Contents

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS FRAMEWORK

1. BACKGROUND

The higher education system in South Africa is one of low participation, high attrition and low completion. Substantial racial disparities exist in the system, with very small proportions of African, Coloured and Indian students graduating in regulation time. By the end of regulation time, more students have been lost to failure and drop out than have graduated. First year attrition is high nationally, at 33%, with some racial disparities also apparent. National data on participation, graduation and attrition rates, suggest that only 5% of African and Coloured youth are succeeding in higher education.

A cohort study conducted by the CHE showed very high overall attrition for undergraduate students, and found that after 5 years of study, 55% of enrolled students would have been lost to the system. Low completion and high attrition are also hugely inefficient and come at a significant cost to universities and students. Nico Cloete has described this as a lose-lose situation for poor students who drop out and find themselves "*being revolved back into poverty*", with the added burden of student debt they cannot repay because they lack the qualifications to secure formal employment (Cloete 2016: 4).

UWC's study on retention and success, entitled Operation Student Success (2016-2018) similarly found high attrition and low retention rates, indicating that a significant numbers of students drop-out of university and fewer complete in regulation time. The CHE noted in 2015, that "*persistent failure across the system and attrition on the scale we see cannot only be attributed to (a) student deficits and (b) poor teaching and will not change spontaneously.*"

UWC's Student Retention and Success Framework presented in this document attempts to prioritise the retention and success of our undergraduate students and encourages everyone at UWC to work together to increase retention and student success. The framework provides a holist approach to the retention and success challenge experienced at UWC, it is hoped that the framework will be used to followed by Student Retention Action Plans that will emanate from all sectors of the University, and that will identify action steps, responsible parties, timelines and intended outcomes.

Our retention data shows that on average UWC loses around 20% of students by the start of their second year; and an additional 20% of students in the following two years. Our success data shows that on average, at UWC, less than 25% of an average three-year degree cohort completes within regulation time; while a total of 50% drop out. By graduation time, which is the third year of a three-year degree, we would have lost significantly more students (40%) than we graduate (24%).

We also know that around 80% of students who do not return at the start of their second year, leave UWC despite being academically and financially able to register for a second year of study. This represents a serious retention problem for the institution. Student success data indicate that, in line with the national picture for undergraduate programmes experience very low on-time completion, significant delayed completion and high attrition.

2. INTRODUCTION: THE COMPLEX LANDSCAPE OF STUDENT SUCCESS

More and more studies are advancing that student success is shaped by a complex, layered and dynamic interplay of events and circumstances related to personal, institutional and broader contextual factors. Moreover, these multivariate interrelationships vary across contexts, so one cannot make predictions or model the outcomes from one higher education institution to another. However, what is clear is that radical transformation of higher education institutions is needed if retention and student success is to be improved, and that it is not just the responsibility of students to adapt to their new environment, but a mutual engagement of students and higher education institutions **is needed** in this endeavour (Subotzky 2011:182).

Three common approaches to studying student academic success in higher education are: statistical approaches which use quantitative indicators to measure progression, graduation and throughput rates; approaches which explain student performance in terms of their individual attributes and behaviours; and, thirdly, approaches which look to the social and cultural processes of institutions to explain student performance (CHE 2010: 168).

While statistical analyses are useful for demonstrating and monitoring trends such as graduation rates, and identifying problems related to student progress, this type of analyses is less useful as explanatory frameworks and providing more nuanced understandings of student success.

Approaches which focus on individual attributes and behaviours tend to emphasise factors such as academic preparedness or under-preparedness, learning styles, and the degree of 'fit' between a student's home and school culture with the university. These studies tend to look at attributes such as motivation, cognitive ability, English language ability and academic reading and writing skills, as well as group characteristics such as gender, race, schooling and class (CHE 2010: 169).

Institutional approaches emphasise the nature of the higher education institution and how it enables or constrains students' access to and participation in the social and academic processes of the institution. These studies explore 'how meanings and historical social relationships in universities are contested and negotiated' (CHE 2010:169).

It would seem that an approach that takes all three of these aspects into account is necessary if effective solutions are to be sought to low throughput rates. This viewpoint is upheld by Ramrathan (2013: 212), who identifies three perspectives from the literature for looking at student 'drop-out' from higher education, and maintains that all three perspectives should be considered in order to gain an holistic understanding of student attrition. Viewed through the 'student lens', dropout is associated with students' negative experiences of campus/university life; the 'institutional lens' depicts dropouts largely as a result of external, background factors; and the 'South African lens' looks at drop-out in terms of the apartheid legacy, and takes a race-based, socio-political and socio-economic perspective.

Taking cognisance of the need for a holistic approach, this framework incorporates student *and* institutional perspectives on what contributes to high attrition rates and to improving retention and success, within the South African context, with a particular emphasis on UWC.

A study into student retention and graduate retention at seven higher education institutions (Letseka, Cosser, Breier and Visser 2010: 35) identified the major reasons for students leaving their studies in 2002, in order of priority, as:
- financial – insufficient funds to pay for studies; inability to afford three or four years of continuous study, so students 'stop out' with the intention of returning later;
- academic – failing courses and facing academic exclusion;
- frustrations with administrative systems and staff;
- loss of interest in the programme – possibly resulting from uninformed/limited programme choice
- inadequate career guidance and counselling at the university.

In the current environment South African universities need to also consider **student well-being** in terms of mental and physical health; and personal experiences of **campus safety and security as possible reasons for student drop-out**.

3. ACADEMIC FACTORS IMPACTING STUDENT SUCCESS:

3.1 Teaching and Learning: The curriculum
In defining the 'curriculum' for the purpose of this framework, it is useful to first place emphasis on the overt, or explicit curriculum, where the purpose of such a curriculum is to ensure that students receive coherent learning experiences that contribute towards their personal, academic and professional learning and development. This definition of curriculum assumes the existence of a statement of intended outcomes to be achieved; and descriptions of what is to be taught, what students must learn and what is to be assessed. This is not to say other conceptualisations of the curriculum are irrelevant: for example, the impact of the hidden curriculum in universities is undisputed and is located in the powerful kinds of learnings students derive from the way institutions are organised, including the behaviours and attitudes of academic, administrators and others.

The CHE warns that there are 'systemic obstacles to access and success, particularly in relation to curriculum structure' (*starting and exit levels, duration, pace and progression pathways, and assumptions about students' prior knowledge*) and that the current curriculum structure has remained virtually unchanged for the last hundred years (2013:15). The major structural problems are identified as the *articulation gap* between secondary and higher education; *key transitions* within curricula for which many students may be unprepared; and the need for *enhancement of undergraduate curricula* 'to meet contemporary local and global conditions' (CHE 2013:19).

At UWC, it was found that significant structural challenges exist in relation to curriculum; not only have some curricula remained unchanged for a decade and more, but that academic staff who ought to be leading curriculum innovation often do not have the skills and tools required to do so, which in itself goes far in explaining the lack of changes to curricula. In addition, there is a distinct *lack of alignment* between exit level outcomes (which academics are often unfamiliar with) and the learning outcomes of individual modules; in addition to a lack of alignment between what is taught and what and how learning is assessed. The result is *incoherently designed curricula*, or, in the worst case, a complete lack of thoughtful curriculum design, and a lack of consciously designed *progression* in learning as students advance through *higher levels of complexity*. Students are on the receiving end of such curriculum incoherence, and often fail to make linkages between learning materials, module outcomes and content, resulting in a *fragmented approach to learning* and significant obstacles to developing critical thinking skills.

> Therefore, it is essential that at UWC we engage in *regular review of modules, curricula, programmes, departments and other entities, curriculum rules and policies* guided by robust review and evaluation processes, which are regularly interrogated and renewed.
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> Secondly, there is an urgent need to *build curriculum design capacity* amongst academics in all faculties so that regular reflection on curriculum will lead to improvements in the coherence of the curriculum, alignment, progression and horizontal and vertical articulation.

3.1.1 High Impact Modules: enabling academic staff involvement

Tinto (2007: 8) reminds us of the importance of enacting policies and plans for the enhancement of teaching and learning at the level of the faculty, and laments the practice of assigning junior, or relatively inexperienced teachers to typically large first-year classes; '*even though research tells us that the first year is the critical year in which decisions to stay or leave are most often made, where the foundations for effective learning are or are not established and where, by extension, the potential returns to institutional investment in student retention and learning are likely to be greatest*'.

It is the case at UWC that many of our high impact modules are first year modules, with a substantial number also at second year level. At UWC, *high impact modules* are defined as those experiencing low pass rates; while *highest impact modules* are those with failure rates of 30% and above, that cater for large number of students and/or are offered across a number of programmes and faculties.

> In short, high impact modules are those that present difficulties for large numbers of students and impact negatively on pass and throughput rates, and consequently, should be prioritised for intervention. Focussing on improving the quality of teaching and learning in high impact modules is a key means of achieving the link between an institution's student success framework and its academic disciplines and the involvement of academic staff (Ogude, Kilfoil and du Plessis 2012: 26-28).

3.2 First Year University Transition

The first-year university transition could be regarded as a period of adjustment and change for many incoming students. Student transition can be defined as 'the process students go through to become ready to engage in learning as they move into new educational contexts, for example, school-leaver to first-year university student' Wahr et al. (2009:434). Studies undertaken on first-year transition indicate that many students encounter difficulties in moving from school or work to university. Some of the challenges identified include students' lack of connectedness to the university; difficulties in developing a student identity; unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the institution; and feeling lonely and isolated. Much of the difficulties faced by the institution in trying to address transition challenges was the change in the identity of a 'typical university student'. With the widening of access and participation at South African universities student population became more diverse in regard to race, age, schooling experience and socio-economic backgrounds.

This diversity has influenced students' feelings of connectedness to the university which have impacted on their identity development and ultimately their decision to either stay and succeed or leave university. Bourdieu (1973) outlines that due to diversity in students and their educational backgrounds, not all students enter university with the dominant cultural capital, which is determined by their socio-economics links, to survive on campus. This creates an uneven playing field and further disadvantaging students to fit into their new university environment.

The above concern has resulted in many institutions shifting their focus of attention away from the institution to the student in addressing transition challenges. The repositioning of the student at the centre of the university experience and purpose allowed the university to acknowledge the students' perspectives. Levy and Earl (2012:xiii) add that in so doing, considerations and representations of the university experience from the students' viewpoint have become a vital part of gaining valuable information on how more students can be provided with more quality experiences so that the outcomes for all students, institutions and societies are qualitatively and quantitatively beneficial.

Much of the literature on transition studies reveals that for students to perform a successful first year transition, they need to develop a sense of belonging and connection with their new peer groups, lecturers and the wider university community. Perry and Allard (2003) further claim that students need to make connections between the experiences they bring with them to university and their new knowledge obtained at university. Pather and Dorosamy (2018) state that higher education institutions have a moral obligation to ensure that the students who gain access into their universities are understood and accommodated for inclusively. They further state that students' university expectations should be made explicit to all first-year curriculum planners, academics and support units to ensure a successful transition into university.

At UWC there are many initiatives taking place in silos to address this issue. Faculties, support units and institutional structures need to work together to ensure a holistic approach is used to ensure that students have a successful first year experience that can lead to graduation in the required time frame.

In this regard UWC has implemented two projects specifically: First Year Experience (FYE) and First Year Transition Programme (FYTP) under the banner Operation Student Success to address first year student transition and success. Such projects once again will need the support of all stakeholders to ensure the success of such initiatives.

First Year Experience (FYE): The First Year Experience at UWC is a new initiative at the institution. It is anticipated to foster a successful undergraduate student experience through strategic programming that focuses on positive academic transitions and the development of learning communities. Through partnerships with faculties, departments, units, staff, and student leaders, we envisage our FYE to create the space for students to define how they will engage, learn, and thrive at the University of the Western Cape. The aim of UWC's FYE is to provide student-centred initiatives to enhance FY student transition and a quality student experience, thereby enabling students to stay and succeed at UWC.

The following objectives were identified:

- To build a sense of community & connectedness with the institution;
- To promote academic integration between staff and students;
- To promote social integration between students & peers;
- To provide students with academic support;
- To provide a safe, inclusive and quality FYE;
- To promote student retention & success

First Year Transition Programme (FYTP): The FYTP is a second new initiative at UWC. The focus is to provide first year undergraduate students with mentorship to promote student success through engagement. The goal is to support all first year students to help them reach their full potential in their university experience. The FYTP at UWC will inspire Collaboration, Integration, Respect and Trust with all first year students, First Year Transition Officers (FYTOs) and mentors on the programme. The FYTP will assist students with a smooth transition beyond first year at university so that they could graduate within the minimum period. The retention and throughput of students is facilitated using different strategies and interventions in the FYTP.

The following objectives were identified:
- To facilitate the smooth transition of first year students into university.
- To enhance the throughput and retention of the University of the Western Cape.
- To contribute towards the personal, academic and social adjustment of first year students.
- To develop graduate attributes.
- To develop strategic, student-centred academic support initiatives.

3.3 Academic preparedness and the 'degree of fit' between students' home/school and university culture

Next to financial reasons as the greatest factor affecting undergraduate completion, students' academic 'under-preparedness', as it relates both to social class and the high school curriculum is cited as one of the main reasons for student failure, for prolonged completion time and for student departure (Scott, Yeld and Hendry 2007: 42-43).

The concept of under-preparedness relates not only to subject knowledge, but also has 'cognitive, epistemological, affective and socio-cultural dimensions' (CHE 2013: 57).

It therefore manifests in a range of ways, from students struggling with the formal curriculum, with academic literacy, with independent study, to adjusting to the university environment, among others. A particular concern is that under-preparedness masks students' *abilities* and their potential to succeed. Therefore it needs to be understood as a relative concept, in terms of what students are underprepared for, and not as an inherent deficiency of certain categories of students: it does not account for the structural faults in the higher education system which they are entering, nor the under-preparedness of higher education institutions to accommodate their diverse learning needs (CHE 2013).

The parameters of student under-preparedness for university study is attributed largely to the inferior education that the current majority of the student population has received, in poorly resourced schools with poorly trained teachers. Their under-preparedness manifests in a variety of ways, and more specific parameters of student under-preparedness at UWC have been described as:

- 'Narrow and limited discipline specific knowledge, fraught with misconceptions
- Poor reading comprehension problems largely due to their inability to process general and expository (science) texts
- Limited experiential learning experiences
- Metacognitively poor learning styles
- Poor problem-solving skills, lack of basic computer literacy skills and poor numeracy skills' (Breier 2007: 7)

Breier has also suggested that other dimensions of unpreparedness that are said to impact on student success at UWC are *poor study habits*; *lack of knowledge of different degree programmes* and of *subject admission requirements* to different programmes, resulting from a *lack of subject and careers advice in schools*; *difficulties with English* as a second or even a third language; and *not having the confidence (or fluency in English) to ask questions or to participate in class* (Breier 2007:10).

The impact of under-preparedness on students' learning journeys cannot be underestimated, hence it is imperative, that as an institution we continue our efforts at Open Days and other pre-university engagements to *provide quality information* to students about degree programmes, their admission requirements and the variety of post-university career options; and these efforts should continue through student orientation processes. The *formal Orientation programmes* conducted for first year students need to be extended for longer during the first year to continue building students' knowledge in these areas.

Secondly, we need to routinely engage in formal processes of *identifying students who are at risk* of failing or underperforming very early on through implementing a fully functional *early warning tracking and alert system* that monitors student performance at the module level.

Thirdly, we need to *introduce interventions* (beyond tutoring) to support students and help them succeed academically, including summer/winter schools where appropriate, which are underpinned and informed by a *functional tracking system* and *data analytics processes* able to provide immediate and regular information on student performance within modules, programmes and cohorts. In addition, variety of *learning support services*, like tutoring, mentoring, writing centre, library, should be strengthened and expanded to provide for the support needs of all UWC students.

Fourth, we need to *concentrate resources and prioritise attention to the high risk, high impact modules*, in order to improve the curriculum, teaching (including promoting the use of blended learning), orientation to learning and assessment in these modules. *Tutorials and a peer mentoring programme* will be offered in all high-risk modules, while specific and timely interventions will be designed to supplement learning during the course of the learning programme in order to mitigate against high failure in these modules.

4. INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

Higher education institutions, on the one hand, question and transform power relations, while on the other hand they reproduce inequitable power relations, such as in taken for granted teaching and learning approaches. 'Norms of behaviour are deeply embedded within social practices and are viewed as the way things are, the way they always have been, and the way they always will be' (Ramrathan 2013: 216). Student access to and success in higher education is impacted by the extent of their social and academic participation in institutional spaces and processes of the institution, which in turn is enabled or constrained by the institutional culture and the degree of 'fit' that students experience.

> '(D)ominant cultural constructs such as class, race, gender, sexual orientation and language shape campus social relationships. These constructs influence behaviours, attitudes, taken-for-granted assumptions and everyday experiences. They are institutionalised in access and success patterns, staff profiles, curricula, university structures and the dominant discourses on access and success.' (CHE 2010:173)

How students experience these constructs and organisational values, culture, social structures and social interactions, and whether they facilitate student integration or serve to alienate them, are important determinants of student retention or departure/non-completion (Koen 2007: 59-62).

Koen (2007) explains that students need to feel they are a useful and important part of the academic process and that their integration into academic and social milieus – facilitated by congruence between student values and the academic process - plays a significant role in retention and time to completion (Koen 2007:29).

4.1 Student Engagement

Student engagement has been defined as *"the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution* (Trowler 2010: 2).

Research conducted for UWC's Operation Student Success Project included a comprehensive review of the literature on student engagement and success conducted at UWC over many years. The literature showed that among the factors identified by staff as directly attributable to poor student performance at UWC were *low class attendance and participation* in class, while other staff acknowledged that, in certain faculties, the mode of teaching had remained unchanged over the years, which by implication impacted on student attendance.

On the other hand, students described the factors that affected their attendance as large class sizes and unsuitable venues; attitudes of lecturers; irregular attendance of lecturers; course content and lecturing style; and personal issues such as health, finance and transport.

The SASSE student engagement survey conducted at UWC in 2014 indicated that there is much work to be done to *improve student engagement*, through improving the *quality of students' participation* in educationally purposeful activities; their *interaction with academic staff and their peers*; and the *conduciveness of the institutional environment* to promoting student engagement.

Learnings from the SASSE study suggest that, at UWC we should promote high level academic activities that challenge students and *involve them in higher order learning, including facilitating the achievement of graduate attributes*; and encouraging student *participation as tutors and mentors*.

Secondly, we should strive for *quality interactions with academic staff inside and outside the classroom*, so that these engagements orient students to the academic world, and expose them to how disciplinary experts think through, for example, staff mentoring and advising programmes.

Thirdly, good quality experiences with staff also relate to the *extent and frequency with which students discuss their marks*, the *quality and promptness of assessment feedback*; the extent to which they discuss their *future plans and career options* with staff; and the extent to which they *engage with staff outside of the classroom*, in fieldwork and other activities.

And finally, learning collaboratively with peers is an important form of student engagement, hence the *formation of learning communities* amongst students ought to be encouraged as part of the formal curriculum, as well as informally and spontaneously.

4.2 Student Voice

Students must become key participants in the University's academic project. At UWC there is a lack of formalised processes of bringing student voices into conversation with academic matters. Student course evaluations remain sporadic, and the feedback provided by students is mostly not applied to improving the quality of teaching and learning. As it stands, course evaluations are mostly a matter between individual lecturers and their students, which reduces the possibility of collaborative reflection on teaching and learning challenges and ways of addressing those. The system of student class representatives is similarly sporadic and has not been regarded as an essential means of giving voice to students' concerns; and neither have student committees (organised within programmes or within faculties) become formalised and routine. Where curriculum reflection and renewal does take place, it is not common for students to be included in these reflections. A consequence of the absence of student voice is that student are denied a stake in improving the quality of learning, teaching and their own success.

Students need to feel that they are an important and useful part of the academic process, and that they have a stake in their own education. At UWC we need to ensure that the *absence of student voice is addressed and challenged*; that *student course evaluations* are routinely done, formally reflected upon and applied to quality improvement; that *student committees* are constituted to provide a means of student participation and feedback to the faculty and University; and that *students be involved* in Faculty processes of reflection on teaching and learning, including regular completion *of student satisfaction surveys.*

4.3 Mutual understanding and knowledge

George Subotzky (2011) reminds us of the importance of effective interaction based on mutual understanding and knowledge for both students and the institution, as a pre-condition for transforming student outcomes. In this regard it is important that students have sufficient knowledge of the institution and the requirements of higher education study. This includes understanding what is required for success at every step pf the student walk. This involves making sound choices about study directions and course loads; understanding assessment expectations; and mastering personal skills such as 'time management, self-study skills, determination and self-discipline'. It also includes knowing when and where to seek help; and understanding university rules, requirements and processes at every step of the student walk, in order to negotiate and manage their way through their academic journey.

Similarly, we are reminded that the institution needs to have sufficient knowledge about its students, including who they are, their academic and non-academic profile and background; risk factors and readiness levels; their needs and behaviours, in order to effectively address student needs and predict risks at every step of the walk.

Subotzky suggests that '*if sufficient mutual knowledge is acquired and translated into effective action at each point in the student walk, a closer alignment between relevant student and institutional attributes and activities is likely to be achieved*', hence improving the 'degree of fit' towards improving student success.

> The *development of mutual understanding and knowledge* occurs at every stage along the academic journey and requires that the institution engages students in ongoing discussion while providing essential information. Student Orientation activities and programmes play in essential role in initially setting out the framework of understanding and knowledge for the student, but ongoing engagements are required to be initiated by multiple sectors of the institution.
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> For the institution, *systemising data analytics approaches* is essential to charting a course towards improving student success through improving the knowledge the institution has of elements such as student risk; student profiles and background; programme risks, patterns and trends in student performance; in order to be able to intervene and offer support to students early on before considerable damage is done.

5. FINANCIAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS IMPACTING STUDENT SUCCESS

Financial factors have been widely reported as the most important factor for students not completing their studies across all HEIs in South Africa. UWC has among the highest proportion of students of low socio-economic status of South African residential universities. In other words, a significant percentage of UWC undergraduate students are first generation scholars and come from poor backgrounds with few financial resources. A very recent Student Expectation Survey of first year students found that the percentage of first generation students ranged from around 46% (in CHS, Dentistry, Science and EMS) to around 58% (in Arts, Law and Education); while an average of 62% of first year students relied on NSAFS and/or bursary support, with the highest percentage being in Education (75%) and the lowest in Dentistry (40%). We also know from earlier research that around 40% of UWC students plan to work while studying. Regarding student housing, 88% of students are not in a university residence, while 42% indicated that their daily commute to campus takes 2 hours or longer. These statistics summarise some of the financial and socio-economic challenges faced by UWC students.

In studying attrition (drop out and stop out), it appears that that most UWC students who do return to complete their studies after stopping out do so because they realise it will make them more employable, while the next most motivating factor is that their parents or relatives are able to provide funding for their studies; further evidence of the critical role that financial factors play in student decisions about their studies.

Not only have many students in the past found NSFAS funding inadequate and problematic in the way it is administered, but financial issues related to fees, accommodation and work study impact negatively on their academic work. Earlier studies showed that a high proportion of UWC graduates were earning additional income in one form or another to support themselves and/or their studies. Although insufficient financial resources is the biggest factor in non-completion of studies, the associated stress of not being able to sustain themselves was identified in previous studies as an indirect financial-related factor which impacted on students' ability to study effectively and to pass their courses. Failing their courses means reduced NSFAS bursary funding, aggravating their anxiety, and so on in a vicious cycle.

5.1 Socio-Economic Factors

Related financial and socio-economic factors impacting student success include *food insecurity, access to healthcare, students' off campus living conditions and the cost of commuting to campus*.

A number of studies at South African universities in recent years have highlighted that nearly a third of students at the country's universities live with *food insecurity*, meaning they are unable to access

adequate, nutritious food on a daily basis. And studies suggest that these numbers may be even higher. The impact of hunger on physical well-being and academic performance does not need to be explained, but we need to be reminded of the impact of hunger on students' mental well-being, as studies suggest hunger may cause mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety.

South African universities are experiencing an accommodation crisis, with most universities being able to provide residential accommodation to only a small percentage of the student population. For UWC students this often means *staying in unsafe conditions off campus*, and/or experiencing *unsafe commutes to campus.*

As large numbers of UWC students live off campus, a large proportion of students commute from home and other off-campus lodging. Forms of commute include walking, the use of public transport (buses and trains) and the use of minibus taxis; as well as the use of personal cars.

Some challenges students face in commuting include long waits for public transport and congestion which often lead to students arriving late for classes; the cost of travel adds to students financial burdens; severe challenges exist in relation to personal safety on these commutes; and the need to get 'home' before dark impacts the level of student engagement and limits their use of educational facilities on campus. A large number of off-campus students walk to campus, often on routes that are unsafe and often unsightly.

Regarding access to on-campus healthcare, students have complained about the *relatively high cost of consultations* at the campus health clinic, where postgraduate students, irrespective of their financial situation, are charged more than undergraduate students. Students reported paying for consultations, for medication and for blood tests, with some of the latter tests being more expensive on campus than at private retail pharmacies. Issues were raised around *patient confidentiality*, especially at the reception area where despite patients can overhear others describing the medical problems they present with. As a consequence, many students do not visit the campus health clinic. through updated patient files.

Student mental health services across the country are largely unable to cope with the demand from students for these services, as we experience a spike in psychological and mental health challenges globally on university campuses. UWC's counselling services have responded creatively to these needs by expanding provision to conclude phone messaging services as well as online programmes that are aimed at assisting students to identify and develop their personal strengths towards achieving academic success. One-on-one counselling is offered, but there is a long waiting list as the clinic struggles to provide for the needs of the large numbers of students who need support. In addition, attempts have been made in some, but very few, programmes to *incorporate well-being teaching into the curriculum.*

We need to consider how we take responsibility for the *safety and security of our off-campus students*, especially, but not exclusively, those residing in known 'boarding houses' and private 'residences' which, although they do not belong to the university accommodate large numbers of UWC students. The latter have been plagued by poor security as well as poor sanitation and a lack of delivery of other basic services, as well as a lack of monitoring of the conduciveness of these environments for studying and academic work.

At UWC tackling *food insecurity* needs resources and sustained attention (already provided by a number of UWC projects), though various interventions including food banks, feeding programmes, campus food gardens and other solutions that come out of the research and action-focussed projects already in existence at UWC.

At UWC, we need to sustain and intensify our efforts to *build more on-campus accommodation* and to engage regularly with the City of Cape Town to impress upon the City the need to focus on the *transport needs of UWC students*. In addition, *walking routes and paths* within the vicinity of campus need to be well-secured all hours of the day, not just during peak student commute times, while efforts must be made to provide more congenial walking environments.

Regarding access to healthcare, UWC needs to consider ways of *improving student access to quality and affordable healthcare*, in order to provide more comprehensively for student healthcare needs.

UWC needs to sustain and expand its varied efforts (online programmes, phone apps etc) to provide *mental health support* for its students, including and in addition to one-on-one counselling. It is also recommended that more programmes *consider the integration of well-being teaching* as a form of psych-social support for students, into the curriculum.

6. UWC STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS FRAMEWORK: THE STUDENT WALK
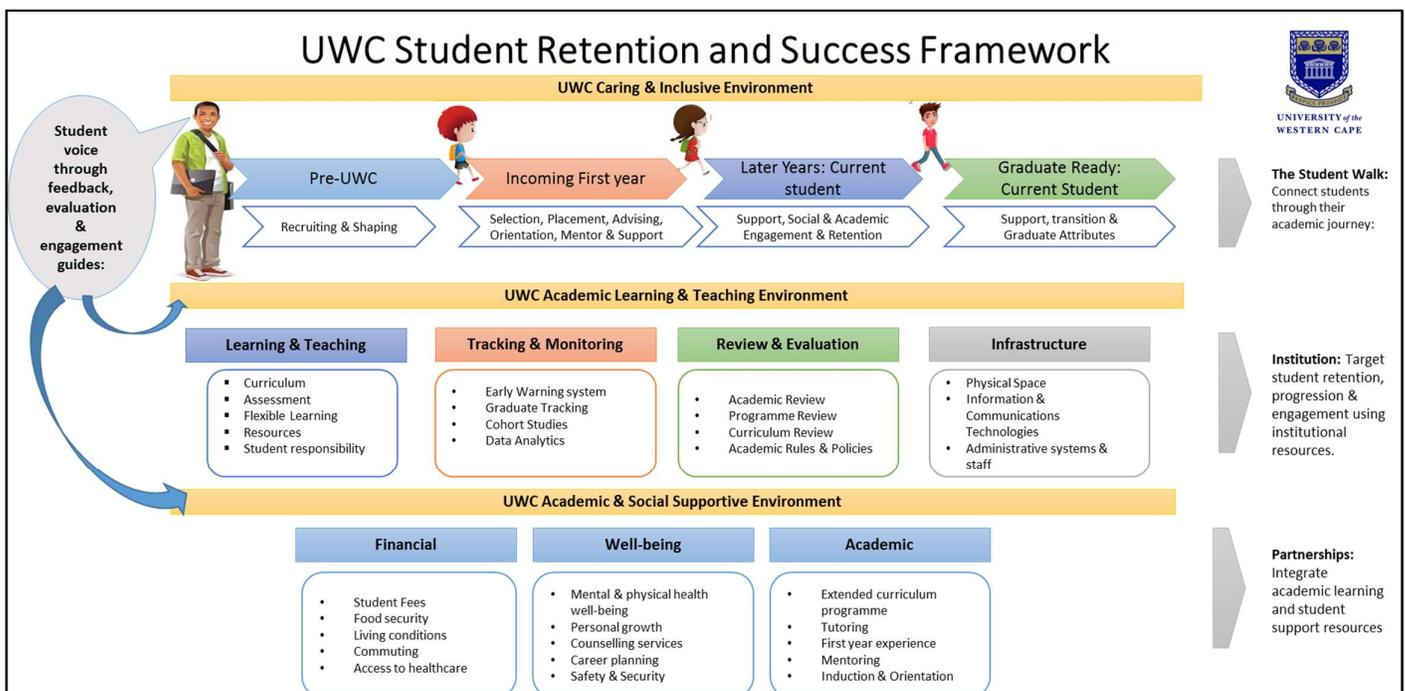
University of the Western Cape Student Retention & Success Framework (Brown, V & Pather, S. 2018)

George Subotsky and Paul Prinsloo (2011: 185) employed the concept of the *student walk* to refer to the numerous ongoing interactions between student and institution throughout each step of the student's journey. At UWC, this begins with recruitment and application and proceeds through selection, registration and orientation; and includes every phase of the student journey to graduation.

6.1   GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles will guide implementation of this framework and strategy:

1. Student success is everybody's business.
2. Student success must become central to the mission of the institution.
3. Taking action is as important as reflection and analytic insights.
4. Student success initiatives require mutual engagement of students and the University.
5. Translate what we know into institutional action to achieve substantial improvement.
6. Engage in ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the framework over time
7. Human resources are important investments into student success and retention.
8. Work across silos in a systemic and integrated approach with an effective implementation, management and coordinated plan.

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