Quality Enhancement Project

Institutional Submissions: Phase 1

Due Date: 1 September 2014

Name of Institution	Rhodes University
Contact Person	Prof CM Boughey
Date of submission	8 September 2014 (as negotiated with Prof Grayson)

Institutional submissions form the starting point for each phase of the QEP. They are intended to be for information rather than for evaluative purposes, although it is expected that institutions will recognise the value and importance of serious engagement in producing the submissions. Institutional submissions serve a purpose for both the institutions and the CHE. For institutions, the submissions provide an opportunity to reflect at an institutional level on what they are currently doing, or planning to do, and where there are unaddressed needs related to the focus areas. For the CHE, the institutional submissions enable the CHE to elicit information related to student success from all universities. This information is needed for two reasons:

1. It serves as a baseline, providing a snapshot of current thinking, practices and priorities in each institution related to the focus areas in particular, and student success in general.

2. It provides a starting point for identifying common approaches and problems, as well as unique approaches that are particularly effective and problems that are of particular concern to sub-sectors of the university community. This will allow more focussed discussions to take place later on in the QEP.

The institutional submissions should be concise and focused. If more detailed information is needed, the CHE will ask universities to provide it. Submissions should include an indication of where further information can be accessed from the university's website, if applicable.

Institutions are requested to be frank and clear in their responses. Otherwise it will be difficult for the higher education sector to engage meaningfully with enablers of, and obstacles to, student success. While there are indisputable differences in institutional contexts, most challenges are common to several, if not many, institutions. Clear and honest statements of the challenges will facilitate the development of strategies to address them. On the other hand, successful approaches developed in one institutional context may be able to be adapted to help students in another context.

1. INTRODUCTION (2-5 pages)

1.1 Briefly describe the features of your institutional context that are most salient to the success of your students.

Rhodes University is a historically white, 'traditional' university. The University enjoys some of the highest success rates in the higher education system. Arguably this is not surprising given that recruitment is from the top end of the school leaving cohort, attracting students from across South Africa and, indeed, southern Africa. Although figures for the 2012[1] academic year show that 60% of all registrations were of black students (with 66% of all *first year* students falling into this category – an indication of ongoing improvement in this area), only 42% of students were South African black. In addition, it is probably fair to say that the majority of these come from relatively privileged backgrounds.

One of our greatest challenges relates to institutional culture. Teaching and learning, and more particularly the assumptions that underpin teaching and learning practices, can be understood to be profoundly cultural although dominant understandings tend to construct these as 'neutral'. It therefore becomes a priority for academic teachers to be able to appreciate the diverse array of understandings and practices which students bring to their learning, for them to be able to challenge, in constructive ways, those understandings and practices that are not productive for *academic* learning and to be able to build on those which are productive.

A significant feature of Rhodes University is its size. In 2013, 7485 students were registered of whom 31% were postgraduate. However, since the funding formula for higher education means that the amount allocated to individual institutions is proportional, we are challenged with regard to size. If the system grows, Rhodes University needs to grow if it is not to lose its share of the total funding for higher education available. This is reflected in one of the strategic goals for teaching and learning in the Institutional Development Plan which acknowledges the need 'to continue to provide high quality learning experiences to a *growing* and diversifying student body'.

The ratio of students to academic staff members (FTE/SCU) for 2012 stood at 16.4 although this figure fluctuated according to faculty and department. While we would not argue that the relatively small class sizes this ratio allows contributes *per se* to student success (since we have many examples where the management of and pedagogy employed in large classes allows for success), we would say that the fact that, to a large extent, students enjoy relatively small class sizes - especially as they progress through the years of study – *is* a factor contributing to success. As the University grows, finding ways to ensure that students continue to receive the sort of attention from their academic teachers that smaller classes allow therefore presents a challenge. In this respect, we have evidence of the way ICTs can be used to increase interaction between teacher and students in large classes and continue to work in this area.

We would argue that an exceptionally well-run residential system also contributes to our success rates. In 2012, 46% of all students were accommodated in one of 42 halls of residence. More significantly, 72% of students in the first and second years of study were accommodated. This not only means that students are provided with a secure, clean place to study and sleep and with regular meals but also that they receive personal attention from the system of hall, house and sub-wardens. House wardens interview every student following the mid year examination period. This allows them to identify academic and personal problems that might be impacting on performance and also to offer encouragement and advice.

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[1] At the time this submission was prepared, figures for the 2013 academic year were not yet available.

Students identified as facing problems would be referred to the academic departments or Deans or to entities such as the Counselling Centre in addition to receiving support from the house structure itself. From 2014, Teaching Development Grant funding has been used to enhance these residential structures with the introduction of a mentoring system involving senior students who act as mentors and academic staff who serve as facilitators in the programme.

Another factor contributing to student success is the extensive and long-established tutorial system. Although first year students will find themselves in a relatively large tutorial group in some departments, they nonetheless will have opportunities for constructive engagement with the learning required of them outside lectures. In addition, in some subject areas practical sessions that utilise the services of senior students as 'demonstrators' also offer opportunities for this sort of engagement. While we believe the tutorial and practical systems contribute to student success, we are also aware that both systems could be improved. To this end, in 2014 Teaching Development Grant funds have been used to employ a post-doctoral researcher to evaluate the current system with the aim of making recommendations for improvement.

The administrative system at the University also undoubtedly contributes to student success. Places for incoming students are allocated from May onwards and confirmed early in January following the release of the school leaving results. Student applications are processed with 24-48 hours of receipt. Deans are intensely involved in the admissions process and in the curriculum approval processes which follow registration. Deans select students using an array of indicators of success, advise on career choices and course selection and continue to monitor students as they begin their studies. The University does not allow 'walk-ins'.

The registration process always progresses smoothly for new as well as more senior students. In 2014, the introduction of online pre-registrations allowing students to update details was introduced, further reducing registration queues. Since 2006, curriculum pre-approval has been in place in at least two of the faculties allowing students with a good academic record to select subjects for the folling year within the rule base, thus elliminating the need for them to see the Dean. Lecturers can expect to have all students available to attend class from the first day of the first term. The administrative system also ensures the fair distribution of financial aid and tries to ensure that no student is left in financial need. In recent years, however, financial aid has been under severe constraints in spite of the University providing large sums from its own limited resources for this purpose. A shortage of financial aid has led to some students not being able to take up places offered to them.

Finally, we believe the small size of the town in which the University is located is, in many ways, also a contributor to success. We have noted the proportion of students accommodated in the residential system. Those living in other accommodation, even when that accommodation is in the poorer areas of the town, generally have comparatively short distances to cover to get to campus. In most cases, students can walk to lectures from their accommodation. This means that the cost and inconvenience of travel is not a problem for the great majority of students. Nonetheless, although Rhodes University enjoys some of the best success rates in the country, only 34% of its students graduate in regulation time.

1.2. Indicate how the submission was prepared, including the names and designations of the people involved with producing various sections of the submission.

This submission was prepared by the Quality Enhancement Project Committee. The Committee is chaired by Prof CM Boughey, Dean, Teaching & Learning and comprises the following members:

(a)   Registrar: Dr Steve Fourie
(b)   Institutional Planning Unit Manager: Ms Ruth Andrews
(c)   Director, Information & Technology Services: Ms Natalie Ripley
(d)   Two Deans – Prof Dave Sewry (Commerce)
                              – Prof Ric Bernard (Science)
(e)   Deputy Dean: Faculty of Pharmacy
(f)   Deputy Dean: Faculty of Humanities
(g)   Deputy Dean: Faculty of Law
(h)   Director: Library Services: Ms Ujala Satgoor
(i)   Head of Department, Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching & Learning – Prof Lynn Quinn
(j)   Member of Senate Teaching & Learning Committee – Prof Jen Snowball
(k)   President, Students' Representative Council
(l)   Students' Representative Council, Academic Councillor

A draft of the submission served before Faculty Boards in the third term of the 2014 academic year and before the University Senate at the end of that term. The submission also had input from the Senate Teaching & Learning Committee in its early stages.

2. FOCUS AREA 1: ENHANCING ACADEMICS AS TEACHERS (3-6 pages)

(Including professional development, reward and recognition, workload, conditions of service and performance appraisal)

2.1 Which aspects of your institution's Strategic Plan relate to this focus area? (Please be specific by quoting from the Strategic Plan).

Strategic Objective 3A of Rhodes University's Institutional Development Plan speaks to the need to enhance university teaching. This objective is to 'develop teaching as a core academic activity which contributes to institutional goals'. Strategic Objective 3B also speaks to this Focus Area. Strategic Objective 3B is to 'recognise, reward and celebrate teaching which promotes the goals of the University'.

2.2 What activities do you currently have in place related to this focus area that are successful? What evidence do you use to conclude that they are successful? (Do not provide detailed evidence, just a description of the type of evidence you collect and a short summary of the results.)

Rhodes University has offered development opportunities to its staff in relation to their roles as academic teachers since the early 2000s. These opportunities include formal programmes such as the PGDip in Higher Education, short courses (accredited via the institutional Short Course Policy) and more informal workshops and events. All staff development opportunities are provided by staff of the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching & Learning (CHERTL).

It is not compulsory for academic staff members to take up opportunities related to their development as teachers. However, in practice the take up of opportunities is high thanks to structures the University has put in place in relation to probation and personal promotion. All staff on probation (the probationary period for Council appointed staff is three years) are required to submit evidence of their capacity as teachers, in the form of a teaching portfolio, before their appointments are confirmed. Criteria have been developed against which this capacity must be demonstrated. Personal promotion procedures also include a set of criteria related to teaching and learning[2].

In order to meet the criteria for the confirmation of appointment, the great majority of staff enrol on courses provided by CHERTL. The latest of these, called CATALst (Conversations around Teaching, Assessment & Learning) builds on a previous course, known as the 'Assessors' Course' which was offered for many years. A formal evaluation of the Assessors' Course led to the development of the CATALyst course. The CATALyst course not only offers staff members the opportunity to achieve 30 credits at level 8 of the HEQSF, provided assessment tasks are completed successfully, but it also allows them to build the portfolio of evidence they will need to meet criteria related to teaching for confirmation of appointment. These 30 credits can also be 'transferred in' to the 120 credit PGDip in HE qualification. A number of staff members choose to complete the PGDip or even a Master's in Education specialising in Higher Education Studies. Having built a portfolio of evidence related to teaching for probationary purposes, staff can continue to add to this over their years of employment at the University in order to apply for personal promotion.

Since the early 2000s, approximately 180 members of staff have completed an Assessors'

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[2] These criteria can be found at:
http://www.ru.ac.za/humanresources/academicstaff/recognitionandreward/personalpromotion/

Course and 74 a PGDip. These figures need to be considered within the overall size of the academic staff complement[3] and the relatively low turn-over of academics at the University. Nine members of staff have achieved a Master's in Education degree specialising in teaching in higher education. Twenty are currently enrolled for the CATALyst course which was introduced for the first time in 2014.

Although learning for all credits is formally assessed following procedures laid down by the Faculty of Education, evidence of having met criteria related to teaching for probationary and personal promotions procedures is assessed by peers in faculties. This decision to place assessement of evidence in relation to teaching in the hands of peers rather than, say, in the hands of staff from CHERTL, means that teaching is treated in a similar fashion to research. Peer assessment not only means that evidence of teaching can be understood in context but also that understandings of assessment criteria and of the myriad ways these can be met are shared within faculties. This serves to disseminate good practice and promote 'talk' about teaching and learning.

Staff development opportunities at Rhodes University are thus 'embedded' in the formal structures of the University. Reward structures other than those related to probation and personal promotion include two Vice Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Awards made annually, one for more junior, and the other for more senior, members of staff.

All courses offered by CHERTL are evaluated on an on-going basis. As noted, a formal evaluation of the Assessors' Course led to the development of a new course, CATALyst. Insights from evaluation are used to inform ongoing course review. Over the years, CHERTL staff have also striven to enhance their own academic profile within the University. Initially, most were qualified only at honours' or master's levels. Now, all either have a doctorate or are pursuing doctoral level research. In addition, all strive to publish regularly. The pursuit of academic status means that CHERTL staff are able to interact with academic staff in 'regular' departments as equals.

In addition to offering formal courses, CHERTL staff members also support academic staff members by supporting evaluation of teaching and course design. CHERTL staff members not only assist with the collection of data for an evaluation but also with its analysis and with reflecting on the implications for teaching.

In recent years, attempts to acknowledge the location of Rhodes University in a town ridden with unemployment and poverty in one of the poorest provinces in the country have increased. The Community Engagement Division has been central to these efforts. The Community Engagement office serves as a catalyst, matchmaker and support structure for departments, residences, student groups, staff and individuals to engage with our community creating opportunities for student success in mutually beneficial and respectful ways. Service-learning has been a particular focus of these efforts and a staff member in CHERTL, with particular expertise in this area, works closely with the Community Engagement office to support and develop staff as they seek to develop curricula incorporating service learning.

2.3 What activities related to this focus area have you initiated during the past three or four years that have not been as successful as you had hoped? In what ways were they unsuccessful? What do you think might be the reasons for the lack of success?

CHERTL does offer some *ad hoc* workshops and other activities (including, for example, Educational Technology 'Showcases') from time to time. Attendance at these events can be patchy and evidence of learning from them can be difficult to collect. In comparison, we

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[3] The 2013 Statistical Digest for Rhodes University shows a staff complement of 336 academic staff.

believe the structured approach taken in relation to staff development opportunities described in 2.2. above yields more reward. We believe that embedding staff development in reward structures is critical not only to the take-up of opportunities to develop the capacity of academics as educators but also to the potential for learning which results from them.

2.4 What activities have you recently implemented or are you planning to implement in the next 12 to 18 months related to this focus area? Why have you chosen these particular activities? What is the need or problem they are intended to address?

In 2013, the Dean of Science convened a 'Teaching & Learning Colloquium' for members of the Faculty. Speakers, who were accomplished scientists with an interest in teaching and learning, were invited from other universities. Attendance at this event was excellent largely, we would argue, because of the affirmation of the event provided by the Dean and his attendance at it. A spin-off from this event was the establishment of a Faculty Teaching & Learning Special Interest Group, led by a member of staff from the Faculty. We believe that conversations about teaching and learning which take into account the context in which teaching takes place (in this case a Faculty of Science) are more useful than generalised events and also are more likely to garner the attention of academics. Other faculties have indicated their willingness to institute similar initiatives intended to address the need for contextualised conversations about teaching and learning.

The agendae of all Faculty Boards include a 'report back' on teaching and learning issues usually led by the Faculty representative on the Teaching & Learning Committee. A recent development in this Committee has been to identify the issues on which Faculty representatives should report at the end of each meeting.

Rhodes University received a Teaching Development Grant for the first time in 2012. This has allowed us to implement a number of initiatives, one of which includes the provision of additional support for the development of teaching evidence (in the form of teaching portfolios) needed for probation and personal promotion. This support will take the form of writing retreats which will allow academics to develop the teaching portfolios needed for probation and personal promotion. CHERTL staff will attend these retreats to provide support. Teaching Development Grant funding has also allowed us to provide a competitive grant of R25 000 to allow an individual to attend a teaching related event, possibly overseas.

To date, the University has not been particularly successful in producing analyses of student performance which can inform development work both with academics and students largely because of a lack of capacity in the area of institutional planning. A number of analyses are now being produced and provide enormously useful insights into which kinds of students perform in different ways. A proposal for a programme of institutional level research is now being developed and funding for this research to be conducted has been identified.

2.5 What are the challenges or problems related to this focus area that still need to be addressed in your institution?

A challenge in this focus area relates to staff who have reached the upper levels of the academic hierarchy, and who therefore have tenured appointments and will not be applying for personal promotion. Such individuals may prioritise research and then adopt a stance of being 'anti-teaching' and 'anti-teaching development'. This cohort of academics exert power and their talk can impact negatively on more junior staff who need to meet criteria for teaching in probationary and personal promotion processes and who welcome teaching development related activities. Challenges to such high ranking academics may then be met by references to their own performance as researchers and to the University's need for high research outputs. In many respects, this problem can be expected to resolve itself over time as

academics who have been exposed to different ideas about teaching rise up through the hierarchy. For the moment, however, it remains a challenge though less of a challenge than it was, say, ten years ago.

Possibly the greatest challenge in this focus area relates to the number of demands on young academics who need to i) complete postgraduate qualifications, preferably the doctoral degree, ii) begin to establish a research trajectory, iii) begin community engagement work, iv) involve themselves professionally in disciplinary networks outside the university and, finally, v) develop themselves as teachers. All this may need to take place whilst young academics are carrying heavy teaching loads at undergraduate levels. In addition, young academics are often starting families and face considerable demands in their personal lives. The ability to balance and manage these demands can be supported by mentorship from HoDs and more experienced members of staff although the constraints noted above can apply here. The University has no formal mentoring process in place for staff who are not placed on accelerated development programmes and faces challenges in finding good mentorship even for those who are placed on such programmes. Ideally, all young staff members would be placed on a development path which would lessen their workload in order for them to meet the demands noted above although available funding precludes this.

Yet another challenge relates to international staff who often may not understand issues in the South African context in a way which allows them to understand the situation vis a vis teaching and learning. The need for redress in a country where the schooling system continues to be disfunctional and where race and social class intersect in producing particular problems in relation to teaching and learning may be hard to grasp for someone who has only recently arrived in the country.

A final challenge relates to the capacity in CHERTL to do development work. Centre staff already work across the country offering short courses and, in addition, have opened up formal programmes to staff from other insitutions. The need for more individuals to work in this area is felt keenly. Although funding is available for posts, filling such posts is difficult. To this end, CHERTL has developed a PGDip programme especially designed to allow individuals to develop the knowledge and strategic competence to work effectively in Teaching and Learning Centres.

3. FOCUS AREA 2: ENHANCING STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT (3-6 pages)

(Including career and curriculum advising, life and academic skills development, counselling, student performance monitoring and referral)

3.1 Which aspects of your institution's Strategic Plan relate to this focus area? (Please quote from the strategic plan)

Strategic Objective 1, 'To be responsive to our niche and location' & Strategic Objective 2, 'Increasing Access with Success' of the Institutional Development Plan relate to this focus area.

3.2 What activities do you currently have in place related to this focus area that are successful? What evidence do you use to conclude that they are successful? (Do not provide detailed evidence, just a description of the type of evidence you collect.)

Rhodes University had an Academic Support Programme in place throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In 1999, following an extensive review process, a decision was made to shift from supporting students to working with academic staff on their development as teachers and to

providing support for activities such as curriculum design and the assessment of student learning. Quinn[4] describes the rationale behind this shift, which followed arguments made in the Academic Development movement more generally[5]. In spite of the shift in focus, a small number of old academic support posts were allowed to remain in faculties and departments. These 'old' posts can be seen to work in different ways. Some have been completely subsumed into mainstream teaching activities to the extent that the incumbent of the post no longer understands their role to be that of contributing to students' learning other than as a regular academic teacher. Others are occupied by a succession of postgraduate students employed by departments to provide 'old style' academic support. Some of these postgraduates may be employed on the basis of their need for funding to complete their studies rather than on the basis of their interest or capacity in matters related to teaching and learning. The interaction between support positions and mainstream academics envisaged as a result of 'infusing' academic support into departments which took place at the University in the mid 1990s in many cases has not been achieved.

Although, to all intents and purposes, the centralised Academic Support Programme which had been established at the University in the 1980s ceased to exist by the end of the 1990s, Rhodes University has continued to run an extensive tutorial programme. All departments have programmes which use senior students as tutors or demonstrators. As indicated earlier in this submission, there is evidence (for example from student feedback) that these tutorial systems do not all work equally well. Because of this, a postdoctoral researcher was employed for the duration of 2014 to investigate the functioning of the tutorial system. We expect the results of this research to inform a strategy to enhance the system.

In addition to the tutorial system, a number of other projects have been initiated thanks to Teaching Development Grant funding which became available for the first time in 2012. The first of these involves the construction of a 'ladder' of Writing Intensive Courses at faculty level. The University offered a language and literacy development course until the mid 2000s. This course, entitled 'English Language for Academic Purposes (ELAP) enrolled black students using English as an additional language and was housed in the Department of English Language and Linguistics. The course was discontinued because there was no evidence that it was impacting on either language or literacy ability. Evidence included results from student feedback surveys, interviews with academic staff and other data perused in a review process which took place as Rhodes University introduced a suite of 'Extended Programmes with Integrated Foundation Phases' thanks to the Foundation Programme Grants allocated by the Department of Education (DET) in 2004.

The need to develop language and literacy in the disciplines (an aim of the Writing Intensive Course Project), rather than in generalised 'stand-alone' courses, is affirmed by both research and theory. The Writing Intensive Course Project began in the Faculty of Humanities in 2012 and has now spread to other faculties. A project co-ordinator, who is an expert in writing development, is employed to support academics who agree to introduce activities intended to support writing development into their courses. These activities are negotiated by the academic and the course co-ordinator.

To date, 9 out of a total of 42 academic departments have introduced courses with 'Writing

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[4] Quinn, L. 2006. *A social realist account of the emergence of a formal staff development programme at a South African University.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
[5] See Boughey, C. 2012. 'The significance of structure, culture and agency in efforts to support and develop student learning at South African universities' in R. Dunpath & R.Vithal (Eds.) *Access and Success in Higher Education.* Pearson: Cape Town.

Intensive' status. In the Faculty of Humanities in 2013, approximately 1545 interventions at the level of the student were provided[6]. By the end of the first semester of 2014, this number had grown to 1806 across three faculties. Already, it is becoming clear that spreading writing support over a faculty is an efficient way to allocate some sort of support to a large number of students. The more courses that achieve 'Writing Intensive' status, the greater this impact will be. The project is evaluated on an ongoing basis by the Project Co-ordinator and staff involved. It is anticipated that research publications will emerge from this work.

A second initiative involves the development of online learning materials intended to support both numeracy and literacy. This initiative draws on the concept of 'gaming' which is familiar to many students. This initiative is still in relatively early stages.

Finally, again thanks to Teaching Development Grant funding, a number of courses in the Faculty of Science have been 'augmented' with additional tuition provided by educational specialists in the sciences. These courses were identified as having higher than usual failure rates. Success rates in these courses are tracked by the Dean and three monthly reports are submitted by the educational specialists. In addition, we are aware of conversations taking place between the specialists running the 'augmented' portion of the course with mainstream academics.

These augmented courses have allowed the Dean to offer a third 'route' through the Faculty in addition to the regular 'three-year' route and the Extended Programme. The new route allows students to enrol for three, rather than four, courses in the first semester of study but still to 'catch up' and graduate in three years. This has obvious implications for admission scores since the Dean is able to place students who might not be admitted to a regular three-year programme on this new route. The availabilty of augmented courses also means the Dean can allow a student to be allocated to one of these courses when assessment indicates that a s/he is not doing well in the regular portion of the course.

In 2010, the completion of a new extension to the University Library alongisde the refurbishment of the 'old' Library building resulted in the provision of an array of versatile learning and work spaces that promote the skilled use of high technology and online research. The 'new' Library has fast emerged as environment with a communal, social and scholarly atmosphere.

A number of student development initiatives focusing on information literacy for undergraduates, and research support for post-graduates and academics have been developed to coincide with the development of this new physical space. One initiative has involved the introduction of a 'Personal Librarian' scheme whereby first year students are allocated to a member of the library staff from whom they are able to request personal attention. The aim is to ensure the a student is supported by a dedicated librarian throughout their years of study at the University.

The Library also adopted the faculty library liaison model which is a proactive method of engaging with departments and academics on matters related to print and electronic collection development, research priorities and scholarly support. As part of this model, all librarians were involved in the Research Libraries Consortium, a Carnegie Corporation of New York funded initiative that focused on enhancing the understanding of the research process, academic research needs and advanced reseach skills for academci librarians. It also supports focused training in the use of subject specific electronic resources, which includes databases, ebooks and e-journals, so that students have 24/7 access to the most appropriate and relevant

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[6] Some students may have benefitted from more than one intervention depending on courses in which they were enrolled.

resources in support of their academic and research pursuits.

In 2014, a residence-based mentoring programme was also introduced as a means of student support. The University has used a mentoring programme in its Extended Programmes, called the Trojan Academic Initiative (TAI) since 2004. Evidence from evaluations of the TAI programme have been extremely positive. These evaluations have drawn on feedback from both mentors and mentees. Significantly, these evaluations have shown the way the programme has contributed to mentors' development as well as to that of their mentees. The residence-based programme draws on the structure of TAI to provide a mentor to all first year students who request to be part of the programme. Mentors are senior students supervised by an academic staff member. The residence based programme will be evaluated in the course of 2014 to inform ongoing development.

The Counselling Centre provides extensive support to students in relation to personal and emotional problems. The Counselling Centre is a training site for counselling psychologists who work under supervision. In addition to providing one-on-one consultations, Counselling Centre staff also provide workshops on issues such as time management.

The University also has a Career Centre which provides individual career counselling as well as workshops on a variety of issues related to securing employment. Activities involving the Career Centre also include an annual Graduate Placement Programme and the Law Faculty's 'Market Day' as opportunities to engage with potential employers. Rhodes University offers mainly general formative degrees with many possible curriculum choices. Deans spend a good deal of time crafting appropriate curricula for students as they embark on their degrees or encounter problems along the way. Sometimes advice extends to a change in study direction depending on the problems faced.

Critical to student support is the week-long orientation programme provided at the start of each academic year. As is to be expected, much of the programme is about orientation into the university community especially for those students who choose to live in one of the university residences. There are also sessions about social issues such as HIV/Aids and alcohol. But a crucially important aspect of the orientation programme is the emphasis on introducing the various courses available and the encouragement given to students to re-evaluate their subject choices and explore changes if necessary. In addition to lectures, one on one meetings with Deans and Deans' advisors are facilitated. The orientation programme is evaluated annually by eliciting feedback from incoming students and from those involved in running the programme.

Support for students cannot only centre on academic performance since it must also encompass the need to prepare them for active citizenship. South Africa's young democracy offers immense opportunities to individuals to make significant contributions to the empowerment, development and growth of citizens, society and country. Like other universities, Rhodes University is serious about embracing this challenge and sees opportunities to contribute to communities as an element of student development. For this and other reasons, community engagement has been elevated to stand alongside the University's core purposes of teaching, learning, and research.

However, to think of community engagement separately from teaching and research would be missing the point. The Community Engagement Division has overseen and assisted in initiatives at Rhodes University which go beyond the traditional 'good deeds' approach to community engagement to occupy a more strategic role of enhancing scholarship, transformation, critical citizenship and teaching. Many of the University's Faculties and Departments have understood the value of engaging communities as a vehicle to enriching

and enhancing teaching that has mutually beneficial results. At Rhodes University there are at least 25 community engagement initiatives within academic departments. These engagement activities range from service learning courses, departmental volunteerism/non-assessed partnerships, and engaged research. Through these initiatives, new spaces have been created in the community where learning is happening, and knowledge is being produced and applied, reworked and made ready for practice. Unexpected new 'teachers' have emerged through these initiatives in the community – people sharing their knowledge and expertise and facilitating an understanding of difference and other ways of approaching life. Initiatives run through the Community Engagement Division thus serve to enhance the quality of teaching, to contributing to student development and, importantly, to shifting the institutional culture.

3.3 What activities related to this focus area have you initiated during the past three or four years that have not been as successful as you had hoped? In what ways were they unsuccessful? What do you think might be the reasons for the lack of success?

In 2012, a guide to learning entitled *RULearning* was produced as a result of work[7] which attempted to conceptualise the link between research and teaching at a 'research-led' university such as Rhodes. This guide was professionally laid out and printed. In 2012, the guide was handed to students as part of an orientation pack distributed at registration. A number of sessions in the Orientation Programme were then devoted to working with the guide. In 2013, following reports and observations that many students had 'lost' the guide during Orientation Week, a decision was made to distribute it later in the first term via the residence system. This plan also incorporated arrangements to include students who were not in residence via the Oppidan Hall (which has its own warden and sub-wardens). Again, there is evidence that the guide was not as well read as it could have been.

In both 2012 and 2013, requests to academic staff to use, or at least refer to, the guide in their own teaching were made. There is evidence of some take-up of these requests though a greater response would have been appreciated.

In 2013, a decision was made to request an Eastern Cape based theatre company, Ubom!, to dramatise the guide. This was done on the understanding that enhanced learning could result from making visible effective *learning practices* via a theatre production. The resulting show, entitled 'Unzip your Learning' was presented in the first week of the second term. All first year students in residence were required to attend one of the nine showings. Like all educational drama, the show aimed to raise questions rather than to 'teach'. Because of this, a question and answer session led by the Dean, Teaching and Learning featured at the end of each show.

The theatre production proved to be enormously attractive to students with many more senior students aiming to gain entrance to each show. Staff were invited to the show although the response to this invitation was relatively low.

A professional recording of 'Unzip' was made and this has been uploaded onto YouTube at http://youtu.be/nhEyCUdFnn8 for students to download and watch at their leisure. In addition, a special showing of the recording will be offered to wardens in the residence system, followed by a discussion. Although some wardens accompanied their students to the actual performances of the show, this was not the case for all. Given the importance of the

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[7] Boughey, C. (2012) 'Linking teaching and research: An alternative perspective.' *Teaching in Higher Education,* 17(5): 629-635.

residence system in supporting student learning, a session with wardens is deemed to be critical. Again, attempts will be made to get academic staff to engage with the show as a potential tool in their own support of students.

Lessons learned from the production of a learning guide centre on the need to provide scaffolded engagement with it. Simply providing a guide is no guarantee that i) students will read it and ii) that it will be meaningful for them.

3.4 What activities have you recently implemented or are you planning to implement in the next 12 to 18 months related to this focus area? Why have you chosen these particular activities? What is the need or problem they are intended to address?

For some years now, the University has been debating the introduction of a Common Course which would be taken by all students and which would aim to promote engagement with issues and problems prevalent in contemporary South African society. The current proposal for this course envisages a student-driven initiative (following a model introduced at the University of Uppsala) which incorporates extensive community engagement. Students would be able to build unique curricula for this Common Course by choosing from an array of modules which, together, would make up the required credit value. Credits would be accumulated over the regulation time needed to complete a qualification. The need for the course is rooted in an understanding of issues facing South African society and for students to learn more about communities other than those into which they were born and raised. It is expected that debate about the Common Course will be re-instated in the near future. In the meantime, an initiative entitled 'Existential Conversations' offered under the auspices of the Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics offers the potential to trial the model for a Common Course in the form of a series of short courses.

A number of initiatives focused on building glossaries of technical terms in isiXhosa are currently taking place. These initiatives involve staff from the African Languages Section of the University's School of Languages. At the same time, efforts are being made to use the indigenous langauges to support learning by, for example, encouraging students to use the indigenous languages in groupwork or other in-class learning activities. The use of the home language in early stages of writing is also encouraged in the Writing Intensive Course Project noted above.

To date, Rhodes University has not implemented a *campus-wide* student performance monitoring and referral system. A new system for recording the results of ongoing assessment has been developed although challenges still exist in getting departments to use it as well as they should. The aim is that all student assessments, including formative assessment from tutorials, class tests, assignments and examinations will be captured on this central system. Once this system is running, it will be possible to monitor students' progress more efficiently.

However, Deans monitor performance in the June examination period. If students are unable to pass at least half of the courses for which they are registered, they are issued with a warning which explains the consequences of continued poor performance which encourages them to discuss their academic performance with the Dean. In interviews which result, the focus is on what the student might do differently in the second semester. It is often the case that students are referred to the Counselling Centre. The November examination results are analysed in relation to the award of degrees, for placing students on probation for poor performance and, in extreme cases, for academic exclusion. In addition, top performers are identified.

Many courses have "Duly Performed" (DP) requirements which have to be met in order for

students to qualify to write the exams. While seldom used punitively, DPs provide an important incentive for students to keep up to date with coursework during the term, including the submission of tutorial exercises, attendance at tutorials, and achieving the required marks in class tests and essays. 'DP' requirements, supported by the tutorial system, thus provide an additional means of tracking student progress on an on-going basis.

3.5 What are the challenges or problems related to this focus area that still need to be addressed in your institution?

Arguably the greatest challenge in this focus area relates to understandings of students as 'social beings'. When students enrol at a university, they bring with them values, attitudes, beliefs and expectations of what it means to study and, indeed, what it means to 'be' from their home contexts. For some students, these may not be so far removed from those which inform the 'academic cultural system'. For others, they will be very far removed. For all students, the achievement of a degree should involve profound change related to the nature of 'graduateness'. For some, however, this change can be enormously destabilising. Of even greater concern is the idea that the change required can 'subtract' from the student's 'being' or 'identity' rather than enriching their understanding of who they are and how they can act in the world.

The University faces considerable challenges in this regard particularly as it tries to make its student body more representative of the South African population in general. Destabilisation of a student's 'being' can result from the social spaces characterising the University. However, teaching and learning practices are also implicated. We would argue that students' experiences of the social space of the University and of the way they need to engage with teaching and learning can result in alcohol abuse or drug taking and other unproductive behaviour as well as in inordinately high levels of psychological stress. The need to understand student behaviour in this way rather than simply as the result of immaturity or 'high jinks' poses a considerable challenge to the University. Of particular importance is the need to get academics to see that the students who sit before them are not the same as those who sat beside them when they were students and that they may be very different to their own children who come from relatively privileged backgrounds in 'educated' homes. As a result, the majority of students will need support in making the change to higher education.

4. FOCUS AREA 3: ENHANCING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT (3-6 pages)

(Including teaching and learning spaces, ICT infrastructure and access, technology-enabled tools and resources, library facilities)

4.1 Which aspects of your institution's Strategic Plan relate to this focus area? (Please quote from the Strategic Plan).

Strategic Objective 5 of the University's Institutional Development Plan, 'To formulate a detailed project plan containing the infrastructural, financial and staffing resource requirements to ensure the realisation 2015 – 2025 enrolment plan', speaks to this focus area. Please note that the 'detailed plan' noted in this objective is still under construction.

4.2 What activities or facilities do you currently have in place related to this focus area that are successful? What evidence do you use to conclude that they are successful? (Do not provide detailed evidence, just a description of the type of evidence you collect.).

In recent years, Rhodes University has suffered constraints with regard to the availability of teaching venues. This was particularly the case in the 2009 academic year when the number of students meeting entrance requirements rose unexpectedly in the context of the introduction of the new National Senior Certificate. At this time, calls were made for the construction of additional large lecture theatres. As these calls were being made, the University was aware of complaints from staff regarding poor student attendance at lectures and of the financial implications of building costs. A project initiated in the Faculty of Commerce, the Commerce Curriculum Project, aimed to address both of these problems by exploring the possibility of replacing one formal teaching period per week (which would release space that can be used by others) with other means of teaching involving ICTs. The intention was not to reduce teaching but to change the mode of teaching. The Faculty of Commerce was identified as a site for this project because of i) its size (the Faculty comprises only four departments) and ii) the enthusiasm and support of the Dean for issues related to teaching and learning.

A relatively small sum of money (R250 000) was made available for the project. Each of the four departments in the faculty was asked to identify an initiative that would replace a formal teaching period with other means of teaching. CHERTL staff members were available for discussion and support but the impetus was on departments to come up with ideas. In the event, all four departments identified completely different ways of meeting the challenge. The financial cost of these innovations was such that relatively little of the original budget had to be used to fund them. As a result of the project, members of the Faculty have not only shown how a lecture per week can be dropped but also how the replacement of traditional teaching methods with innovations related to the use of ICTs does not impact negatively on and can actually enhance student performance. Feedback from students, collected through formal course evaluations conducted by CHERTL, is extremely favourable. As a result of the project, we have also seen an increasing number of staff members in the faculty incorporating ICTs into their own approaches to teaching. We are thus using ICTs to challenge constraints related to the availability of teaching venues.

Although the Commerce Curriculum Project is a step forward, constraints on teaching venues, particularly those accommodating forty or fewer students continue to grow. Again, finances constrain the construction of more venues. One suggestion intended to address the venue shortage involves the reconfiguration of the timetable that currently largely locates practicals and tutorials in the afternoons. This system allows students to build a curriculum

drawing on subject areas located in different faculties combining, for example, physics and music. While such flexibility would be a loss, it may be something the University needs to explore in the future.

A number of building initiatives are currently under way to enhance the learning environment. In 2014, work began on a new Life Sciences building and work will begin on a new building for the School of Languages. These building projects have been funded by infrastructure development funding provided by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET). Funding from the DoHET also provided for the construction of a new building for the Education Faculty completed in 2013. The construction of new buildings is very carefully managed in order to ensure no over-runs in costs. The construction of the 'new' Library noted below was managed so well that costs came in significantly under budget.

The maintenance and ongoing upgrade of teaching venues is the responsibility of the Lecture Venues Committee, a sub-committee of the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning. The Lecture Venues Committee works with its own budget and has developed policies to ensure that venues are maintained and upgraded on the basis of criteria and principles. The Lecture Venue Committee reports to the Teaching & Learning Committee at each meeting. Perusal of the Minutes of the Lecture Venues Committee, which is chaired by an academic member of staff who teaches regularly, shows the range of issues addressed by the Committee and planning for upgrading and maintenance on a principled basis.

Teaching venues are attended by a Facilities Officer responsible for their upkeep. The Facilities Officer checks on electronic and other equipment in venues regularly and ensures that venues themselves are cleaned and maintained to institutional standards.

As already indicated in Focus Area 2, in 2010, the University completed a large extension to its Library facilities accompanied by a refurbishment of the 'old' Library. This 'new' Library offers a number of 'alternative' learning spaces including:
- The Information Commons dedicated for the use of undergraduates with 54 computers, 9 group study rooms with assistance at hand from staff and trained students during Library opening hours;
- A Research Commons dedicated for the use of postgraduate students (master's and doctoral levels) which provides high-end computing facilities and professional assistance;
- Group study rooms, reading rooms and over 1100 individual study spaces which encompass flexible and comfortable seating;
- Dedicated spaces for the physically impaired;
- A secure 24 hour study area;
- Photocopying and printing hubs throughout all facilities.

The Library uses the LibQual survey to evaluate its facilities and services on regular basis. Comparison of the results from the 2005 survey with those from the 2012 survey show a significant improvement in the perceptions of the entire University community towards the quality of service, the information resources and the Library as a physical space. This has affirmed that the new building and service provision model adopted by the Library are positively located in the academic endeavor. It would appear that the Library is an extremely popular study space in spite of the fact that a large number of students are resident on campus in (mostly) single rooms equipped with study facilities.

Heavy usage of the Library has led to a focus on residences as study spaces. All residences have a common room that is often mostly used for television viewing and occasional house gatherings. Plans are now being developed to turn these common rooms into learning spaces and to engage with wardens with regard to additional ways in which they can support residents' learning. Each common already has 1 PC and 1 printer available and most will have 2 PC's by the end of 2014. In addition, Wireless network coverage is expanding and most common rooms have Wireless connectivity for BYOD (bring your own devices)

In recent years, a number of new residences and dining halls have been built on the campus thanks to infrastructure funding from the DoHET. The residence system not only offers clean, well-maintained accommodation but also a choice of meals at every sitting to suit a wide range of dietary preferences. The ratio of wardens to students in the system in 2012 was 1:18. The residence system at Rhodes University has been subject to evaluative research over the years with quality of residence life surveys run regularly[8].

4.3 What activities or facilities related to this focus area have you undertaken or put in place during the past three or four years that have not been as successful as you had hoped? In what ways were they unsuccessful? What do you think might be the reasons for the lack of success?

In spite of the residence building programme, usage of accommodation in town, of varying quality, remains high. The construction, by private individuals, of blocks of flats designed as student accommodation arguably has alleviated the demand for accommodation in town and may have impacted on the 'lower end' of the student market thus improving the overall quality.

Complaints from residents about unruly student behaviour continue to emerge in spite of the appointment of a Warden of Oppidans and a group of sub-wardens who visit accommodation at which complaints have been directed.

Attempts to persuade coffee shop owners in town to open in the evenings in order to provide an alternative to venues serving only alcohol have been largely unsuccessful. As a result, entertainment venues are limited to pubs and clubs. As all of these are located within a small area, this can become crowded in the evenings and bad behaviour is not infrequent.

The University is acutely aware of the need for a large flat floor space which could host student entertainment as well as serve as a venue for examinations. However, the cost of providing such a venue is prohibitive particularly given the need for residence, teaching and office space.

4.4 What activities or facilities have you recently implemented or acquired or are you planning to implement or acquire in the next 12 to 18 months related to this focus area? Why have you chosen these particular activities or facilities? What is the need or problem they are intended to address?

To date, little communication has taken place between the Lecture Venues Committee and the Information Technology Division. As a result, the tendency has been to 'catch up' with

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[8] See, for example, Botha, F., Snowball, J., De Klerk, V., and Radloff, S. (2013) Determinants of student satisfaction with campus residence life at a South African university. Economic Society of Southern Africa Working Paper. [Online] Available: http://www.econrsa.org/publications/working-papers/determinants-student-satisfaction-campus-residence-life-south-african

technology rather than to identify new technologies and their implications for teaching and learning as they emerge. However, the establishment of a new Directorate of Information and Technology Services means that this gap will receive attention.

Although Grahamstown is small in size, students accommodated at the eastern end of the town experience difficulties getting home late at night. In addition, complaints are made about the distance between new residences constructed some distance away from the main lecture venues. Until recently, the SRC ran a late night bus which alleviated some of the problems of students living at a distance from campus. However, concerns about liability have led to this being discontinued. Research is currently being conducted on the feasibility of using a commercial provider to for bus services for students although indications of costs received so far do not look promising.

Construction of a new School of Languages building was hindered as a result of a delay in the approval of building plans by the Municipality. This delay has resulted in an increase in costs. The new building will allow space currently occupied by the School to be used by other departments suffering space constraints. Plans were also submitted to the Municipality for the construction of a new postgraduate residence. These plans were also subjected to the delays.

The construction of a 'services hub' in which divisions such as HR & Finance will be located is currently being considered. This will allow space at the centre of the main campus to become academic space. The University has developed a spatial plan up to 2030 and the construction of the service hub is part of this.

4.5 What are the challenges or problems related to this focus area that still need to be addressed in your institution?

Plans to expand infrastructure have been hampered by poor performance in Makana Muncipality. Delays in the approval of building plans have already been noted. Problems in the Municipality affect the University in other ways. In 2013 and 2014 Grahamstown has suffered a number of major 'water crises' related to failing infrastructure in the town's water supply and the failure to manage this. On two occasions, many residences were without water for more than seven days. Other cuts to the water supply have been common. Every effort has been made to manage these water cuts. Residences without water are paired with others that still have a supply to enable students to use bathing facilities. Early warnings of impending cuts are given and every effort is made to preserve water when this happens. Water tanks have been located across campus and a tanker has been acquired to ensure that these are filled. The University has worked with the Presidential Infrastructure Co-ordinating Committee regarding the water supply and this engagement has been supportive and largely fruitful. Nonetheless, a campus closure plan is being developed as it is recognized that, should a major outage occur, it may be necessary to send students home. Should this happen, the impact on teaching and learning will be immeasurable.

We are also aware of threats to the electricity supply and a number of generators have been purchased to supply power to large lecture venues in the event of a cut. The cost of running these generators in the event of prolonged electricity outages will be prohibitive however. The town sewerage system may also present problems in the future.

The University thus remains at the mercy of the Municipality which has not always shown the capacity to manage crises. All this not only poses a threat to the well-being of students but also to the capacity of the University to grow. At the time of writing this submission, the

Municipality has been placed under administration.

5. FOCUS AREA 4: ENHANCING COURSE AND PROGRAMME ENROLMENT (3-6 pages)

(Including admissions, selection, placement, readmission refusal, pass rates in gateway courses[9], throughput rates, management information systems)

5.1 Which aspects of your institution's Strategic Plan relate to this focus area? (Please quote from the Strategic Plan.)

Strategic Objective 5 of the University's Institutional Development Plan, 'To formulate a detailed project plan containing the infrastructural, financial and staffing resource requirements to ensure the realisation 2015 – 2025 enrolment plan', speaks to this objective.

5.2 What activities do you currently have in place related to this focus area that are successful? What evidence do you use to conclude that they are successful? (Do not provide detailed evidence, just a description of the type of evidence you collect.).

Rhodes University's Admissions Policy has overarching goal of achieving academic access and success based on social equity. Obviously, the starting point is the minimum admission requirement of a National Senior Certificate with degree study endorsement. In addition to this, faculties may set faculty-specific criteria and require specific levels of achievement.

Students may apply for a first choice qualification as well as a second choice. The first factor taken into consideration is the applicant's admissions points score (APS). The score requirements are published annually and are faculty specific with, for example, adequate mathematics and science scores needed for the Science and Pharmacy faculties. The APS can lead to automatic acceptance if the score is sufficiently high, to automatic rejection if it is too low, or to admission at the Dean's discretion. The latter is of importance in achieving the admissions goal referred to above.

Rhodes' application forms for undergraduates require more than mere biographical detail and school achievement particulars. Also included is written work about, for instance, the applicants motivation for choosing the degree for which they are applying; their place in class, information about leadership and community service experience; their parents' highest educational achievements and a recommendation from their school principal. All of this information is available to the Dean when making a decision. The Deans, and not admissions officers, make all of the decisions, often in consultation with colleagues such as co-ordinators of the Extended Studies Programmes. At least one Dean chooses to see all applications including those that would otherwise lead to either automatic acceptance or automatic rejection. The other Deans take care to ensure that the range of APS scores for Dean's discretion is sufficiently wide to ensure that they see a sufficient number of applications to be able to shape the profile, both demographic and educational, of the intake into their faculties.

The admissions decision of the Deans is not confined to the mainstream programmes but also to either four year limited curriculum programmes (where students are given more time to complete the same number of courses) or to Extended Studies Programmes with an integrated foundation phase, funded by the DoHET.

Deans are able to suggest to applicants who cannot initially be admitted that they take the National Benchmark Tests (NBT). The NBT results are used to augment the APS and inform

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[9] 'Gateway courses' are those courses that have a large impact on students' ability to progress. Typically they are prerequisites for other courses, and often they have large enrolments. At many universities, examples of gateway courses are first year Mathematics and Economics. In some cases, if students fail a gateway course they automatically have to extend their studies by one or two semesters.

the placement decision. It does not replace the APS.

As mentioned above, students are able to indicate a second admissions choice. If they are unsuccessful with their first choice their application is automatically considered for the second choice.

Financial aid is allocated during the admissions process. In recent years, the University has allocated large sums from its own limited resources for financial aid. In spite of this, requests for financial aid far exceed the amount available with the result that some students are unable to take up places allocated to them. A place in a hall of residence is also allocated during the admissions process if students have indicated they would like to stay in the residence system.

Evidence of the success of these admission and placement procedures can be seen in the fact that the University is generally able to hit enrolment targets for first year students fairly accurately. Students arrive for registration on time and are invariably in class on the first day of term.

It is to be admitted that the Rhodes admissions process leads to a highly competitive environment with only some 1800 out of 7000 to 8000 applications for admission being successful. The fact that the institution has among the very best pass and success rates, coupled with the rapid strides that have been made in altering the student demographics, suggests that the admission, selection and placement processes are reasonably appropriate.

In recent years, attempts to recruit black working class students have been increased. Each year a day is set aside for bringing the best performing students from rural schools in the Eastern Cape province to the institution to introduce the programme offerings available but, more importantly, to assist them with understanding the admissions process and with aligning their aspirations with what is realistically possible for them at Rhodes. During these visits, application forms are distributed and assistance is provided on how to complete the form. All application fees are waived for participants in the visits.

Each year the Deans meet with the admissions staff to access the appropriateness of the APS score requirements. The recruitment staff are tasked with ensuring that prospective students are aware of the admissions requirements and, especially, that they understand the concept and benefits of the 'Deans' discretion' mechanism.

5.3 What activities related to this focus area have you initiated during the past three or four years that have not been as successful as you had hoped? In what ways were they unsuccessful? What do you think might be the reasons for the lack of success?

Attempts to recruit an increased number of black working class students have been indicated above. In spite of strategies such as inviting learners from rural schools onto campus for the day, the University continues to struggle to admit such students largely, we would argue, because of our demanding admissions criteria. Many of the students offered places on four year Extended Programmes would be admitted to three-year programmes at other institutions and some choose this option in preference to taking up a place at Rhodes University. Although every attempt is made to accommodate black working class students who apply for admission once the school leaving results have been published, financial aid may then no longer be available. In such cases, personal appeals have been made to members of the University community for sponsorship of worthy students.

Although every effort is made to widen recruitment, perceptions of Rhodes University arguably impact on the willingness of some students to apply. We acknowledge that increased efforts need to be made to promote the University as a place for all.

The University's Enrolment Plan has identified increased enrolments at honours levels.

These enrolments have not always been achieved however partly because of the role played by departments in making offers to students. We acknowledge that recruitment and placement at honours level is an area which needs to be improved and which has been discussed in senior management fora.

The 2014 academic year also saw a relatively large number of students in good academic standing not returning to take up their studies. The assumption is that this was because of financial constraints although this needs to be tested by research. A proposal for this research is currently being prepared for the Institutional Planning Committee.

5.4 What activities have you recently implemented or are you planning to implement in the next 12 to 18 months related to this focus area? Why have you chosen these particular activities? What is the need or problem they are intended to address?

The University has an extremely active Community Engagement Division and a number of other 'outreach' initiatives including a mobile biology laboratory and the Khanya Maths and Science Club which meets every Saturday morning under the guidance of members of the academic staff. It is acknowledged that more effort needs to be made to work more closely with these initiatives to identify learners who could benefit from a place at the University. Some of this work will need to focus on changing perceptions of the University as a place ofp privilege which is open only to a select few. This work will aim to contribute to efforts being made to change student and staff demographics.

5.5 What are the challenges or problems related to this focus area that still need to be addressed in your institution?

As noted earlier in this submission, Rhodes University is located in a town with huge levels of unemployment in one of the poorest provinces in the country. In addition, performance of the majority of schools in the area is poor. Recruitment of students from Grahamstown and the Eastern Cape is low. Although efforts have been made to work with schools in the local area to enhance the learning opportunities available to learners and thus make a university education more possible for them, these have not been as successful as hoped.

Problems related to recruitment go beyond school performance however since perceptions of the University as a place of privilege are arguably also implicated in decisions of learners not to apply for admission. Such perceptions are undoubtedly being challenged by the work of the Community Engagement Division although more efforts need to be made more generally across the University.

Possibly one the most critical problem faced by the University, however, relates to financial aid. In recent years, the University has exhausted its own ability to add to funding available from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Funding available is still insufficient to meet the needs of students, however, with the result that many cannot take up the places made available to them.

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6. OTHER AREAS THAT AFFECT STUDENT SUCCESS (2-5 pages)

(Areas that do not fall within the four focus areas)

6.1 Briefly describe other activities your institution is undertaking to promote student success (beyond the four focus areas).

The Equity and Institutional Culture Office has recently embarked on a series of events intended to explore the issue of 'Africanisation'. A day-long colloquium held in the second term of the 2014 academic year included a session on 'Africanising the Curriculum'. This session was included because of calls from students and staff for curricula to be made more relevant to the University's location in Africa. As a result of this colloquium, a second series of events exploring 'knowledge' more generally is being planned. This will include exploration of relativist and realist positions on knowledge.

We would argue, however, that the incorporation of African content will not necessarily impact on student success. Curriculum development needs to incorporate consideration not only of what is taught but also how teaching takes place. African 'content' could be just as elusive to students as northern, western, masculine content depending on teaching approaches.

The University is fortunate in having a vibrant Department of African Languages. In addition, it was also successful in securing a SARChI Chair in the Intellectualisation of the African Languages. As indicated earlier in this submission, the use of African languages in teaching and learning is therefore a strategy being pursued across the campus. A number of glossaries of technical terms have been produced. In addition, projects such as the Writing Intensive Course Project promote the use of the African languages as a support for learning. Staff development programmes also discuss the need for students to use their home languages as languages of learning by, for example, being allowed to discuss topics and issues in their home language in tutorials and group work. Staff are encouraged to take an introductory course in isiXhosa offered by the Department of African Languages. Completion of this course allows individuals to signal their awareness of languages other than English on campus and to begin conversations with students and others.

6.2 What other challenges or problems does your institution face in promoting student success?

Academic literacy has long been a matter of concern at South African universities. Social anthropologist Brian Street[10] offers two models of literacy: the 'autonomous model', which constructs literacy as a technical ability involving the encoding and decoding of printed text, and the 'ideological model' which sees literacy as a set of social practices. The ideological model thus acknowledges the role of 'dispositions' to read certain kinds of texts in certain kinds of ways as prevalent amongst social groups. Academic literacy involves but one set of dispositions.

The emergence of information and communication technologies has resulted in the development of a disposition, in many social groups, to relate to the screen. This can be at the expense of paper-based texts which are then 'set aside'. This disposition is already evident amongst our students who increasingly come to Rhodes University with a willingness to engage with screen-based technologies for myriad purposes arguably at the expense of reading and writing in more 'traditional' ways. A significant challenge for the University is

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[10] Street, B. 1984. *Literacy in theory and practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

thus to harness this willingness whilst, at the same time, ensuring that it is used for academic purposes *in appropriate ways.* Understandings of literacy as a socially embedded phenomenon can be difficult to grasp, however, with the result that the things students do in relation to text are often understood as mere deficiencies rather than as processes related to social change of a wider order. Rhodes University will continue to grapple with this problem in its staff development work and in relation to student development.