study skills for coping with the new academic demands (Tinto 1993:49; Cleeton 1996:343). These under-prepared students bring their own set of problems. With learning skills that are not well developed, difficulty is experienced with the comprehension of material. Reading becomes a laborious exercise, the student gets bored, discouraged, feels alienated and will disengage or drop out of the system (Astin 1985:164).

Tinto (1993:49) underlines an alarming fact: the incidence of academic under-preparedness in the United States of America has risen to between 30 % and 40 % of all entering first year students, these students requiring support with respect to college-level reading and writing skills in order to adequately cope with academic demands. It is further estimated that 25 % of all freshmen are involved in mathematics, reading and writing remediation courses. No such statistics for first year students are currently available for the South African context.

### **c Incongruence between student and institution**

Incongruence refers to the mismatch between the individual student's preferences, needs and interests, and the needs and interests of the institution. The student may find himself unable to match the academic demands that are placed upon him due to his level of ability, his interests or lack thereof, and skills that do not match those required for the completion of a specific course of study. He may find that the demands are too easy and do not challenge him sufficiently, thus voluntarily withdrawing from the programme.

A number of students with whom the researcher works find themselves in a position of academic incongruence, but because of pressure to obtain post-secondary education from various quarters is so very strong, these students will struggle on, sometimes failing a course again and again. The result is often the onset of severe psychological problems.

The mismatch may also take place within the social arena amongst the student's peers. For some, gaining a social identity is as important as an intellectual one (Tinto 1993:53). If the student perceives that he does not fit in with the dominant culture of the institution, or with individual students and faculty members, he does not apply himself to his studies and may withdraw. He may even opt to move to an institution where he feels more at home.

### **d Lack of significant contact with others on campus**

The student who does not have enough contact with members of both the student and faculty communities will experience isolation. He need not experience incongruence to feel isolated. He may not be very different from other students yet is unable to establish meaningful contact with members of institutional communities. Tinto (1993:56) points out that the degree and quality of personal interaction is of great importance when it comes to the student persistence process. He cites this lack of significant contact with other people on campus, bearing in mind, the student's background, personality and academic performance, as the single most important predictor of eventual withdrawal.

Schlossberg's (1989:11) theory of marginality and mattering underscores this aspect of attrition in that if the student does not make contact with others, especially with members of faculty, he feels that he does not matter to anyone and consequently does not get sufficiently involved in academic and social pursuits. Thus, the importance of developing close bonds and relationships is tantamount to the first year student persisting to the second year (Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn & Pascarella 1996:445).

### **3.4.2.3 External forces**

There are forces at work in the external world of the student over which he may feel that he has very little power, or has no power to change. They are:

#### **a Obligations**

It is of utmost importance that each student manages to integrate on both academic and social levels in order to obtain the full benefit of tertiary education (Pascarella & Terenzini 1980:72). Every student comes to the institution with his own set of commitments to external communities and to other people. When the values of these external individuals and communities support the goals of tertiary education, the chances are great that the student will persist with his studies. However, should the student come from a community where the interest in the participation in tertiary education is low, such as a historically disadvantaged community, the student may have to struggle to complete his studies.

Commuting students find that keeping past friendships, while studying, can be problematic. It often means that they do not become socially integrated into the institution. Yet if friends, family and the local community share the student's belief that college education is important, the effect can be most positive (Tinto 1993:62).

Employment can be problematic for the student. For many of the students with whom the researcher works, they have to find employment in order to clothe and feed themselves. For many, this means being pulled away and blocked from participating in the local communities on campus. In some cases, it means missing certain classes. Any spare time is spent earning money instead of engaging in academic pursuits.

## **b Finances**

A study undertaken at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1987 considered the problems perceived to influence chances of academic success. Within the study, financial problems loomed ominously. The students affected were all English second language speaking first year students. Money for paying fees, for personal use (clothing and food), as well as enough to be able to buy textbooks, was perceived to be highly problematic, affecting the students' general quality of life and their chances of academic success. It brought with it the burdens of anxiety, stress and alienation (Delvare 1995:39). The students provided the reasons for financial stress and anxiety as:

- parents struggling to support them;
- the students working part-time and still not having enough money;
- the inability to secure bursaries, loans or grants;
- highly inadequate sponsorship.

Pantages and Creedon (1978:80) found the lack of finances to be the third most important reason for students to withdraw from tertiary education. Delvare (1995:79) makes a most salient point in that some of South Africa's historically black tertiary education institutions grew extremely rapidly during the 1980s. They enrolled students who were unable to pay fees, and were, furthermore, under-prepared for tertiary education, and thus unlikely to graduate. A number of these institutions are in trouble today, experiencing bad debt, less financial support from the government, inability to attract competent staff and weak links with industry.

With the proposed merging of the current tertiary education institutions starting in 2004, the existing number of tertiary institutions will be reduced from 36 to 21. This reducing action could be a symbolic second chance for a number of institutions to get things right. Summarising a speech delivered by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Natal at a conference in Johannesburg, Mecoamere (2003:6) commented that many historically black institutions are afraid that the pending merger is designed to enable historically advantaged white institutions to swallow and absorb them. It is hoped that both the financial state of many institutions, as well as academic standards will improve, thus affording the disadvantaged student a better chance at successful institutional integration, strong academic support, ultimate graduation and viable vocational prospects.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

Chapter three deals with the first time entering student, how he adjusts to the institution and the difficulties that he can expect to experience during this phase. Also addressed is the aspect of performance and achievement, those factors that can hinder progress, as well as those that aid performance and enhance achievement levels.

The aspect of student retention, the problem of underachievement, the possibility of failure or academic withdrawal, as well as the issue of voluntary withdrawal is examined. Consciously borne in mind is the under-preparedness of the disadvantaged student within the South African tertiary education context, and the possibility that many are affected by historical disadvantage.

The problems common to the new student, as well as some that are peculiar to his current situation will be the focal point of the empirical study. The research design will be described in Chapter Four, with the data from the research undertaken noted in Chapter Five and discussed in Chapter Six.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH DESIGN

**Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but have those because we acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act but a habit.**

**Aristotle**

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the two preceding chapters, a literature study was undertaken that examined holistic student development in the light of performance, achievement, failure and withdrawal. In Chapter One, it was mentioned that the research study would be constituted as a two-part inquiry.

Firstly, an extensive literature study has examined the developmental phases in which the student finds himself, as well as some factors that may promote or retard his performance as he develops. This theoretical basis is deemed necessary as it offers a broad understanding of the student in context, and will provide a backdrop against which an interventional programme can ultimately be drawn.

As the core problem encompasses those factors that are perceived to be constraints upon student performance and achievement, the empirical study will examine those areas that address the research question, namely whether or not there is a relationship between underachievement and perceived psychological and educational deterrents. These areas of concern will be incorporated in the design of the intervention model.

In order to obtain as full a picture as possible, the researcher will make use of the triangulation model. This is the process whereby data is obtained from as many different sources as possible, using more than one method to secure the data. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are used in this study, including the techniques of workshop, questionnaire and focus group interview usage. What follows is a brief overview of research methodology in general, a description of both the qualitative and the quantitative research methodology, how they are to benefit the current study, and an explanation as to why triangulation was the final choice for the research design.

## 4.2 EXPLANATION OF THE CONCEPTS IN RESEARCH DESIGN

The terminology to be explained concerns the methodologies commonly used in social science research practice. It follows therefore, that such terminology will be used with reference to the research project currently under discussion. It should be noted that the term “*participant*” will be used for those individuals participating in either the workshops or the focus group interviews. Likewise, the term *respondent* will refer to those students responding to the questionnaire.

### 4.2.1 Research project

As with other research projects, this research study endeavours to adhere to the following successive steps:

- awareness and identification of the problem;
- review of relevant literature and related research;
- formulation and definition of the study area that will determine the use of appropriate research methods;
- compilation of clear, concise study aims and possible hypotheses;
- extensive, in-depth study of relative literature
- selection of a research design, using one or more of the following:
  - descriptive method, where data are obtained by means of observation, interviews, questionnaires and surveys, documents and visual material;
  - experimental method, where data is obtained via an experimental group and a group of participants of which are either randomly chosen or paired-off;
  - ex-post facto method where the research is conducted after the participants have been classified;
- a written report and/or the publication of results;
- generation of a theory based on the results.

### 4.2.2 Literature study

The literature study reflected in Chapters Two and Three was undertaken in order to obtain a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem to be studied. It highlights previous research done in the area, removing the danger of replication. It

exposes similarities, differences, common trends and comparisons, providing deeper insight into the complexity of the problem. The study provides justification for continuing with the project, defining and redefining the research questions and tentative hypotheses by placing them within the larger context of empirical findings. Thus, the study is not just a collection of information. It serves as the basis from which the researcher can propel the investigation, while constantly on guard against the gathering of shallow or incomplete information (De Vos 2001:65).

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used as part of the triangulation approach. The background to these methods will be discussed in the section that follows.

### **4.2.3 Qualitative research methodology**

Qualitative research, also known as field research and naturalistic research, attempts to describe and understand, rather than explain human behaviour. The research is undertaken in a natural setting where the researcher interacts with the individuals in the study. Attempts to minimise the distance between researcher and those being researched are constantly made. Creswell (1994:15; 1998:14) explains it as being the building of a complex, holistic picture by the researcher, where words are analyses and informants' views are detailed. Creswell (1994:145) cites Merriam's six assumptions with regard to qualitative research:

- it is concerned primarily with process rather than outcomes or products;
- it is interested in meaning, how people make sense of their lives and experiences;
- it mediates data collection through the qualitative researcher, rather than other instruments;
- it involves fieldwork, observing and recording in natural settings;
- it is descriptive in that meaning and understanding are gained by means of words or pictures;
- it is inductive in that the researcher builds concepts and hypotheses from details given to him.

The above-mentioned assumptions are underscored by Neuman (1994:404). Babbie and Mouton (2001:270) further explain that the natural setting can mean naturalistic inquiry or

fieldwork, where the researcher will use participant observation as a means of studying people in their natural environments. Because the setting is natural, as opposed to an artificial or controlled setting, this design is well suited to social studies over lengthy periods of time.

The qualitative method used in the research study was naturalistic in nature. During the workshops, participant observation was used, which will be described in detail in section 4.3.3.1. The decision was made to use the focus group interview technique as another qualitative method to garner data, and that will be described in detail in section 4.3.3.3.

Creswell (1994:150) lists the advantages of using qualitative research:

- the researcher has firsthand experience of the participant during observation;
- information can be recorded as it occurs during observation;
- unusual aspects can be noted during observation;
- the interview is useful when the participant cannot be directly observed;
- the participant can provide historical information;
- the researcher can control the line of questioning in an interview;
- using a document, the researcher has access to the language of the participants;
- the document is an unobtrusive information source;
- it saves the researcher transcription time;
- qualitative research is value-laden.

The disadvantages of qualitative research are:

- language, race, culture or beliefs are among the many differences between the researcher and participants, which could become potential barriers;
- during observation, the researcher may be seen as intrusive;
- in observation, much depends on the researcher's listening and attention skills;
- rapport must be established and some participants can be difficult;
- indirect information is filtered through the eyes of the participant;
- not all participants are equally articulate and perceptive;
- the presence of the researcher may bias responses.

Although the list of disadvantages in using the qualitative method is long, and the chances were good that most of the listed factors could occur in the current research study, the decision was made by the researcher to make use of the qualitative method as the advantages outweighed the disadvantages.

#### **4.2.3.1 Qualitative research validity**

The validity of a qualitative research finding is a requirement of effective research. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000:105) point out that although essentially demonstrating that a particular instrument has, in fact, measured what it was purported to measure, validity takes on numerous guises. A qualitative study may be deemed valid if it addresses the richness, scope, depth and honesty of the captured data. The extent to which the researcher has been able to remain objective, as well as the participants who were approached, contributes to the overall validity of the study. It must be borne in mind that a natural bias filters through in the respondent's and participant's subjectivity, opinions, perspectives and attitudes.

A number of ways to ensure validity, authenticity and credibility are suggested by Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000:107-108) by:

- using multiple researchers;
- using low-inference descriptors;
- using mechanical data collection means;
- using prolonged field studies;
- triangulating methods, researchers, resources and theories;
- peer debriefing to test hypotheses and subsequent research steps;
- member checking to provide summaries and check the analysis adequacy.

Throughout the project, the above-mentioned points were borne in mind. The advice of experts was sought during the protracted research period of eighteen months. Much peer debriefing occurred in order to test hypotheses, and a variety of theories, methods and resources was used in order to paint as rich a canvas as possible.

Internal validity is strengthened when the researcher allows for change to occur. This will happen over time and must be built into the research. Observer effects can be reduced if

the researcher samples widely and stays in the situation long enough for the participants to take him or her for granted, which can be said of the current research.

#### **4.2.3.2 *Qualitative research reliability***

McLeod and Hanks (1985:970) view reliability as the ability to be depended upon or trusted. De Vos (2001:85) notes the synonyms used for reliability are stability, consistency, predictability, accuracy, reproducibility, repeatability and generalisability. Independent administrations of an instrument should consistently yield similar results, with a comparable instrument repeating similar results under comparable conditions. It is then that the instrument may be termed a reliable one. Reliability is thus concerned not with what is being measured, but rather how well something is being measured (Creswell 1994:159; Hall & Hall 1996:44; Cohen, Mannion & Morrison 2000:117; De Vos 2001:86).

Mouton and Babbie (1998:120) suggest some ways in which the reliability of a study can be compromised. They are:

- misinterpreting information from participants under observation;
- the observer's subjectivity;
- asking questions to which the respondent has no answers;
- asking difficult questions and confusing the respondent.

Babbie and Mouton (1998: 21) have suggestions for dealing with problems of reliability:

- ask questions, the answers to which should be known to the respondent;
- be clear in what is being asked;
- ask questions that are relevant to the respondent;
- use the test-retest method, by repeating the measurement;
- use the split-half method of randomly measuring the variable;
- use established measures;
- guard against interviewer unreliability by verifying selected information through checking a respondent sub-sample;
- clarity, specificity, training and practice will reduce unreliability.

Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000:156-157) cite a number of problems in the qualitative approach that could affect both the validity and the reliability of the research. However, they can be minimised by noting the points made above. They are:

- participants may be unaware of the real situation, and distort or falsify information;
- the presence of the researcher can have the *Hawthorne effect* in that participants want to impress, avoid, deny or influence him;
- the presence of the *Halo effect* where existing knowledge about the situation or participants can influence readings in subsequent situations;
- this research accepts the participant's perspective and corroborates the status quo and is focused on the past and present rather than on the future;
- as both researcher and participant are very close to and familiar with the situation, important aspects can be overlooked;
- due to the open-endedness and diversity of the situation being studied, differences may be over-emphasised at the expense of regularities;
- micro-level research risks excluding wider social contexts and constraints;
- as most of the situations are unique, how is the aspect of generalisability going to be addressed?

The decision was taken to make use of qualitative research as part of the overall research design due to the advantages that the method advances. Reliability and validity of the study was ensured by constant checking that nothing had been overlooked. Unreliability was minimised as the students and staff members, familiar with the issues under discussion, were able to supply answers to the questions that were asked. The researcher ensured that the questions were relevant, simple, clear and comprehensible. Use was made use of sub-samples and the measurement was repeated a number of times.

A discussion of the two techniques that would best serve the purpose of broad, rich data collection, namely the workshop and the focus group interview, follow hereafter.

#### **4.2.3.3 *Specific techniques used in the qualitative research study***

##### **a The workshop technique**

The workshop technique involves creating a micro-world of individuals, in the case of the current study, representatives from similar settings, and inviting them to express their

opinions and brainstorm issues that are of common concern. In this study, the issues of concern centred on the student attrition rate, and the perceived reasons for underachievement and failure. Participant observation was used to find just how the participants make sense of and attach meaning to the world around them. The procedure of participant observation is regarded by De Vos (2001:279) as the main data collecting strategy of qualitative research, and one method of implementing it is to do so in a workshop mode.

The setting is usually natural and as in the current study, the workshops were organised on campus in specific faculty buildings that are used by the staff members on a daily basis. In order to allow full participation and a fair chance to discuss varying opinions, the research study workshops each had three to four small groups within the large one. The workshops required team research in that each subgroup had a facilitator and a scribe to record notes and observations. Each subgroup also had a team leader who would report back at the end of the sessions, and a scribe to record notes.

#### **i Advantages of the workshop technique**

A number of advantages of using participant observation within the workshop are noted by De Vos (2001:291):

- it produces a relatively detailed picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny;
- first-hand opinion is obtained by the researcher;
- attitudes or activities not clearly understood can casually be questioned without the thought that it is uncalled for;
- the procedure is fairly flexible in that should a particular angle hold the possibility of shedding more light on what is under scrutiny, research can be directed along that particular path.

#### **ii Disadvantages of the workshop technique**

De Vos (2001:292) also underscores a number of aspects that could be problematic in using the technique. They are:

- participant observation is time-consuming and arduous;



- it is highly dependent on the observation of the researcher executing the study;
- it can create the feeling that not much meaning will come out of the study due to its lack of structure;
- the sessions can be very demanding;
- members may become bored and as the sessions in the current study each lasted a full day, great care was taken to ensure that this did not occur.

Babbie and Mouton (2001:293) also mention the difficulties of participant observation as do Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:396). They see the astute researcher as one who is:

- able to think on his feet;
- able to simultaneously look and talk, think and listen;
- able to combine curiosity and openness;
- able to discriminate between significant and superfluous data;
- able to build and maintain rapport;
- able to make others feel unguarded and relaxed;
- able to be open and forthright;
- not thrown by confusion.

#### **b The focus group interview technique**

In order to increase the validity, reliability and to add richness to the study, it was decided to use a second qualitative measure, that of the focus group interview, which is seen by De Vos (2001:314) as a purposive discussion of a specific topic or topics that takes place amongst eight to ten individuals with similar backgrounds and common interests. In the case of the current research study, the common topic was the problem areas perceived to inhibit first year student performance.

A semi-structured approach was decided upon, and the focus group interview was chosen. A useful tool, the focus group allows people to come together and create meaning for themselves rather than individually (Babbie & Mouton 2001:292). The information gleaned from the individual responses in the questionnaire comprises one aspect of the study. By putting individuals together, through their interactions, a different set of data is obtained (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:288).

### **i Advantages of the focus group interview**

De Vos (2001:324) enumerates some of the advantages in using the focus group interview:

- the technique can validate data obtained in the workshops and the questionnaire;
- it can be done within a relatively short period of time;
- the financial costs are limited;
- it permits considerable probing and exposes participants' worldviews;
- it can shed light on phenomena about which little is known;
- it facilitates group interaction and enhances data capturing;
- it is a flexible technique that can explore unanticipated issues;
- it allows participants to build on the responses from others;
- it can provide speedy results.

### **ii Disadvantages of the focus group interview**

Although the technique may appear straightforward to use, there are a number of pitfalls. These are pointed out by De Vos (2001:325):

- gathering the right people to participate;
- overcoming the obstacles of transport and time available;
- the raising of irrelevant issues and detours must be avoided;
- the data can be difficult to analyse, thus researcher bias and subjectivity should be eliminated, if possible;
- sensitive issues can give rise to questions of confidentiality;
- the group is a very small sample and information is not generalisable;
- the facilitator needs group dynamics training and interview skills;
- one group can vary considerably from the other;
- the environment must facilitate discussion that is not always logistically possible.

Morgan (1995:516) points to salient issues when investigating the possibility of using the focus group technique. The focus group must serve the researcher's purposes by contributing to the research information base. This is done through problem identification, planning, implementation and assessment. In the case of the current study, the focus group serves the purpose of identifying problems and attempting to assess them.

The necessary resources must be calculated. Both personnel and budget should be considered. In the current study, the researcher had to be a recruiter, moderator, scribe and analyst. Finances were not a problem as the students met on campus and did not have to travel to a specified venue.

It is imperative to choose suitable questions, and apply a relevant format for asking those questions. Critical questions that capture the study intent needed to be identified (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:390; De Vos 2001:318). The basic format of the interview guide is the funnel structure, where the initial questions are broad and a little less structured, with the main aim being to hear what the participants' perspectives were on the topic under discussion. Questions in the middle of the discussion become more structured, where the goal is to cover the issues within the topic. At the end, the questions are narrow, focusing on the aim to elicit answers to specific questions. A summary of the interview guide appears in Table 4.2 (see section 4.3.3.2) and shows the actual questions that were planned.

Having researched the focus group technique (Neuman 1994:245; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:288; Babbie & Mouton 2001:292; De Vos 2001:316), the researcher decided to implement the technique, keeping in mind the areas that could prove problematic in the technique.

Although qualitative techniques are widely used in social research, they can be problematic. If used judiciously, however, they play a very important role in the garnering of valuable research data. In the current research study, the researcher was constantly reminded of the above-mentioned problems that could affect the validity and reliability of the project, and a point was made to minimise both the *Halo* and the *Hawthorne effect*. One factor that plagued the researcher was the task of containing the study and keeping the focus group interviews to a manageable number. As so many students wished to have their say and add to the research base, the temptation to extend the social context, rather than concentrate on the micro-level research, was ever present.

In order to link the abstract perceptions that would be obtained from the qualitative research techniques discussed above, with a technique that would attempt to measure these perceptions fairly precisely, the questionnaire, as a quantitative technique for data collection

and measurement, was decided upon for this research study. In the section that follows, a discussion concerning qualitative research and the specific technique of questionnaire usage will ensue.

#### **4.2.4 Quantitative research methodology**

Quantitative research has as its underlying tenet, the quantification of constructs. Whereas qualitative data are expressed as words, pictures or symbols, quantitative data are expressed as numbers. It is felt that the best way of measuring the properties of phenomena is by allotting numbers to these perceived properties. It is also concerned with describing and analysing human behaviour by means of variables. Central to the research process is the control of error source by means of experimental controls, as in experimental designs, or by means of statistical controls as in multivariate designs (Babbie and Mouton 2001:49).

Neuman (1994:58, 75) cites some assumptions with regard to quantitative research:

- the research is objective;
- it is a logical, deductive system of definitions, axioms and laws;
- the researcher is neutral, detached and objective;
- favoured methods are experiments, surveys and statistics;
- it attempts to measure precise things about people;
- it tests hypotheses by analysing numbers from the measures;
- its concern with abstract formulae and laws does not always relate to the actual lives of actual people;
- is logically connected to laws and based on facts;
- abstract ideas derived from law are linked to precise measurements of the social world;
- is value-free as subjectivity and prejudice are controlled by statistical techniques;
- its aim is to discover natural laws in order that people can predict and control events.

The above mentioned comments are underscored by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:6, 73). The aspect of quantifying or measuring abstract phenomena, turning them into quantitative variables facilitates research in two ways. Firstly, by assigning numbers to

objects under investigation, one is able to systematically classify and arrange these objects according to how much they possess a particular characteristic. Secondly, by making use of different mathematical operations, measured attributes can be manipulated in ways that would not normally be possible. Thus, statistical procedures are used to analyse quantitative data and are a very useful tool when it comes to measuring and quantifying variables (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:74).

#### **4.2.4.1 Quantitative research validity**

In the case of quantitative research, the measurement validity is important. This is the degree to which the measure does what it is supposed to do. The research design should deliver the conclusions that it claims it should deliver (De Vaus 2001:29). Using the questionnaire technique in the quantitative method, one can be confident of a measure's criterion validity when measurements gauging people's rating on a new measure, match the rating on a well-established measure of the concept (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:83). Criterion validity has two limitations in that the benchmark must itself be valid, and one needs to remember that there are not many established measures for the social sciences. In the case of the current research study, no benchmark questionnaire-type instrument was available, and therefore the researcher had to draw up an instrument specifically for the study.

Understanding the different types of validity is important in the design (Ader & Mellenbergh 1999:325; De Vaus 2001:30). Internal validity depends upon other factors being ruled out as rival explanations of the observed association between the variables under investigation (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 1992:105). Content validity evaluates how well the measures account for the different aspects of the concept being examined. Establishing the content validity of the present study was important. The questionnaire addressed the potential problem by running the three sets of construct questions against each other. A full discussion will follow in Chapter Five.

It is noted that construct validity relies on seeing how well the results obtained by means of the measure fit with theoretical explanation (Ader & Mellenbergh 1999:325; De Vaus 2001:30). De Vaus contends that there is no ideal way of assessing validity. If the measure passes the criterion, content and construct validity tests, the measure is more

likely to be valid. One cannot be certain, however. What the researcher needs to do is to argue for the validity of the measure used.

#### **4.2.4.2 Quantitative research reliability**

Reliability addresses objectivity. The hidden laws that form the base for the rules that govern number assignation to attributional quantity representation, cannot be directly observed or measured, thus their existence is inferred. Inference is based on regularity. One way of testing the reliability of a measure is to check its regularity. If a measure is reliable, the scores will present in an ordered and regular pattern. This suggests that the measures are based on objective laws (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:91).

De Vaus (2001:31) sees unreliability as stemming from:

- poor question wording;
- different interviewers get different answers from different people;
- age, gender, class and ethnicity influence responses;
- answers that are affected by mood and a particular context.

Mouton (1996:157-160) comments that there are a number of ways to ensure reliability, including:

- stressing the anonymity of the participant;
- establishing rapport;
- in some cases, conducting covert research where the participant does not know that he is part of a study;
- using control groups in experimental studies;
- training the researchers may counteract the researcher effect;
- selecting co-researchers who share some of the study group characteristics;
- replicating studies to try and confirm empirical relationship.

All the points made above with regard to ensuring reliability, as well as potential problem areas, were borne in mind when the questionnaire technique was decided upon. This will be explained in the section that follows.

#### 4.2.4.3 *Specific technique used in the quantitative method*

##### a **The questionnaire**

The dictionary explanation of the word “*questionnaire*” refers to a set of questions on a form, submitted to a number of people in order to collect statistical information (McLeod & Hanks 1985:935). The new dictionary of social work (1995:51) defines the word as a set of questions on a form that is completed by the respondent in respect of a research project.

Black (1999:215) views the questionnaire for quantitative research in the social sciences as an instrument to measure and quantify how people feel about things, their attitudes, perceptions, opinions and views. It can be applied in many ways and is probably the most widely used instrument (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:293). De Vos (2001:153-154) lists the different types of questionnaires from which to choose:

- mailed questionnaires, where the researcher and respondent are physically removed from one another, is fairly inexpensive, but can be difficult to manage;
- telephonic questionnaires, where researcher and respondent are separated but can communicate, can be expensive, is convenient, but needs to be very simple and clear;
- personal interviews, where the form is completed and researcher is at hand for further elucidation;
- hand-delivered questionnaires requiring a pickup; limit the survey as fieldworkers must make two trips per respondent; good response rate due to personal contact, possible literacy issues may arise;
- group-administered questionnaires which is a combination of the personal interview and mailed questionnaire techniques, which saves both time and costs, and respondents can respond simultaneously to the same stimuli; however, finding time and suitable venues can be bothersome.

Questions posed by the researcher as to the choice of data-gathering instrument were:

- What data is expected to result from the investigation that will answer the research question?
- Will this data provide what is needed for the statistical tests?
- Is a questionnaire the most appropriate choice considering the population and the sample?

#### 4.2.4.4 *Validity and reliability of the questionnaire*

The researcher, after looking at the options, decided to use the group-administered questionnaire format. Although the main difficulty lay in finding the sample groups, time slots and suitable venues, it was felt that the group-administered questionnaire was the most appropriate method of ascertaining how most students feel.

When designing the questionnaire, the researcher had to bear a number of ethical issues in mind, raised by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:245-246). These are:

- the questionnaire will be an intrusion into the respondent's life;
- the respondent cannot be forced into completing a questionnaire;
- he has the right to withdraw at any stage;
- his consent is needed;
- a guarantee that the research will not harm him;
- the potential of the research benefiting the respondent;
- the guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality;
- the degree of question sensitivity or threat;
- assurance of validity and reliability of the instrument;
- the respondent's reaction to items he deems questionable.

Having examined both the qualitative and quantitative research methods, and deciding that a broad, rich study was envisaged, the researcher decided to combine both methods into one large process, termed "*triangulation*". Here, some of the disadvantages of both qualitative and quantitative methods could be counteracted in that no single method would be responsible for the gathering of data. It is hoped that the advantages of both methods will be evident in the obtained results. The explanation, with regard to the combined research design, follows in the next section.

#### 4.2.5 *Triangulation methodology*

Meaning "*to take one's bearings from different angles*", the term "*triangulation*" implies that the same problem is examined by means of a variety of data sources and research methods (Neuman 1994:141; Hall & Hall 1996:44; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:112; Babbie & Mouton 2001:275). It may be used to denote the conscious combination of the qualitative



and quantitative methodologies (De Vos 2001:359), or the use of a number of different data collection methods in order to increase observation reliability.

Triangulation is a fairly labour-intensive method of collecting data on various aspects of human behaviour. The process entails collecting as much data as possible from as many different sources, and in as many different ways as possible, using a variety of researchers (Creswell 1998:251; Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:128; Babbie & Mouton 2001:359). In the current study, it must be noted that data triangulation is used in order to gather data through a variety of sampling strategies. Methodological triangulation is used in this study as three data collection techniques are used within the single study.

#### **4.2.5.1 Advantages of using triangulation**

The main advantage of triangulation is that it is removed from the personal biases that surround single-method studies, while weak points or deficiencies in either a researcher or in methods are partially overcome (Babbie & Mouton 2001:275). A further advantage is that because no single method is the sole provider of data, which can result in bias or distortion, the richness of the human experience, situation and condition can be captured by means of triangulation. The more the various methods contrast with each other, the greater the confidence of the researcher, and this is why triangulation was chosen as the preferred research design.

A point made by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:113) is that the social sciences are renowned for limited use of existing methods of inquiry, thus triangulation can help to overcome what is termed "*method-boundedness*".

#### **4.2.5.2 Disadvantages of using triangulation**

The drawback and warning that is sounded is that it can be a problematic process. Creswell (1994:173) proposes some of the drawbacks of using triangulation. They are:

- extensive time needed to use different paradigms adequately;
- the expertise needed by the researcher;
- the problem of the scope of the study limitation;
- lengthy reporting that often results.

Creswell (1994:177) asserts that it would be advantageous for a researcher to combine methods to better understand a concept that is being tested or explored. The researcher could consider integrating the methods at different phases of the research process, using either the two-phase design, where the qualitative study is separate from the quantitative one, or the dominant-less dominant design, where the study is presented from one dominant angle. Neither of these approaches fulfils the needs of the current research study, therefore the third alternative design was examined. The method is termed the mixed methodology design, which seeks to combine both the qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study. Both approaches carry equal weight. Both qualitative and quantitative paradigms are mixed in all, or some, of the methodological steps.

This approach adds complexity to the study as it carries both paradigm advantages while counteracting the disadvantages of the alternative paradigm. The main contrasting elements of both research designs are seen in Table 4.1 below.

Qualitative research	Quantitative research
Uses inductive reasoning: perception and understanding obtained from data patterns.	Uses deductive reasoning: collected data assesses hypotheses and theories.
Meaning arises from the subject's perspective.	Attribution of meaning comes from the researcher.
Tries to understand life's everyday meaning.	Objectively measures the social world, tests hypotheses and controls behaviour.
Subjective approach to reality.	Objective approach to reality.
Only when the researcher is immersed in data is meaning captured.	The researcher begins the study with a hypothesis that needs to be tested.
Concepts form themes, categories and motifs.	Concepts are seen as distinct variables.
Needs to understand phenomena.	Needs to control phenomena.
Level of information richness in settings determines observation and different observation types are used to improve understanding.	Observations are systematic and standardised.
Data presented as words.	Data presented as exact figures.
Design is flexible and cannot be exactly replicated.	Standardised design for exact replication.
Data analysis done by obtaining themes.	Data analysis done by standardized

	statistical processes.
Analysis unit is holistic, connecting element relationships; whole is more than the sum.	Analysis unit is variables, elements form part of the whole.

Adapted from Neuman (1994:405) and De Vos (2001:242)

Working in both paradigms requires a sound knowledge of both methodologies. This fact can prove to be a stumbling block for the researcher. This approach is to be used in the current study as it lends itself to the exploration of the richness of the world of the first year student. These complexities may not be captured if only one approach is used. However, the researcher is well aware of the above-mentioned stumbling block. It is with these thoughts in mind that the current research study has been designed. This will be discussed in the following section.

### **4.3 RESEARCH METHODS**

In this section of the chapter, the core problem and the aims of the research study will be revisited, and then the actual empirical study will be explained. Starting with the facilitation of the workshops, followed by the administration of the questionnaire, and concluding with the moderating of the focus group interview, the research study attempts to discover what the factors are that are perceived to inhibit first year student performance.

#### **4.3.1 The problem statement and aims of the research study**

As the statement of the problem (1.2) determines the aims (1.4) of the research and those aims determine the specific research methods to be used, it is necessary to touch on both aspects once again.

The core problem of this research study is the determination of those factors that are perceived to constrain the first year student from performing at optimum level. The areas of achievement, underachievement, failure and dropout are widely understood and researched. Most of the research has focused on either the cognitive, academic factors or psychological angles such as anxiety, stress and motivation.

A number of researchers have examined groups of factors, while others have given consideration to single factors. From the literature study in Chapter Three, it appears that

there can be no single defining set of groups or factors affecting achievement, as each researcher groups factors according to his way of thinking. For example, someone dealing with the aspect of setting achievement goals may see this as part of psychological characteristics (Archer, Cantwell & Bourke 1999:31) while others (Raaheim, Wankowski & Radford 1991:59) see it as part of the academic conditions for success.

Looking at stress and anxiety factors, it is interesting to note that psychological health has limited exposure in the literature (McKenzie & Schweitzer 2001:23). For the researcher, to consider perceived factors in isolation from the whole student makes little sense as the students in the current study presented with a multitude of perceived problems, amongst others:

- disenchantment with the study process;
- anxiety regarding examinations and tests;
- fear of failure;
- inability to cope with the workload;
- reading problems;
- under-preparedness for tertiary education;
- stress symptoms at examination time;
- tough living conditions;
- muggings and armed robbery in the inner city;
- financial constraints.

Having to deal with such a variety of problems, the researcher has set out to attempt to answer the following question:

**Is there a relationship between first year student underachievement and perceived psychological and educational deterrents?**

This question leads to a number of other questions that need to be answered in order to obtain a whole picture of student underachievement. They are:

- What are the main causes perceived to be related to performance inhibition?
- Are the problems mainly in the academic arena?

- Does academic underachievement have any effect on psychological well-being?
- How does underachievement impact on the student?
- What factors are important to each gender?
- Do the perceived factors differ from course to course?
- What are the most common academic problems?
- What are the most common psychological factors?

An extensive literature study, and both qualitative and quantitative research methods, are necessary in order to examine this problem from a holistic perspective, with the goal of drawing up an intervention model that may begin to address the problem areas.

#### **4.3.2 Preparation and literature study**

The students with whom the researcher works on a daily basis have provided the need for this empirical investigation. Long before any research study was planned, the researcher was in the position of attempting to address under-performance and concomitant issues that were presenting on a daily basis with astonishing regularity. No research project had to be thought out. No specific topic for investigation had to be found. The research study found the researcher, who has not been able to ignore the dilemmas facing the students.

As the students presented with academic, psychological, environmental and social problems, it was deemed necessary to investigate all angles in order to draw a holistic picture of the student in distress. Therefore, it has been necessary to ground the study in a firm theoretical foundation, and to use an approach that looks at the development of the student from a holistic angle. An intensive study of a student development perspective, namely Chickering's (1969:8) Seven Vectors Theory of Development is the basis upon which the investigation has proceeded.

#### **4.3.3 Empirical investigation**

What follows is a discussion of the three different techniques used in the triangulation approach used to collect the data in this research study. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in order that the study should result in a rich and full examination. There is a possibility that this would not be so if only one method of investigation was used.

### **4.3.3.1 The workshops**

#### **a The role of the workshop**

Although the workshops started the practical phase of the research procedure, initially they were not designed to fulfill this role. Only once the researcher had been asked to help with the facilitation of the various groups in dealing with the problem areas to which she had daily exposure and constant contact, did she decide that the workshop group would be an ideal starting point in the gathering of data.

An opportunity to get a cross-section of academic, administrative and support personnel together to discuss common problems does not occur very often at an institution of tertiary education. The researcher decided to use this rare opportunity. The opportunity to be part of the group, to observe, to understand how others feel about the institutional problem areas and to obtain raw data that would be invaluable, was an opportunity not to be missed.

#### **b The selection of workshop participants**

The five workshops conducted in four faculties of a large tertiary institution (technikon), comprised four workshops for academic and support staff, as well as a separate one for students. Participants were not selected. Volunteers from each sector took part, with one proviso, that in the faculties, neither deans nor heads of schools or department heads were to participate. The sessions were organised for lecturing staff members who had daily contact with the students, both in and out of the classroom.

Approximately twenty-four staff members volunteered from each faculty per session. One advantage of having participants volunteering to take part in the discussion groups is that they wanted to do so. Most were really concerned about the students, and possible reasons for students not all making the grade. They knew their students and felt that they were doing something worthwhile in being part of the working group.

However, one disadvantage was that the participants, although they represented their faculties and colleagues, may not have known how other colleagues felt about specific issues and were restrained in their discussions. Thus some information may have been missed that could have been of vital interest. The constraints of time and managing the project limited the workshops to small, manageable samples that spanned one whole day's discussion per faculty.

### **c The participant observation technique used in the workshops**

The theory behind participant observation used in the workshops and discussed in section 4.2.3.2, revealed both the advantages and disadvantages of the technique. These aspects were borne in mind during the execution of each workshop session. Observation during each of the workshops was a valuable tool. As facilitator, the researcher helped each group get organised and elect a scribe and spokesperson. The members were unaware of the facilitating role and presumed that psychological input was necessary, and possibly helpful.

One of the difficulties of participant observation is that of simultaneously being a member of the group, while observing others. The researcher did not find this too problematic as questions and ideas were flowing back and forth, and she was immediately accepted as part of the group. The researcher did not make any notes during the group sessions. A co-worker jotted down points as an onlooker. Group members seemed pleased that their ideas were being recorded.

The aim of these workshops was not to observe each individual and his or her interaction with the others, but rather to concentrate on the ideas that were being generated by various members.

### **d Validity and reliability of the workshops**

A pilot group could not be facilitated due to the logistics of getting a sub-sample group together at short notice as well as the fact that the researcher was only part of the process, and not the initial co-ordinator. It would have been valuable if the researcher had been afforded that opportunity. Ideally, the other four facilitators should have been briefed as to rapport, engagement and the art of simultaneously looking, thinking, talking and listening.

The conditions were such that the researcher, aware of problems that could arise regarding validity and reliability, tried to minimise those possibilities by concentrating on the richness and diversity within the small group, while simultaneously interacting with the group members. The fruitfulness of the inquiry is the result of creative engagement with both participants and contexts. This is what the researcher strove to attain.

Once the groups had all reported back, discussed their findings and suggestions, the raw data presented as lists, flowcharts and mind maps were collected for analysis by the researcher.

One comment made by a participant was:

*"I hope that this is not going to be one of those fruitless exercises. We have come up with some good notions here. Will someone please get back to us with tangible results and an action plan for the institution?"*

It was this somewhat casual remark that propelled the researcher into further empirical action.

#### **e Analysis of the raw data**

The raw data was then analysed. Common points raised in various groups were placed together and recorded as trends, while singular ideas were also noted. The main trends served as a basis for the next step in the empirical research.

#### **4.3.3.2 The questionnaire**

##### **a Compilation of the questionnaire**

The compilation of the questionnaire followed the steps set out by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:293). The researcher constantly asked questions in order to draw up a sound questionnaire. Firstly, the purpose of the questionnaire had to be identified. This meant clarifying the reason for the study, which is:

Determining those factors that are seen to constrain the first year student from performing at optimum level.

It was then necessary to determine the information that the researcher requires from the respondents, which was:

How strongly does the student feel about each item in the questionnaire?  
To what extent does he perceive to be affected by these factors?

All the research questions that needed to be answered by the questionnaire had to be listed. These were:



What are the main causes perceived to inhibit performance?  
 Are the problems mainly in the academic arena?  
 What are the most common academic problems?  
 What are the most common psychological factors?  
 Which factors are important to each gender?  
 Do the perceived factors differ from course to course?  
 Does academic underachievement impact on psychological well-being?

The identification of any demographic information that addressed the research questions was also necessary, such as:

Age of the respondent;  
 Language spoken;  
 Sex of the respondent;  
 Study course, and whether or not the respondent was repeating a course or module.

The next step in the development of the questionnaire was the drafting of the questions. The researcher looked at the main trends arising from the workshops and broke them down into smaller items. For each item, four possible questions were written down. Using question-drafting tips, the following checklist was regularly consulted (Neuman 1994:226; Black 1999:229; Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:294; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:248):

- use simple, direct and familiar words;
- avoid leading or loaded questions;
- avoid double-barreled questions asking two things in one;
- all questions to be applicable to all respondents;
- avoid vague questions ;
- avoid complex questions ;
- avoid irritating questions ;
- avoid jargon, slang and abbreviations;
- avoid emotional language;
- avoid asking about future intentions;

- avoid false premises.

Thirty-five themes were identified, each with four questions totaling 140 questions. These were carefully scrutinised and the best three questions per item were retained, resulting in a 105-question survey, addressing 35 factors (see annexure A, B and C). The following table shows the specific questions that address the 35 factors.

<b>Table 4.2 Questions that address specific factors</b>		
<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>FACTOR ADDRESSED</b>	<b>MAIN TREND</b>
1, 36, 71	Staff-student communication	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>
2, 37, 72	Staff language use	
3, 38, 73	Financial constraints	<b>FINANCE</b>
4, 39, 74	Student accountability	<b>ACADEMIC FACTORS</b>
5, 40, 75	Lecture attendance	
6, 41, 76	Personal motivation	
7, 42, 77	Goal-setting	
8, 43, 78	Personal time management	
9, 44, 79	Study skills and habits	
10, 45, 80	Study facilities	
11, 46, 81	Concentration	
12, 47, 82	Comprehension	
13, 48, 83	Reading comprehension	
14, 49, 84	Writing skills	
15, 50, 85	Examination and test-taking techniques	
16, 51, 86	Academic support	
17, 52, 87	First year orientation	
18, 53, 88	Course selection and placement	
19, 54, 89	Career guidance	
20, 55, 90	Self esteem	<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS</b>
21, 56, 91	Self confidence	
22, 57, 92	Self discipline	
23, 58, 93	Boredom (complacent disengagement)	
24, 59, 94	Frustration	
25, 60, 95	Fear of failure	
26, 61, 96	General anxiety	
27, 62, 97	Depression	
28, 63, 98	HIV/AIDS fear	<b>PSYCHO-SOCIAL FACTORS</b>
29, 64, 99	Leadership skill development	
30, 64, 100	Social relationships	
31, 65, 101	Social discipline	
32, 66, 102	Loneliness	
33, 67, 103	Situational victimisation	

34, 68, 104	Racism	
35, 69, 105	Abuse and violence in community	

Scaled statements were decided upon, followed by a rating scale where the respondent could indicate the intensity of each item. Mention is made of the scaled question being the most commonly used rating scale format. It is a useful tool when measuring attitudes and personality as subtle graduations in perception or opinion can be captured (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:296; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:253). A Likert-type scale was arrived at with four gradients.

	AA	O	S	N
	AA =	almost always		
	O =	often		
	S =	sometimes		
	N =	never		

The task of assembling the questionnaire proceeded. It comprised a question booklet and a response sheet. Layout and clear instructions were most important. The questionnaire was given a name:

### THE PERFORMANCE FACTOR INDICATOR

The front cover of the questionnaire booklet carried the instructions (see annexure A). A brief background to the study was provided, with clear instructions as to the correct way of marking the response sheet. Confidentiality was assured and consent was given when the respondent signed the bottom of the response sheet on completion of the exercise. Pages two to four of the questionnaire booklet carried the 105 questions.

The full questionnaire consisted of four parts. Part one was at the beginning of the response sheet. This section was allotted to demographic information. Although the student was required to fill in his name and student number, this information was regarded

as highly confidential and only for the use of the researcher, should the emerging responses require immediate intervention. The information that needed to be gleaned was:

- the student's name;
- the student's institutional student number;
- the course for which the student is registered;
- age;
- gender
- whether or not the student was repeating a course or module;
- language spoken most frequently.

The second part of the questionnaire was the 105 statement booklet (see annexure B). Part three was on the response sheet, the area reserved for marking the appropriate answers (see annexure C). A fourth section was included on the reverse side of the response sheet. This was the profile that could be drawn up by either the researcher or the student. Clear instructions were given as to the hand scoring of the instrument. This section was included as it made provision for the feeding back of relevant information to the individual student, should this be deemed necessary (see annexure D).

#### **b Validity and reliability in this phase**

One way of increasing the validity and reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire, is to check the statements for ambiguity and clarity (Fowler 2002:101). All statements should mean the same thing to all respondents and the researcher made use of a linguist who scrutinised the questionnaire. Yet another method to increase the validity and reliability of the instrument as well as its practicability, is to undertake a pilot study. Colleagues did the pretest after having checked the flow of statements, the word usage, clarity of instruction and user-friendliness. Following the advice of Hall and Hall (1996:126) the instrument was taken to superiors in the institution. The group consisted of a psychologist, a linguist, a behavioural science researcher, a statistician, and the head of research. They scrutinised the questionnaire, suggested a few minor changes, proposed that use be made of the computerised marking facility, and gave the study their blessing.

A pilot study was then conducted in order to test the instrument and to fine-tune it. The questionnaire was administered to a group of 24 students, whom are seen once a week by the researcher. All were studying the same course, a good mix of ages, gender, achievers

and repeaters, cultures and ethnicity. Background information about the project was provided, and when asked if the group would like to be part of the research project, the response was unanimous. A suitable time and venue was arranged. No one refused or failed to complete the questionnaire. The statements were discussed after the questionnaire was complete. The students were most willing to offer comments as to how they each experienced the situation. The questionnaire was found to:

- take roughly 30 minutes to complete;
- contain three words that were quite difficult and that needed changing;
- contain clear instructions;
- be easy to fill in;
- contain statements that were fairly easy to comprehend;
- be fairly non-threatening;
- appeal in its layout.

The questionnaire was duly refined according to the comments received. The pilot group offered one proviso; that the response sheets were to be returned the following week so that each could draw up his or her individual profile (see annexure D).

### **c The administration of the questionnaire**

The researcher hoped to obtain responses from at least 700 students on campus. As she was already working in certain courses, access to the students and implementation of the instrument did not pose a problem. The students in eight different courses were offered the opportunity to be part of the research project, while simultaneously finding out a little more about themselves.

A limit had to be placed on the number of students taking part in the project, as many who were not part of the sample population when they heard what the sample group was doing, requested that they join the project. A really large sample would aid reliability and validity, but would have been physically impossible to manage. Application of the questionnaire was replicated eight times, during normal lecture time in the usual lecture rooms. Due to absence on the days when classmates completed the questionnaire, the total number of students that took part in the project amounted to 650. All 650 response sheets were marked by hand and returned to the respondents the following week during lecture time

(see annexure C). The students were shown how to draw up their individual profiles and various items were discussed (see annexure D).

Not included in the research study or research report was the individual student who, on seeing his or her profile, decided to take action and ask for help. A number of students needed help and lunchtime group sessions were arranged for those who experienced common problems. Some students were sensitive about certain issues and they were afforded individual counselling and/or therapy.

#### **d Analysis of the questionnaire data**

The data was fed into a statistical database for analysis and will be highlighted in Chapter Five discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

#### **4.3.3.3 The focus group interview in qualitative research**

As was mentioned in section 4.2.3.2, in order to increase the validity, reliability, and to add richness to the study, it was decided to use a second qualitative measure, that of the focus group interview.

##### **a The technique of using the focus group**

Having researched the focus group technique (Neuman 1994:245; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:288; Babbie & Mouton 2001:292; De Vos 2001:316), the researcher decided upon the following:

- three to five groups of eight to ten participants, each to allow for one or two people not arriving;
- to take great care with the sampling in order that homogeneity of the required background (first year student) is present;
- to employ as many skills as possible in order to make people feel comfortable and happy to speak their minds;
- facilitate the group without being too directive, keeping it open-ended and on track.

##### **b Selection of the focus groups**

The selection of the various groups was difficult, as finding a time where students would have two hours free was problematic. Going into the classrooms to find participants was not ideal. Thus, the researcher relied upon peer helpers. These are senior students, appointed and trained by the researcher and colleagues to help the younger students, both on campus and in the residences. They are highly motivated and reliable individuals. They know the student body well, and would know who would be willing to participate in such discussions. The sampling was therefore purposive.

Six peer helpers were given some background to the research study, and each was then tasked with organising a group of students that would meet in the counselling centre at a convenient time. The brief that they were given was involved. The group to be assembled had to:

- have eight to ten members;
- have an equal number of males and females;
- comprise only first year students;
- have a good mix of study fields;
- have a mix of day and residence students.

After some hard work on the part of the peer helpers, the groups were found and dates, times and venues were agreed upon.

### c Designing the interview guide

Bearing in mind the suggestions for drawing up a sound interview guide mooted by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:390) and De Vos (2001:318), critical questions that would capture the study intent were identified. A summary of the interview guide appears below in table 4.3 and shows the actual questions that were planned.

Question	Question type	Planned question
1	<b>Opening question:</b> general, factual, quick establishment of what is shared by group.	<i>What is life like here for you as a student?</i>
2	<b>Introductory question:</b> introduces the topic and sparks conversation.	<i>How do you know that a student on our campus is facing problems?</i>

3	<b>Transitional question:</b> participants become aware of how others see the topic.	<i>In your opinion, which is the biggest problem area for the first year student?</i>
4	<b>Key question (a)</b>	<i>Has it affected any of you?</i>
5	<b>Key question (b)</b>	<i>In what ways have you been affected?</i>
6	<b>Key question (c)</b>	<i>What things / problems do not get discussed?</i>
7	<b>Key question (d)</b>	<i>What other academic / emotional / social issues stop the student from performing at his best?</i>
8	<b>Key question (e)</b>	<i>Are there other aspects about which we have not thought?</i>
9	<b>Ending question:</b> identifies most important aspects.	<i>Of all the factors that we have raised, which are the most important?</i>
10	<b>Summary question:</b> after raising main issues.	<i>Is what we have summarised adequate?</i>
11	<b>Final question:</b> ties up loose threads.	<i>Have we missed anything?</i>

#### **d Administration of the focus groups**

The groups were held over a period of six months. Each group had one session of up to two hours, meeting only once as that was all the time that the students could give the researcher. Using the guidelines suggested by De Vos (2001:320), the researcher conducted each group in the following way:

- at the beginning of the session, an atmosphere of openness, friendliness and trust was established;
- all participants were seated around a table so that they could see each other;
- ground rules were established such as respecting others' views, not all talking at once;
- the first two group interviews were audio-taped, the others were video-taped;
- confidentiality was stressed;
- probing and pausing were techniques used to get additional information;
- homogeneity of the groups ensured sound group dynamics;
- each group ended with the students acknowledging that they had enjoyed the sessions and wanting to know if they could help in any further manner.



### **e Advantages and disadvantages of using the focus group**

One advantage of using the focus group as a qualitative method of data collection is that it proved to carry minimal cost. The group opened the eyes of the researcher to different facets of student lives that would have been missed if only quantitative data had been used. The fact that the participants interacted with each other enhanced the capturing of data. It afforded the researcher a good deal of flexibility in order to probe. The group allowed other participants to build upon the information that others had provided. The focus group was a validating tool for the data collected in the workshops.

A disadvantage of using the focus group interview method is that it was difficult to decide on participant selection as this phase took place near final examination time. Finding sufficient time to put aside in a busy week for all was a problem. The researcher had to watch the group dynamics in order to redirect the discussion, as some strong participants tended to wander off the subject. The researcher had to watch for subjectivity and bias in all proceedings. Not all the groups reacted to the same set of questions in the same way. Some were difficult to get started, while others were fired up from the beginning.

### **f Media used to collect the data**

Initially, the medium chosen by the researcher to record data in the focus groups was the audio-tape recorder backed by note-taking. Note taking is straightforward and non-invasive. It was explained to the groups that key phrases would be jotted down to back up the tape-recording in case background noise, or two people speaking at once, made transcription difficult. Permission was requested to tape the sessions. The researcher explained that she did not want to miss important points that the students might make, to which there were no objections. The advantage is that recording the session is more like a conversation, where all the nuances, interjections and exclamations can be captured. It is a full record of what the participant says and how it is said (Hall & Hall 1996:162). Note taking and audio-taping were used to record the data in the pilot group. The notes were copious to transcribe and the tape recording was not as clear as it should have been and the task of transcribing the data was onerous.

As no co-researcher was used to take notes while the researcher facilitated the focus group, some of the body language interaction may have been missed. The researcher had to rely purely on the words spoken, what words were used and how they were used.

### **g Analysis of the focus group data**

The results of this phase will be highlighted in Chapter Five and fully discussed in Chapter Six.

## **4.4 CONCLUSION**

An extensive literature survey looking at student development and areas that are affected during these different phases was conducted in order to provide a sound backdrop to the empirical study. Through a number of workshops for staff and students, areas of concern were highlighted. From the data collected and analysed, a questionnaire was drawn up and administered. Following the questionnaire were a number of focus group interviews. Pilot studies were conducted for both the quantitative and qualitative methods, and the researcher decided not to use the data as validity and reliability could not be guaranteed.

Chapter Four explains the reasons for choosing the research methods that were used in the study. Both the qualitative and quantitative design in the triangulation method of data collection used in the research study, although extensive, time-consuming and at times difficult to manage, were necessary in order to get as full a picture of the student in distress as possible.

In Chapter Five, the information gleaned during the empirical study will be selected, sorted, and highlighted. Chapter Six will see a comprehensive discussion and summary of the information, and the main conclusions will be highlighted. This information will enable the researcher to draw up an intervention model, and will consist of a number of intervention programmes to be contained in Chapter Seven. It is the intention of the researcher to bring this model to the attention of the institution in the hopes that all facets of student development and underachievement may be addressed.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE EMPIRICAL STUDY**

There are a number of research conditions in which the sole use of the interview or questionnaire leaves unanswerable rival explanations. The purpose of those less popular measurement classes emphasized here is to bolster these weak spots and provide intelligence to evaluate threats to validity. The payout for using these measures is high, but the approach is more demanding of the investigator.

Eugene Webb (1981)

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter One, the researcher introduced the research orientation. Chapters Two and Three examined the literature that addressed student development from an holistic perspective, and the problems that first year students experience that affect their performance and achievement levels.

The manner in which the research study was planned and executed is described in Chapter Four. In the current chapter, the results of the empirical study examining the psycho-educational factors perceived to inhibit first year student performance are described. The empirical study took place in three phases. Phase one concerned the workshops, phase two, the questionnaire and phase three, the focus groups. Data was collected and processed qualitatively in phases one and three, and quantitatively in phase two.

What follows is the resulting data captured in both the qualitative and quantitative investigations. A full discussion relating to the data will be found in Chapter Six.

#### **5.2 PHASE ONE: THE WORKSHOPS**

The researcher was approached by the institution a year prior to the commencement of the current research project, to find ways of addressing the dropout and attrition rate. It was felt that the workshop format should be utilised rather than focus group interviews at that stage, as not only was individual opinion sought on the topic, but also workable solutions. Each faculty had its own workshop, wherein problems and solutions peculiar to that specific faculty were discussed and investigated during the full day programme. These faculty sessions were not interview sessions, but rather groups where strategic planning would take

place once the strengths and weaknesses had been highlighted. Each group needed to find a way forward in dealing with the problem of student attrition. This procedure therefore entailed the “workshopping” of ideas and solutions.

Consequently, co-facilitation of four informal workshops followed, where lecturers were invited to participate, rather than deans or heads of departments. It was felt that as the lecturers had daily contact with the students in and out of the classroom, they had the opportunity to get to know the students fairly well. They probably had a better idea of where problem areas were, and the possibility of talking openly about these problems with others of like mind would be beneficial to all. Approximately twenty four lecturers from each faculty volunteered to participate.

One workshop per faculty was arranged, one for art, design and architecture, one for engineering, one for business management and one for health sciences. Included in each of these four workshops were support staff members, such as those from student affairs, housing and finance, as these staff members service all faculties alike. It was then felt that a small representative group of students should have their say, and a special workshop was arranged for them. This was the fifth workshop. These students were from the student leadership sector, with members from house committees, the Student Representative Council and student sports bodies. Approximately 120 individuals were involved in the five workshops, and each spanned a full day with breaks for refreshments.

After an initial orientation concerning the national student dropout and attrition rate, the gathering broke into working groups of no more than eight persons, each with a facilitator and a scribe. The first phase of discussion hinged on highlighting specific problems that staff experienced, or perceived the students to be experiencing. These took the form of narratives, with the scribe capturing the essence of the stories, personal experiences and commentaries. Once those particulars were captured, each group then classified the data into general themes and basic trends. All working groups then reported back for general discussion, wherein group themes were compared. It was interesting to note that most groups experienced similar problems. Some group members became quite upset, angry and confrontational as they wanted to know what management was doing about the problem.

The mandate that followed was to return to the small groups and to come up with ways of addressing the problematic issues by seeking viable solutions. Having to find solutions was not expected by most lecturers as many felt that the day had been set aside in which they could air their views and frustrations, complain about the system and wait for management to come up with workable solutions. Initially, this had a silencing effect upon some group members who were fairly agitated and frustrated with current student problems, but interestingly, some of those individuals eventually came up with extremely feasible solutions. All groups then reconvened towards the end of the day, and each group had the opportunity to take the floor and present their findings and resultant solutions.

During the individual group report back session for each faculty, the main themes or focus areas were recorded. With all participants involved, these themes were grouped together and four focus areas were identified in each of the five workshops. The areas of concern centred on student issues, lecturer and teaching issues, social issues and institutional issues. The four focus areas thus comprise the format that will be used in describing the findings of the five workshops. Each of the five workshop findings will be individually reported, and are followed by the composite findings of phase one. The findings of the workshops are necessary in order to orchestrate phase two, which is the compilation of the questionnaire.

It must be emphasised that because the researcher is concerned with the problem areas within the institution, these form the focus of the investigation. It must be noted that although there are current problem areas, there is a lot of good happening on campus. Exciting and innovating initiatives are in progress that will go a long way in addressing some of these issues.

### **5.2.1 Data obtained from workshop 1**

This workshop was run for the largest of the four faculties, that of business management and included lecturers and some of the support staff members. The four focus areas perceived to be problematic by the individuals in this group are student issues, staff issues, institutional issues and social issues, seen from the perspective of the lecturer and not the student.

### **5.2.1.1 Student issues**

#### **a Language difficulties**

Students have problems expressing themselves in English. Some find the textbooks difficult to read. The subject-specific terminology is confusing, and for some students certain concepts and technological phraseology do not exist in their mother tongues. This makes full comprehension of a concept fairly difficult. For many, English is not a second language but a third or fourth language.

#### **b Critical thinking skills**

Many students come to the institution ill-prepared for tertiary education as they have not been taught critical thinking skills in high school. It is then with great difficulty that these students attempt to master the elements of critical thinking, such as analysis, synthesis and insight.

#### **c Study skills**

Students lack the correct skills to make the best of their studies. They do not know how to apportion time, make notes and write effective essays. Lecturers also comment that many students feel that the lecturer is responsible for making the learning material comprehensible during class time, and that these students do not see the necessity of having to apply themselves to understanding each lecture once it has been delivered.

#### **d Selection and placement**

For those departments still using a selection test battery, it is felt that current aptitude tests are culturally biased and outmoded. Some departments require portfolios and individual interviews in order to place students. The question was raised as to whether or not the current matriculation results carry equal value for both privileged and disadvantaged students alike.

#### **e Financial constraints**

Students have problems finding the necessary money for textbooks, fees, for transport and food.

### **f Academic support**

The lack of free access to computers and extra tutors and tutorials is problematic. Students need every possible form of academic support available.

### **g Class attendance**

Class attendance is generally felt to be poor. Lecturers feel that students take class attendance lightly, and do not always see the necessity in attending regularly.

### **h Respect for lecturers**

Some staff members feel that not enough respect is afforded the lecturer, who puts a great deal of effort into the preparation of each lecture. The student feels that as he is paying for the class, he is owed a good lecture.

### **i Orientation**

The traditional orientation of new students to academic and campus life takes place at the beginning of the academic year. It is thought by many staff members to be insufficient, ineffective and in some areas, totally lacking.

### **j The Student Representative Council's role**

Many lecturers question the reason for serving on this body as a representative of the student community. The image presented by some members of the SRC is that they are there to entertain the new student and expose him to the social side of life on campus. The core functions of student governance by the SRC need to be explained to all new students during orientation, and the SRC members are responsible in setting the academic tone by achieving good grades and encouraging the new students to do likewise.

#### **5.2.1.2 Staff issues**

##### **a Communication**

Staff-student communication is poor as cultural and language barriers exist. Students do not always understand what the lectures are saying, and in turn the lecturers do not understand the context from which students emanate. This results in misunderstandings.

**b Staff-student ratio**

Staff sees this as problematic as some classes are far too big to handle efficiently. Students do not get the attention that they require.

**c Staff allocation**

In some courses, there are too few staff members to teach the required number of subjects. Some staff members are thus allocated teaching subjects in which they have very little interest. The students pick the apathy up immediately, which affects their performance levels.

**d Staff mentoring**

Not enough emphasis is laid on the mentoring of individual students in the group. Staff members feel that some lecturers do not really care about their students. Both care and mentoring are necessary for each student to feel that he is of some importance and worthwhile to the lecturer.

**e Teaching styles**

There are some staff members who possess very weak teaching abilities. Their teaching technique is thus inadequate, and the student suffers as a result.

**f Attitude**

Colleagues comment on the negative attitude of some lecturers towards their subject and their students. Staff members feel that the days of the autocratic lecturer are numbered, and such lecturers have no place whatsoever within the institution.

**g Staff priorities**

Each lecturer must be able to distinguish between the needs of the institution and prioritise accordingly. Time must be apportioned to teaching, research, consultation and community involvement, but not to the detriment of the student.

**h Accountability**

It is noted that there are staff members who take their academic responsibilities lightly and do not arrive on time for lectures, or do not arrive at all. The consequences are that those lectures do not get covered or are glossed over. Students model this shoddy behaviour, it affecting their output by consequence.



### **i Lecturer appointment**

A number of concerned staff members question the method of staff appointments. There is a feeling that the criteria that may or may not exist are questionable, and there seems to be no lecturer evaluation once they are employed. This raises the question of whether or not they have well-developed teaching skills and are able to cope with disadvantaged students.

### **5.2.1.3 Institutional issues**

#### **a Academic facilities**

Staff members feel that facilities should be better maintained as some are very run-down and neglected.

#### **b Recreational facilities**

The institution lacks suitable recreational and sporting facilities on some campuses. These are facilities that the students need in order to live a balanced life.

#### **c Service culture**

There is a very weak culture of institutional service that affects the students in many ways. The life skills that could be modeled from the various support services are lacking.

### **5.2.1.4 Social issues**

#### **a Security**

Attacks at gunpoint and frequent muggings are a cause for great concern. These attacks result in students having to deal with, and come to terms with violence, this fact having a negative impact on student learning.

#### **b Accommodation**

The shortage of residential accommodation on and around campus translates into students having to find alternative living space. This is often sought in undesirable and dangerous areas. The student may not be able to afford accommodation, and thus has no fixed abode. He will squat for a time and then move on.

### c Peer pressure

The need to fit into a group is very strong and can result in alcohol and drug abuse, the misuse of student funds for purposes other than learning, and irresponsibility towards academic demands. Some students do not possess the necessary social skills that would enable them to withstand this pressure.

As a group, workshop one came up with some innovative ideas that unfortunately, due to report constraints, cannot be discussed in this study. In summation, Table 5.1 shows the different aspects that received attention.

Areas of Concern	Student issues	Staff issues	Institutional issues	Social issues
	Language	Communication	Academic facilities	Security
	Critical thinking skills	Class size	Recreational facilities	Accommodation
	Study skills	Course allocation	Service culture	Peer-pressure
	Selection	Mentoring		
	Finance	Teaching style		
	Academic support	Attitude		
	Attendance	Politics		
	Attitude	Accountability		
	Orientation	Staff appointments		
	SRC's role			

### 5.2.2 Data obtained from workshop 2

This workshop catered for the second largest faculty, the faculty of engineering. The same format was used to capture the data pertaining to the main areas of concern in this group as used in the previous one, and the following points were highlighted by the group.

### **5.2.2.1 Student issues**

#### **a Under-preparedness**

Most students come with a history of poor schooling. Advanced critical thinking skills are not well-honed. There appears to be a feeling that not all matriculation symbols carry the same values.

#### **b Language**

Students appear to have problems in both comprehending and using English. For many students, English is not a first or second language. It may be a third or fourth language.

#### **c Study skills**

Skills are lacking in note taking, listening, looking for keywords, reading skills, assignment writing and examination and test-writing techniques.

#### **d Career counselling**

Staff members find that many students have not had the privilege of career counselling at high school level. They make poor course choices, based on factors other than interest and ability. When marketing the courses at high school level, there is not enough clear course explanation given to the prospective students. Often courses are embarked upon without any knowledge of what a particular course entails. Course changes are made unwittingly, often with dire consequences.

#### **e Selection and placement**

The psychometric test battery currently in use by some departments as a guide to student course placement is inappropriate as the tests are out of date. They are culturally biased and should not be used. The dilemma continues with regard to the placement procedures without any valid and reliable knowledge as to students' potential levels.

#### **f Finance**

Financial constraints are placed upon the students in that they struggle to find the fees. Textbooks are extremely expensive and they find themselves unable to purchase the required books. Many travel far and spend hours commuting, which adds to the expenses.

**g Attendance**

Far too many students miss far too many classes. Some of those repeating modules do not attend classes, and only appear when writing tests or examinations. They do not seem to think that having failed, they will benefit from attending classes.

**h Motivation**

It is felt that students, generally speaking, are not well motivated. Some appear to be bored with what they are studying, and others remark that they will not find work once qualified.

It is felt by some lecturers that academic staff members do not always create the right climate in the classroom, one that is conducive to raising student motivation levels.

**5.2.2.2 Staff issues****a Ability levels**

Some staff members find the different levels of ability quite difficult to work with in the lecture room.

**b Flexibility**

Academic staff members feel that there are many lecturers who are extremely rigid in their thinking and teaching, with the consequence that they are unable to provide time or motivation to help the weak students.

**c Class size**

Many classes are far too big, resulting in difficulties with assessing and recording students' progress, conducting tests and teaching a large group that is cramped in an inadequate lecture room.

**d Teaching styles**

There are feelings that academic staff members would benefit from skills training and development in teaching techniques. Some current teaching styles are not conducive to improving student achievement levels.

### **e Tutorials**

Some lecturers do not make themselves available to conduct necessary tutorial groups. Most feel that academic staff should encourage peer tutoring and offer input when peer tutors are chosen.

### **f Staff-student communication**

It is felt that lecturers do not understand the students. The cultural gap is large and misunderstandings frequently occur. These misunderstandings result in a communication breakdown, leaving the students feeling victimised, and the lecturer frustrated or angry.

### **g Staff priorities**

Academic staff members need to work out how to best balance teaching responsibilities against research, consultation and community work.

## **5.2.2.3 Institutional issues**

### **a Practical work**

Practical work completed by students in the laboratories is impeded by poor maintenance and a lack of equipment.

### **b Library**

A problem for most students is the fact that there are no proper study areas available in the libraries. Textbooks that are too expensive for many students to buy are only available on short loan periods.

### **c General maintenance**

A number of issues are problematic. Classrooms do not get cleaned regularly. Many venues are poorly lit. During the summer months, there are air conditioning units that do not work in the large teaching venues. Overhead projectors break and do not get fixed.

## **5.2.2.4 Social issues**

It is of interest to note that in this group no social or psychological issues came to the fore. As for workshop one, Table 5.2 summarises the data that was captured in workshop two.

Areas of Concern	Student issues	Staff issues	Institutional issues	Social issues
	Under-preparedness Language Study skills Career counselling Selection Finance Attendance Motivation	Student abilities Flexibility Class size Teaching style Tutorials Communication Priorities	Practical work Library General maintenance	None

Besides the fact that this group as a whole did not address any social issues, most of the discussion centred on the student. The problems appeared to be very one-sided. Only when it was pointed out to the members that they should start looking in other areas, did the focus shift from the student to the staff member. Even then, the academics did not want to shoulder much responsibility for attrition or underachievement. The conversation hinged on the poor quality of student entering the institution, and not the possibility of the poor quality of teaching.

### 5.2.3 Data obtained from workshop 3

This was a workshop run for the academic staff in the smallest faculty, that of art, design and architecture plus some support staff members. The issues under discussion are as follows:

#### 5.2.3.1 *Student issues*

##### a Under-preparedness

High schools tend to shelter the learner from a lot of the harsh realities of life. When students from the rural areas arrive in the city to start their studies, a number of them are unable to cope adequately. They find their newfound freedom an awesome responsibility and are unable to handle it adequately. Staff members feel that many schools from which

the disadvantaged students come are unable to prepare their learners adequately for tertiary education. Residence life can prove to be highly problematic for the new student in that he is unable to settle down adequately enough in order to tackle his studies in a serious way.

### **b Course selection**

Some high schools provide little or no career guidance. Important skills such as decision-making are not emphasised, with the result that poor course choice takes place. Many students do not get into their first or second choice courses, and go on to enroll for courses in which they have little interest or knowledge. They need to study something, and take whatever they can get. Placement tests are perceived as being outmoded and culturally biased.

### **c Independence**

Some students have problems adjusting to the new freedom that they experience the first time that they live away from home. For many students, this means the end of dependence upon someone significant in their lives. Some lecturers are of the opinion that many students are not ready for this independence, and thus are unable to manage well on their own.

### **d Language / literacy**

The ability to communicate and express oneself in English is seen to be a huge problem by this group. Not only does the new student find it difficult to communicate fluently and comprehend what some lecturers are explaining, he also finds difficulty in reading the prescribed textbooks. The workload is insurmountable and many a student simply gives up trying.

### **e Financial constraints**

Most students appear to struggle to pay for their studies. For many of the bursary holders, it is the first time that they are working with a relatively large sum of money. They possess little financial management skills, are unable to budget adequately, and as a consequence, find that they have to do without proper food. They are not always able to buy the required textbooks, calculators and other items that are necessary in specific course studies. Many staff members feel that no substantial study schemes are in operation to support the needy student, and those that exist are not managed properly.

### **f Life skills**

Most staff members feel that adequate programmes in life skills are sadly lacking, and the student is not afforded the opportunity to develop the skills that he needs the most.

### **g Attendance**

Not enough emphasis is placed on the importance of attending every lecture and preparing for that lecture the day before. Too many students feel free to come and go during lecture time, some arriving up to half an hour late. Others do not see the necessity to complete any homework that is given during lecture time. Student responsibility and accountability do not appear to be taken seriously.

### **h Students' Representative Council**

For many lecturers, the SRC is not fulfilling the role for which it was created. The popular image is one of an entertaining unit during registration and orientation. There do not seem to be strong role models upon which the students can model their own behaviour. The SRC has a responsibility to model serious academic commitment and help to establish a strong work ethic within the student body.

## **5.2.3.2 Staff issues**

### **a Communication**

Staff-student communication appears to be fragile as the student is not understood by the lecturer. His background is not understood and the lecturer has no idea of the student's context. The cultural gap widens as the student finds that he is unable to communicate with the lecturer on an acceptable level, finding that he cannot understand the lecturer's context.

### **b Attitude**

There appear to be lecturers that do not enjoy the subject that they have to teach, and consequently their attitudes are negative towards both the subject matter and the students who they teach. This does nothing to improve staff-student communication and impedes real learning.



**c Class size**

A number of lecturers feel that the ratio of academics to students is wrong. Some classes are far too large to handle effectively, and the lecturers struggle with the heavy teaching and marking loads.

**d Teaching styles**

Lecturers remark on the antiquated style that some academics are still using. For many students, these methods equate to an inability to comprehend what is happening in the classroom. These lecturers need to look at what they are teaching, how they are teaching it, and change their methods in order that the disadvantaged student may benefit from their expertise.

**e Flexibility**

The teaching staff members need to become less rigid in their approach so as to accommodate the disadvantaged student and teach him what he needs to understand. This could mean a total change of approach.

**5.2.3.3 Institutional issues****a Service culture**

The students often find themselves at the receiving end of poor administrative service. They are the customers and are often misinformed or not informed at all. Feelings that they are not valued as customers requiring a particular service are evident.

**b Maintenance**

Comments regarding lack of proper maintenance of equipment, air-conditioning units, classrooms and laboratories are common.

**c Examinations**

The ratio of lecturer to student is often undesirable. The spacing of examinations between the end of formal lectures and the start of the examination period is far too short. The students struggle with managing their examination writing time as no clocks are in the designated venues.

#### **d Library**

Many of the books in the libraries are outdated and there are no proper study areas within the various libraries. For many students, the library hours are inadequate.

#### **e Experiential learning**

The established institutional practice of creating opportunities for students to be exposed to the world of work during the second or third year of their studies is perceived as being taken lightly in some departments. It is still common practice in some courses, but others do not see the relevance thereof. In years gone by, students used to first obtain work and then come from industry to gain their qualifications. They thus arrived at the institution with some experience of the world of work. Today the students know nothing about industry, or very little about the vocational field towards which they are headed. Having graduated, when they try to find work, they have no experience and consequently cannot find employment.

#### **5.2.3.4 Social issues**

##### **a Accommodation**

Students coming to the city to study experience the shortage of accommodation. This is not explained to them during recruitment, and many find themselves in difficult positions when they come to the city, expecting to secure a residence placement. Those students who are undergoing experiential training find themselves without accommodation during the holiday periods as the residences close.

##### **b Security**

The students do not always feel safe in the inner city, and some leave for safer locations. Although all possible attempts are made to keep the students safe, there are occasionally security breaches. Those that have been mugged at gunpoint suffer and need therapeutic intervention. The violence that many have had to endure is detrimental to the performance of each of the affected students.

Table 5.3 summarises the problem areas discussed in workshop three.

Areas of Concern	Student issues	Staff issues	Institutional issues	Social issues
	Under-preparedness	Communication	Service culture	Accommodation
	Course selection	Attitude	Maintenance	Security
	Independence	Class size	Examinations	
	Language	Teaching style	Library	
	Finance	Flexibility	Experiential learning	
	Life skills			
	Attendance			
	SRC			

#### 5.2.4 Data obtained from Workshop 4

This workshop comprised academic staff from the third largest faculty that of health sciences. Problem areas that were discussed in this workshop were more holistically oriented than the previous two workshop groups.

##### 5.2.4.1 *Student issues*

###### a Under-preparedness

Here the emphasis rests on the need for academic spoon-feeding, which the staff experience in their new students. They find that some students are highly dependent and experience problems in making their own decisions. Lecturers report that many students hold negative opinions about the courses, without trying to get to the truth with regards to correct course requirements. Many do not fully understand what a particular profession entails, and are shocked when they find that they have to carry out the dissection of human cadavers as part of a course requirement. Many students appear to be unprepared for the many new social responsibilities that await them in higher education.

###### b Selection and placement

Staff members question the accuracy and reliability of the matriculation symbol as an indicator of achievement as it does not always seem to tally with student performance

levels. They are disappointed with the current psychometric placement tools as the analyses are no longer suitable for current course placement. With other institutions offering parallel courses, the academic staff members find that the institution is competing with other neighbouring institutions in capturing of high calibre students. As the students must travel to the inner city to study, many choose to attend institutions that are located in traditionally safer areas, thus many strong potential candidates are lost to other institutions.

### **c Life skills**

It is of grave concern that no life skills are taught at curricular level for credit purposes. These are sadly lacking and should form part of every course design. These are skills that are sorely needed in the professional workplace and should be part and parcel of the curriculum.

### **d Support structures**

It is also felt that too few support structures are in place for the students, especially those students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. In this faculty, although peer tutoring and peer mentoring programmes are in place, there are too many students needing academic support and not enough students who have the time, patience and interest to help them.

### **e Freedom**

The transition from high school to a tertiary education institution marks the moving away from dependence upon strong parental influence to individual freedom. For many students, this means behaviour that is not always responsible, accompanied by a false sense of freedom. Many show lack of self-discipline, as well as lack of social discipline. Many students fail to develop a strong work ethic or ethos, and consequently their performance levels reflect the lack of learning ethic that should be the driving force behind their study intentions.

### **f Motivation**

Many students start their courses with the best of intentions. They are enthusiastic and hardworking. However, as they progress through some of the lengthier courses, as demands and workload increase, motivation levels decrease quite rapidly.

### **g Time management**

With overloaded curricula, many students struggle to apportion their time successfully. They find that they do not get through their workload, are unable to find time in which to play sport or relax, and generally are extremely tense. Their concentration levels suffer, their clinical work suffers and their performance levels are not what they expect them to be, even though they are working extremely hard.

### **h Study skills**

Academic staff members find that the disadvantaged students often do not have the necessary skills with which to cope with the academic demands that are placed upon them. Consequently these students experience problems with daily class preparations, as well as writing assignments, tests and examinations.

### **i Finance**

For many students, financial constraints are a major headache. Besides the problem of finding funding, expensive textbooks are necessary, and specialised equipment is needed in some courses. For most students, the luxuries such as a warm bed, good food and electricity are taken for granted. For many students, the reality exists that living conditions do not include these luxuries, especially electricity. Assignments have to be typed and work done at night where no computer or electrical facilities exist. This is indeed working against great odds.

### **j Attitude**

There are students who have very negative attitudes towards the institution and their work. It is thought by many academics that they could be studying for the wrong purposes. There may be pressure to perform because the student is a bursary holder. There could be parental pressure to follow a course that is not the choice of the student, but rather the desire of the parent. It is evident that some students did not receive suitable counselling when deciding about course registration, and have embarked upon courses for which they are not totally suitable.

### **k Psychological problems**

The health sciences workshop group was the only group to highlight the psychological problems that are evident in some students. There are students on the campus who hide all their problems. When they start missing classes or present with unusual behavioural

patterns, lecturers notice that something is wrong. In the courses where psychopathology is taught, there are students who recognise that they do indeed have a problem and are willing to find help. If students feel free to speak to someone, problems can be sorted out long before they begin to interfere with academic and emotional performance.

#### **5.2.4.2 Staff issues**

##### **a Communication**

There are students who appear to be afraid of lecturers, making participation in class quite a difficult process. The students are encouraged to stop the lecturer and to ask questions during class time. This does not occur, hence the lecturer thinks that the material being discussed is understood, when it is not. Many lecturers are totally out of touch with the students. They do not understand the students' backgrounds, and hence misunderstandings occur.

##### **b Staff development**

Teaching staff needs capacity building. It is felt that in order to cope with the diversity of student preparation, ability and academic development levels, the teaching staff needs to become multi-skilled. Many are already in multi-skilled situations where they find themselves ill equipped to deal effectively with these situations.

##### **c Teaching styles**

New and innovative teaching methodologies are needed in order to cope with student diversity. The institution needs to support the lecturers in their bid to upgrade their teaching skills.

##### **d Priorities**

The teaching staff expresses the need to know where their priorities lie. All are aware that their work is part teaching, part research, part community service and part consultation. Clarity is needed as to how to apportion these priorities.

##### **e Workload**

For many lecturers, the large classes, and reduction in teaching staff has brought a vast increase in workload. There is a constant balancing act in progress where sufficient teaching, evaluation, personal interest and involvement are precariously juggled.

**f Holistic approach**

Staff members notice that the student needs to be trained holistically. The entire student needs to be developed, not just skills that are applicable to a specific profession.

**5.2.4.3 Institutional issues****a Study facilities**

The institution has failed to provide adequate study facilities for the students. As so many of the students do not have the ideal living conditions that are conducive to successful study, they need areas that are safe and quiet, set aside on the campus for the sole purpose of study.

**b Recreational facilities**

Opportunities to relax and play the sport of one's choice are not available on all the campuses, much to the detriment of those students who cannot afford to travel across town to play sport or to join a club. If students are to be developed within a holistic perspective, they need to be able to relax in this fashion.

**c Service culture**

It is strongly felt that the culture of service is sadly lacking. Administrative processes are cumbersome and time-consuming. Students experience animosity and have described the various services as showing war-like tendencies. For the new student coming from a protected rural environment, this experience can be devastating.

**5.2.4.4 Social issues****a Crime, violence and abuse**

This workshop group recognised that crime, violence and abuse, all of which the student is facing, has faced in the past or could possibly face in the future, impact upon the student's academic performance and his emotional well-being.

### b Security

Many students accessing the institution have to travel through and to dangerous inner city areas. Constant vigilance has a detrimental effect on the general well-being of the student.

### c Fear of HIV/AIDS

The health sciences workshop was the only faculty group to highlight the serious issue concerning the impact of HIV/AIDS on students. The HIV fear overshadows the student, especially those working in various clinical fields with a good comprehension of what the virus entails. Fear of HIV and AIDS is a very real fear, one that impacts upon the lives of the students as they lose loved ones and close friends to the virus.

### d Peer pressure

Many lecturers note that there are students in their courses who do not seem to fit in anywhere. They appear to be lonely, and it is felt that there is an inherent danger wherein the student in order to feel that he belongs somewhere, will follow the behaviour of other less responsible students.

Table 5.4 illustrates the summary position taken by academic staff members in this faculty.

Areas of Concern	Student issues	Staff issues	Institutional issues	Social issues
	Under-preparedness	Communication	Study facilities	Crime, violence and abuse
	Course selection	Staff development	Recreational facilities	Security
	Life skills	Teaching style	Service culture	HIV fear
	Support	Priorities		Peer pressure
	Freedom	Workload		
	Motivation	Holistic approach		
	Time management			
	Study skills			
	Finance			
	Attitude			



	Psychological problems			
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### 5.2.5 Data obtained from Workshop 5

This workshop was organised for representatives of the student community. It was well attended and enthusiastically embraced.

#### 5.2.5.1 *Student issues*

##### **a Disadvantaged backgrounds**

The students acknowledge that they come to tertiary level education lacking certain academic skills, and that they have a large backlog or deficit to overcome. They need support in order to try to rectify the situation.

##### **b Language**

Here, numerous problems exist, from comprehending, listening, reading, and writing essays to examination and test-taking techniques. For many students, English is not a first or second language, but rather a third or fourth language. Some are too shy to speak or to conduct an oral presentation in front of the whole class. It is acceptable, in their eyes, to skip that class and not get a mark, rather than hazard the chance of making fools of themselves.

##### **c Finance**

There appear to be a multitude of financial problems that are encountered by most students. Travel costs for commuting students are high. Funds need to be found, or sponsors need to be identified. Accommodation, clothing, food, textbooks and apparatus needed for specific courses need to be paid for. There are those students who do not worry about paying for tuition, but there are others who worry constantly as to where they are going to get enough money to feed themselves.

##### **d Adjustment**

Most of the students comment that adjusting to the ways of the tertiary institution is tough. Most do not arrive prepared for the transition from high school or from the quiet rural districts. For many, it is a big shock to arrive in an enormous city, and have to travel or live

in the inner city that is seen by many to be unsafe. Very few are prepared or skilled well enough to handle the great dose of instant freedom that tertiary education brings to them.

#### **e Victimisation**

A great number of students see themselves as victims of one or another situation. These situations may be historical, political, educational, social or emotional. Many use this as an excuse for not performing, while others are determined to put the past behind them and make the most of this new opportunity to make something of their lives.

#### **f Self discipline**

Most students admit that they are not self-disciplined enough. This means that they miss classes, get to class late, do not hand in assignments and essays on time, lose library books and do not bother to attend tutorials or keep consultation appointments.

#### **g Responsibility**

Many fail to take personal responsibility. They do not think it necessary to participate in class, to prepare for new classes, to ask when they do not understand. Instead, many feel that it is the responsibility of the lecturer to keep them motivated.

#### **h Study habits**

Many students say that there are no proper facilities on campus where they can study effectively. The residences are all too noisy, and home conditions could be worse. Large classes are blamed for ineffective learning.

#### **i Selection process**

Most students find the selection and placement process unfair. The tests are in English which they find difficult, and they feel that they cater for those students who have had privileged schooling and upbringing.

#### **j Psychological problems**

Most students will not admit to having any problems, and will find all methods of hiding those problems, often to their own detriment. Uncharacteristic behaviour may manifest itself in poor attendance, absenteeism and poor performance or course dropout.

### **5.2.5.2 Staff issues**

#### **a Attitude**

Many students comment that they sometimes feel humiliated and degraded by staff. Some lecturers still maintain an authoritarian attitude that the students find most condescending. They feel that they are not being treated as adults. They may experience them as hostile, antagonistic and prejudiced. Some lecturers are perceived as being unapproachable, while others do not consult. Students feel afraid to stop and ask questions in class for fear of feeling foolish.

#### **b Communication**

Most agree that the lecturers have very little idea about who the students really are as people. They do not understand their diverse backgrounds. Students also regret the fact that they have very little contact with part-time lecturers, and are unable to form firm bonds with them.

#### **c Assessment**

Many students feel that assessments are biased towards white students as they feel that the lecturers spend more time with them, and thus they get higher marks. This perceived practice is seen to be unfair.

#### **d Teaching style**

The students boldly state that many lecturers do not know how to teach properly. There are those who do not provide course outlines or lecture guides at the beginning of a semester. Lectures are sometimes cancelled without explanation or prior warning.

#### **e Class size**

Many classes are far too large for effective teaching and learning to take place. The students do not get the attention that they require.

#### **f Equity**

Most students would like to see staff equity as they feel that the black community is highly underrepresented.

### **5.2.5.3 Institutional issues**

#### **a Recreational facilities**

Only one campus has proper recreational facilities, while the others do not have such luxuries. It is felt that in order to perform at optimum level, the students need to be able to pursue leisure activities and develop other angles of their being.

#### **b SRC role**

The role that the Students' Representative Council plays is seen by most students to be that of an entertaining body for all new students. The welfare and academic survival of the new students is ignored. A paradigm shift is necessary in order for this student body to gain clarification as to its role and functioning within the institution.

#### **c Libraries**

The library hours are limited, excessive noise levels exist, texts are often outdated and book processing takes a long time. The students feel that they should have a corner where they can study through the night, if necessary.

### **5.2.5.4 Social issues**

#### **a Peer pressure**

Students find it difficult to become accepted, and resort to a number of different methods to obtain social acceptance. Not finding acceptance can result in the choice of undesirable friends and the development of unacceptable behaviour patterns. The students continue to stress the extraordinarily strong role that peer pressure plays in their lives.

#### **b Accommodation**

The students find that they have grave problems finding accommodation. They say that they do not know where to start looking for alternative accommodation when they cannot get into a residence. Those who are staying in a residence comment that it is almost impossible to try and study in their rooms as the noise and disturbance factors are great.

#### **c Security**

Security and safety on and off campus is seen as problematic. It is felt that crimes such as muggings at gunpoint near campus should not be occurring. Strict regulations apply with

regard to drug and alcohol abuse, abuse of women and prostitution, yet they are not enforced unilaterally and unequivocally.

Table 5.5 summarises the data captured in group five.

Areas of concern	Student issues	Staff issues	Institutional issues	Social issues
	Background	Attitude	Recreational facilities	Peer pressure
	Language	Communication	SRC role	Accommodation
	Finance	Assessment	Library	Security
	Adjustment	Teaching style		
	Victimisation	Class size		
	Self-discipline	Equity		
	Responsibility			
	Study habits			
	Selection			
	Psychological problems			

### 5.2.6 Summary of the findings from the five workshop groups

A number of issues kept surfacing over and over again. Some issues were of grave importance to a particular group and not highlighted or even discussed by the others. Table 5.6 shows all the topics that were discussed in the five sessions.

TOPICS DISCUSSED	WS1	WS2	WS3	WS4	WS5
<b>Student issues</b>					
Adjustment				✓	
Attendance	✓	✓	✓		
Attitude	✓			✓	
Background					✓
Career guidance		✓			
Finance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Freedom				✓	

Independence			✓		
Language	✓	✓	✓		✓
Life skills			✓	✓	
Motivation		✓		✓	
Orientation	✓				
Psychological problems				✓	✓
Responsibility					✓
Selection	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Self discipline					✓
Study skills and habits	✓	✓		✓	
Support	✓			✓	
Time management				✓	
Thinking skills	✓				
Under-preparedness		✓	✓	✓	
Victimisation					✓
<b>Staff issues</b>					
Accountability	✓				
Assessment					✓
Attitude	✓		✓		
Class size	✓	✓	✓		
Communication	✓	✓			
Course allocation	✓				
Diverse student ability levels		✓			
Equity					✓
Flexibility		✓	✓		
Holistic approach				✓	
Mentoring	✓				
Power politics	✓				
Priorities		✓		✓	
Staff appointments	✓				
Staff development				✓	
Teaching style and skills	✓	✓	✓		
Tutorials		✓			
Workload				✓	
<b>Institutional issues</b>					
Academic facilities	✓				
Examination facilities			✓		
Experiential learning			✓		
Libraries		✓	✓	✓	
Maintenance		✓	✓		
Practical work		✓			
Recreational facilities	✓			✓	✓
Service culture	✓		✓	✓	
Students' Representative Council role	✓		✓		✓
Study facilities				✓	✓
<b>Social issues</b>					
Accommodation	✓		✓		✓
Crime, violence, abuse				✓	
HIV/AIDS fear				✓	
Peer pressure	✓			✓	✓
Security	✓		✓	✓	✓

Topics that received the most attention from all five groups are: finance and selection and placement. For four of the groups, the use of language and the issue of campus security were important topics of discussion. Of importance were the issues surrounding study skills, under-preparedness, class size, teaching style and skills, library facilities, recreational facilities, the culture of service, the Student Representative Council's role, accommodation and peer pressure. Relevant topics were then grouped together in sections forming the focus of the empirical study in phase two, which resulted in the compilation of the questionnaire.

### **5.3 PHASE TWO: THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

The purpose of the questionnaire was to ascertain those factors that are seen to constrain the first year student from performing at optimum level. Information required from the respondents was how strongly they felt about each item in the questionnaire, and the extent to which they perceived themselves to be affected by these factors.

Deciding what specific factors to include in the questionnaire came from the data from the workshops, and this data formed the basis of the questionnaire. The four broad themes of student issues, staff issues, social issues and institutional issues were examined. The four themes were used as the basic format of the questionnaire, and incorporated into the main focus area of the research study, that of academic and psychological issues. As the problems of communication and finance were heavily debated in the workshops, some questions concerning these two subjects formed part of the questionnaire. Some of the many social problems confronting students were also included in the questionnaire.

#### **5.3.1 Background information**

Using the focus areas of communication, finance, academic issues, psychological issues and psychosocial issues as a guide with thirty-five specific factors identified (see Table 4.2, annexure D). Each of these thirty-five factors has three questions attached to them, resulting in a 105-question survey (see annexure B).

A broad spectrum of information has been gleaned, and not all of it can be used in this study. Although information has been obtained with regard to language, course failure, and whether or not the student is in residence or commuting daily, these findings have been

omitted from the discussion in the study. What will be addressed are the perceived factors that appear to disturb student performance from both academic and psychological perspectives.

The number of students that completed the questionnaire was 650 of a possible sample of 700. These students were not randomly assigned to the eight sample groups. Rather, they comprised eight different courses in which psychologists from the student counselling unit were conducting life skills programmes in which the researcher was involved. The average age of the sample group was 19.8, with a standard deviation of 2.09. The number of female students totaled 393, and male students numbered 257. The eight courses in the study comprised the following:

- course 1 n = 93 (access group)
- course 2 n = 158 (credit management)
- course 3 n = 107 (human resources management)
- course 4 n = 23 (management)
- course 5 n = 18 (management services)
- course 6 n = 36 (public relations management)
- course 7 n = 100 (marketing)
- course 8 n = 115 (hotel school)

The answer sheet (annexure C) contained the 105 answer possibilities for the thirty five factors in three columns that run horizontally across the page. In each of the three columns were four possible answers to each question, which were:

- A: where the factor occurs **almost always**;  
 B: where the factor occurs **often**;  
 C: where the factor occurs **sometimes**; and  
 D: where the factor **never** occurs.

The weight given to each possible answer was as follows:

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| A (almost always) | 3 |
| B (often)         | 2 |
| C (sometimes)     | 1 |



D (never)                      0

The answers chosen for each of the three questions in a factor were marked in the appropriate boxes, and a value was assigned to each of the three answers that comprised a specific factor. The three scores were added horizontally and written down in the total score column. The highest possible total score for each factor was nine, and the lowest possible total score was naught. On the reverse side of the answer sheet was the individual profile for the respondent (annexure D), and when drawn and compared with the score distribution table that follows (Table 5.7), the individual student could observe his problem areas and the level of perceived intensity.

In order to clearly illustrate the level of concern with which each student views the problem factors, as well as what type of intervention should take place, and at what level the intervention should be exercised, a decision was taken to calculate the scores and express them as three clear groups. The total calculated scores between one and three were placed together, and comprised the below average group of scores. Scores calculated between four and six were placed together and comprised the average group. Scores calculated between seven and nine were placed together and formed the above average group.

In relation to the questionnaire and the information required from the questionnaire data, the lower the score, the better the student is faring. A high score indicates the degree of intensity to which the student experiences a particular factor. Therefore, a three will indicate that the student is coping adequately and an eight will indicate grave problems.

For the purpose of this study, a score of five and above will be of significance. Although four and three indicate adequate coping abilities, the students in the range of four could benefit from long-term intervention to improve their skills. Five is significant to the study, as that is the baseline from which attention is directed to areas in the students' lives that should be addressed fairly soon. Six is highly significant, and intervention would be short-term occurring soon. Seven is critical, indicating that problems could become severe if left unattended. This range has problem status and requires immediate attention. Eight is highly critical. Students in this range have problems that cannot go unattended, and they require immediate attention. Nine has priority status, is extremely critical and requires crisis intervention of an immediate nature. The breakdown can be seen in the table below.

TOTAL SCORE	SCORE GROUP	STATE OF CONCERN	INTERVENTION
9	below average	extremely critical	crisis intervention (priority)
8	below average	highly critical	immediate attention
7	below average	critical	immediate attention
6	average	highly significant	short term intervention
5	average	significant	short term intervention
4	average	coping	long term intervention
3	above average	coping adequately	long term intervention
2	above average	coping well	does not need attention
1	above average	coping extremely well	none

All the total scores for each of the thirty five factors, as well as all the demographic information, were fed into a database and converted into percentages for statistical analysis.

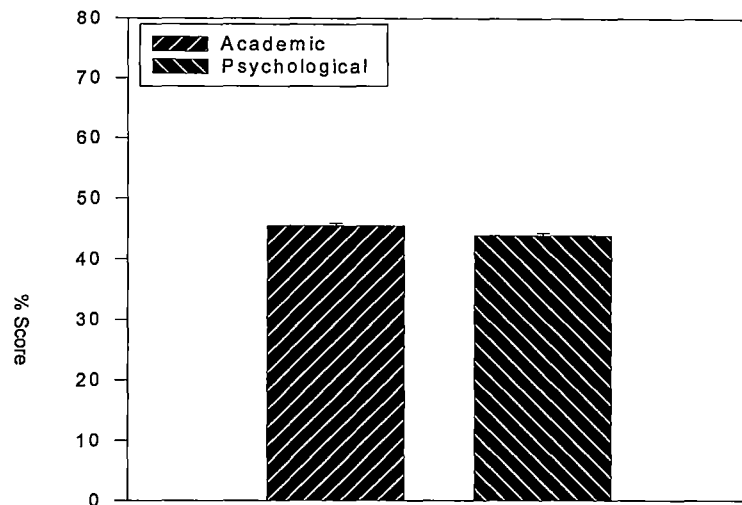
As a large amount of data resulted from the questionnaire, only six focus areas were examined in order to contain the study and render it manageable. The discussion of each of these foci follows that looks at:

- overall comparison between academic and psychological areas;
- perceived academic problems;
- perceived psychological problems;
- factors affecting gender;
- course differences of perceived inhibitors;
- common factors perceived to be problematic.

### 5.3.2 Overall comparison between academic and psychological problem areas

The first focus point of the study is the comparison between the academic and the psychological problem areas. The statistical analysis takes the sixteen academic factors and the eight psychological factors in the questionnaire into consideration. The graph that follows illustrates the one group of factors that are perceived to be more problematic than the other(s). The score for the academic variables is slightly higher than that of the psychological factor grouping.

**Figure 5.1 Overall comparison of academic and psychological problem areas**



Converting the scale points to percentages, the academic factor percentage is 44.59 and the psychological factor percentage is 43.92. Using the paired t test the p value of 0.00005 indicates statistically a highly significant difference. Although there is a significant difference, statistically speaking, in practice or clinically speaking, the significant difference is only 1 % as the two scores are fairly similar. Both values fall within the average range at the low average level, and appear to be non-problematic. However, due to the large sample group, the many non-critical scores cancelled out the great number of critical ones, leaving an overall impression that neither of the two areas need immediate intervention as students appear to be coping at a low average level.

However, when a deeper analysis is conducted, the great variance in individual scores in the eight groups is evidence that there are many students with scores within the critical range, and therefore the analysis must be applied to each individual group rather than to the total sample group.

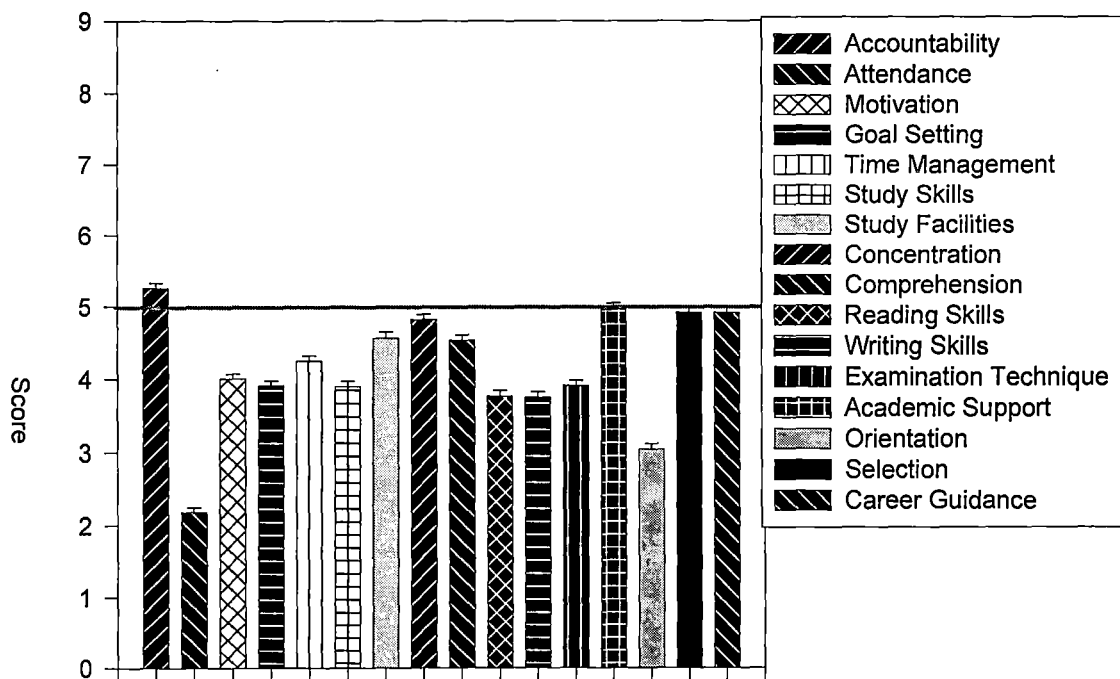
### **5.3.3 Perceived academic problems of all respondents**

The academic factors refer to those educational competencies that are necessary for the student to acquire and master in order to cope with the academic demands of tertiary life. Those included for assessment in the questionnaire were accountability, attendance, motivation, goal-setting, time management, study skills and suitable facilities, concentration,

comprehension, reading and writing skills, dealing with tests and examinations, career guidance, and selection, orientation and academic support offered to the new student. The 650 students from all eight classes in the various courses are included in this analysis.

The academic factors that appear to be problematic, and fall within the significant to highly significant range, are lack of accountability, lack of academic support, the selection process, the lack of suitable career guidance and the inability to concentrate. The use of suitable study facilities and the ability to always understand the lecturers and the study material are significant. The lack of efficient time management, although not deemed problematic could at some stage impact on the student's general academic life. The graph below shows the specific problem areas. Generally speaking, the students do not appear to have a problem attending lectures, and the orientation process may have served a purpose in that the students appear to be coping with student life. These students appear to be coping with academic reading and writing. They possess reasonable motivation levels, goal-setting ability and study techniques. The figure that follows illustrates the sixteen variables that comprise the academic factor group seen to inhibit student performance in the eight course groups.

**Figure 5.2 Academic factors perceived to affect performance of all respondents**

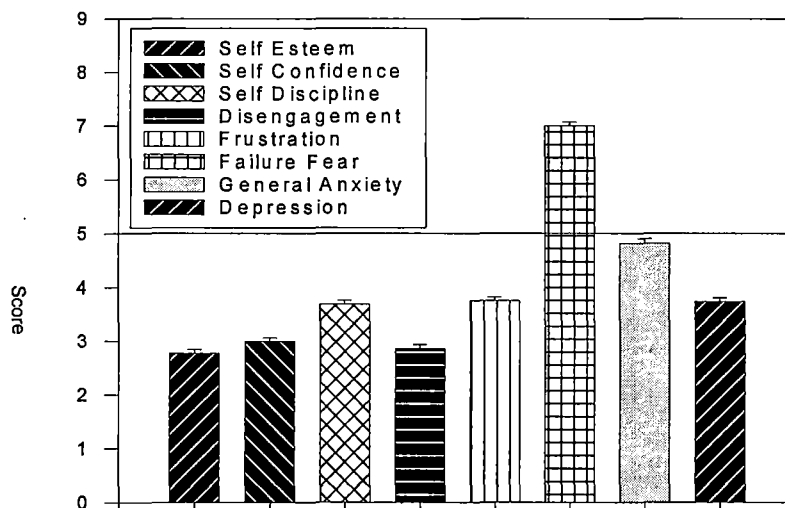


### 5.3.4 Perceived psychological problems of all respondents

The psychological aspect refers to those factors that disturb the general mental and emotional equilibrium of the student. The factors assessed in the questionnaire include self-esteem, self-confidence, self-discipline, complacent disengagement or non-involvement, frustration, fear of failure, general anxiety and depression. The 650 students from all eight classes in the various courses are included in this analysis.

On the psychological front, the students present one variable with a reading much higher than the rest, namely that of fear of failure. This fear score falls within the critical zone, and is followed by general anxiety that is almost at the significant level. Appearing to cope with some depression, frustration and self-discipline, these students see themselves as having a fairly healthy self-esteem, they are quite self-confident and they are engaged in student life. It is only when the various groups are studied separately that the wide discrepancy between problems is observed. The graph below illustrates the eight variables in the grouping of perceived psychological factors that appear to inhibit student performance.

**Figure 5.3 Psychological factors perceived to affect performance**



### 5.3.5 Factors affecting gender

Whether or not a difference exists between male and female students with regard to all thirty-five factors was deemed to be of some interest to this study. All 650 students were included.

The validity of the instrument was tested by comparing the answers that were given by the male and female students. Three statements were linked to each of the 35 factors, forming three groups of answers to those statements in the questionnaire. Set A contained answers 1-35, set B contained answers 36-70 and set C contained answers 71-105. Converting the total scores for each set of answers to percentages, set A had a total of 44.3 %, with a standard deviation of 11.3 %. Set B's total was 49.7 %, with a standard deviation of 12.0 %. Set C had a total of 45.4%, with a standard deviation of 12.1%. Using a paired t test, a statistically highly significant difference between the three sets of answers is revealed that is possibly due to the large sample group or population that was used.

Looking at Figure 5.4 below, set A and set C do not appear to be statistically different from one another, however set B is statistically different, revealing that the students had more negative answers in set B than in A or C.

**Figure 5.4 Comparison between male and female answers**

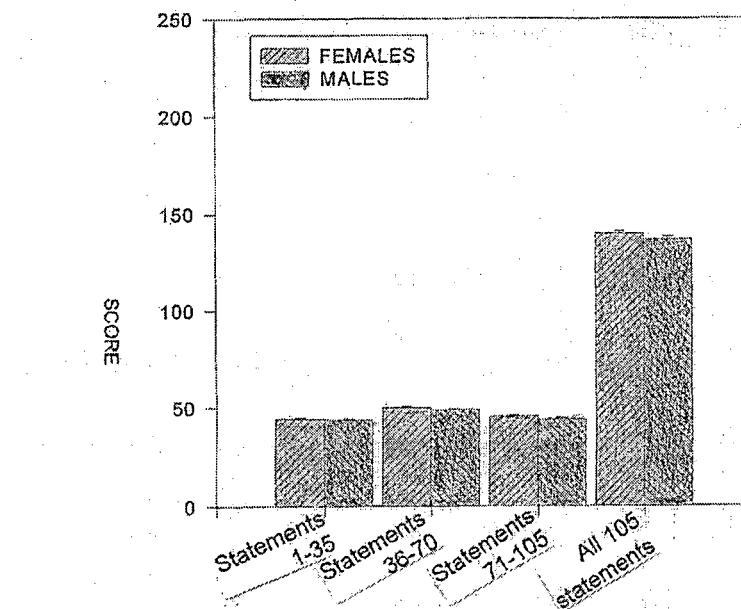
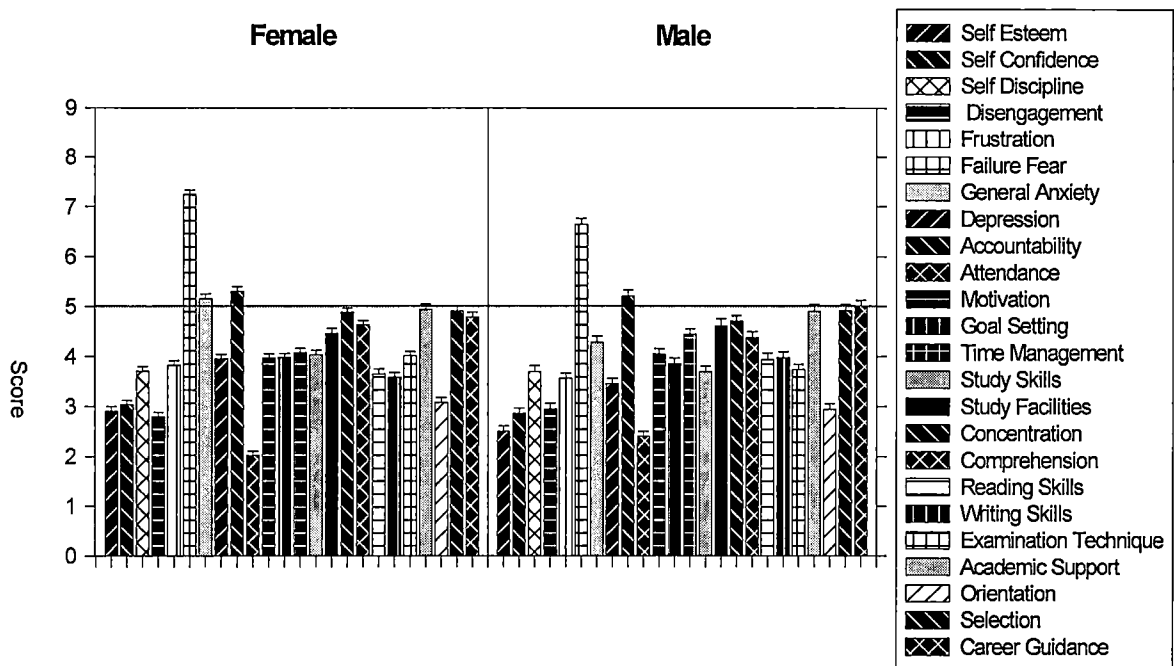


Figure 5.5 below illustrates the factors that are significant in the lives of both male and female students. For both gender groups, fear of failure tops the factor list. Female students are above 7 and the male students are just below 7. Both readings fall within the critical range. Slightly higher for the females than the males is the second factor, which is lack of accountability or taking personal responsibility for one's own academic performance. With both readings just below 5.5, they are of significance. General anxiety levels are also significant in females.

Although both groups feel that the lack of career guidance at high school may be hampering performance, the males feels more strongly about the issue than do the females. Accompanying the lack of career guidance for both groups are the issues of insufficient academic support, as well as the whole course selection process. The male students appear to have more trouble managing their time, as well as reading and writing than the female students. Both groups could benefit from an improvement in concentration levels. Although not problematic, it is interesting to note that, generally speaking, females have a higher level of depression than do the males.

**Figure 5.5 Comparison between factors affecting female and male students**



### **5.3.6 Difference in results of students in different courses**

Having considered the overall results between male and female students, as well as the dominant academic and psychological problems of all 650 students, it was deemed necessary to look at each of the eight course groups that comprise the interview respondent sample in more detail.

Each course or study field is dealt with on an individual basis examining:

- academic factors that inhibit students' performance;
- psychological factors that inhibit students' performance;
- comparison of academic and psychological factors in each course.

Taking each course on its own, there appear to be both similarities and differences in the factors perceived to inhibit performance. The academic and psychological factors in each of the eight courses or study fields in which the 650 students are engaged will be highlighted and compared.

#### **5.3.6.1 Group 1: Business science access course**

This is a one-year foundation course, where students not quite making the grade for specific course selection are afforded a chance to improve their results in the subjects that are course requisites.

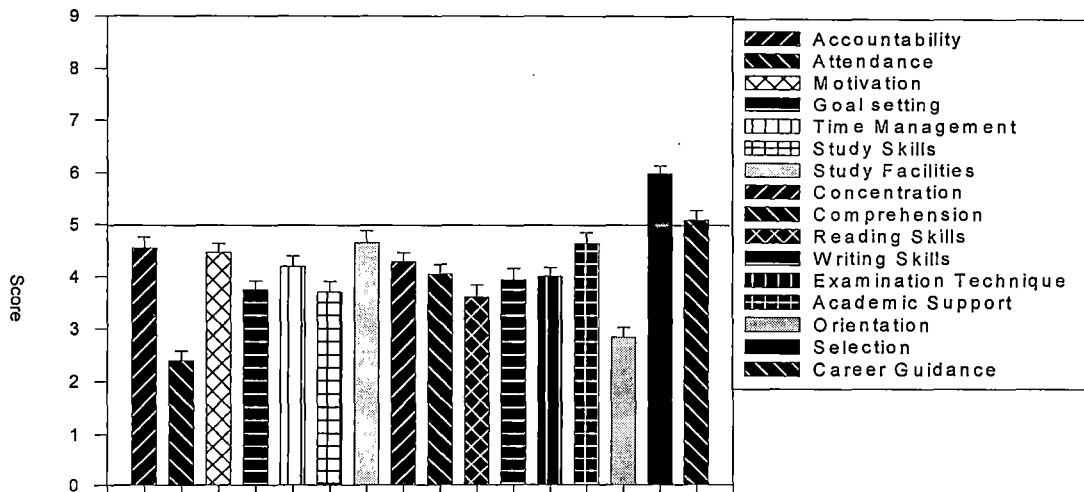
##### **a Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 1**

Looking at the results, it appears that having to upgrade the required subject marks during the current year, and not being allowed to study the chosen course, is deemed problematic by group 1 students, as can be seen in the selection variable that stands out from the rest of the variables. These students currently follow a foundation course that aids the upgrading of results and skills to enable them to reapply the following year. The orientation that they underwent at the beginning of the academic year appears to have been satisfactory and they have no problem attending lectures. Of significance is the lack of career guidance not obtained at high school. They feel that there is insufficient academic support, as well as suitable study facilities. A slight lack of accountability is noted that could be addressed as



could motivation levels. Below is the graph that shows the academic factors that these students feel are problematic for them.

**Figure 5.6 Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group1**

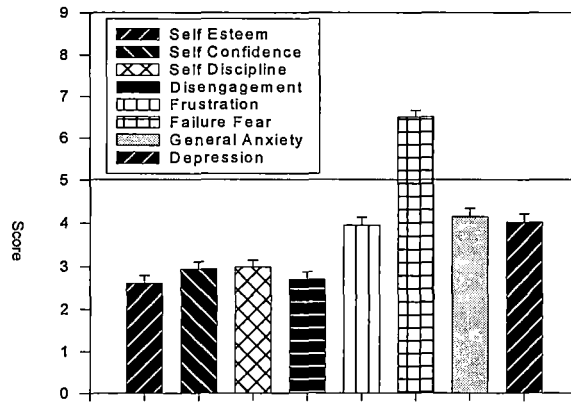


#### **b Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group1**

Looking at the psychological factors that are perceived to be problematic, highly significant to critical is that of fear of failure. These students also experience frustration and general anxiety and depression that should not be left unchecked.

It is of interest that the self-esteem, self-confidence and self-discipline levels are low that indicate coping abilities. These students appear to be engaged in their lives as students as is indicated by the low score in complacent disengagement. On the psychological front the following graph shows the areas of concern for group 1.

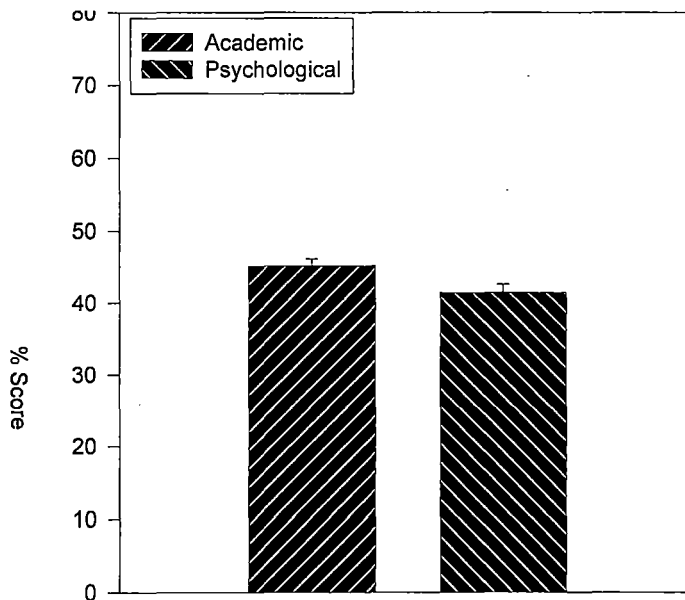
**Figure 5.7 Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 1**



**c Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group1**

Converting the total score in group 1 to a percentage, the academic factor has a mean of 45.1 %, and psychological factor mean is 41.38 %. Using the paired t test, the p value of 0.0003 indicates a highly significant difference between the two. There is also a highly significant clinical difference between the two scores. The scores for the academic factors range between 25 % and 71.5 %, and the psychological factor scores lie between 12.5 % and 69.4 %, as seen in the graph below.

**Figure 5.8 Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group1**



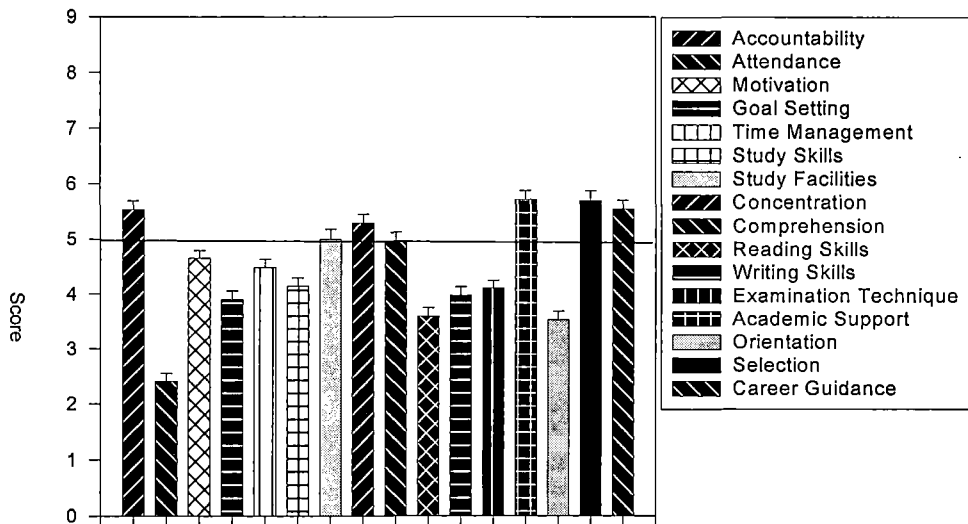
**5.3.6.2 Group 2: Credit management**

This group was the largest of the eight groups. Students in this course are trained to execute administrative and accounting functions within an organisation. Skills needed are strong decision-making abilities, good organisational skills and an ability to work with meticulous accuracy while working under pressure.

**a Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 2**

The lecturer in charge of this group was extremely concerned about the general attitude and the number of students not appearing to cope with the academic pressure. The four parameters that stand out are lack of academic support, the course selection process, lack of career guidance at high school and lack of accountability. Of significance, too, is a small group with similar scores lead by lack of concentration, lack of suitable study facilities and comprehension problems. Motivation levels, as well as time management, require attention. Considering the graph that follows for this group, the problem areas are visible.

**Figure 5.9 Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 2**

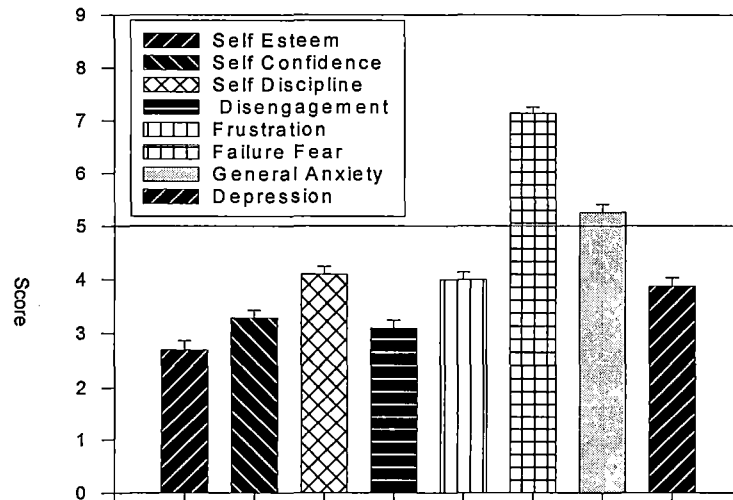


**b Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 2**

The main factor that stands out in this group of students is the fear of failure. This score falls within the critical range as it is above seven. General anxiety is significant as it falls above five. Self-discipline and frustration levels need to be noted, as can be seen in the graph below. Self-esteem and self-confidence levels appear to be stable. These students

seem to be involved and adjusted to campus life fairly well, as the score for complacent disengagement that reflects boredom and apathy is fairly low, as can be seen in the graph that follows.

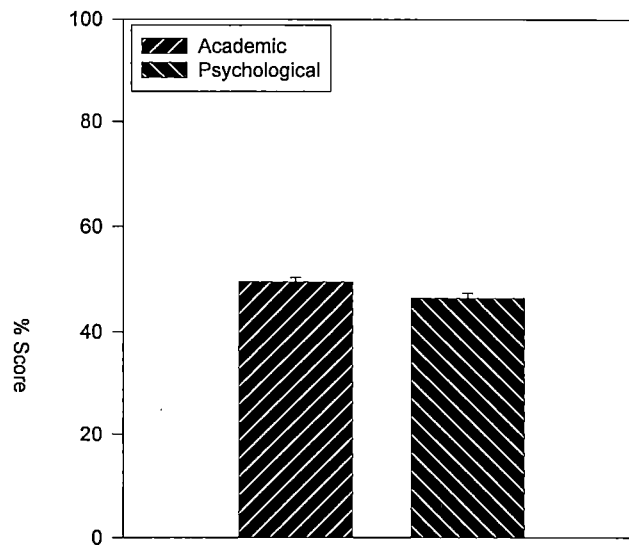
**Figure 5.10 Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 2**



### c Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 2

Converting the total academic score to a percentage, the academic factor has a mean of 49.5 % and the psychological factor mean is 46.4 %. There is a highly significant statistical difference between the two, as is indicated when using the paired t test where the p value is 0.00009. There is a large variance in the scores of individual students in this group. Academic factors percentage range is 18 % and 72 %. The percentages of the psychological factors range between 17 % and 85 %, thus indicating a clinical significance as there are areas of grave concern to many individual students as is visible in the following figure.

**Figure 5.11 Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 2**



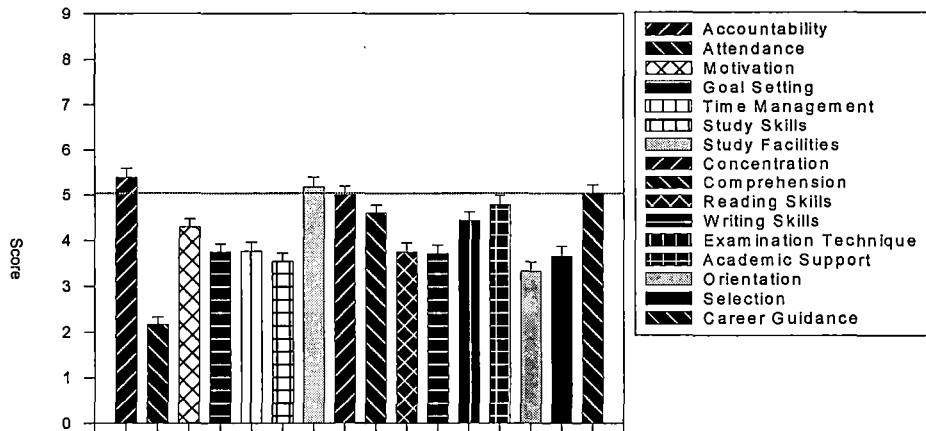
### **5.3.6.3 Group 3: Human resources management**

The students in course three are studying towards a qualification that will see them in a career field that centers on people, matching them with appropriate job profiles, and dealing with all the problems and issues that surround employment. The training of these students places great emphasis on the development of employees, especially those previously excluded from opportunity. The challenge of this vocational field is the identification of employee potential, the recognition of prior learning and the acceleration of employee development.

#### **a Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 3**

The factors that emerge as significant are all more or less within the same range. Lack of accountability is the highest score, followed by the lack of suitable study facilities, little or no career guidance in high school, a problem with concentration, the lack of appropriate academic support, problems surrounding comprehension and understanding and a lack of examination-writing techniques. The level of motivation could be improved. These students do not feel that reading or writing skills are problematic, as can be seen in the figure below.

**Figure 5.12 Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 3**

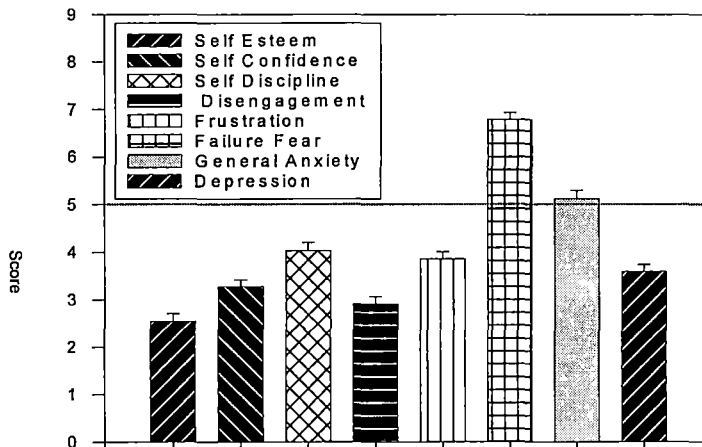


**b Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 3**

The fear of failure is in the highly significant region that borders on becoming a critical state. The general anxiety level is significant, and the self-discipline level should be monitored. Self-esteem and self-confidence are perceived to be quite healthy, and these students appear to be quite involved with their lives on campus.

The following figure illustrates the psychological factors that are perceived by these students as inhibition to success.

**Figure 5.13 Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 3**

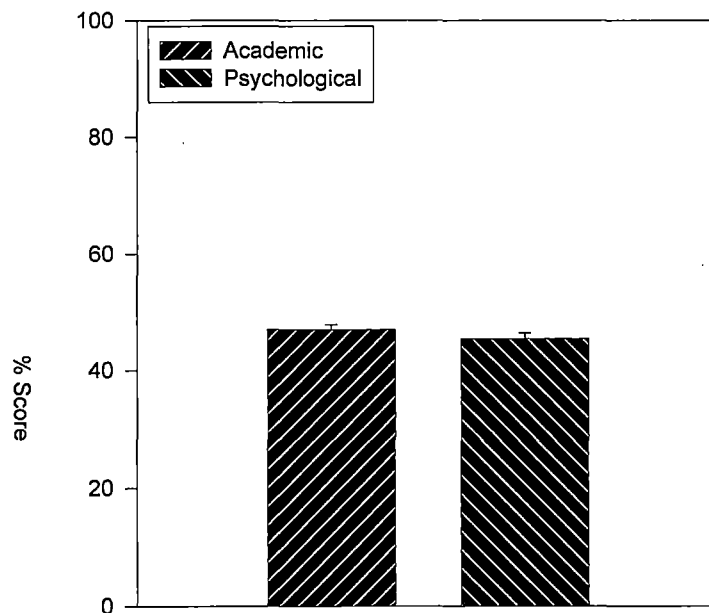


### c Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 3

Converting the total factor scores to a percentage, the academic factor mean is 46.9 % and the psychological factor mean is 45.4 %. Using the paired t test, a p value of 0.049 emerges. With very little difference between the two, there is only a slight statistical significance.

However, looking at the individual percentage ranges in the two factor groupings, with the range in academic factor percentages between 24 % and 74 % and the psychological factor range between 16.7 % and 84 %, the result is of clinical significance as there are many individuals who reveal scores that fall into the critical radius where intervention is indicated. This is evident in the following figure.

**Figure 5.14 Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 3**



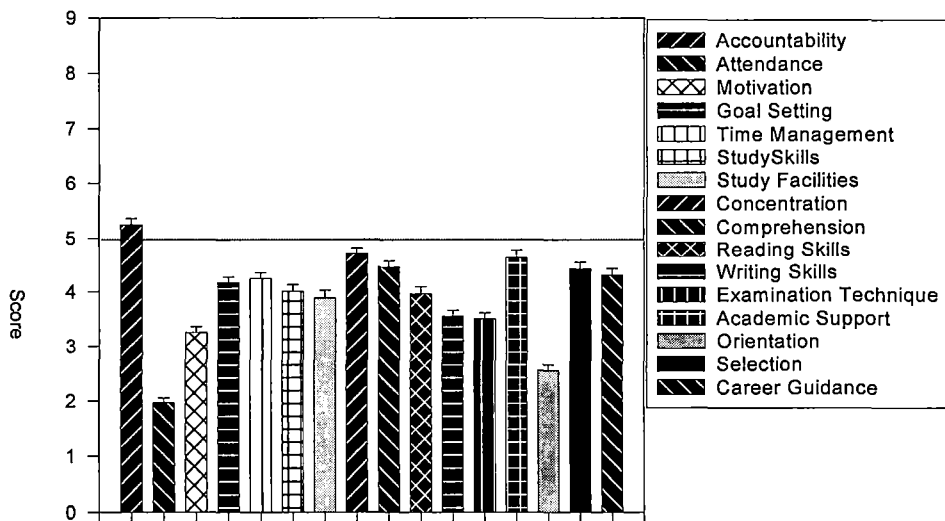
#### 5.3.6.4 Group 4: Management

This course offers training in the assistance and advice on improvements regarding the administrative efficiency and productivity of an organisation. This includes procedures, methods, systems, organisation structures, job design and forms design, with the aim to improve productivity.

**a Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 4**

The highest scoring academic factors in group 4 are the lack of accountability, concentration, comprehension and course selection. Although comprehension, selection and time management fall on or within the coping range, for the scope of this study, they should be noted for improvement. The graph below shows the academic factors that these students perceive to be a hindrance to their success.

**Figure 5.15 Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 4**

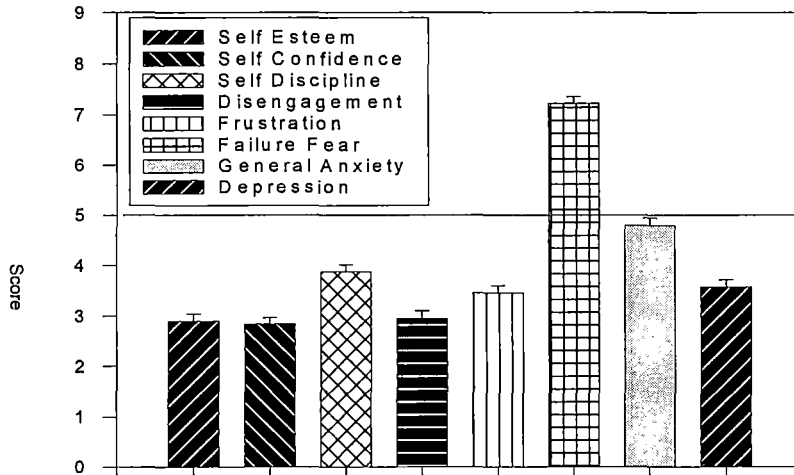


**b Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 4**

Fear of failure is in the critical range, while general anxiety could become significant. Depression, frustration and self-discipline levels must be noted for attention. These students appear to be quite self-confident. Their self-esteem levels are healthy, and they appear to be quite involved in and adjusted to student life, as can be seen in the figure below.



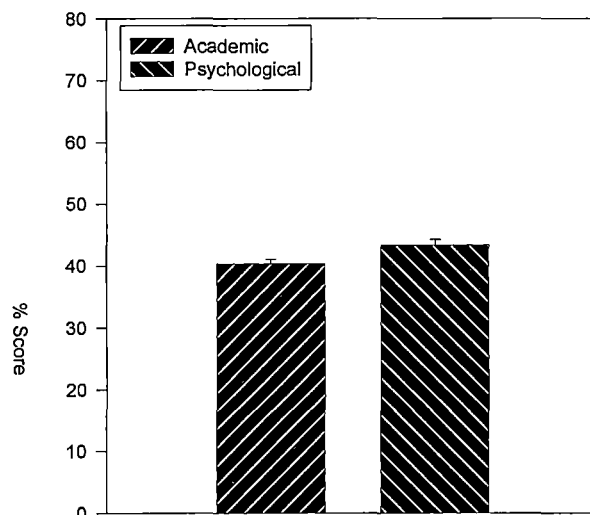
**Figure 5.16 Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 4**



**c Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group**

Converting the total scores of group 4 to percentages, the academic factor has a mean of 40.3 % and the psychological factor has a mean of 43.35 %. The paired t test reveals a p value of 0.0003 that is statistically significant. Clinical significance is indicated as the percentage range for the academic factors is between 23.6 % and 63.9 %. The psychological factor range is between 20.83 % and 75.0 %. These percentages indicate a large difference between individual students, where top scores fall within the critical arena as is seen in the figure below.

**Figure 5.17 Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 4**



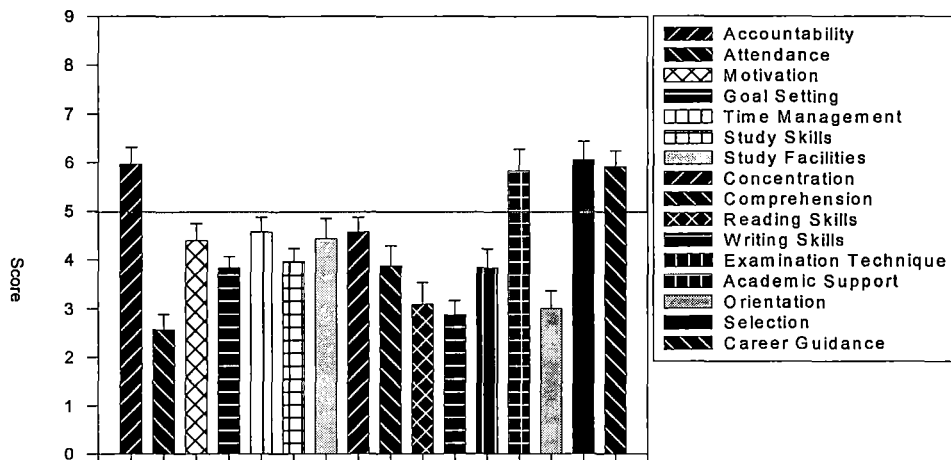
### 5.3.6.5 Group 5: Management services

This course trains students at a managerial level, covering numerous vocational fields and career paths. It is ideally suited to students who have been in the workplace for some time and wish to upgrade their qualifications.

#### a Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 5

The group presents with the greatest number of factors falling between the highly significant and critical levels. This group appears to be most unhappy with their course selection as this factor presents with the highest score. It is followed by a lack of accountability, a lack of adequate career guidance at high school, as well as appropriate academic support. The second group of perceived problems contains time management, concentration, motivation, study skills, comprehension, examination techniques and the setting of goals. Although these are not critical, they should all be addressed, as seen in the figure below.

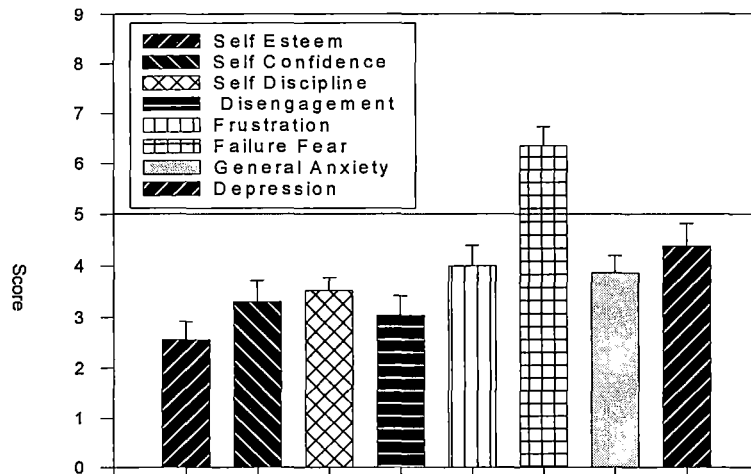
**Figure 5.18 Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 5**



#### b Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 5

This group also has a high fear of failure indication. The score falls within the highly significant range, followed by the depression factor that could become significant. General anxiety is present, and although it appears that the students are dealing with it in an adequate fashion, it should not go unchecked. Self-esteem levels appear to be fairly healthy and these students seem to be quite involved in student life. The following graph shows the psychological factors perceived by this group to be problematic.

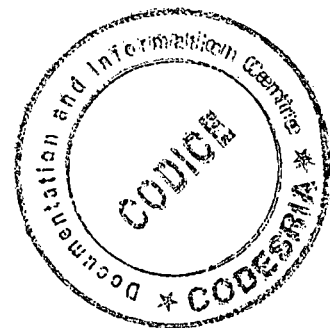
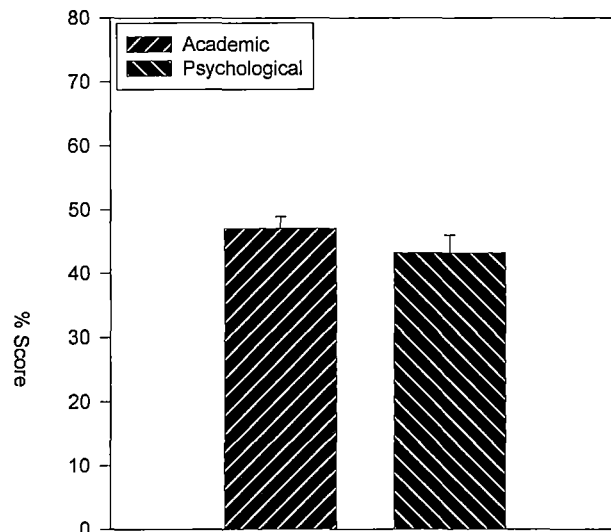
**Figure 5.19 Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 5**



**c Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 5**

Converting the total scores in group 5 to percentages, the academic factor has a mean of 47.7 % with a range of high and low scores between 25 % and 66.67 %. The psychological factor score has a mean of 43.11 %, with a score range of 19.44 % and 73.61 %, indicating areas of critical concern for individual students. Although there is no significant statistical difference between the two groups of factors, as the paired t test reveals a p value of 0.14, there are still individual differences that require attention. The results are evident in the graph below.

**Figure 5.20 Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 5**



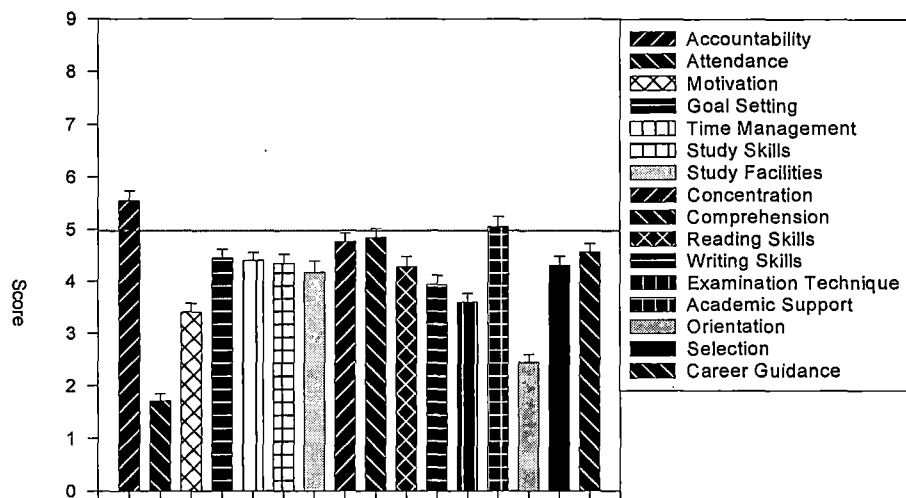
### 5.3.6.6 Group 6: Public relations management

The students training in this course will be in the forefront of any business, interacting between management and the media, representing a specific business and advancing its corporate image. By the nature of the job requirements, the majority of these students are extrovert, highly sociable and involved. They need a strong sense of responsibility, conscientiousness, and integrity. Also needed is the ability to formulate and reproduce ideas creatively, an open mind and the ability to work individually.

#### a Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 6

Of significance in this group are the lack of accountability and the perceived lack of academic support. These students do not find their selection or career guidance to be a problem. Although not seen as strong inhibiting factors, comprehension, concentration, career guidance, goal-setting, time management, selection, study skills and reading skills need attention. The factors perceived to inhibit the students on the academic front in this group are shown in the figure below.

**Figure 5.21 Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 6**

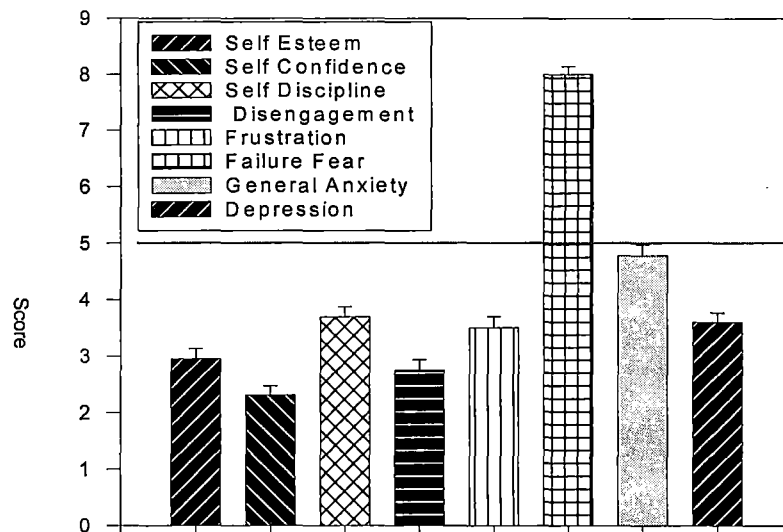


#### b Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 6

For this group, fear of failure is verging on the highly critical level as it is just on 8. General anxiety follows as a factor that is seen to be problematic as it could become significant.

Self-confidence is strong, and self-esteem and involvement are fairly healthy. Although the students appear to be coping with slight depression, frustration and self-discipline, these factors need to be monitored. The graph that follows shows the inhibiting psychological factors as seen by the students.

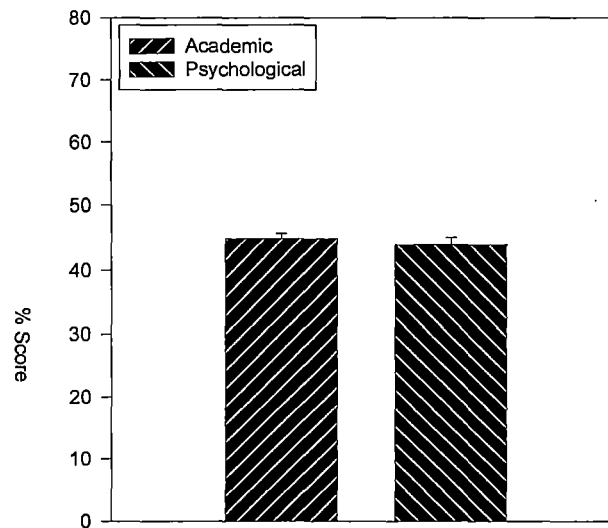
**Figure 5.22 Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 6**



### c Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 6

Converting the total scores of group 6 to percentages, the academic factor score has a mean of 44.8 %. The mean of the psychological factor total is 43.9 %. The paired t test reveals a p value of 0.3 indicating that there is no significant statistical difference between the two groups of factors. However the result is clinically significant as the academic factor range is between 25.69 % and 66.67 % and the psychological factor range between 20.8 % and 72.2 %. Some students' results fall within the range that has a critical indication, requiring intervention, as can be seen in the figure that follows.

**Figure 5.23 Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 6**



#### **5.3.6.7 Group 7: Marketing**

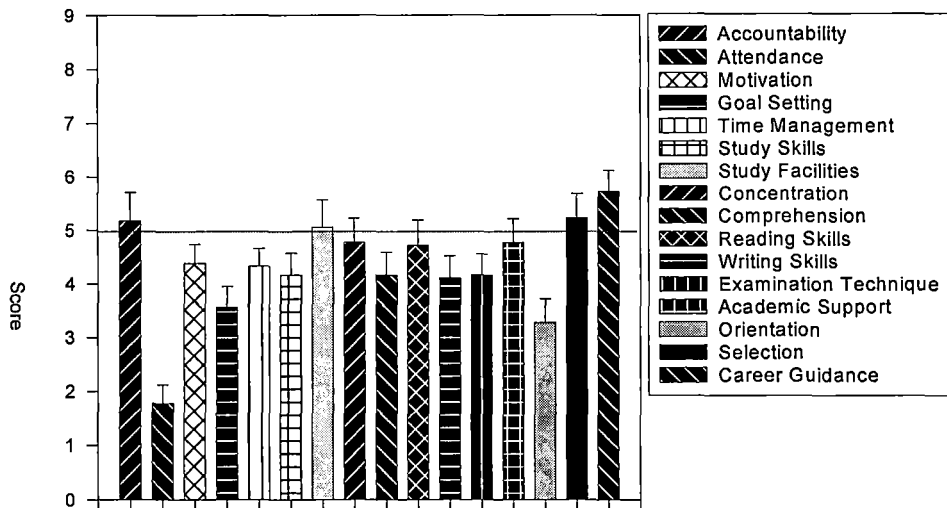
The students in this course are being trained to find out what the consumer wants, and to satisfy those needs as efficiently as possible. The skills that are necessary are leadership capabilities, strong communication skills, the enjoyment of dealing with people and the continuous seeking of new challenges.

##### **a Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 7**

The academic problem areas that came to the fore are headed by the lack of suitable career guidance and dissatisfaction with course selection. A number of factors are of significance. The lack of accountability, the lack of suitable study facilities and academic support, concentration, reading skills, motivation, time management, study skills could become significant. Writing skills and examination techniques should be monitored.

The following graph shows the main causes for concern in group 7.

**Figure 5.24 Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 7**

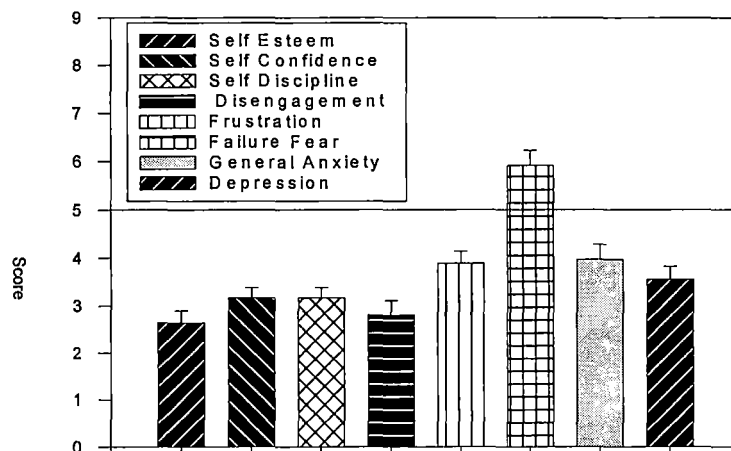


**b Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 7**

Fear of failure in this group is bordering on becoming critical as the score lies just on 7. The high general anxiety level is significant and could become highly significant. Self discipline needs to be noted, as well as depression and dealing with frustration. Self-esteem appears to be fairly healthy, but could be monitored.

The following graph shows the psychological factors that are perceived by the students as problematic.

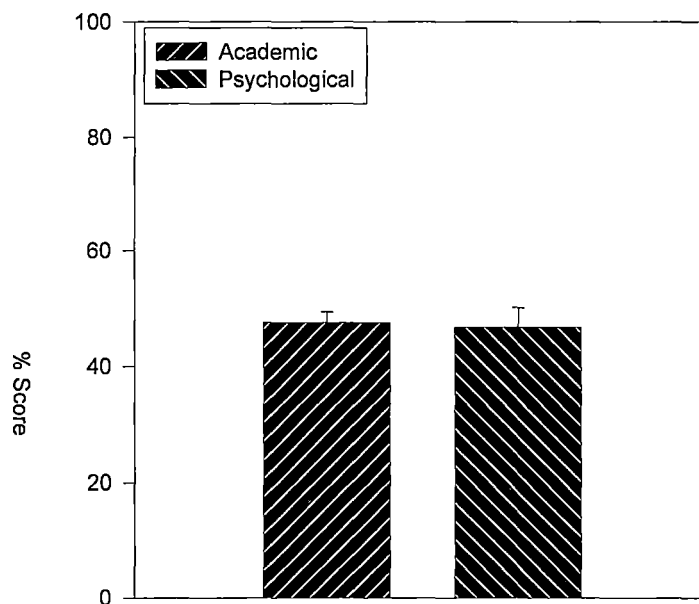
**Figure 5.25 Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 7**



### c Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 7

Converting the total scores to percentages, the academic factor has a mean of 46.78 %. The psychological factor total, when converted has a mean of 40.43 %. Using the paired t test, the p value is 0.0005 that is highly statistically significant. The range of academic percentage scores is between 29.9 % and 61.1 %. The psychological scores fall between 30.6 % and 93.1 %. These results are clinically significant as the range is large, with some students presenting at the critical level, as seen in the graph that follows.

**Figure 5.26 Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 7**



#### 5.3.6.8 Group 8: Hotel school

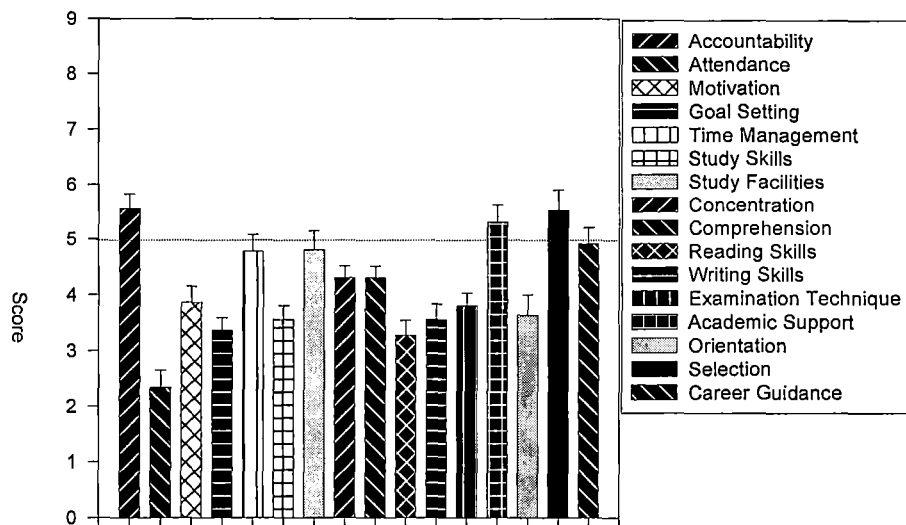
This group is made up of two different courses that afford the students entry into the hospitality industry. The career field is a highly sociable one, developing competent and versatile students who have the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to move into a highly competitive industry. The classes are very small, and the students are under tremendous pressure as they have to cope with both theory and practicum, resulting in very long working hours.



### a Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 8

The academic factors that appear to affect the performance of the students in this group are the lack of accountability, the selection process, academic support, the apparent lack of suitable career guidance, suitable study facilities and time management skills. Of these, selection, accountability, career guidance and academic support are significant. Time management and suitable study facilities could become significant, as can be seen in the graph below.

**Figure 5.27 Academic factors that inhibit student performance in group 8**

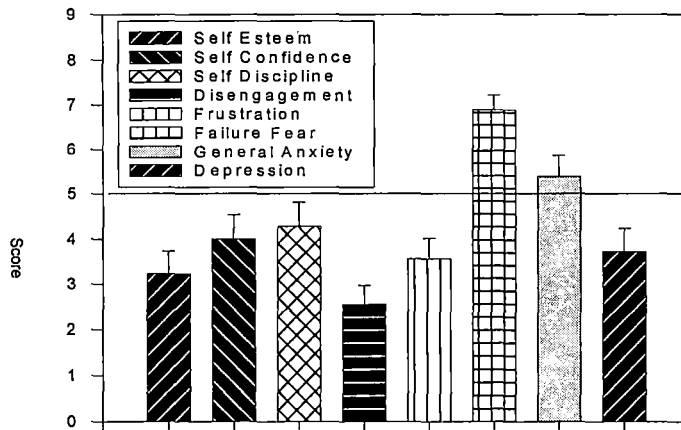


### b Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 8

Fear of failure at 6 is seen to be highly significant. The general anxiety level appears to be under control, as are the levels of frustration and depression. These students appear to be involved in student life with healthy self-esteem and fairly healthy self-confidence and self-discipline levels.

The graph below illustrates the psychological factors that are perceived to be stumbling blocks on the road to success.

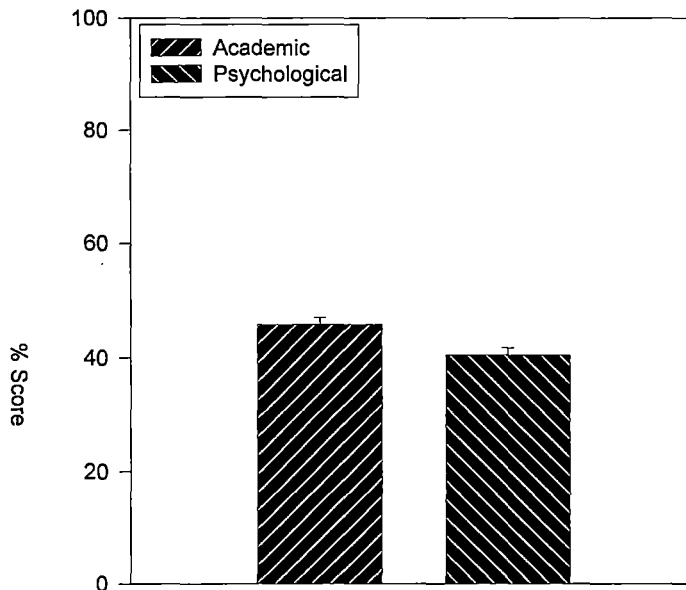
**Figure 5.28 Psychological factors that inhibit student performance in group 8**



**c Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 8**

Converting the total scores to percentages, the academic factor mean is 47.49 % and the psychological factor mean is 46.68 %. Using the paired t test a p value of 0.797 indicates no significant statistical difference, but the result is clinically significant as the academic scores vary from 29.86 % to 61.1 % and the psychological scores fall between 30.56 % and 93.06 %. Intervention will be necessary with students in this course as the top scores fall within the critical arena, as is seen in the figure below.

**Figure 5.29 Comparison of academic and psychological factors in group 8**



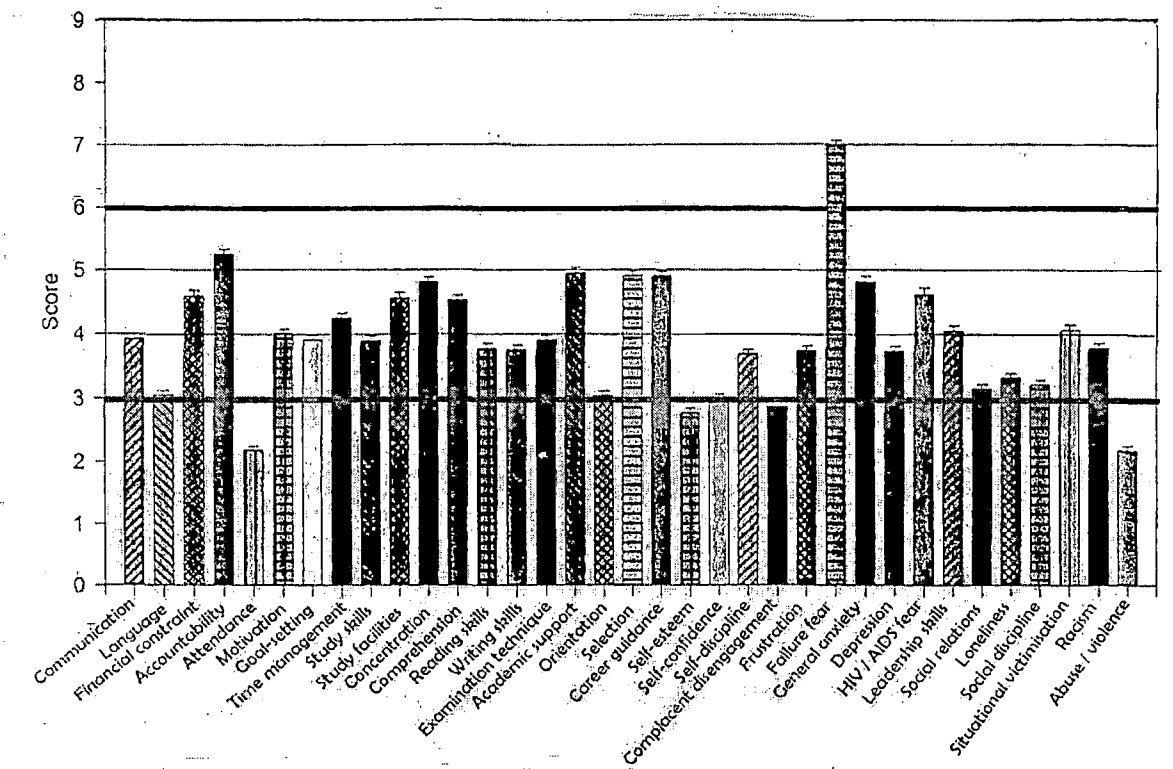
### 5.3.7 Problem areas experienced by students in the eight courses

Having examined all eight courses' results, certain factors are common to the various groups that are deemed problematic. Standing head and shoulders above all the other variables is that of fear of failure that falls into the critical zone. The lack of accountability is the second highest variable and is in the significant zone. The lack of academic support, the process of selection to courses, inadequate career guidance and general anxiety are visible just below the level of significance. Halfway towards becoming significant are the variables of financial constraint, the lack of suitable study facilities, concentration and comprehension skills.

Although not an academic problem in the true sense of the word, the fear of HIV/AIDS can impact severely on academic performance. It generally appears to be classified as a social problem as it impacts upon society in South Africa. What cannot be ignored is the effect that this disease has on the individual. The fear of becoming infected, of not knowing one's status, being classified HIV positive, living with someone who is HIV positive, nursing a family member who is suffering in the advanced stage of the disease, or having someone close die from AIDS complications must impact on the psychological well-being of the student. Although the figure below displays the fear of HIV/AIDS as falling in the area just below the significant level, this may not be a true reflection of how the students actually view the disease. It may very well become highly significant or even critical in a short space of time, and thus it is imperative that it be viewed and dealt with as though it had already reached a critical level.

The graph below illustrates these variables.

**Figure 5.30 Common factors perceived to be problematic in the courses**



### 5.3.8 Summary of phase 2

It is alarming to discover that the great majority of students in the study sample are living with a very real fear of failure. Reasons for this fear will possibly emerge from the focus group interviews that follow in the next phase. Some possibilities may be connected to the shortage of financial aid, the lack of suitable study facilities for many, or the inability to concentrate, resulting from stressful situations in which the students often find themselves. Not studying the desired course may result in low motivation and ineffective goal-setting. Not fully understanding the study material or lectures accompanied by poorly developed critical thinking, reading and writing skills could result in a student finding himself in a constant state of anxiety and fear.

The student who thinks that someone else is responsible for his under-preparedness for tertiary study because of ineffective career guidance, or was not taught the essence of effective study, feeling that there is not enough support on the academic front and that he may have not got into the field of study of his choice, is apportioning the responsibility or

blame to an outside party. The lack of accountability shown as the second highest problem factor appears to be illustrating a perception that many students have of not being responsible for their situations. They do not feel that they are at fault.

In the section that follows that forms the third phase of the investigation, the qualitative data collection technique of using the focus group interview will be discussed. The findings from this section will be in the form of small vignettes as the excerpts from the conversations or narratives reveal the essence of the participants. The vignettes add depth and a richness to the findings.

#### **5.4 PHASE THREE: THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW**

The focus group interview, as a purposive discussion centred on the topic of the first year student experience, was limited to first year student participants on the business management campus. These students are all training in one form of business management or another. They had fairly similar backgrounds and some common interests.

Six senior students trained as peer mentors by the psychologists in the student counselling unit were tasked with organising between eight to ten participants for the six focus groups. The stipulations in the choice of participants were that there should be a good mix of male and female, and residence and commuting students, restricted to first year students only. Two sessions were planned for each group and ultimately only four focus groups were formed. The peer mentors reported that although there was overwhelming interest in joining a group, finding suitable times proved to be problematic for most. Each group had eight students, with the researcher as facilitator and the peer mentor sitting in as co-facilitator. None of the participants took part in the student workshop held the previous year, but two had completed the questionnaire during class time a few months previously.

The four groups met independently, and each one decided to rather have both sessions on one day with a break in between the two sessions. The four interview groups each began at lunchtime on a week day and ended late in the afternoon with a break for tea. Although the students were tired at the end of each discussion, they felt that exhausting the topic on one day was preferable to having to return for a follow-up session where the group dynamics would have to be reestablished, and much impetus may have been lost in the interim. The sessions extended over a period of two months

The results from the discussions in the four groups will now be discussed on an individual basis. They will be related in the form of vignettes, with a summary table for each group followed by the composite table for all four focus group interviews.

#### **5.4.1 Focus group 1**

Group 1 was mobilised by a peer helper in her first year. She managed to balance the group of eight students fairly evenly with four men and four women, some residential and some day students. Three students were well known to her, while others were strangers who offered to be part of the discussion when they heard what was transpiring.

Basic ground rules wherein the opinion of each participant is viewed as valuable were established. Allowing each one a turn to speak, underscoring confidentiality and encouraging participation from all ensured a lively, uninhibited debate. The same questions were asked of all four focus groups. What follows are snippets of conversation that have emerged from group members, rather than the researcher's interpretation of what transpired. These vignettes are but a very small fragment of the type of conversations that ensued.

The first question put to group one was:

#### ***What is life like for you as a student?***

*"It was difficult at first. I felt that I did not fit in anywhere. I had problems making friends, but then I always have. I really wanted to belong somewhere"*

*"I did not like the way people put you in little boxes. When they hear that you do not come from the city, they have already judged you and put you in this box marked 'not us'. I think that they look down on me because I am from a rural area"*

*"Me too. I first noticed all the cool labels that the others were wearing, like Diesel and Soviet, and then felt that they would say that this guy is not cool. Eventually you get to a point when you know that you don't have to have them and that is really cool!"*

*"I went to a school that concentrated on mathematics and science and I am doing a business course with accounting which I didn't have at school and I am having to do a foundation course this year".*

The general line of conversation here focused on social issues, involvement and academic preparedness. Most felt that they were under-prepared for what they had to face at the beginning of the academic year. It was generally felt that this was due to a lack of real guidance by some teachers at high school level.

***How do you know that you know that a student on our campus is facing problems?***

*"Yes there are. I know of many who have problems with self-image. It is this fitting-in thing again as they want to feel part of the student body, but do not know where to start. Some will do just about anything to be part of the group. They do not have the right clothes, the latest cell phone, the cool labels, they just don't fit in".*

*"That's not the only thing. Some students were not selected for the courses that they really wanted to study, and they then have to take a second or third choice. Others do not know why they are here. They seem to think that education is going to get them wherever. They just have no dream or vision. They are not motivated to study anything in particular and so they register for any course that they can get into. Then they wonder why they fail!"*

Here the problem of social identity, involvement and peer pressure appears once again. Lack of motivation is also an issue for many, as is the selection process and academic preparedness.

***In your opinion, which is the biggest problem area for the first year student?***

*"For many of us, it is fear of failing. I know that I am really scared of failing my parents and failing myself. There is so much pressure. Your family expects a lot from you. They have such high expectations. Even the neighbours in the street and people at church are interested. That is huge pressure. I feel my parents have given me an opportunity in life, they have sacrificed a lot to get me here and I cannot disappoint them".*

*“Yes and if I have to repeat it is going to cost me financially. Where am I going to get the money to pay for another year?”*

*“Yes getting the funds to pay for the studies is a big problem. Even if we get a loan or a bursary it takes months before you get paid out. We have to live in the meantime. Some students do not have money for the expensive textbooks. Some get money from their parents for the textbooks and they spend it on food or clothes”.*

This group felt that the issues of failure and finance were the biggest problem areas. For many, they are intertwined as the first issue impacts upon the second. For one of the group members, that most important issue was the new found freedom that greets many students on leaving the parental home. He felt that because there is no strict control in the technikon environment, some students become extremely irresponsible. They forget why they are studying in the first place. The social arena is most important. They start to miss lectures as they would rather be with their friends. They fall behind in their studies, become bored and begin to disengage from the small connection that they have made with the academic process.

### ***Has it affected any of you?***

*“The finance issue has affected me as I do not have enough to live on, so I had to get a part-time job. It was difficult for me when I started, but since getting this job, my life has changed. It is a bit easier and I can go and buy what I need. I get very tired, but it is worth it”.*

*“I am very afraid that I will disappoint my parents, as well as myself. I can’t afford to fail. I am working hard so that I can get through this year. There is not enough money for me to repeat anything. This makes me stress”.*

*“You know, it is all about backbone. You have got to have backbone to get through here. You cannot allow the others to put pressure on you Be grateful for what people are doing for you and get on and study”.*

This question raised the issue of accountability and responsible behaviour. Some realise that the privilege of study opportunities brings a responsibility to work hard and get the



qualification in as short a time span as possible. Having the strength of character to resist outside pressure that comes from many directions appears to be a requirement for academic success.

***In what other ways have you been affected?***

*“When I started here, it was all so strange. I did not know where everything was. I did not know where to go for classes. I suppose that other students are affected in the same way. Especially when you come from a little town, this place can make you scared. When we had that orientation day, I felt excited by what I heard. I became familiar with places like the library and the clinic. I knew where to go. I still felt a little scared. We must do more during registration for the new students. Help them to register and show them what to do and where to go. Then they won't feel so strange”.*

This student has touched on the aspect of orientating the new student to campus life. She also stressed the point that the new student needs to feel that he belongs somewhere. The daunting prospect of arriving in a big metropolis when the new student has only experienced small town or village life can be unnerving at best. The group also suggests getting involved in the registration and orientation process and making a worthwhile contribution.

***What things/problems do not get discussed?***

*“This problem of freedom does not get discussed. Do you know how many students are not able to afford food, good clothes and cell phones? Some make themselves cheap so that they can get money to pay for all the things that they need. Haven't you seen the smart cars parked in the road with drivers who are too old to be students?”*

*“There are many lonely students who find making friends very difficult. They can be on the campus for three years and not be part of any group. Can we do something for them?”*

*“Maybe they think that no one will like them. Maybe they don't want to fit in. Maybe they don't like themselves very much. If they don't talk, how will we know if anything is wrong?”*

*“I have also noticed that the day students go home straight after class. They don't get involved in activities after hours”.*

Prostitution is an issue that, for many students, is both alarming and discomforting. This issue is an extremely delicate one and was not discussed at great length as many were uncomfortable with it. Also raised are loneliness, involvement and self-image, and once again the group feels compelled to do something about the issue at hand.

***What other academic / emotional / social / issues stop the student from performing at his best?***

*"When you live in a residence like I do, the students seem to do what they like. They have so much freedom. We actually want structure and rules. It is just about impossible to study there at night. There is so much noise. I use the library until eight o'clock and then go back to the noise in the res. I really am trying to work hard, but it is very difficult to study where I am".*

*"I find that so many of my lecturers are really concerned about us. They want us to get somewhere in life. They are so passionate about what they are doing. But there are times when I don't understand what the lecturer is trying to say or explain. I do not get his meaning. I find it embarrassing to stop a class to ask a question, and I would rather not put up my hand. Can lecturers not realise that we cannot all get A's and that we are not all going to be at the top of the class? They need to acknowledge that we all have different strengths and not get impatient when we don't understand".*

Residence life for many students seems to be problematic. Although they are working hard, they do so under trying conditions, where others do not appear to respect the need for silence during study time. Many have to make alternative arrangements in order to be able to concentrate fully. Communication between students and faculty members can also present a problem as neither feels understood by the other.

***Are there other aspects about which we have not thought?***

*"One area in which we could be successful is leadership. We want and need to develop these skills, but we don't get many chances. We can't all be chairpersons or council presidents. It would be nice to have the opportunity to train and then use these skills. It would be nice to be recognised as a leader. Even if I do not use the skills now, I have them*

*and will be able to use them at a later stage when I am working. We do not have many student leaders who are role models, and it would be good for the new students to have these role models”.*

Of concern to the students is the fact that there are not enough student leaders who are visible as role models. The young student needs to be able to look up to the older student who is exemplary in every way so that a high standard is set on the academic level as well as on the social and interpersonal levels. The students feel that these achievers set the scene and subconsciously spur the others on to reach their potential. If student leaders are seen to be dedicated and hardworking with a mind to using the current situation to the best of their ability, other students may well be encouraged to follow suit.

***Of all the factors that we have raised, which are the most important?***

*“For most of us, the most important issue was adjusting to the new environment and finding that we were able to fit in academically and socially”.*

***Is what we have summarised adequate?***

*“We have thought of some important things, but most important is that maybe we can all do something about it. Maybe we can be of help to the new students so that they do not make the same mistakes that we made when we first arrived”.*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Topic discussed</b>
1	<i>What is life like here for you as a student?</i>	Adjustment issues, social issues, involvement, academic under-preparedness.
2	<i>How do you know that a student on our campus is facing problems?</i>	Self-image, social identity, involvement, peer pressure, motivation.
3	<i>In your opinion, which is the biggest problem area for the first year student?</i>	Fear of failure, finance, freedom.
4	<i>Has it affected any of you?</i>	Finance (part-time work), accountability and responsibility.

5	<i>In what other ways have you been affected?</i>	Orientation, belonging and involvement.
6	<i>What things / problems do not get discussed?</i>	Freedom, prostitution, loneliness, self-image, involvement.
7	<i>What other academic / emotional / social issues stop the student from performing at his best?</i>	Residence life, communication between students and faculty members.
8	<i>Are there other aspects about which we have not thought?</i>	Leadership opportunities, role models.
9	<i>Of all the factors that we have raised, which are the most important?</i>	Adjustment, fitting in both academically and socially.

### 5.4.2 Focus group 2

This group, brought together by a most dynamic young lady, passionate about students and student life; the group was a good mix of male, female, day and residence students that made for a most interesting discussion. What follows are some vignettes extracted from the lengthy discussion concerning a number of issues.

#### ***What is life like for you as a student?***

*"Socially, it is very good for me, but then I like people and I go out of my way to talk to them".*

*"I work hard and I play hard. My results are improving, so I am happy with the way things are, most of the time".*

*"I am still finding it difficult to always know what the lecturer means. English is not my home language. In fact it is my third language, so I have to work hard to keep up".*

*"I find living in the residence very different to living at home. It is very noisy and lots of things don't work. It is a big adjustment to make and no one could tell me before I came what to expect. You have to find out for yourself, and often it is the hard way".*

The social aspect of student life was discussed, with most in the group fairly content with their adjustment and settling-in phase. Making new friends for most was a plus factor, while only one member of the group was still experiencing difficulty settling in.

Living conditions was a well-debated topic, with arguments from all angles. Most of the group felt that much could be improved upon, affording the students a better chance of adjusting and adapting to higher education. If conditions did improve and suitably quiet study facilities were made available, then those students who are serious about performing well would be given the opportunities and support to do so.

Comprehending the language used in lectures remains problematic for some. For most students, English is not their first language or mother tongue, and difficulties are experienced when reading textbooks and journal articles, writing assignments and understanding and answering examination questions.

***How do you know that a student on our campus is facing problems?***

*"I think many students have problems on the academic level. One is language. Most of us have English as a second or third language. For some, English is a fourth language. There is often a problem in the classroom when the students don't understand what the lecturer is saying. Many of us are afraid to ask for help. It would be great if the lecturers were able to identify the students who are weak and then we can maybe organise a tutor".*

*"It is important that we have a good relationship with each lecturer from the start. We do not want the lecturer to have favourites as we all want to be treated the same way. Please no favouritism".*

*"You know some are so interested in us and want us to succeed. Others don't seem to have time for us. When we go for consultations, they are not there. They can be impatient and treat us like primary school children".*

*"Another big problem for students is finance. So many come here without knowing who will pay. It is difficult to get a loan and bursaries are just about impossible to get".*

The first issue to surface was academic survival. As mentioned in the previous question, the ability to use English in an efficient and effective manner remains a thorny issue for

many students. The inability to express oneself adequately is detrimental to student performance, and frustrating, and possibly even humiliating for the individual.

The second problem discussed was the relationship between the student and the lecturer. In some instances, the students felt that there was a lack of communication with neither side understanding the other. Mutual respect is required in order to foster this most important relationship.

The issue of finance was raised with all voicing opinion as to why it remains a problem. Many in the group spoke from experience.

***In your opinion, which is the biggest problem area for the first year student?***

*"For me, the biggest issue is finding somewhere to live. They think that by filling in the form for a place in a residence, it means that there will be space when you arrive. Often they have not got enough money to pay the deposit to secure a room. Some squat and move every few days so they do not have a fixed address. Some are sleeping under bridges and in railway stations, just so that they can attend class and get an education".*

*"I think that registration is a problem. Not everyone comes from the city or towns close by. They come from rural areas and small villages. This city terrifies them. When they get here to register, they don't know where to go, they are sometimes too scared to ask and then they stand for hours in the wrong queues. We need to do something".*

*"I still think that money is the biggest problem. The students want to learn, but there is no one who can afford to pay for them. Even if these students are able to get someone to sponsor or pay the fees, they still have to buy textbooks and clothes and they have to eat. If the money goes on clothes, then they don't eat".*

The lack of finance remains a burning issue. Accessing loans, finding sponsors, as well as enough money on which to live appears to be problematic for many students. Attached to the issue of finance is that of accommodation, with some students living under extremely adverse conditions. Determination to get an education is paramount in the lives of these young people as they are willing to put up with hardship and adversity in order to attend classes. Comments were made with regard to those students fortunate enough not to have

to study under such conditions. For many of them, they may be unaware of what some students are going through, or they may be completely out of touch with the reality of these students' lives.

Also of grave concern is the difficulty experienced by many new students with orientation to campus life and successful involvement in this life. Very few felt that they had adequate preparation before arriving at the new institution. The remark was passed that the high schools do not prepare the students well enough. What was further questioned was the question of responsibility for this specific aspect.

### ***Has it affected any of you?***

*"Yes, registration for me was a nightmare. It was chaos. I had no idea where to go. I had to get to the city on my own, which was bad enough, and I also had to find somewhere to stay. I wanted to settle down quickly".*

*"The course that I am doing has quite a few trips that I need to go on as part of my studies. I had just enough money to pay my fees, and nothing left over for these trips. So I won't be able to go on them. I am going to lose out but what can I do? Money is a big issue".*

The difficulty in becoming orientated to student life was experienced by most of the group as an unsettling, difficult time, especially those coming to live in the city, having gone to school in rural areas. The word most frequently used to describe the various experiences was "scary". Successful orientation for most meant registration without problems, clear explanations as to where to go and what to do, finding suitable accommodation, making new friends fairly easily, settling into an academic routine and feeling that they belong to the institution. The question of involvement appeared time and time again.

Money, or lack thereof, was once again discussed, and on this occasion, mention was made of practical excursions that could not be undertaken due to not having the necessary funds. The students noted that these trips were very important in many courses as they afforded the students opportunities to experience the practical side of their chosen courses. It is then that they are able to see how the theory that they are studying can be applied in the working context.

***In what other ways have you been affected?***

*"I am living in the residence and I find it very difficult to study there. There is too much disturbance. I need a quiet place, so I go to the library at night. It is a shame that it closes at nine because then I have to return to all the noise and try and work".*

*"I do not find the library user-friendly. As we have nowhere else to study, there are too many of us that need the library and there are not enough tables".*

*"For me, I could not use the computer in the library to find information when I first arrived here. I was too embarrassed to let anyone find out. We did not have computers in our high school. Luckily we have a course in basic computer operation this term and now I am OK. It would have been so much easier if I had known the basics before I started, then I would not have been so embarrassed".*

The issue of the inability to study in their living areas appears to be problematic to many students living in the residence halls. They feel that they cannot work in their living quarters' as others do not respect the fact that they need to study and prepare. Instead the library is used, but appears to be inadequate for the number of students requiring a place in which to work. The hours of operation are limited, and the students have to leave early in the evenings.

Leading from the previous discussion was that of computer illiteracy of some students who have not had the privilege of computer literacy classes while at primary or high school. Two in the group shared their experiences in this regard. For both, it was highly embarrassing in the beginning as they felt that most staff members assumed that students know how to use a keyboard and know how to access information from the Internet. Although a basic computer course is a requisite in most courses, for these students, it would have been far more beneficial to have had exposure to a pre-registration basic computer course.

***What things/problems do not get discussed?***

*"One area that is never spoken about is prostitution. Some of the girls in res have multiple relationships. Maybe they want to experience life. Maybe they like the money. It buys them the things that they could never afford. You see the cars parked outside on the road,*



*just waiting for them after class. Gives the rest of us a bad name. We don't know how many are doing it".*

*"I don't know if this is related to money, but students don't all have a healthy lifestyle. Some don't eat every day. Others use the little money that they have on alcohol or drugs. We need to let them know that it is not OK to live like this. There are some girls who are so figure conscious that they starve themselves so that they can be really thin. They think that they look good".*

*"I don't have much money, but at the moment I am sharing everything with my roommate. She comes from far away and has no money for food. I feel sorry for her and so I give her half of what I have. I cannot do it all term, so it is difficult for me. I am hungry most of the time".*

*"You know that so much is made of HIV/AIDS in the media. Are we really affected by it here? How many people who you know have died? Some students have, yes, but we still don't talk about it. Handing out brochures does not help. They just pretend that it isn't there. We have some lecturers who talk about it and are really involved in the fight. Maybe they can help us make students more aware and responsible".*

Once again, the issue of prostitution was raised. It appeared that the students in the group were a little embarrassed to talk about it. They made it very clear that they were aware that it was occurring, but were at great pains to distance themselves from the issue. Reasons were given as to why the students thought that prostitution was taking place, but they did not want the researcher to think that they were in any way connected to the problem. No friends of theirs were involved in this specific activity.

The question of some students literally living on the bread line, while experiencing problems with finance, was underscored. Although finance seemed to appear with each question asked, for many students it remains an issue about which most do not want to talk. However, for those who are able to eek out an existence, the lack of food and living space for others can impact upon them.

An issue that is impacting on students is the HIV/AIDS issue. They know that many students take it seriously, and are making use of the free testing and counselling in order to

ascertain their status, yet it remains a critical issue that carries a stigma. Many have close relatives or friends that have proved to be HIV positive, or have died from complications related to the AIDS virus, and this is not easily talked about.

***What other academic / emotional / social / issues stop the student from performing at his best?***

*"The security on campus is a problem. We want to work here at night, but are too scared to come on campus. I know one guy who has been robbed twice at gunpoint and each time they took his cell phone. There are some parts that are really dangerous".*

*"Not all students are motivated to study properly. They come here to do a course because the family expects them to get a tertiary education. They have no idea what they want to do or be and so pick courses where there are vacancies. Some other students do not get the course of their choice, or they do not have the subject requirements and then they apply for any old course. No one wants to learn under those conditions. I'm not surprised that they become bored and eventually drop out".*

*"I know that we have discussed teaching and understanding what is going on, but it is so important that the communication between the students and the lecturers is good. There should be better communication, and more contact between the two. If I can get to know my lecturer as a person, and he can get to know me, we can start to really understand each other. My culture, family and home life is different to his and so often I do not think that he knows where I am coming from. We are going to pick up wrong messages from each other".*

An area of concern is security on and off campus. This is an ongoing dilemma that is being addressed, but students still do not feel safe. Granted that the institution is in the inner city, and one could expect the crime level to be higher than in the suburban areas, it does not lessen the danger aspect. Some in the group remarked that they wondered when it would be their turn to experience a security problem as these incidents do not only happen to other people. They are happening to their friends. One has already experienced what it is like to be mugged at gunpoint.

Lack of motivation appears to be prevalent with certain students. There does not seem to be any strong motivation to study and to do well. These students disturb the hardworking

ones who want to be successful. The group tried to find reasons for the lack of motivation, mooted one possibility as not getting into the course of choice. Taking the second choice on the list, or enrolling in any course just for the sake of being in the tertiary education arena, was thought to possibly aid the motivational lack.

The third area of concern was student-faculty interaction. Lack of proper communication, whereby each understands the other, creating a climate wherein mutual respect can be cultivated is absolutely necessary if true understanding and respect are to be established. Some group members said that they would relish the opportunity to interact with staff on an informal level in order for them to get to know each other better.

***Are there other aspects about which we have not thought?***

*"We haven't said much about selection for courses. Some of us have the right subjects because we had guidance at high school. The schools in the townships don't all have guidance teachers who can give the learners advice, so they pick courses for all the wrong reasons. Some choose because friends are studying that course. They may hear from friends about glamorous jobs that get much money, and so that is what they choose. It is not because they are suited to it or they really want to do it. Those are all the wrong reasons for wanting to study".*

It appears that the reasons for being in a particular course vary from student to student. It was felt that many students arrive at an institution of higher learning unprepared for what lies ahead. They have had little or no guidance from teachers in high school, and decide on courses and career paths about which they know extremely little, or for which they are unsuited. No subject choice, vocational interest levels, job knowledge or self analysis has ever been considered, and therefore the prospective student will pick a course for which he has the required subject package. Sadly, the course may pick him in that it may be the only one left that is not full.

***Of all the factors that we have raised, which are the most important?***

*"I think that finance is a very important issue. Not being able to get it or not having enough is going to affect student life".*

*“Living conditions, especially living in the residences, has a big impact on a student’s ability to work hard and perform well”.*

*“Security could be a big problem for many students. If they have been mugged, it is difficult for them to concentrate on their schoolwork and do well”.*

*“I think that many students are not properly prepared for tertiary education. They do not know what to expect and when they get here they think that they can work the way they did in high school. They are unprepared for the academic pressure and workload”.*

The four factors that the group feels are most important and need to be addressed immediately, if possible, are the issues surrounding the financial crises that many students face. Also of grave concern is the matter of the living conditions of some students, the lack of food, the inability to study successfully and peacefully, while others appear to have it all and take all for granted.

All agreed that the majority of students arrive under-prepared for higher education. They experience problems with workload, motivation, time-management and feel the effects of the inability to cope by experiencing stress-related symptoms.

***Is what we have summarised adequate?***

*“Yes. We could carry on talking for the rest of the week”.*

***Have we missed anything?***

*“All that I want to say is this: are there any ways that we can do something?”*

<b>Table 5.9 Summary table for focus group 2</b>		
<b>No.</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Topic discussed</b>
1	<i>What is life like here for you as a student?</i>	Social adjustment, language, living conditions.
2	<i>How do you know that a student on our campus is facing problems?</i>	Language problems, teaching, communication and finance.

3	<i>In your opinion, which is the biggest problem area for the first year student?</i>	Residence life, registration process and finance.
4	<i>Has it affected any of you?</i>	Adjustment issues, finance.
5	<i>In what other ways have you been affected?</i>	Academic pressure, study, computer literacy.
6	<i>What things / problems do not get discussed?</i>	Prostitution, eating habits and disorders, life style, HIV/AIDS.
7	<i>What other academic / emotional / social issues stop the student from performing at his best?</i>	Security, motivation levels, communication between students and faculty members, teaching style.
8	<i>Are there other aspects about which we have not thought?</i>	Selection of courses.
9	<i>Of all the factors that we have raised, which are the most important?</i>	Finance, academic pressure and under-preparedness, residence life and security issues.

### 5.4.3 Focus group 3

This group comprised a good mix of male and female students. They were all commuting students, living either in apartments or at home.

#### ***What is life like for you as a student?***

*"I find student life very stressful. When I was school, I had no idea of what student life would be like. I was not prepared for this. I did not think that it would be so tough. I realise that high school was different and much easier".*

*"I am enjoying the course, but am having trouble getting through the large workload. I never seem to get on top of the work. This is stressing me out, frustrating me and makes me angry. I feel like giving up".*

*"I feel as though I do not have a life at the moment. This course is tough. I do not have a social life now. I am not able to see my friends like I did in high school. I do not have any free hours, and they do not understand. They think that I do not want to be friends any more. I just don't have the time and they are being neglected".*

*"What I really like about being a student in my course is that the class is small and I have not had a problem making friends. I know that there are lonely students in first year but we do not have that problem in this course".*

It was apparent from this group that many felt that they were sufficiently prepared on entering the institution. For some, the level of tertiary education has come as quite a shock. The amount of work that has to be tackled is considered to be great, and for some is insurmountable. The issue of time management is a real one, one that permeates both the academic and social arenas as old friendships are affected.

***How do you know that a student on our campus is facing problems?***

*"There are social problems, like peer pressure, where you have to be seen wearing the right clothes and using the most up-to-date cell phones. That can be a problem for some students. But there is also good peer pressure when you work hard and others follow your example. So it is not always negative or bad".*

*"For me, a big problem is one of money. The students do not always talk about it, but it remains a problem, finding funding, sponsors and money for food and clothing. It is difficult to get a loan from a bank".*

Peer pressure was debated with this group, looking at the issue from both the negative and positive perspectives. It was felt that the perceived negative peer pressure could affect self-esteem, whereby students feel that they need to dress in a certain way in order to be accepted. This would, in due course affect financial status.

Financing studies was another problematic area that saw the group discuss all sorts of means by which financial aid could be accessed.

***In your opinion, which is the biggest problem area for the first year student?***

*"I think that the biggest problem facing students is the lack of motivation. I speak for myself, but I know that others feel just like me. Nothing is spurring you on from inside. The only things that move you forward are the completion dates for assignments and tests and*

*examinations. I lost focus within six months; I have lost sight of the big picture. There are so many little things that I have to get done, and I can't figure out where they fit into the big picture. I just go on day after day in a mindless sort of way as the workload is so enormous".*

*"What are you complaining about? I spent last year at a very big university where the classes were so big that I was lost. Although there is a lot of work in this course, I feel that I can cope because the class is so small in comparison and the lecturers know who we are and are interested in what we are doing. We are lucky".*

*"For me, the biggest problem is money. Getting the money to study, paying it back later, finding someone to sponsor your studies, none of this is easy. We never have enough. When you get some, you have to decide - book money, food money or taxi money?"*

Lack of motivation was evident in this phase of the discussion. Many students seem to be losing their way. As the workload increases, so academic responsibilities mount and the majority felt that they were unable to cope. Some questioned why they were studying, trying to work out where everything with which they are currently occupied fits into the greater whole.

For one student, having experienced a much larger institution, the current setup is preferable as she felt that she is now seen for who she is. Because the group is small, she has found it easy to integrate in to the system and thereby has been able to become involved in her studies.

The lack of financial aid for many students is seen as a big stumbling block to success. The nightmare of not always knowing where the next term's fees are coming from is a reality in many young lives.

### ***Has it affected any of you?***

*"Yes. I need to get money in order to live properly, so I should be getting a part-time job. Because I do not have enough free time, I cannot get a job, so I must do without that money. How do others manage to hold down a job and attend class all day?"*

*"I may have to leave this course and return once I have enough money. We paid for the first semester, but do not have enough for the second half of the year. That means that I will not write the examinations at the end of the year and I will be half a year or more behind in my studies. What if I do not get accepted the second time?"*

*"I look at some of the students and wonder why are they here? They don't seem to know why they are studying. They are completely unmotivated. I know why I chose to do this course. I still want the qualification and have the career, but at the moment, I am questioning what it is that I am studying. I drag myself to class every day because I must be here, but at the same time, I keep asking myself where does all this theory fit in? Maybe when I have some practical experience in the field, I'll understand more about the theory".*

Not having enough money means that many students are forced to find part-time work. Unfortunately, some courses are very heavy and the students feel that they cannot cope with class work, preparation as well as working on a part-time basis. Priorities have to be established and the disposable time needs to be very well managed. The possibility of being unable to complete a course through lack of adequate finance looms ahead for many.

There seems to be a number of factors that influence the lack of motivation, these include: work load, inability to apply theoretical concepts, full understanding of the lecture material, possible course choice and the inability to manage personal time.

***In what other ways have you been affected?***

*"You heard that she said that she may not be returning next semester if she cannot find the rest of the fees. That is how others are also affected. I'm okay as my fees are paid, but it must be dreadful not knowing if you are going to be able to finish something having started it. Maybe this is a reason why students leave at odd times during the year. They are too embarrassed to admit that they have not been able to find a loan or a sponsor or a bursary".*

*"For me, one of the most difficult parts of the course is in the classroom. Besides the workload being very big, I do not always understand what the lecturer is saying during a lecture. The language side is not easy for me. English is not my language at home and I feel that I cannot stop the lecturer to ask him to explain something again when he has just explained it to the whole class".*



*"Yes, it is embarrassing to stop and ask that something be explained again. I don't want the other students to laugh at me, so I do not ask questions. The lecturers use big words - well they seem very big to me - and they seem to think that we should know what these words mean. Today he used the word "variance", and none of us knew what it meant. We all felt so stupid after that. Isn't there a simple word that could be used and then he could use the other word and we would understand. I don't like feeling stupid".*

The possibility of course incompleteness appeared, which will impact both financially and psychologically upon the student. On the academic front, the areas perceived to be troublesome are comprehension, the use of English in the classroom and limited vocabulary.

***What things/problems do not get discussed?***

*"We don't really talk about our problems. I would rather keep mine to myself. There's talk of prostitution, but that is all we know. It's not here, you know, so we don't talk about it".*

The students were decidedly uncomfortable by this stage. What had come out of the other groups on the topic was discussed with the members of this group, who were visibly disturbed by the subject matter, and it became expedient to move on.

***What other academic / emotional / social / issues stop the student from performing at his best?***

*"I would love to be like other students and come and go as I please. Here our classes are too small, so if you don't pitch, they notice that you are absent. I don't see why you have to attend all the classes, because you can always do the work on your own".*

*"For me the scariest thing about being here is if I fail. I am really scared of failing. That could cost money. If I have to do an extra year, where am I going to get the funds? It also costs time as it would mean a whole year longer to wait before starting to earn a proper salary. My parents would be so disappointed. I don't want to let them down. They are giving up a lot so that I can study. They do not know that I am struggling. How can I tell*

*them when they want me to have this opportunity to study so much? It makes me anxious and tense and affects me just before I write class tests. I just cannot disappoint them”.*

*“We did talk about understanding what the lecturer says in class, but there is more. The textbooks are difficult to read. I struggle and have to read sections over and over again before they make sense. Then I don’t always know what the lecturers are asking in the test papers. I don’t know how to answer some of the questions, because I don’t know what they want”.*

*“I have not got all the textbooks. I am waiting until I get some money so that I can go and buy them. Instead, I go to the library and hope that the textbook that I need is on the shelf and then I work in the library. Some students never have textbooks to work from. They rely on others or just study for the tests from their own notes”.*

Although the above vignette does not dwell too lengthily on the topic of accountability and responsibility, the topics nevertheless came up every so often. The students appear to feel that they are entitled to use their time as they best see fit. They did not feel that class attendance was an issue, and would like the freedom to spend their days as they see fit. All too often, the lecturer was seen as being responsible for enthusing and motivating the student, and when sections of work are not fully comprehended, it is put down to ineffective teaching or problems understanding the lecturer.

Fear of failure reared its head yet again in this group, with the concomitant results affecting time, finance and disappointment for parents. Once again, outside factors are seen to play their part in this potential lack of success, especially when textbooks are unavailable or not possessed by the student.

***Are there other aspects about which we have not thought?***

*“Some students have problems at home. There are social problems, like parents being out of work and not being able to support their children. I know of students who are doing part-time work because parents are not working and the students are the only ones in the house who are able to do so. They are feeding the whole family. I know of one student who is responsible for nine people in her family”.*

*"In my home, my little brother looks through all my things and my younger sister wears my clothes without my permission. I do not feel that I have any privacy and if I did have, it would not be respected".*

*"Studying is difficult in areas where there is no electricity. Working by candlelight is not easy. My home is very noisy and I cannot work properly there. I get up early and get to the library when it opens as it is quieter than at home".*

*"We haven't talked about parents who drink or brothers who do drugs. It is sometimes impossible to work when parents are fighting. One may be drunk or both. I just want to get out and far away from it".*

***Of all the factors that we have raised, which are the most important?***

*"Here I think that we can put down time-management. All of us here today have a problem with it. Besides having all this work to do, I do not have time for my old friends. They do not seem to understand that I have all this stuff to do each day and they think that I am neglecting them. I feel bad, but it is not the same any more. Relationships suffer".*

*"All these things that stress us are important. We end up feeling frustrated and anxious and the work suffers".*

*"Lack of money is a huge problem for many of us. We do not always like to admit it, but it is".*

Most of the group seemed to agree that the lack of time management is a big problem for many students in both their academic and social lives. Stress is seen as a factor that is able to inhibit success, affecting academic performance and interfering with psychological wellness. A third factor is the lack of finance that impinges on food, living arrangements, clothing, transport, class fees and textbooks, as well as and specific articles that have to be bought as course requirements.

***Is what we have summarised adequate?***

"We have to stop talking somewhere as there will always be problems where there are students".

### **Have we missed anything?**

"Probably, but we won't know, will we?"

This group was different to the others in that the members have not experienced the frustration level common to most students who live on campus, as they have conducive study facilities available in their homes. They do not have to try and find a quiet place in which to work. They do not have to pack up and leave the library early each evening when it closes. Being able to study is a problem common to all the other groups except this one. The summary in table form below shows the areas that are considered problematic by group three.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Topic discussed</b>
1	<i>What is life like here for you as a student?</i>	Under-preparedness, workload, time management and friendships.
2	<i>How do you know that a student on our campus is facing problems?</i>	Peer pressure and finance.
3	<i>In your opinion, which is the biggest problem area for the first year student?</i>	Lack of motivation and finance.
4	<i>Has it affected any of you?</i>	Time management, finance and lack of motivation.
5	<i>In what other ways have you been affected?</i>	Finance, comprehension and language.
6	<i>What things / problems do not get discussed?</i>	Prostitution.
7	<i>What other academic / emotional / social issues stop the student from performing at his best?</i>	Accountability, fear of failure, comprehension and lack of textbooks.
8	<i>Are there other aspects about which we have not thought?</i>	Domestic or social problems and study facilities.
9	<i>Of all the factors that we have raised, which</i>	Time management, stress and

	<i>are the most important?</i>	finance.
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#### 5.4.4 Focus group 4

Group four was comprised of two males and five females. Three students live on campus and the rest commute each day. A vociferous group, the members were all studying in different directions, and the experiences were also quite dissimilar.

##### ***What is life like for you as a student?***

*“As a first year student, my social life is very important to me, as important as my studies. I have friends who see it another way. They spend much more time on their social lives than on their studies. I am happy here. I work hard and have made some good friends”.*

*“I found coming here that I was not prepared for all the independence that I have. You are faced with challenges. You are put under so much pressure so that in the end, you do not know which route to take, and you don’t get the right advice from the right people. You get very confused”.*

*“I got a shock coming here. I wasn’t prepared for this. The teachers are not the same as school. You have got to do everything on your own here. I was not expecting this. No one told me about this at school”.*

*“At the beginning of the year, I was not very comfortable. There were so many details and things that I had to deal with. I did not know what to do. I did not know where to go. It was all on me. It was terrible”.*

This group stressed the shock of entry into higher education. Each had experienced a drastic change from being in high school, and all commented that they were unprepared for what lay ahead.

The adjustments that had to be made centred on the new found independence, the various types of pressure that came from all sides resulting in a most confusing time for all in the group, with a few admitting that the experience had frightened them.

***How do you know that a student on our campus is facing problems?***

*“Yes, they have problems with finance, money for textbooks and food and also finding accommodation”.*

*“As students from disadvantaged backgrounds, we come here not really knowing what to do. Where will we live, what should we do, what should we study? We think that this is the best place, but when we get here, we are disappointed. We have ideas about tertiary education, but it doesn’t turn out like we think. I think the schools need to be marketed better. I am from a rural area and did not know much about the different institutions. Not much help at school either. We could have career exhibitions there to help the learners”.*

*“It would help the new students if they could attend an orientation course before they register so that they get help with choosing the right courses and would know what to do when they start. So many students have no idea what to study. They just come here to get educated. For some, it doesn’t matter what it is as long as they are studying something”.*

*“Registration is difficult for many students. I did not know where to go and was standing in queues for ages. The new students do not always understand how the system works and they are really confused. You feel frightened and worried and scared”.*

The conversation reverted to the topic of confusion for most, and disappointment for some. Registration was certainly not an easy process and they had plenty of ideas as to how best to streamline the process. The students arrive at the institution with certain perceptions and aspirations, and find that some perceptions are unfounded and some aspirations are left unmet. Financial problems were discussed, noting that students struggle to find the funding and enough money to purchase the required textbooks, sufficient food and simple accommodation.

The lack of suitable vocational guidance at high school level was an issue as well as the lack of information about courses and institutions. The fact that many are psychologically unprepared for what lies ahead, and are academically ill-prepared for the lecture hall experience, gave rise to a lengthy deliberation. This concerned disadvantaged schooling and the lack of subject knowledge in some areas, as well as a lack of self-knowledge that is necessary in order to map out a suitable career path.

Client services came under fire once again in that the various processes left the new students feeling confused and disappointed due to the perceived lack of understanding on the students' part, and lack of communication and co-ordination within the various departments orchestrating the registration process.

***In your opinion, which is the biggest problem area for the first year student?***

*"A huge problem is the registration process. We need smooth running and good co-ordination".*

*"I think that a big problem is the lack of communication between the students and the lecturers. We do not always understand each other. You find that the attitude is not always right with everyone. Why do some people want to teach if they don't seem to like some of the students? You feel you can't do the right thing and this affects your self-confidence. It de-motivates you. Makes you want to give up. You get bored and then start missing lectures. There are students who stay away from certain lectures to avoid negative comments".*

For the student, the process of registration is a daunting one. The fact that it kept coming into the conversation shows that it has affected them in many ways. Many did not know what was required of them on entering the institution.

Communication between some members of staff and the students seemed to be strained, with each misunderstanding the other at times. The attitudes of some were questioned as they left some of the students feeling stupid, incompetent and demoralised.

***Has it affected any of you?***

*"Yes, I have a problem with finance. We are all affected. We get stressed trying to find fees, and then worry if we will be able to write exams and get results. If your mother dies, or your father loses his job, then what happens to you? There is no one to pay for you or to support you".*

*"Sometimes the attitude of a lecturer affects me. I feel that no matter how I work, it is never good enough. It makes me not want to go to those classes".*

First hand experience of a lack of financial aid was common to many in the group. They spoke freely about the difficulties in obtaining bank loans as they had very little surety and they experienced problems trying to raise student loans. Very few bursaries were seen to be available, and the pathway to securing enough financial aid appears to be strewn with all sorts of difficulties. There appeared to be quite a high level of anxiety in some group members, with a few admitting to feeling insecure and extremely stressed over the issue.

***In what other ways have you been affected?***

*“For me, I have been trying to get a loan and I do not know why I cannot get one. I want to study. But then the bank says my parents do not earn enough for me to have a loan. I have paid my registration fees; but I do not know where the rest of my fees are going to come from”.*

The insecurity of not having enough money to finish paying for the current year of study once again appeared. Although the subject had previously been well-debated, the students felt that they still had more to say on the subject.

***What things/problems do not get discussed?***

*“You know there must be a way for someone to find out if you are not doing well and that maybe you are going to fail. In the middle of the year, if you are not performing well, they should call you and ask you if you know that your marks are dropping. You should get a notice to say that something must be done. Students don’t talk about academic performance. You leave that alone. You don’t let others see what is happening to you”.*

*“You see expensive cars parked outside the residences with sugar daddies inside. Some girls are giving the rest of us a terrible reputation. It is a problem. I find it degrading. It is embarrassing, seeing it for yourself. It is so bad that when your father fetches you at residence or your brother comes to visit you, you have a battle to explain who they are. They do not want to believe you. They automatically think that it is a sugar daddy”.*

*“Something that is there, but does not get talked about, is dagga. I have a problem with the guys who stand outside the gates, smoking dagga. Out in the open. They come in stoned and that puts us at risk. You don’t know how the substance is going to affect their minds.*



*They fall asleep in class. If they see you have dreadlocks then they offer you those muffins, hot 'ganja' cookies".*

*"The students are well-informed about HIV/AIDS. They are aware of it, but they ignore it. Maybe they think that it won't happen to them. It will happen to someone else".*

This was the only group to directly address the topic of academic performance. The members were highly concerned about students at risk, and posited a numbers of ways in which the institution could identify them. Of interest was the perception that students do not talk about how they are faring on the academic front.

The subject of prostitution was not readily or enthusiastically debated. The students appeared to be embarrassed when the topic was broached. The area had to be probed, and no student actually used the word "*prostitution*", and a variety of euphemisms were circulated. The members of the group made sure that they were not associated in any way to this topic of discussion, and the distaste and disdain was palpable within the group.

Substance abuse was discussed at great length, with most of the students reacting most vociferously. They are adamant that this was not to be tolerated and did not wish to be associated with students who pursue such a way of living.

Notable is the concern with HIV/AIDS. This group tried to probe students' attitudes towards the disease. It appears that while some are behaving responsibly, this group thinks that most students try to ignore it and its consequences. An element of unaccountability within the student community was stressed.

***What other academic/emotional/social/ issues stop the student from performing at his best?***

*"Trying to fit in for the student is difficult. You compare yourself to others all the time. You cannot help it. You want to copy others so that you fit in".*

*"When you know where you come from, your background - you know that you can't afford the smart labels, these expensive things. Know yourself. Know that you can't be like them,*

*and they must accept you for who you are and not what you wear. I call this 'fashion sickness' and it is everywhere".*

*"When you start here, straight from school, you do not want to look like a first year, a 'ntwana' (small boy). You want to be seen as 'skhoko' (the crust of the bread). This is a problem when you come to the city from the rural areas. They look down on you".*

*Students have problems with socialisation. My village in the rural area is in the dust and we had teachers who stayed away from class and did not teach us to speak proper English. When I got here, I could hardly speak English. People couldn't understand me. I really had a problem fitting in. This affected me. I would write it, but not speak it properly. So for me to stand up in front of the class and present something, it was terrible".*

*"Yes, language is a problem, especially your accent. They laugh. If you try to greet someone in their home language, they reply in English always. They are proving that they know how to speak English. There is a name for these people. They are called 'coconuts': black outside, white inside. These students are pressured. In the end they do not fit in anywhere".*

*"This thing of not speaking fluent English affects you a lot. You are not comfortable speaking in class. As a first year student, you want to ask a question or have a section of the work clarified. Because you are not fluent, you don't ask the question and you lose out. If the class is big, you won't say anything in front of them".*

Adjusting to student life can be very difficult. For many of the students, it means fighting the urge to be like everyone else. Keeping up with the others is seen by this group as a kind of sickness, and the pursuit of being seen in the right clothing, moving in the popular circles and carrying the most up-to-date accessories was felt by group 4 to be a signal to the world that those students do not know who they are and have forgotten from where they have come. This group felt it imperative that you accept yourself, and do the best with what you have at your disposal.

The use of English for many is problematic. For a great number of students, this is not their mother tongue, neither is it a second language. Yet, it is the medium of instruction, and this can be a struggle for many. Although having learnt English at school, there are those who

are not fully conversant in it, others struggle to express themselves in written English, and still others who find it difficult to understand the language used in the textbooks. This appears to affect confidence, motivation, class attendance, and in some cases, completion of both projects and examination papers.

***Are there other aspects about which we have not thought?***

*"We haven't said anything about the residences. They are very noisy places and it is very difficult to work in your room. We use the library, but it is not big enough and it does not stay open very late. There is also a lot of stuff that needs repairing, and just doesn't get done".*

The issue of having a quiet place in which to study came to the fore yet again. Besides the points raised by the other groups, this group debated how run down the buildings have become, the lack of tight security and the type of reputation that residence life has developed over time.

***Of all the factors that we have raised, which are the most important?***

*"The smooth running of the administration when we register, and also afterwards, is a big problem. There is not much co-ordination, and we get very confused and frustrated".*

*"Communication for everyone could be improved. Before we get here, during registration, between staff and the students".*

*"For me, lack finance is a very big problem".*

*"Attitudes towards each other can poison relationships. Some lecturers could change but we could too, I suppose".*

Finance remains a big issue for most students, affecting most areas of their lives. Improvement in the way the registration process is run would be most welcome. Co-ordination of services on offer, and co-operation between departments would go a long way to making the student feel more comfortable. A change in attitude of a few of the staff would ease tension. A healthy respect and attitude towards each other, as well as being

able to appreciate others' differences, will be a necessity if the student is going to succeed. The members in this group admitted that they were responsible for the changes that they would have to make.

***Is what we have summarised adequate?***

*"We all have so many ideas, but we have got some of the most important things".*

***Have we missed anything?***

*"We worry that we will not pass at the end of the year. You know it is so embarrassing when you fail a test or an exam. I can't go home and tell my mother. They have such high expectations for me and they want me to do well. The community there is also interested. I am studying here and the community sees me as setting a good example to the others in the area. How can I go back at the end of the semester and then they ask me how I have done?"*

*"If I fail, it is going to cost me. I will be very embarrassed. I will have to repeat the year and that is going to cost another year's fees, and I will have to wait a whole year extra before I start working. We should have talked about this when we were discussing the other issues that stop students from performing well".*

The final point in the discussion was that of fear of failure. This proved to be a point about which each member felt most strongly. Having to repeat a year would mean embarrassment, a shattering of dreams for many, disappointment for parents and the student, finding extra finance, as well as having to wait an extra year before starting to earn a living wage.

Table 5.11 below presents a summary of the topics that were discussed by group 4.

Table 5.11 Summary table for focus group 4		
No.	Question	Topic discussed
1	<i>What is life like here for you as a student?</i>	Social life, adjustment, independence, workload, under-

		preparedness.
2	<i>How do you know that a student on our campus is facing problems?</i>	Finance, schooling, under-preparedness, course selection, registration process.
3	<i>In your opinion, which is the biggest problem area for the first year student?</i>	Registration process, communication, attitudes.
4	<i>Has it affected any of you?</i>	Finance, stress, anxiety, staff attitudes.
5	<i>In what other ways have you been affected?</i>	Obtaining study loans.
6	<i>What things / problems do not get discussed?</i>	Academic performance, prostitution, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS.
7	<i>What other academic / emotional / social issues stop the student from performing at his best?</i>	Identity, socialisation, language, fear of failure.
8	<i>Are there other aspects about which we have not thought?</i>	Residence life.
9	<i>Of all the factors that we have raised, which are the most important?</i>	Communication, attitudes administration, finance, student accountability.

#### 5.4.5 Composite findings from all the focus group interviews

What follows are the composite findings from all four focus group interviews. Recurring issues were noted, as were the new themes to emerge from the discussions. It is most interesting to see certain themes recurring again and again, not only in the focus group interviews, in the questionnaire findings as well as the workshop outcomes.

The issues about which all four focus groups agreed were a lack of finance, under-preparedness, a lack of study skills and the issue of prostitution. The issues debated by three of the four groups were student accommodation, adjustment to campus life, the different backgrounds of the students, career guidance, communication between staff and students, language issues, motivation, orientation and the registration process, psychological issues such as anxiety and fear, student responsibility, time management, the fear of HIV/AIDS, residence life and security matters.

As noted in the workshop outcomes, similar trends or themes emerged in these interviews. For the sake of convenience, the interview topics have been grouped under the same four headings as the findings from the workshops, namely student issues, staff issues, institutional issues and social issues. Once again, the student issues appear to outweigh the other themes.

Summarising the focus group interviews in a similar vein to those of the workshop groups, the topics that emerged in the groups can be viewed in tabular format below.

Table 5.12 Composite findings from the four focus group interviews				
TOPICS DISCUSSED	FG1	FG2	FG3	FG4
<b>Student issues</b>				
Academic performance				✓
Accountability			✓	✓
Adjustment	✓	✓		✓
Background	✓		✓	✓
Career guidance	✓		✓	✓
Fear of failure	✓		✓	✓
Finance	✓	✓	✓	✓
Freedom	✓			
Identity	✓			✓
Involvement	✓			
Language		✓	✓	✓
Leadership opportunities	✓			
Loneliness	✓			
Motivation	✓	✓	✓	
Orientation and registration	✓	✓		✓
Psychological problems		✓	✓	✓
Responsibility	✓		✓	✓
Role models	✓			
Selection	✓	✓		
Self-image	✓			
Study skills and habits	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time management	✓	✓	✓	
Thinking skills			✓	
Under-preparedness	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wellness		✓		
<b>Staff issues</b>				
Attitude				✓
Class size				
Communication	✓	✓		✓
Teaching style and skill		✓		
<b>Institutional issues</b>				
Libraries	✓			
Study facilities	✓		✓	
Administration				✓

<b>Social issues</b>				
Accommodation	✓	✓		✓
Crime, violence, abuse	✓			
Domestic problems			✓	
Friendships			✓	✓
HIV/AIDS fear	✓	✓		✓
Peer pressure	✓			✓
Prostitution	✓	✓	✓	✓
Residence life	✓	✓		✓
Security	✓	✓		✓

#### 5.4.6 Problem areas addressed by the triangulation process

The concept of combining more than one methodology in order to increase the reliability of observation is termed “*triangulation*”. Often thought to mean the combination of both qualitative and quantitative techniques, it is thought to refer to multiple methods of data collection. In the case of the current study, the workshop, questionnaire and focus group interview techniques were used, which happen to be both qualitative and quantitative in nature.

Looking at the findings from the three different investigation methods namely participant observation in the workshops, the conducting of the questionnaire and the focus group interviews, not one set of findings emerges, but rather three, giving the examination a richness and depth that would not have been apparent had only one data collection technique been used.

The process of triangulation that is comprised of these three techniques made use of qualitative data collection to start the process in the form of the workshops. In order to enrich the study, the quantitative data collection technique of questionnaire completion was undertaken. To further broaden the study, the utilisation of the focus group interview added a second qualitative dimension.

What follows is a consideration of the amalgamation of the findings from all three techniques. Of all the common issues that came under discussion in the workshops, by means of the questionnaire and through the focus group interviews, the following issues appear to have garnered the most serious attention, and are thus extremely significant. They are thought to be critical enough to warrant immediate intervention:

- fear of failure;
- selection process;
- study skills;
- under-preparedness.

Also falling into this important group is the problem of finance, as well as that of prostitution. Although initially not thought to be included in the current study, these issues may very well have a bearing on the other variables that will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Looking at the factors that were thought to be highly significant were the following:

- accountability;
- adjustment (academic and emotional);
- career guidance;
- communication;
- language;
- general anxiety;
- time management.

The issue of security fell into this group. Although not a direct psycho-educational factor, it could nevertheless have a bearing on other variables, and will be noted in the following chapter. Also debated was a third group of issues discussed thought to be significant, namely:

- academic support;
- concentration and comprehension;
- study facilities.

The table below shows the common problem areas that surfaced during the triangulation process, and the level of concern for each of the issues perceived to be problematic by lecturers and students, which were highlighted through the use of the three different techniques. The composite findings from the workshops, the composite findings from the questionnaire, as well as the composite findings from the focus groups are placed in order of importance afforded them by the various participants and respondents in the study.



Those at the extremely significant level are felt to be critical and need to be investigated immediately. Those issues that are highly significant need intervention in the immediate future, while those issues perceived to be significant need to be addressed fairly soon.

Table 5-13: Problem areas addressed by the triangulation process	
AREA OF CONCERN	LEVEL OF CONCERN
fear of failure selection process study skills under preparedness	<b>Extremely significant</b>
accountability adjustment (academic & emotional) career guidance communication language general anxiety time management	<b>Highly significant</b>
academic support concentration comprehension study facilities	<b>Significant</b>

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

Chapter Five comprised a description of the empirical study that was undertaken, examining the numerous factors that are perceived to inhibit first year student performance. The perceived problem areas were examined by means of the three techniques used in the triangulation method of investigation, both qualitative and quantitative in design. Although many of the students experienced a great variety of problems, there were specific problems that were common to a number of students.

The following chapter summarises the findings from the literature study and encapsulates the findings of the various data collection techniques, namely the workshop, the questionnaire and the focus group interview. Thereafter in Chapter Seven, a model follows that considers the new student in an holistic light with suggested interventions that will

afford the new student opportunities to remedy problem areas, as well as development opportunities that address the student as a totality.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

Some persons are born with an inner constitution which is harmonious and well balanced from the outset. Their impulses are consistent with one another, their will follows without trouble the guidance of their intellect, their passions are not excessive and their lives are little haunted by regrets. But there are others whose existence is little more than a series of zig-zags, as now one tendency and now another gets the upper hand. Their spirit wars with their flesh, they wish for incompatibles, wayward impulses interrupt their most deliberate plans, and their lives are one long drama of repentance and effort to repair misdemeanours and mistakes.

William James (1890)

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to construct and conduct the empirical study of this research project, a large body of literature was studied. The literature consulted covered the developmental vectors along which the new student must move. Also examined were the variables that are seen to influence the student during the adjustment phase on entering the tertiary education environment. The variables that play an important role in the performance and achievement, as well as those that may affect underachievement, failure and consequent withdrawal, were taken into consideration.

The literature that was consulted provided background information to the study, and served as a referential framework for the workshops, the compilation of the questionnaire, as well as the focus group interviews. Chapter Five covered the empirical research into possible factors that are seen to inhibit first year student performance, and was described in detail.

In the current chapter, summation of information gleaned from the literature study and the empirical study is noted. Of importance is the resultant intervention programme that has been designed for the institution that attempts to lay a foundation for all stakeholders concerned with the total development of the student. With the seven vectors of development as a guide, numerous programmes are suggested that address specific development areas. This programme is included in Chapter Seven as a recommendation for institutional use.

## **6.2 FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE STUDY**

### **6.2.1 Findings concerned with student development**

Student development theory, on which this study is based, has a variety of meanings for a variety of researchers. The major agreement area is that of intellectual, emotional and behavioural growth that the student experiences while he is involved in higher education. It is fundamentally a process that entails the whole person (section 2.2).

Student development theory has been researched for the past fifty years and has developed from the initial psychological and sociological stance to four major clusters that include psychosocial theories, cognitive-structural theories, typological models and person-environment interaction models (section 2.3).

The specific development theory that is used as the basis for the current study is Chickering's Seven Vector Theory of Student Development, used by many institutions worldwide as a way of better understanding the student and devising programmes that foster holistic development. What follows is a brief summary of the findings from the literature that address student development theory, the adjustment phase in higher education, as well as student underachievement, failure and withdrawal.

#### **6.2.1.1 *Developing competencies***

The first vector addresses competence in intellectual pursuits, in physical and manual activities, as well as interpersonal skills. Seen by Chickering and Reisser (1993:53) as the ability to cope with whatever crosses the individual's path and the achievement of goals in a successful manner, competence gives the student the freedom to risk and try new endeavours. It is the responsibility of the institution to provide the many varied opportunities wherein all round development can take place, where confidence can be built and the student is respected as a developing adult (section 2.5.1).

#### **6.2.1.2 *Managing emotions***

The second area of development embraces the emotional life of the student. He needs to be able to recognise and accept a whole range of emotions, which include anxiety, fear,

aggression, anger, depression, guilt and shame. The balancing of the need for intimacy, unconditional acceptance and nurturing with the need to nurture, to respect and give affection is vital if the student is to develop as an integrated being. He needs to recognise and express the positive emotions of wonder, caring, optimism, inspiration and worship. Taking ownership of these feelings can be both painful and freeing for the individual. This is a journey concerned with integrating the emotions, one where the student learns to accept, take responsibility for, and actively choose when, where and how he will express those emotions (section 2.5.2).

#### **6.2.1.3 *Moving through autonomy towards interdependence***

The third vector sees the movement from a dependent emotional state to that of independence and interdependence, whereby the student is empowered to interact in a highly effective manner with other people. It frees him from constantly needing approval, reassurance and affection from others. It enables him the freedom to become instrumentally independent, whereby he is able to pursue his own opportunities, direct himself and solve his own problems. The journey towards interdependence sees changes in attitude and behaviour, as the student recognises that for every one of his actions, there is a reaction. He feels his interconnectedness with others, and is able to perceive that he is but a small part of the much larger whole. The theory of marginality and mattering comes into play as the student finds that he needs to belong, and once he belongs, he is able to fully involve himself. The act of giving and taking is refined as he moves towards independence and being part of the greater whole (section 2.5.3).

#### **6.2.1.4 *Developing mature interpersonal relationships***

Competent communication skills in dealing with other people, the ability to recognise, accept, control and express emotions, as well as the movement towards interdependence are all necessary if the student is going to be able to develop and sustain mature interpersonal relationships. This type of relationship requires tolerance and appreciation of and for differences and similarities between people. Knowing how to resolve differences amicably, having patience with others, developing empathy for others, and learning how to care for friend and stranger alike, sees the developing student well on his way to becoming capable of forming and sustaining mature, intimate interpersonal relationships. It is during this process that the individual learns that his need for control, dependence on others for

happiness and awareness, that personal baggage and unfinished business not be projected upon the relationship, will aid the development of healthy intimacy (section 2.5.4).

#### **6.2.1.5 *Establishing identity***

Building upon the four preceding vectors is the establishment of identity, the skills that contribute to the definition of self are those of competency development, where emotions are better managed and tolerance and openness and intimate relationships are established due to the ability to bond with others. Identity develops when the student feels that he fits in with the social world. Internal integration helps him to relate to the world wherein several factors contribute to this development:

- he needs to be comfortable with his body and his appearance;
- he needs to be comfortable with his gender and sexual orientation;
- he has to have a sense of who he is within a social, historical and cultural context;
- he needs to find opportunities in which he can play different roles;
- he needs positive feedback from others in that he knows that he is listened to, is appreciated and has a sense of belonging;
- he has to learn to accept himself in that he is not and cannot be perfect; and
- in dealing with all the above-mentioned aspects, he is moving towards personal stability and integration (section 2.5.5).

#### **6.2.1.6 *Developing purpose***

The development of purpose is the second last vector of development that addresses who the student is going to be, and where he is going to. This is the phase during which clear vocational goals are established. The student needs to take all opportunities that create challenges for him wherein he is able to discover and develop new talents. As he develops purpose, he moves away from an area of shallow personal interests to a level where interests become more focused and activities bring reward and fulfillment. In the same vein, interpersonal and family commitments become more focused and are stronger than before. Balancing his lifestyle with career aspirations and other commitment is made easier when clear values help to drive the process. It is commitment that gives moral depth and vitality to the student's life, providing his existence with intentionality (section 2.5.6).

### **6.2.1.7 Developing integrity**

Connected to the development of identity and purpose is integrity. This is the seventh and final vector in student development. It develops as the student journeys through different environments and situations that question both his beliefs and assumptions. The tertiary institution is the ideal setting for both experimentation and discovery. It provides scope for intellectual, cultural and social experiences, teaching principled, moral thinking, aids the discovery of truth, goodness and quality and encourages the actualisation of personal ideals. It is a process of both humanising and personalising values. When the student's behaviour matches his personalised values, he will experience congruence. It is the apex of personhood where awareness and communication match experience.

The achievement of congruence and integrity is a lifelong process that necessitates satisfactory development along all the other vectors. It is only in the development of a strong set of core beliefs that the student is able to engage fully with life itself, making life decisions based on that set of values and beliefs, *en route* to self-actualisation, where these values will contribute to the good of all and support him during difficult times (section 2.5.7).

## **6.2.2 Findings concerned with new student adjustment issues**

The adjustment phase is one in which the new student learns to adapt to student life, and this phase rarely runs smoothly. Trying to deal with newly-acquired freedom, academic demands, social communities and emotional issues can complicate this period of his life. Some of these issues are competency, emotional, independence, adjustment, identity, goals and commitments, living arrangements and institutional issues.

### **6.2.2.1 Competency issues**

Competency issues, where researchers have found that a great number of problems that the new student faces are on an academic level, emerged. Issues such as time management, class teaching, language, poor course choice, study methods and habits, are but a few of the most pressing issues that are faced (section 3.2.1).

### **6.2.2.2 *Emotional issues***

Emotional issues often come to the fore when the student leaves home or is physically separated from a supportive family. These range from anxiety and depression, to poor academic achievement. Researchers stress the fact that the new student is potentially at risk of negative reactions to stress, as well as depressive symptomology (section 3.2.2).

### **6.2.2.3 *Independence issues***

Independence issues, including separation from parents, managing the anxiety of being alone and independent decision-making are some of the biggest problems faced by the new student. The results are manifested in feelings of loneliness, a decreased sense of competence as a friend and distress as a result of unrealistic expectations that are not, and cannot, be met during the transition phase (section 3.2.3).

### **6.2.2.4 *Adjustment issues***

Social adjustment can be difficult for many new students. When engaging with unfamiliar people and new situations, various risks are involved for which the student may or may not be ready to take. The manner in which the new student gets involved with the variety of new groups and communities on campus will have a significant influence on his general well-being (section 3.2.4).

### **6.2.2.5 *Identity issues***

Creating a clear self-identity is one of the many transition adjustments that need to be made. The new student needs to know who he is and where he best fits into the greater whole. This includes an understanding of his social, cultural and historical context, a healthy gender identity, feeling comfortable with his own body and appearance. When all these facets are in place, psychological wellness and successful academic involvement are the expected results (section 3.2.5).



### **6.2.2.6 Goals and commitment**

Having clearly defined goals, and then committing wholeheartedly to those goals, is a major adjustment for many new students. This may be attributed to a lack of focused self-knowledge. The clearer the picture that the new student has of himself at registration, the better his chances are of swift adaptation and successful integration (section 3.2.6).

### **6.2.2.7 Living arrangements**

Many students have to make environmental adjustments in that they exchange home life for residential life. For many who are not so fortunate, unsuitable living arrangements can add to their woes and anxieties (section 3.2.7).

### **6.2.2.8 Institutional issues**

Some of the institutional problems that face the new student are the selection processes, lack of interdepartmental communication and bureaucratic red tape surrounding the awarding of bursaries and loans that may result in insecurity and anxiety (section 3.2.8).

## **6.2.3 Findings concerned with student performance and achievement**

The growing diversity in the student population brings new demands, and challenges the system to cater for the changing needs and variety of academic potential of the dynamic and heterogeneous group that typifies higher education. These variables that affect academic success are well researched and include both academic variables and psychosocial variables.

### **6.2.3.1 Academic variables**

Academic variables that are thought to affect performance and achievement of the first year student are:

- previous performance and admission tests as a means of assessing whether or not the new student will cope adequately on the academic front (section 3.3.1.1);

- study habits and cognitive abilities favour success where the student is capable of deep-level learning (section 3.3.1.2);
- the ability to read proficiently with fluency, speed and comprehension, as well as motivation to learn results in successful learning (section 3.3.1.3);
- knowing how to manage time from both the qualitative and quantitative perspective can influence performance (section 3.3.1.4);
- the manner in which the student learns, as well as how he is taught, will affect his academic outcomes (section 3.3.1.5);
- the nature of the interaction between the student and the relevant faculty will affect him (section 3.3.1.6); and
- the academic climate, setting and ethos of the institution, if supportive, will foster both intellectual and personal growth (section 3.3.1.7).

#### **6.2.3.2 Psychosocial variables**

A great deal of research has offered wide discussion on a number of psychosocial variables, seen to affect performance and achievement. Amongst others are the following:

- personal motivation as having an implication for academic success in that it develops and influences achievement (section 3.3.2.1);
- the ability to set goals and follow through as an important antecedent of academic achievement (sections 3.3.2.2, 3.2.6);
- self-efficacy as the driving force behind task initiation, task direction, determination to complete the task and a successful outcome (section 3.3.2.3);
- psychological and physical health as seen as factors that can influence achievement (section 3.3.2.4).

The literature covers a great many other topics that are seen to influence performance and achievement, such as academic self-concept, attitude and ambition, finances, employment, personality, living arrangements and career orientation (section 3.3.2.4). The research field is extensive and due to logistical constraints, not all aspects could be fully investigated.

#### 6.2.4 Findings concerned with student under achievement, failure and withdrawal

Worldwide student attrition has been an ongoing concern for the past eighty years. In South Africa, the student profile has changed, yet the number of under-prepared students registering for the first time remains a problem. A number of variables are seen to be associated with underperformance and withdrawal.

- The disposition of each individual student appears to play a role. The student's intention regarding tertiary education, his goals and level of commitment to both work and the institution, if clear and strong, will greatly assist his retention and ultimate success (section 3.4.1.1).
- The new student's experience within and of the institution plays a large role in attrition and retention. If the initial adjustment period is fairly smooth, the student is more than likely not to complete the course. If he is able to meet the academic demands and standards by being equipped with the necessary skills, he is more likely to complete the course. If there is a mismatch between the student's preferences, needs and interests and those of the institution, the possibility exists that he will not see his course through to the end. This state of incongruence can also manifest itself in the social arena, whereby not fitting in may signal a failure to persist with the studies and a consequent withdrawal from the institution. It is of great importance that the new student begins to make significant contact with others on the campus (section 3.4.1.2).
- Many external forces come into play with regards to under achievement and withdrawal.
- Many students have obligations to communities outside the institution. Others try to keep old friendships alive, and do not make new friends on campus hence they battle to integrate fully within the institution. Commuting students experience problems and others who are working part-time also have major adjustments to make in order to fulfill academic requirements.
- Finance, or the lack thereof, plays a significant role in the lives of many students. Studies show that financial problems are one of the top three factors that influence performance and achievement. Lack of sufficient finance affects the general quality of

the student's life and can bring the added burdens of anxiety, stress and alienation (section 3.4.1.3).

### **6.3 FINDINGS FROM THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION**

The following discussion centres on the findings from the quantitative study. Initially, the questionnaire appeared to be a substantial instrument, only to discover during the discussion groups with students that many possible areas of investigation had not been tapped. What follows is a discussion on the questionnaire findings, backed by the findings from the focus group interviews and the various workshops. Although the project findings are weighty and lengthy, the triangulation of the process has added a richness and breadth that a single investigation would have failed to produce.

In the following section, academic and psychological performance inhibitors, common academic and psychological factors, gender-related inhibition factors, the differences exhibited between courses of study and the impact that underperformance has on the student will be summarised.

#### **6.3.1 Academic and psychological inhibitors of performance**

A great many factors both academic and psychological are perceived to constrain student performance. The composite profile of the questionnaire reveals the group of academic variables to be slightly higher than that of the psychological factor grouping. Although both readings appear in the average range (between 4 and 5 on the scale) and can be interpreted as indicating that the students appear to be coping, on closer analysis, this is not the case. The large variance between top and bottom scores of individual factors emphasizes the different coping levels of individual students, from adequate coping skills to critical levels where immediate intervention is indicated. On yet closer scrutiny, neither the academic nor the psychological areas are healthy for all students.

Substantiation from the literature points to the lack of appropriate study skills, the manner in which the individual organises and processes knowledge, the manner in which he is taught, his level of reading ability, time management and self-management all contribute in some way to his eventual performance. All these factors came under scrutiny in the discussion groups.

The literature also underscores the attitude of the student and his level of involvement in student life as influencing his ultimate performance. These aspects were hotly debated, but not directly measured by means of the questionnaire. An aspect that appeared in all of the phases was that of the lack of finance. Supported by literature findings previously mentioned this might very well be a great cause for stress and anxiety.

### **6.3.2 The most common academic factors**

There are five academic variables that are prominent in all three data areas. They are lack of accountability, insufficient academic support for the student, lack of suitable career guidance, the existing process of the institution and an inability to concentrate.

Looking at the individual academic variables, the one that is the highest scoring of all the academic factors is that of accountability, in other words, the seeming lack of academic responsibility. In the workshops, the majority of the groups debated class attendance, with a decided conclusion that getting all students to attend all classes was a pipedream. Staff members feel that there seem to be great freedom associated with attending or not attending classes, with some students only appearing on test writing days, or at the handing in of assignments.

The students' argument is that they have the freedom to attend or not attend to lectures, with the majority getting to most of the classes. However, they acknowledge that there are many students who do not think it important, many who feel de-motivated, as well as those who are repeating modules who seem to think that they only need to write the tests and examinations. It is interesting to note that some of the students felt it to be of great importance that some faculty members begin to take their work seriously and be held accountable for their academic actions, while failing to see their own responsibility to attend lectures.

The second highest factor is academic support. For the students, this means support that is available for all students, not just those engaged in foundation courses. The students feel that they should be able to access computers free of charge. Consultation with faculty members is part of this process, as is the tutorial system. According to the students, neither is functioning optimally and should be investigated. Faculty members see this aspect from

a different angle, commenting that the students expect things to be done for them and there is not very much initiative from the students' side.

Also worrisome is the lack of career guidance. This is seen in the questionnaire results, the workshops and the focus group interviews. The students report that at many township schools, there are no teachers who fulfill this role, and vocational preparation for the world of work remains uncharted territory. There are those schools that are privileged to have specialists dedicated to the sole responsibility of learner guidance, and these students are undoubtedly the beneficiaries of sound advice and counselling. However, the two ends of the continuum mentioned above are in the minority, with the majority of students reporting that they had teachers who had to fit the task of career counselling in over and above their normal class workloads. The added responsibility of guidance for which they had little or no training is in all possibilities not seen as a priority in the academic school calendar.

The selection process as used until 2002 is still perceived as being a problem by both faculty members and students alike. Some students see selection as an academic exclusion tool, where placement is dependent upon previous strong performance. The previously used test instruments are outmoded and culturally biased against the disadvantaged student. For many faculty members there remains a dilemma as to how to assess potential, especially when selecting the disadvantaged student. Many feel that with the fierce competition from universities and colleges nearby, the high caliber student may be drawn to other institutions, leaving a smaller pool of potential applicants, many of whom are disadvantaged.

Noting all the problematic academic factors in the workshops, the questionnaire and the focus group interview results, there are both similarities in and an overlapping of data. A table similar to those expressing the data from the three techniques used has been constructed. The academic factors appear in order of severity of impact on performance, and the level of concern is also tabulated. The five factors that appear to be significant in the overall profile are clearly illustrated in the following table, as well as the two factors that need to be noted.

POSITION	ACADEMIC FACTOR	LEVEL OF CONCERN
1	Accountability	Significant

2	Academic support	
3	Career guidance	
4	Selection process	
5	Concentration ability	
6	Study facilities	To be noted
7	Comprehension	

### 6.3.3 The most common psychological issues

Two psychological variables dominate the results of the investigation. They are a fear of failure and anxiety, followed by depression, frustration and a lack of self-discipline.

With a score lying in the critical zone, the highest of all these factors is the fear of failure. This is one issue that did not emerge during the workshop period, but was, however confirmed by each of the focus groups after the researcher posed some probing questions, to be the most critical of all the issues discussed. On further enquiry, students proffered some reasons as to why this fear is so intense and real for them. Failure for many is equated with one of more of the following:

- a huge drop in self-esteem;
- as first generation students many are under tremendous pressure to perform;
- disappointing parents who sacrifice at great cost to provide an opportunity for further education;
- having to leave the institution;
- repeating a year will add immense financial burden to a struggling family;
- having to wait one year longer before becoming economically independent;
- anxiety throughout the year that is highly noticeable around test and examination time.

Fear is so very real for so many that all sorts of measures are used to cover up the fact of subject or year failure. The most common resolution is not to tell the parent and pretend that the course is one year longer than it is in reality. The fear of failing factor appears to be coupled to that of general anxiety. Many students have presented with severe anxiety symptomology, panic attacks during examination writing and a psychological paralysis when it comes to retaining information and activating the memory. The flood of students appearing for counselling just before test and examination time, as well as the post-results

period underscores this high level of anxiety. Common sentiments expressed during discussion are:

- “ I just could not work”;
- “I could not remember anything”;
- “I was too scared to write in case it was wrong”;
- “I am so scared that I am going to fail”.

For some, this may not be the issue of writing examinations and the looming possibility of failure. Other possible academic, emotional, relational or social issues may be causative. However, it would appear that general anxiety is significant in the life of the first year student. It is serious and should not be taken lightly. Also of growing concern is the frustration level noted by the students that may be due to a number of different factors. To be watched is possible depressive symptomology that, although appearing to be under control, could be masked by general anxiety. The table that follows illustrates the psychological factors that are most common in all the groups.

Table 6.2 The most common psychological factors inhibiting performance		
POSITION	PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTOR	LEVEL OF CONCERN
1	Fear of failure	Critical
2	General anxiety	Significant
3	Depression	To be noted
4	Frustration	
5	Self-discipline	

#### 6.3.4 The factors important to both genders

Both male and female students showed similar results, with fear of failure heading the list. For female students the fear of failure is in the critical zone, and for the male students, the fear of failure is highly significant. The females present a level of anxiety that is significant, unlike the males who appear to be coping with whatever it is that stresses them. A possibility exists that the very high failure fear level in the females could be supported by anxiety that is of significance.



Neither of the two groups feels that it is responsible for what is happening to them, as can be seen in the level of significance with regard to accountability. The apparent lack of accountability was most noticeable in the student discussions, where outside factors were continually blamed for various situations wherein students find themselves. One group in fact did realise that each is accountable for his or her own progress, and the student cannot sit back and wait for others to help. This particular group underscored the axiom that the student is the architect of his own life and he alone has to make the journey forward. Others are there to assist along the way, and this is a privilege for him, not a right.

There are common feelings about selection and the lack of adequate academic support and career guidance. To reiterate, it is those factors over which the student feels that he has no control or power that he feels the most strongly. If the student lacks accountability, he is possibly going to blame extrinsic variables for poor performance, such as course selection, little or no perceived academic support, and little or no career guidance while at high school.

In the table that follows, using the same format as the previous tables in the chapter, the variables that affect performance, seen to affect both male and female students in varying degrees of perceived intensity, are the fear of failure, a lack of accountability, a lack of suitable career guidance, the current selection process and insufficient academic support.

POSITION	FEMALES	MALES	LEVEL OF CONCERN
1	Fear of failure		Critical
1		Fear of failure	Highly significant
2	Accountability	Accountability	Significant
3	General anxiety	Career guidance	
4	Academic support	Selection	
5		Academic support	
5	Selection		
6	Career guidance	Concentration	To be noted
7	Concentration	Study facilities	
8	Comprehension	Time management	

### 6.3.5 Comparison of the results of students following different courses

Comparing the eight study courses proved to be one of the most enlightening aspects of the questionnaire analysis. At first glance, when looking at the overall results of all eight groups, the composite scores suggest that the students appear to be coping with both academic and psychological aspects of higher education. However, when each course is examined, a very different picture emerges. As previously mentioned, the overall score for the academic variables is slightly higher than that of the psychological factor group. This is so for seven of the eight groups.

Group 8 was the only group of students whose psychological factor score was slightly higher than the academic factor score. The academic score was lower than most of the other courses. It is a study course in which a life skills programme is part of the curriculum for six months of the academic year. These students are seen once a week by a counsellor who works at developing higher learning competencies, thus enabling the student to move towards a greater self-awareness within the academic realm. This may account for a higher coping mechanism that is more evident in the academic scores for this group. The possibility exists that this type of intervention has benefited these students.

To be noted is the fact that the academic and psychological scores for course 6 were almost the same, and both were lower than most of the other groups. The students in this course are subject to mentoring by the lecturers who are extremely involved in their general well-being. They are constantly energised and motivated by staff, and student counsellors have run various workshops to get them involved and adjusted to higher learning, as well as providing them with academic competency training. Below is the table that illustrates the causes for concern in all eight courses.

COURSE NO.	ACADEMIC FACTORS	PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS	AREA OF CONCERN
1	1 selection 2 career guidance 3 academic support 4 study facilities 5 accountability	1 failure fear 2 general anxiety 3 depression 4 frustration	Academic
2	1 academic support	1 failure fear	Academic

	2 selection 3 career guidance 4 accountability	2 general anxiety 3 self discipline 4 frustration	
3	1 accountability 2 study facilities 3 career guidance 4 concentration 5 academic support	1 failure fear 2 general anxiety 3 self discipline 4 frustration	Academic
4	1 accountability 2 concentration 3 comprehension 4 selection 5 academic support	1 failure fear 2 general anxiety 3 self discipline	Psychological
5	1 accountability 2 selection 3 career guidance 4 academic support 5 concentration	1 failure fear 2 depression 3 frustration 4 general anxiety	Academic
6	1 accountability 2 academic support 3 comprehension 4 concentration 5 career guidance	1 failure fear 2 general anxiety 3 frustration 4 depression	Academic
7	1 career guidance 2 accountability 3 selection 4 study facilities 5 academic support	1 failure fear 2 general anxiety 3 frustration 4 self confidence	Academic
8	1 accountability 2 selection 3 career guidance 4 study facilities 5 time management	1 accountability 2 selection 3 career guidance 4 time management	Academic

### 6.3.6 The impact of underperformance upon the student

This study set out to identify those factors that are perceived to be problematic to the student's performance or success. That these variables are all perceptions, and may not be factual, has been constantly emphasised. However, in the minds of the students, these factors are extremely real and that must be remembered and appreciated. It has not

attempted to try and discover the relationships between variables, if there are any. That is a topic for further study.

If the academic variables are examined, most could be placed under one aegis that of academic under-preparedness. This encompasses the lack of career guidance, academic support, adequate cognitive and study skills, reading, writing and comprehension deficiencies, time management, goal setting and accountability. The lack of preparedness for what lies ahead has been voiced by each and every group, whether faculty members or student groups.

The fact that most of the students come from disadvantaged backgrounds is one area that cannot be ignored, as this may well have an impact on students' academic and psychological well-being. Further investigation of many psycho-social factors is needed in order to ascertain just how a disadvantaged background impacts upon the students' lives.

What has been observed, however, is that in this study, underperformance and the fear of failure appear hand in hand with anxiety. The literature supports the fact that psychological health assists performance, whereas it is not known from this study whether the academic performance is influenced by the psychological factors, or whether the psychological factors appear because of academic problems.

#### **6.4 CONCLUSION**

This study has, at times, become cumbersome and extremely lengthy due to the use of three different data gathering techniques. A broad, rich tapestry of interwoven snippets of the students' lives was envisaged at the outset of the design. It has proved to be more than just a tapestry of how people engage in their campus lives. It has opened the doors to how these students actually feel about themselves and their lives. It has provided a glimpse of the pain that many experience, without other students knowing about it. It has allowed access for others to see determination to succeed at all costs, where disadvantage is not viewed as a barrier to success, but as a challenge. Despite the lack of so many necessary skills there are those students who meet the challenge and are successful.

The two hypotheses that were proposed at the beginning of this study can be proven, in that from the perspective of the student, first year performance is affected by academic

constraints, and psychological factors such as anxiety and fear restrain the student from performing adequately.

It is felt by the researcher that the factors to emerge as being the most critical in impeding performance, namely accountability, fear of failure and anxiety, may possibly be connected to the history of disadvantage. Many students arrive at tertiary level education under prepared for what lies ahead. Their schooling did not equip them sufficiently, and unfortunately the education sector is not moving rapidly enough in redressing the wrongs and inequalities within the system. The previous political regime did little to empower these students and their families. That particular brand of socialisation may have equipped people to only accept things, and not to reach out for themselves. The history of being prescribed to, and having very little freedom, may still have its residue in the lives of these students. They cannot hold others responsible for what happens to them now. They need to know and understand that they are no longer powerless, but that they hold the power for change in their own lives. They need to assume responsibility for their lives and become accountable for their actions.

In the final chapter, the limitations of the study will be discussed as well as recommendations for further study and specific recommendations to be implemented by the institution for the betterment of the student.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This generation is no better and no worse than any other generation, but, like every other generation before, is unique. As a result, this generation requires a unique brand of education that will enable it to attain its personal dreams and to serve the society it must lead. The education we offered to previous generations, whether successful or not, will not work for these students. They are different, and their times are different. Above all, current undergraduates are in need of an education that provides them with four things: hope, responsibility, appreciation of differences and efficacy.

Levine and Cureton (1998)

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study has revealed aspects of the new student's life that he or she perceives to be problematic. Each student has decided to study further for a variety of reasons. Each one has his or her own motives for further education, and the tertiary institution is the vehicle for attaining specific goals, whatever they may be. This period of the student's life is a transitory one, temporary in that it is but one stop *en route* to becoming whatever he will become – philosopher, writer, parent and teacher amongst others.

Each student arrives with his or her own set of ideals, hopes, fears and preconceptions that centres on this new study phase. One aspect of which each new student can be assured is that being part of the tertiary education phase is a phase that cannot be anticipated. It is unlike anything that he may have previously experienced. People would have told him that being a student is very different to anything that he knows. For one, the change in living arrangements, the social environment and academic demands may leave him feeling lonely, afraid, without friends and somewhat desperate. Yet for another student, it is this very change that excites and drives him.

The impact that this experience has on each student cannot and must not be underestimated. Every institution will offer the student a different set of experiences. These experiences will vary in kind, degree and intensity. As the university or college is the trading area of ideas and debate, this aspect can add to the new student's confusion. When he finds his feet, feels comfortable with who he is and feels that he belongs, he is then best able to follow his dream and begin the journey that will take him through a great variety of

experiences and interactions, with people and situations that are going to support him along the road to maturity and self-actualisation.

In this chapter, the limitations of the study are enumerated, recommendations for the institution are cited, with the presentation of a model that will serve as an intervention programme, and recommendations for further study are proposed.

## **7.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Although this research study was conducted on a fairly wide basis, the researcher feels that only the tip of the iceberg has been exposed. So many problems came to the fore during the investigation, and due to the logistics of the situation, received little or no attention.

Within the South African context, there is not a great plethora concerning research findings and guidelines. There is not much tangible research that is local when compared to the numerous studies that have been undertaken on an international scale. Worldwide research into student life, student development and its concomitant problems goes back at least fifty years, providing a valuable basis of findings and methods of dealing with these problems.

Although many of those early problems still abound in the life of the student, expectations and academic demands have changed considerably. It is hoped that the current study will in some small way, contribute to the manner in which students are perceived, understood and helped to develop.

During the course of the investigation, certain limitations became apparent, and they are, amongst others, the following:

- As each factor came under scrutiny, others linked to that particular perception came to the fore, making it extremely difficult to contain the study as it grew exponentially. There is still so much more to discover, and this investigation has only begun to scrape the surface of the problem areas in student life.
- An eventual sample group of 650 of a possible section of 700 first year students responded to the questionnaire, leaving unaccounted the other 5 300 new students who

may very well have problems differing from those covered by the questionnaire, the workshops and the focus group interviews. However, there is a limited establishment of the fact that the information gleaned from this study agrees in part with findings obtained on an international level.

- The sample group belonged to one campus only, where the main focus is on the science of business management. Results may differ when students studying fine art, architecture, design, health sciences and engineering are placed within the equation.
- The empirical study did not always run according to plan. The focus group interviews were extremely difficult to organise as getting each group of students together at a specific time on a specific day proved problematic. Trying to find time when each group could meet meant coordinating all the course timetables as many classes take place during lunch breaks with some students in residence halls and others commuting great distances on a daily basis.
- The copious triangulation method was used in the empirical study, turning the investigation into a rather lengthy exercise. Caution had to be exercised as the findings opened numerous doors to investigative possibilities and the end result had to be considerably narrowed down.
- The possibility of the questionnaire being done in an alternative format that would have generated computerised scores and profiles would have speeded up the data capturing process and reduced the vast number of hours used to mark each answer sheet and in some cases, the drawing up of individual profiles.
- Although the questionnaire respondents were very clearly asked to answer each question as honestly as possible, there may have been those individuals who were not entirely truthful with themselves and answered the questions from the "ideal self" perspective.
- Students finding out about the survey and focus group interviews from the various respondents and participants expressed a desire to be part of the study. Logistics denied their being accommodated. Various faculty members also requested that the study be conducted with their specific course students. It is therefore with a sense of regret that



the researcher has only been able to work with the relatively small sample group as so many require the personal insight that comes from taking part in the various sessions.

- Findings cannot be generalised for the entire student community. Tendencies can merely be indicated as the investigation may have revealed tendencies that are applicable to a specific student group.

In the following section certain recommendations have been drawn up for the specific institution in order that the highlighted problem areas be addressed. General student development programmes are suggested, with emphasis on a specific model that has been successfully implemented in addressing student attrition rates.

### **7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES**

Although this study has looked at the psycho-educational factors that may be perceived as inhibitors of optimum performance of students in their first year of study, the other factors that are problematic cannot be ignored. It has been stressed from the very outset of this project that the development of the student in his totality is tantamount.

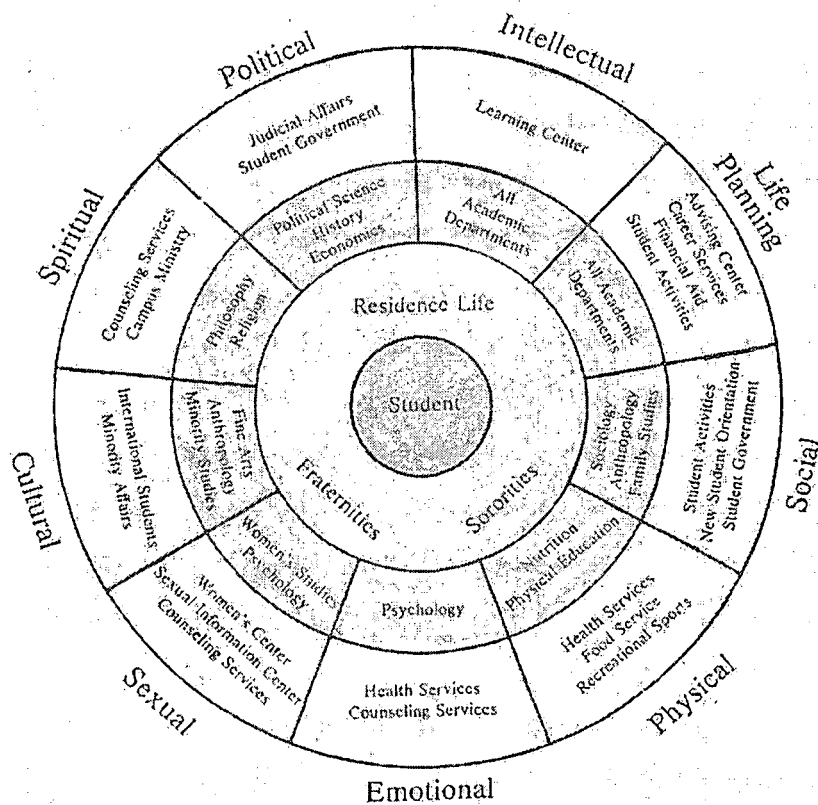
No tertiary institution can justify the education of its students from any angle other than that of holism. The student needs to be guided and aided towards the unleashing of his true potential and afforded opportunities to self-actualise. The goal of the institution is, after all, to facilitate student success, and over the years a number of programmes that address problem areas have been developed and used with great success in many different tertiary institutions. What follows in the next section is a description of the different types of programmes that the current institution could investigate when addressing the problems of underachievement and attrition.

#### **7.3.1 General programmes**

In an attempt to improve institutional effectiveness in solving problems and achieving objectives, a structural intervention model was designed as a systemic approach to effective student development. A number of different programmes, based on Chickering's vector theory (1993:38) are mentioned in Upcraft et al (1984:41).

Dickson (1991:213) has also adapted Chickering's vector theory, but in this case, to a wellness structure. The resulting model seen in Figure 7.1 emerged as a means whereby suitable programmes could be run that address the different dimensions of student development. Dickson (1991:211) identified the student as the centre of the development sphere, operating within his own world, made up of different communities at different times. Nine major developmental areas are highlighted, namely intellectual, life planning, social, physical, emotional, sexual, cultural, spiritual and political. These areas are developed by various university units and personnel and afford the student a multitude of opportunities through which to develop.

**Figure 7.1 Developmental organisation: actual model**



Noel, Levitz & Saluri (1985:439-446) identified some programmes that have proved their success over the years, some of which are still in use today. Seen to be influential in addressing problem areas, maintaining or improving retention rates, they are:

- an early academic alert systems programme;
- academic and career guidance programmes;
- student communication and publicity programmes;
- involvement programmes;
- learning assistance and support programmes;
- orientation programmes;
- out-of-class contact with faculty programmes;
- peer support and mentorship programmes; and
- residence life programmes.

Hanson (1982:10) adds to the above list, with mention made of:

- counselling programmes;
- specific computer programmes;
- work-study programmes.

Wimbish, Bumphus and Helfgot (1995:24) have observed that the promotion of student success is aided by:

- programming based on the cultivation of intellect;
- personal development programmes;
- progressive social progress programmes;
- radical social change through adult education programmes; and
- organisational effectiveness programmes involving student career preparation and leadership development.

In the following section, specific programmes that could be implemented are briefly noted, amongst others, study skills, learning centers, experiential learning, leadership training, adjustment and orientation and financial aid programmes.

### **7.3.2 Specific programmes**

A number of studies have been completed that have given consideration to singular problem areas. The researchers have made suggestions as how to best attempt to address and rectify the problems. What follows in this section are just a few areas in the life of the

student that need consideration. The problem areas are extensive and the current study is able to address but a limited number.

### **7.3.2.1 Study skills**

Research into study programmes is vast. Although some programmes are old, they have been tried, tested and proven to be effective, and therefore they are included in this study. A valuable study was done by Pantages and Creedon (1978: 95) examining 25 years of college student attrition and the resultant skills programmes that were embarked upon in order to improve the retention rate. Successful study skills training programmes for first year students that address such issues as time management, study techniques, self-discipline and attitude towards learning, have proved to have a significant effect on the retention of at-risk college students (Erickson & Strommer 1991:65; Pintrich & Garcia 1994:43, 203; Al-Hilawani & Sartawi 1997:537).

### **7.3.2.2 Learning centre**

The establishment of offices or formal programmes for learning assistance can be found on the campuses of roughly 90 % of all American universities. The exact number in South African universities and colleges could not be established. In a learning assistance programme, individual analysis and counselling is done and followed if necessary, by either remedial or developmental intervention for reading, writing and mathematics. Also of importance are the workshops that are offered in study techniques and time management, as well as tutoring that is undertaken (Erickson & Strommer 1991:211). The concept of peer mentoring and tutoring as a mode of student support is further explored by Orzek (1984:404), Astin (1985:164), Rice and Brown (1990:293) and Earwaker (1992:124). Other comprehensive programmes of note are Terenzini, Springer, Yaegar, Pascarella and Nora (1996:17) and Cilliers and Kilpin (1997:23).

Chickering and O'Connor (1996:16) have taken the learning centre concept a stage further by actively connecting the in-and-out-of-class learning experiences of the students at George Mason University. This dynamic and innovative programme comprises a fully equipped library, computer training room, various seminar rooms, a large conference venue, a film theatre, a bookstore, food services, a cyber centre and information centre. It is literally a one-stop learning facility that needs to be open 24 hours a day, all year round.

### **7.3.2.3 *Experiential learning***

It has been shown that cognitive learning is positively influenced by working part-time on campus and participating in internship programmes (Terenzini, Pascarella & Blimling 1996:149; Kuh 1997:10; Graham & Gisi 2000:280). At the institution under discussion, experiential learning is a requisite in a number of courses, but not in all. Those course programmes that implement experiential learning as part of the curriculum see it as a most valuable practice that takes place in the senior years of study. It would appear from the literature, and other successful programmes, that the current experiential learning policy of the institution under the spotlight needs to be revisited.

### **7.3.2.4 *Leadership training***

A programme that applies student development theory to the practice of enhancing leadership skills is the GOLD programme at the University of North Carolina. This stands for Growth Opportunities for Leadership Development. It often happens that only those students who hold office of some sort will be afforded this type of training. However, this programme is offered to students other than office bearers to afford them the opportunity to gain leadership experience and personal enrichment (Grant 1994:92).

### **7.3.2.5 *Adjustment and orientation***

The successful integration of the student into new and unfamiliar academic and social settings is desirable and made possible by means of well-run orientation programmes. Orientating the new student a few days before formal classes begin necessitates acquainting the student with administrative and faculty rules and regulations. The programme should introduce the student to campus organisations and activities, student services and allow for time to draw up an academic programme. Informal opportunities where the student meets faculty are also advised (Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle 1986:156).

Paul and Brier (2001:85) suggest that adjustment programmes need to begin before the student reaches the university. They feel that a prevention programme should operate at the pre-college level, possibly in orientation programmes that take place before the student makes the transition, within the year preceding tertiary study.

Greeley and Tinsley (1988:519) stress the importance of adjustment programmes wherein emphasis is laid on separation from parents, management of the anxiety of being alone, asserting oneself and on making decisions. These are issues that appear to be most pressing, often presenting in the guise of relationship problems.

#### **7.3.2.6 *Financial aid***

One approach to looking at student finance from an holistic angle is that of Coomes (1992:28). In this approach, a practical solution is posited for financial aid administration. It necessitates satisfactory academic progress on the part of the student who is then monitored. Secondly, the student is encouraged and assisted in finding part-time work. Student employment is seen as a powerful tool for campus student involvement, while positively influencing retention and success. Furthermore, student debt counselling is undertaken where the student can fully understand his financial obligation. Financial aid publications that are user-friendly are to be encouraged both on campus and in the schools for prospective students.

In the following section, specific initiatives for the institution are mooted. These include the establishment of a learning centre, the curricularisation of life skills programmes that are credit-bearing, the establishment of a day student centre, as well as a proposed intervention model.

### **7.3.3 *Practical solutions for the institution***

In the light of this discussion, in order for the institution to retain the student, decrease the attrition rate, while simultaneously affording the student opportunities to grow and self-actualise, the following needs to be considered:

#### **7.3.3.1 *The establishment of a learning centre***

It is proposed that a learning / study centre / academic development centre should be established to be utilised by students and staff alike. A suitable venue should be found, fitted with computers and relevant language programmes. If the programme facilitators, where a remedial language specialist, as well as someone conversant with the editing and

publishing process, their skills in coping with all facets of language development would be beneficial to all. These programmes should comprise language development from pre-literacy through to advanced academic writing. Unskilled workers falling into the first category would then have access to basic literacy programmes. The students would be afforded the opportunity for individual assessment and then be placed on individual programmes to be worked through at their own pace. Postgraduate students, as well as staff wishing to upgrade their language and writing skills, would be afforded the opportunity to do so. Numeracy skills training could be included in the programme.

### **7.3.3.2 *Life skills curriculum***

At present, life skills are taught through arranged workshops held at times to suit the student body, or facilitated by a counsellor during lecture time. This takes place when the lecturer feels that most students in a particular course would benefit from such interaction. Making a basic life skills course a prerequisite to obtaining a qualification, in that it would become a credit-bearing course, would ensure that every student is afforded the opportunity that is necessary to commence the journey towards holistic living.

If the staff members of the institution are truly committed to the holistic development of each student, those members other than the student development practitioners need to develop the skills that are necessary for furthering and fostering effective student development.

### **7.3.3.3 *Establishment of a non-residential student centre***

Much emphasis in this study has been laid on the involvement of the student in both the academic and social life on campus. If he knows that he matters, he is better able to involve himself fully in these pursuits. Many campus programmes are designed with the residential student in mind. The day or commuting student must also be cared for in a similar fashion. The earmarking of a suitable venue that could be used for day students as a meeting place would be effective in keeping these students longer on campus and affording them opportunities to become involved. Suitable programmes can be designed and put into practice in the day centre or day house. It would be preferable to appoint a house manager to run this centre, a strong role model with whom the students can identify.

### 7.3.3.4 Implementation of the proposed model

The combination of the data from the three collection techniques, the common factors that appear to inhibit student performance, has led to the conducting of a needs analysis. Thirty-five factors were examined by means of the questionnaire, with a number of factors emerging as problematic. Combined factors can be addressed by adapting the seven vectors' developmental model to suit the institutional needs. As the perceived problems are examined more closely, they can be seen to fit into one or more of the seven vectors.

When the problems as illustrated in Table 7.1 below are examined, the need to address the problems in a holistic manner becomes evident. Student concerns fall across the entire spectrum of development and no one facet can take precedence over another. Equal attention should be given to each phase in order for the student to have a multitude of opportunities to develop all potential and competencies.

Table 7.1. Problem areas in specific vector development	
DEVELOPMENTAL VECTOR	AREAS OF CONCERN TO BE ADDRESSED
1. COMPETENCE	Communication, language, finance, attendance, motivation, security, writing skills, time management, cultural background, study facilities, concentration, reading skills, examination techniques, academic support, life skills, under-preparedness, mentoring, experiential learning, friendships, social relationships.
2. MANAGING EMOTIONS	Accountability, orientation, adjustment, complacency, disengagement, frustration, general anxiety, depression, leadership, social relationships.
3. AUTONOMY TO INTERDEPENDENCE	Finance, social relationships, adjustment, independence, involvement.
4. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS	Social relationship, communication, wellness, prostitution.
5. IDENTITY	Self-esteem, self-confidence, self-discipline, situational victimisation, racism, loneliness, abuse and violence in community, peer pressure, cultural background, wellness, prostitution.
6. PURPOSE	Selection, career guidance, goal-setting, motivation, accountability, experiential learning.
7. INTEGRITY	Social discipline, HIV/AIDS fear, freedom, attitudes.



Taking this model one step further, and using the perceived problem factors as part of a needs analysis, these specific problems can be addressed as part of a holistic intervention programme. The proposed model that follows in Table 7.2 seeks to address all seven vectors of development in order that all concerned become aware of the necessity of holistic student development. Although some sub-programmes may already be in operation within the institution, there are areas that are not currently addressed and the model includes these as initiatives that should be driven. Each development vector is named with the general zones that it addresses. These zones are further broken down into specific areas or topics that need to be addressed. A number of different activity types are suggested followed by the personnel who would be best able to facilitate development in a specific area.

<b>Table 7.2: Holistic student development programme</b>			
<b>GENERAL AREA</b>	<b>SPECIFIC AREA</b>	<b>ACTIVITY TYPES</b>	<b>FACILITATORS</b>
<b>COMPETENCE</b>			
<b>Intellectual</b>	thinking skills	learning centre, ongoing orientation programme, curriculated coursework, workshop	Student counselors, faculty members, experiential learning providers
	aesthetics cultural	debate, speaker, seminar, visit, tour, media tour, visit, guest performer, seminar, media, arts	guest speakers and performers, clubs and societies, diversity forum, experiential learning providers, residence staff
<b>i physical</b>	sport and recreation	sports club, gym, wellness centre,	sports bureau, clubs, wellness centre staff
<b>ii manual</b>	manual dexterity	hobbies club, extension course, enrichment class, entrepreneurial enterprise	hobbies club, art and business faculty members
<b>iv interpersonal</b>	leadership, social and communication skills	training course, workshop, seminar, debate	counsellors, speakers, faculty members, residences staff, experiential learning providers
<b>MANAGING EMOTIONS</b>			
<b>recognition and acceptance</b>	anxiety and fear anger and aggression shame/guilt, depression dysfunctional sexual	workshop, debate, individual therapy, skills workshop, speakers	counsellors, faculty members, experiential learning provider, residence staff, campus ministry
<b>i expression</b>	care, wonder, inspiration, awe, worship interpersonal sexual self assertion communication	community outreach, church youth work, campus ministry communication workshop, seminar, relationship development training, workshop, skills training, discussion skills training course, workshop, speaker, seminars	counsellors, faculty members, guest speakers, residence staff, experiential learning providers, clinic staff
<b>ii flexible control</b>	interpersonal community personal	community outreach, campus pastoral work, church youth work, staff/student diversity celebration, hope, courage and inspiration talks, debate, discussion groups	experiential learning providers, residence staff, peer helpers, tutors, HIV educators, clubs, societies
<b>AUTONOMY TOWARDS INTER-DEPENDENCE</b>			

<b>i emotional independence</b>	accountability goal-setting decision making adjustment issues	debate, skills training, workshop, speaker, experiential learning, committee work, financial aid programme	experiential learning providers, speakers, counselors, clubs, orientation staff,
<b>ii instrumental independence</b>	problem-solving creative thinking part-time work student leadership	skills training, workshops, course work, committee work, part-time work, experiential learning,	experiential learning providers, speakers, counselors, faculty members,
<b>lii interdependence</b>	interpersonal teamwork community	seminars, speakers, tours, travel, entrepreneurial programmes, committee work, community outreach, campus ministry, club & society meetings, peer-helping & tutoring, leadership positions, workshops, skills training, experiential learning	counselors, faculty members, clubs, societies, world of work
<b>MATURE INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>			
<b>i tolerance and difference appreciation</b>	cultural diversity	workshops, seminars, clubs and societies, student productions, diversity celebration, discussion, experiential learning, residence programmes	speakers, clubs, performers, faculty members, experiential learning providers, residence staff
	caring and altruism	volunteer work, community outreach, fundraising, student office campaigns, experiential learning ,debate	outside organizations, experiential learning providers, residence staff
<b>ii intimacy</b>	sex role and attitudes healthy relationship building	discussion, workshops, individual therapy, debate, communication workshops, clubs, societies, residence life	Wellness centre, counsellors, faculty members, speakers, residence staff
<b>ESTABLISHMENT OF IDENTITY</b>			
<b>i appearance</b>	healthy life style healthy attitude	gym, wellness centre programme, seminars, debate, speakers, skills workshops, weekend camps, sports activities, residence programmes	guest speakers, counsellors, faculty members, sports organisers, clubs and societies, wellness centre, clinic, HIV educators, residence staff
<b>ii gender</b>	values and attitudes sexuality	debate, discussion, workshops, speakers, seminars, community visits & projects, social outreach, campus ministries, individual counselling, residence programmes	faculty staff, guest speakers, wellness centre, student clinic, counsellors, peer helpers, HIV educators, residence staff
<b>lii social context and lifestyle</b>	ethnic and cultural place social and historical place spiritual place	experiential learning, diversity celebrations, discussion, debate, speakers, outreach work, youth work, campus ministries, society meetings, enrichment classes, selected media, residence programmes	experiential learning providers, faculty members, clubs, guest speakers , residence staff, campus ministries
<b>iv self acceptance</b>	self assertion self concept self esteem	skills training, workshops, debates, speakers, seminars, experiential training, campus projects, community projects, leadership positions, residence programmes	counsellors, faculty members, guest speakers, societies, experiential learning providers, residence staff
<b>v stability</b>	Integration	clubs and societies, campus projects, community projects, experiential learning, residence programmes	project leaders, societies, experiential learning providers, residential staff, counsellors, faculty members
<b>PURPOSE</b>			
<b>i vocational plans</b>	career exploration self assessment, interests, values and abilities	learning centre, workplace seminars, speakers, experiential learning, internet, relevant media, class discussion, counselling sessions, part time work placements, job	guest speakers, faculty members, counsellors, experiential learning providers, part time work place

<b>ii personal interests</b>	academic non-academic	discussions, debates, reading, extra courses social functions, sport and recreation, reading and travel, humanitarian projects, crafts and hobbies, spiritual activities, community outreach	clubs, societies, project leaders, faculty members, counselors
<b>iii commitments</b>	interpersonal and family	decision making workshops, experiential learning, part time work, community projects, campus projects	work providers, counsellors, project and community leaders
<b>iv intentionality</b>	belief and value system goal setting	discussions, debates, speakers, workshops, campus ministries, residence programmes	speakers, counsellors, faculty members, residence staff
<b>INTEGRITY</b>			
<b>i humanising values</b>	alternative viewpoints spiritual exploration creative thinking self expression care for others	debates ,discussions, speakers, seminars campus ministries, discussion, reading skills workshops, creative projects, art, music, dance, drama workshops and performances, experiential learning community and campus outreach projects, residence programmes	speakers, project leaders, counsellors, clubs and societies, experiential learning providers, faculty members, campus ministries, residence staff
<b>ii personalising values</b>	moral development	outreach projects, student leadership, experiential learning, part-time work, residence programmes	project leaders, work providers, student office (SRC), residence staff
<b>iii congruence</b>	decision making social experiences intellectual experiences cultural experiences	workshops, experiential learning clubs, societies, sport and recreation, outreach projects, campus projects, community projects debates, discussion, seminars, conferences, meeting role models, part-time work, residence programmes.	faculty members, counsellors, clubs, experiential learning providers, project leaders , residence staff.

In conclusion, the richness and depth that has emerged from the study has illuminated the fact that the development of the whole student needs to be addressed. No problem area can be addressed in isolation. In order for the student development practitioner and the academic to afford the student every possibility to develop hope, responsibility, appreciation of differences and efficacy, the implementation of an intervention programme, as illustrated above, should offer him the chance to unleash his potential, and by so doing, move forward towards self-actualisation.

In the section that follows, some recommendations for further study are suggested. The richness of the study has come to the fore in the variety of possibilities that lie untapped. Should further investigation take place, a richer understanding of the student, his development and how he perceives himself would be of great benefit to higher education in

general, and to those who in the future will design both academic curricula and support programmes for students.

#### **7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Due to the wide scope and points of concern that have been raised through this study, there are a number of recommendations for further investigation. As other South African tertiary education institutions may be struggling with similar problems and are finding that the attrition rate needs to be seriously addressed, while developing the student as a totality, the following recommendations are suggested:

- that similar studies be launched in other South African tertiary education institutions in order to obtain some sort of national database and a network whereby each can help the other without having to “re-invent the wheel”;
- that students other than first year students be included in future studies in order to profile changing demographics;
- that broad studies be conducted in investigating specific social problems not addressed by this study;
- that in-depth investigation be undertaken on singular factors such as finance, violence and most importantly, the impact of HIV/AIDS on the current student population;
- that a study be conducted on the clusters of variables that may be found to support one single factor perceived to be an inhibiting agent;
- that student development practitioners in South Africa investigate their problem areas in their own institutions, openly face the problems and start to talk about and share their concerns with each other. These experiences could be of great value to other institutions finding that they have similar problem areas. This could encourage the sharing of intervention programmes that have worked for those particular institutions;
- that those institutions who have researched the problem areas and devised suitable intervention programmes, having coped with the current merging of institutions, set up a

regional base, committee or organisation that will be able to pass on advice and expertise to neighbouring institutions in the southern African region.

## 7.5 CONCLUSION

Raaheim et al (1991:46) comments that tertiary education can be viewed from two different angles. It can be a place where a great variety of study subjects are available, where tuition conditions may be, at times, somewhat unsatisfactory and some faculty members do not possess basic teaching skills. One can also view the institution as a microcosm of the world of work, where representatives from a great variety of professions meet at various crossroads on campus, where the students can work with professionals well established in the research area of a particular study field who can influence their yet undecided career path.

If the student is to be accountable, he needs to take full responsibility for his own educational development. He needs to be able to watch and learn from the "master craftsman" (his professor). The craftsman has the knowledge. The student needs to get the "tools of the trade" from the lecturer or professor, and in turn learn how to use them. However, it may be that not all students possess all the skills necessary for effective learning and the institution needs to take cognizance of this fact by actively supporting the student with appropriate programmes. It will be up to the student as to whether or not he decides to benefit from these programmes as he is the architect of his future.

The transition from high school to that of higher education is fraught with difficulties. The first year should be a year where the student is made to feel welcome, where he is supported and eventually assimilated into the institutional community. It is a year where adjustments take place on all fronts, in many ways determining his future success.

The student arrives with many expectations. For many, this new phase will be very different to anything that has previously been experienced. That it will be exciting, challenging and rewarding may be some of the high aspirations that the student holds. This may prove to be his reality, but for another student, this phase may turn out to be unexpectedly stressful and difficult.

The student needs to learn to focus on his academic life as the myriad of campus activities and newfound freedom can be most distracting. He needs to be able to ask for help and that help should be readily available. If he is to develop as a whole human being, the student has to be responsible in grasping each opportunity to grow firmly in his hands. He must want to self-actualise and actively seek out each and every chance of so doing.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991:616) sum up the higher education experience as one where the student, should he fully involve and engage himself in the academic experience, will experience a greater level of knowledge acquisition and general cognitive development that spans purposeful challenges and integrated learning. Furthermore, the educational impact that is made upon the student is enhanced by social interactions that extend beyond the classroom, involving peers, faculty members and support staff.

One would like the student to experience as rich and beneficial education as possible. He needs every opportunity in which to grow, every opportunity in which he can tap his potential and move towards self-actualisation. In all his relationships, within the classroom, within student organisations, with peers, in his living arrangements, in part-time work and experiential learning, he may take up the challenge and use each opportunity wisely.

May the student development professional, together with the faculty member and the support staff member, have a clear sense of his or her professional heritage. May they devote their energies to the fostering of the student's cognitive, emotional, physical, interpersonal, vocational, ethical and spiritual development in order that the student may arrive at graduation as a whole being, one capable of hope for the future, a responsible, caring and efficacious citizen with an ability to appreciate differences.

**There are parts to human nature that cannot be reached by either legislation or education, but require the power of God to deal with. As human beings we cannot perfect ourselves. To the degree to which we align ourselves with correct principles, divine endowments will be released within our nature in enabling us to fulfill the measure of our creation. The struggle is worthwhile and fulfilling. It gives meaning to my life and enables me to love, to serve and to try again.**

**Stephen R. Covey (1989)**

## ANNEXURES

### ANNEXURE A

Annexure A reflects the page that contains the directions for completing the questionnaire. The directions are clear and simple and also serve as the cover sheet or front page of the questionnaire booklet.

## PERFORMANCE AFFECTOR INDICATOR

### DIRECTIONS

The purpose of this questionnaire is to help you to improve your academic results by identifying those factors that may be a problem. For each statement, there are four possible answers:

**Almost always**       **Often**       **Seldom**       **Never**

Read each statement and then choose one answer from the four possible answers above.

Colour in the appropriate circle with a dark pencil.

Should you make a mistake, erase the mark that you wish to change.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet side one.

Make sure that you answer each question opposite the corresponding number on the answer sheet.

Do not make any marks on the question sheet.

Remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

Work as quickly as you can, without omitting any of the statements.

There is no time limit and your answers are entirely confidential.

Mark the statement both honestly and thoughtfully and you will discover ways in which you can improve.

**ANNEXURE B**

Annexure B is the questionnaire containing 105 statements.

---

**YOU:**

**1**

- 1 feel that you are still treated like a schoolchild
- 2 struggle to write and understand English
- 3 worry about having to leave the institution due to money problems
- 4 are free to choose whether or not you attend classes
- 5 think that 100 % attendance is unrealistic
- 6 do not enjoy your studies
- 7 never seem to get on top of the workload
- 8 do not seem to finish tasks on time
- 9 feel unprepared for successful learning
- 10 experience high noise levels when trying to study
- 11 lose interest in a lecture quite quickly
- 12 have to read something many times before it makes sense
- 13 read slowly
- 14 do not make notes while the lecturer is talking
- 15 do not have time to read the entire question paper before starting
- 16 have no family member that can help you with your studies
- 17 still feel disorientated on campus not knowing where things are or where to go
- 18 feel that the selection process is unfair



- 19 find little help on campus when it comes to careers 2
- 20 are not satisfied with yourself
- 21 need your friends more than they need you
- 22 leave things to chance
- 23 are happy to let others do most of the talking
- 24 get angry with people quite quickly
- 25 worry about letting down your parents
- 26 perspire or tremble when thinking about some difficult task that lies ahead
- 27 feel sad and gloomy
- 28 worry about HIV/AIDS in fellow students
- 29 are not given the chance to develop leadership skills
- 30 find it difficult to be friendly
- 31 feel that you are not really part of the student community
- 32 do not worry to keep your place neat and tidy
- 33 feel trapped in your current situation
- 34 feel that you are disadvantaged because of race
- 35 are exposed to violence and fighting in your community
- 36 feel that your lecturers do not understand you
- 37 have a problem expressing your self in English
- 38 may have to find part-time work to help pay for your studies
- 39 as a student are free to do as you wish
- 40 feel that you have a right to bunk a class if you so wish

- 41 get discouraged by poor examination and test results
- 42 see a big task as overwhelming
- 43 run out of time during examinations
- 44 find that tests are on you before you know it
- 45 would like the library to be open after hours
- 46 are unable to listen attentively in class
- 47 are embarrassed to stop the lecturer in order to ask questions
- 48 do not enjoy reading
- 49 are unable to take notes and listen at the same time
- 50 prepare only the important sections for a test
- 51 feel that staff members do not care about your academic progress
- 52 wonder what student orientation is all about
- 53 are angry or upset that you did not get your first course choice
- 54 think that teachers should have given you career guidance at school
- 55 feel inferior to your friends
- 56 feel bad when criticised in a group
- 57 would rather socialize than have to study
- 58 would rather not make the effort to meet new people
- 59 wonder whether others take you seriously when you talk to them
- 60 get scared when you have to write a test or examination
- 61 experience stomach or headaches
- 62 are aware that your eating/sleeping habits have changed

- 63 fear losing someone close to you through AIDS 4
- 64 think that there are not very many student role models at the institution
- 65 wish that others would show interest in you more often
- 66 wish that you had some close friends
- 67 have difficulty waiting for your turn
- 68 feel that you are a victim of poor schooling
- 69 think that black and white students are treated differently
- 70 suffer because others have abused you in some way
- 71 do not experience good staff - student relationships
- 72 have lecturers who use words that you do not understand
- 73 worry about running out of money
- 74 think that the lecturers should be motivating the students to study
- 75 do not bother to write the tests if you do not feel like it
- 76 do not reward your self for a job well done
- 77 do not know where you are going in life
- 78 have no time in which to relax during examinations
- 79 do not really know how to study successfully
- 80 cannot find a decent place to study
- 81 are easily distracted
- 82 do not understand what the lecturer is explaining
- 83 move your lips when reading silently
- 84 write slowly and do not finish tests in time

- 85 do not know what is required of you in an examination 5
- 86 think that there is not enough academic support for students
- 87 still feel uncomfortable or unsafe or out of place on the campus
- 88 think that student selection is unnecessary
- 89 feel unprepared for the studies that you are doing
- 90 are envious of other people's personalities or success
- 91 are afraid to try something new or different
- 92 are not able to complete unpleasant tasks
- 93 find it a waste of time to make "small talk" with people
- 94 find that others are not interested in what you are saying
- 95 are scared of failing a test or examination
- 96 tend to get worked up over something that has happened
- 97 feel that your situation is hopeless
- 98 worry about becoming HIV positive your self
- 99 feel that your education is not training you to be tomorrow's leader
- 100 are usually self-conscious and reserved with authority figures
- 101 feel that other students do not really care about you on campus
- 102 feel that you are free to do as you wish
- 103 think that the system has let you down
- 104 feel that racism is present on the campus
- 105 are angry or upset by abuse that you suffered in the past

**ANNEXURE C**

Annexure C is the answer sheet to the questionnaire that is side one of the Performance Affecter Indicator. This sheet captures the data pertaining to the respondent's name, study course, age, home language and gender, as well as the answers to the 105 statements.

**PERFORMANCE AFFECTOR INDICATOR**

side 1

Surname .....  
 First name ..... Date.....No.....  
 Student number .....  
 Age .....  
 Course .....  
 Repeating .....  
 Home language .....  
 Male / Female .....  
 Residence / day student.....

For each question, choose one of the four circles and shade it in:      **O O O O**  
**A = almost always                      O = often                      S = sometimes                      N = never**

	A	O	S	N		A	O	S	N		A	O	S	N	total score
1	O	O	O	O	36	O	O	O	O	71	O	O	O	O	1
2	O	O	O	O	37	O	O	O	O	72	O	O	O	O	2
3	O	O	O	O	38	O	O	O	O	73	O	O	O	O	3
4	O	O	O	O	39	O	O	O	O	74	O	O	O	O	4
5	O	O	O	O	40	O	O	O	O	75	O	O	O	O	5
6	O	O	O	O	41	O	O	O	O	76	O	O	O	O	6
7	O	O	O	O	42	O	O	O	O	77	O	O	O	O	7
8	O	O	O	O	43	O	O	O	O	78	O	O	O	O	8
9	O	O	O	O	44	O	O	O	O	79	O	O	O	O	9
10	O	O	O	O	45	O	O	O	O	80	O	O	O	O	10
11	O	O	O	O	46	O	O	O	O	81	O	O	O	O	11
12	O	O	O	O	47	O	O	O	O	82	O	O	O	O	12
13	O	O	O	O	48	O	O	O	O	83	O	O	O	O	13
14	O	O	O	O	49	O	O	O	O	84	O	O	O	O	14
15	O	O	O	O	50	O	O	O	O	85	O	O	O	O	15
16	O	O	O	O	51	O	O	O	O	86	O	O	O	O	16
17	O	O	O	O	52	O	O	O	O	87	O	O	O	O	17
18	O	O	O	O	53	O	O	O	O	88	O	O	O	O	18
19	O	O	O	O	54	O	O	O	O	89	O	O	O	O	19
20	O	O	O	O	55	O	O	O	O	90	O	O	O	O	20
21	O	O	O	O	56	O	O	O	O	91	O	O	O	O	21
22	O	O	O	O	57	O	O	O	O	92	O	O	O	O	22
23	O	O	O	O	58	O	O	O	O	93	O	O	O	O	23
24	O	O	O	O	59	O	O	O	O	94	O	O	O	O	24
25	O	O	O	O	60	O	O	O	O	96	O	O	O	O	25
26	O	O	O	O	61	O	O	O	O	96	O	O	O	O	26
27	O	O	O	O	62	O	O	O	O	97	O	O	O	O	27
28	O	O	O	O	63	O	O	O	O	98	O	O	O	O	28
29	O	O	O	O	64	O	O	O	O	99	O	O	O	O	29
30	O	O	O	O	65	O	O	O	O	100	O	O	O	O	30
31	O	O	O	O	66	O	O	O	O	101	O	O	O	O	31
32	O	O	O	O	67	O	O	O	O	102	O	O	O	O	32
33	O	O	O	O	68	O	O	O	O	103	O	O	O	O	33
34	O	O	O	O	69	O	O	O	O	104	O	O	O	O	34
35	O	O	O	O	70	O	O	O	O	105	O	O	O	O	35

By answering this survey, you have agreed to help in this research project.  
 Your answers will remain strictly confidential.                      Signed .....



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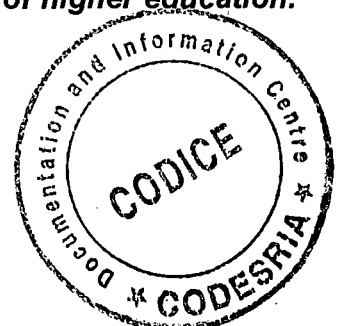
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