

Beating the odds: a case for student support

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Woman with wax tablets and stylus, (two thousand years ago), National Archaeological Museum of Naples. Roman fresco of about 50 CE, from Pompeii

1. Abstract

The Stellenbosch Academy of Design and Photography, a small private tertiary institution offering a BA degree in Visual Communication, has a student number fewer than 200 and a lecturer component of 18. However, the Academy has its share of at-risk students with issues in varying degrees of seriousness. These include academic underpreparedness, psychological and neurological conditions, learning disabilities, second-language problems, weak writing skills, absenteeism, drug use, time-management problems, accommodation concerns and even hunger. These academic and non-academic factors have a significant impact on students' academic performance. It is the mission of the Academy to look after its students in a holistic way, in other words in their totality as human beings, and in this way support them on their journey towards graduation and life-long learning. This presentation will focus on one case study that exemplifies the methods of support which are part and parcel of the Academy's ethos and which were implemented to assist this student and enhance her chances of success.



2. Department of Education's 1997 *White Paper*, Ch 2: Structure and growth (Equity and redress)

2.32 In the short to medium term, in order to improve equity of outcomes, the higher education system is required to respond comprehensively to the articulation gap between learners' school attainment and the intellectual demands of higher education programmes... The development and provision of student support services, including career guidance, counselling and financial aid services, are other essential requirements.

2.33 Thus academic development structures and programmes are needed at all higher education institutions to promote the development of teaching skills, curricula, courseware and student support services as a mainstream programme development.

3. CHE Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources 2004



Evaluative Question 2: Policies/ guidelines for student development & support Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

An institutional policy (or guidelines) provides a rationale for and outlines the institution's intention to offer programmes and services that will afford all students adequate academic, environmental and personal support, in the interests of ensuring that they have a fair chance of achieving academic success. The policy provides principles and values to guide the provision of a comprehensive range of student development and support services responsive to the diversity of the student population, and strategies for managing the implementation of such services in an integrated manner. The policy includes a clear statement on language, including the language of learning appropriate to a multilingual society. Strategies and outcomes of the policy are clear and measurable. The implementation of the policy is the responsibility of a dedicated senior manager. Information about the student support and development policy and its services and programmes is widely disseminated throughout the institution.

4. CHE Quality Enhancement Project 2014



The Quality Enhancement Project has as its aim the improvement of student success by means of enhanced student learning – this is with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable.

Focus area 2: Enhancing student support and development

Career and curriculum advice, life and academic skills development, counselling, student performance monitoring and referral.

5. Academy's Academic Development Policy

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The Academy during the exhibition of November 2014

Policy statement

As the Council on Higher Education (2004) acknowledges, a small private institution such as the Academy faces particular challenges in providing an acceptable level of academic support and development. To address this issue the Academy has as one of its staff members an Academic Development Coordinator who, in close collaboration with the Academic Head, the Director and the lecturers, manages academic development and support. The Academy is committed to provide an environment wherein all students, independent of race and gender, can maximise their chances of academic success. In order to attain this, **access is widened** by mechanisms such as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and literacy and numeracy entrance tests for students who experience difficulties in English (as second/third language). Historically disadvantaged students are given opportunities for individual help by the Academic Development Coordinator. Of primary concern is to respond to the **articulation gap** between first year undergraduate students' school attainment and higher education – problematic for students regardless of background. Early **identification of high-risk and underprepared students** is essential in order to offer support before they could potentially drop out of their studies. Academic support is not given in isolation but is **embedded in the mainstream programme** which promotes the requisite skills and literacies – such as reading and writing academic texts, computer literacy, and library and research skills – and taught within disciplinary content in an integrated manner. Where necessary, strategies for particular individuals or small groups of students are employed in the form of **workshops**, always within the context of relevant subject-specific tasks.

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