

ALTERNATIVE ACADEMIC ACCESS - ANALISING THE SUCCESS (Part one)

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary challenge facing all Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) since 1994 focuses on generating methods to broaden the access for school-leavers who are ill-prepared and not ready for higher education. In response to this challenge the CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, FREE STATE'S SCHOOL FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSSINESS DEVELOPMENT (SEBD) developed and presented a foundation programme since 2001. This article is aimed at assessing its success. Although the success rate of the first intake was very low the author believes that by modifying the programme on a continuous basis, it has a justifiable place in the Institution's "access with success programme".

1. Introduction

Foundation programmes prepare students not only academically to begin diploma/degree level but also on pastoral support to help them to adapt to university life. The friendly atmosphere of the campus and the extra-curricular activities provide an opportunity to widen their social and communication skills, meet other students and make friends (The Foundation Programme, [n.d]: online).

Foundation programmes, programmes of alternative academic access, according to Warren (1998:80) have different meanings:

- "It may be understood as "bridging" in the sense of "backward-looking" pre-100 level courses which attempt to redress gaps in knowledge and limits in cognitive, communication and learning skills.
- On the other hand, the term could also mean laying foundations for further study, such as "forward-looking" entry-level courses to introduce students to key academic concepts and ways of knowing".

Furthermore, a foundation programme may consist of specially designed courses leaving the mainstream courses intact or combining "bridging-type" courses with mainstream courses (Warren, 1998:80). The latter has been the preferred direction at the SEBD whereby some of the contents of mainstream subjects are included in the foundation year.

According to Hay and Marais (2004:59-60), campaigners of foundation courses face much critique for example that it is not worth the effort and money; that these students are simply not higher education material and that they will in any case drop out eventually. The above-mentioned researchers emphasize further: ".....for those of us who are advocates of bridging programmes, the obligation is

to engage in vigorous research to prove that these programmes are indeed worthwhile and have a place in higher education. Currently there seems a lack in South African research into the achievements brought about by such programmes, particularly for longitudinal or tracer studies”.

In this article the author maps the academic progress of the first intake (2001) of students on the foundation programme offered by SEBD. Data was obtained from each CAP student’s progress report captured on the Institution’s Integrated Technology System (ITS). The data was processed and it revealed how the students progressed, dropped out, number of diplomas awarded and the number of students still in the mainstream.

2. Course structure

The poor school results render vast numbers of school-leavers ineligible to higher education. As a partial solution to provide access to a number of students who would normally not be accepted in the higher education system (or main stream) SEBD designed a foundation course the **Context Advancement Programme (CAP)**. The term context refers to the background of students, the change from the school to the higher education environment and the socio-economic factors affecting the student (Context Advancement Programme – Proposed plan to accommodate students who normally do not qualify for admission to the Technikon Free State, 2000:1).

Common deficiencies exhibited by many students are:

- Lack of language and communication skills;
- Poor academic skills;
- Incapability of recalling facts;
- Lack of computer literacy and numeric skills
- Lack of comprehension and
- The inability to apply the learned knowledge.

CAP is designed to help first year students to adjust successfully to the higher education environment. The different fields of study at the university require different abilities and skills. It was therefore appropriate to design this specific programme to accommodate the different requirements of the disciplines management and accounting.

Accounting has been identified as the subject area where most students experience problems. It was decided to include accounting as a subject and therefore to concentrate on the following fields of study namely: accounting, business management, computer literacy and communication. The above-mentioned fields of study were presented in four subjects, namely:

- Applied Accounting (year subject)
- Introduction to Organisations, Control & Ethics (semester 1)

- Computer Skills (semester 2)
- Business Communication (year subject)

The programme was offered in English and on a full-time basis. The requirement for students to enter was a school-leaving certificate and they were required to register for all of the subjects. All of the subjects should be passed in one academic year in order to qualify for further enrolment in mainstream programmes in the School for Entrepreneurship and Business Development.

The programmes available at the time were:

- Cost and Management Accounting
- Internal Auditing
- Marketing
- Human Resources Management
- Management
- Import and Export Management

Successful candidates (those who have passed all four subjects) will receive credit (for semester one) for the following subjects in formal programmes of the School for Entrepreneurship and Business Development:

- Financial Accounting I (Module 1)
- Accounting for Marketers (Module 1)
- Accounting for Personnel Practitioners (Module 1)
- Accounting Skills (Module 1)
- Internal Auditing 1 (Module 1)
- Communication I (Module 1 and 2)

No re-registration was allowed if any subject was failed.

3. The 2001 CAP-intake

Although the academic planning document recommended an intake of 100 students, 285 were eventually enrolled (Report on CAP Programme: Faculty of Management, 2001:1). The only requirement for enrolment was a matric certificate. Day classes for full-time students were scheduled and the contact time was fixed on only eight hours per week. The students were divided into four groups and their learning process was facilitated by four part-time lecturers (Report on CAP Programme: Faculty of Management, 2001:1).

Additional support was provided, according to the above-mentioned report, by means of a workshop where they dealt with the following topics:

- Using the library and finding information;
- Administration and evaluation;
- The learning process;
- Writing tests and evaluations; and
- Student services available.

4. Research findings

4.1 Entering the mainstream (period 2002 to 2004)

It was expected of students (now in the mainstream) to attend all of their classes (although not compulsory) in order to obtain maximum exposure to class activity. The pass mark was set on 50% as stipulated by the Institution's policy for all subjects.

One hundred and twenty three (43%) of the students have passed all of their subjects. One hundred and twenty entered the mainstream of the school whilst three students entered a programme in Information Technology. The composition of the students, who were successful, is illustrated by the following tables and figures:

TABLE 1: GENDER

GENDER		TOTAL
MALE	FEMALE	
55	68	123
45%	55%	100%

FIGURE 1: GENDER

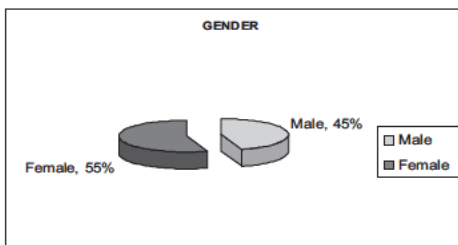
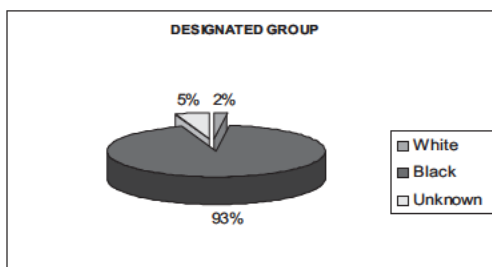


TABLE 2: DESIGNATED GROUP

DESIGNATED GROUP			TOTAL
BLACK	WHITE	UNKNOWN	
114	2	7	123
93%	2%	5%	100%

FIGURE 2: DESIGNATED GROUP



From the table below it is clear that the programme in Internal Auditing was the most popular, followed by the programme in Cost and Management Accounting.

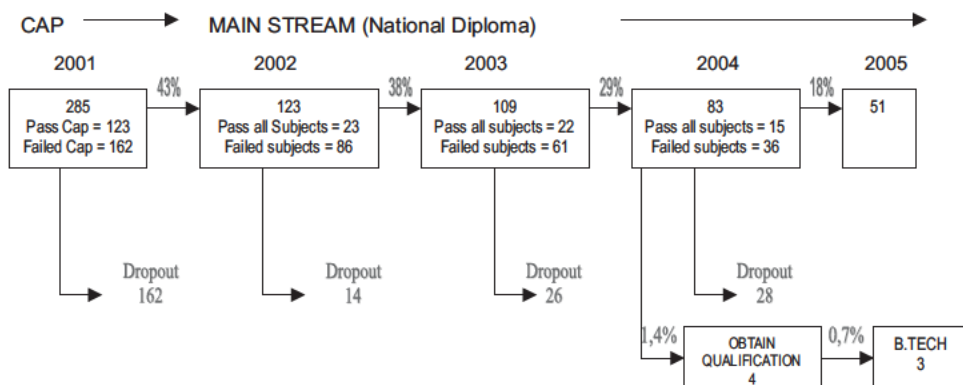
TABLE 3: PROGRAMME CHOICE

PROGRAMME CHOICE					
PROGRAMME	RANKING	2002	2003	2004	2005
ND: Internal Auditing	1	54	52	33	22
ND: Cost & Management Accounting	2	38	33	29	19
ND: Marketing	3	14	11	9	6
ND: Import & Export Management	4	5	3	3	1
ND: Human Resources Management	7	2	2	1	1
ND: Office Management & Technology	6	2	2	2	1
ND: Financial Information Systems	5	5	2	2	1
OTHER	8	3	4	4	0
TOTAL		123	109	83	51
Percentage of initial CAP enrolment (285) in main stream		43%	38%	29%	18%

4.2 Discussion of findings

The findings of the research can be best painted by a flow diagram indicated below (figure 3). The diagram indicates *inter alia* the number of students in the mainstream and the number of dropouts per annum. Only four students completed their three-year-diploma in three years. In other words only 1,4% of the original intake of 285 students obtained their qualifications in the prescribed time.

FIGURE 3: ANALISING THE SUCCESS/PROGRESS OF 2001 CAP INTAKE



The final result of the four students refer to, is illustrated in table 4 below:

TABLE 4: FINAL RESULTS

Programme passed	Subject average	Subject distinctions	Gender	Designated group
ND.: Marketing	66%	1	female	black
ND.: Internal Auditing	69%	4	female	black
ND.: Cost and Management Accounting	69%	5	male	black
ND.: Human Resources Management	62%	0	male	black

These four students' subject average was in the excess of 60% and up to 5 subject distinctions were obtained by a student. Three of the four students who successfully completed their National Diploma continued with a B. Tech-degree in the year 2005, which represent only 1,05% of the original intake of 2001. However, 51 students were still in the mainstream during 2005 who may still qualify for a diploma in future. The majority of them are left with three subjects to complete.

5. Conclusion

In retrospect, we may argue whether it was worth the effort. Although the success rate was extremely low for the first intake, it should be regarded as an alternative mean to widen access to school-leavers who do not meet the admission requirements of higher education – which it did. However, it is clear from this research that a mere grade-12 certificate will not meet the case – some form of selection is vital (see also Report on CAP Programme: Faculty of Management, 2001:2).

In order to improve the pass rate and to ensure quality education the following were phased in as from 2002 (Report on Cap Programme: Faculty of Management, 2002:1):

- Revised curricula and learning guides were provided to students in each subject;
- Students were divided into smaller class groups;
- Tutorial classes were instituted and more contact time in certain subjects allocated;
- Compulsory consultation hours for lecturers;
- A comprehensive manual (policy) for teaching and administration was compiled and made available to every part-time lecturer;
- Weekly liaison between programme co-ordinator and lecturers;
- Marks of tests and evaluations are analysed on a prescribed form;

- Emphasis on remedial education and practical work in the lecture rooms; and
- A full set of textbooks and learning material are provided free of charge.

Further more, only students who just don't make it to the mainstream were advised, as from 2002, to enrol for CAP. It was assumed that they will have the best chance for success. The programme is now running for five years. Part two of the research article will investigate the success of the second and further intakes of CAP.

Final word: There is a institutional commitment to accommodate students in a well-designed curriculum to ensure access and so offer a chance to enter the mainstream.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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