# AN EVALUATION OF THE FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT SUCCESS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

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# AN EVALUATION OF THE FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT SUCCESS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

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**DECLARATION**

I, Sheralyn Ann Watkiss, student number 202316769, hereby declare that the treatise for Magister of Business Administration is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another University or for another qualification.

*Sheralyn Ann Watkiss*

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this treatise to my mom

*"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".*

Nelson Mandela

Thank you for believing in the power of education, for nurturing my sometimes idealistic dreams and for believing in my ability to change the world.

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# CHAPTER 1

# ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

## 1.1    Introduction

The context of this study centres on Higher Education in South Africa, the role that this sector plays in terms of economic development and the implications that face Institutional management in retaining students in the Higher Education system. Central to this study is the notion that student development theory can be used as a basis towards understanding the customers of Higher Education, how to better serve the customers needs and finally, retain students in the system through more effective management practices.

The education sector is growing at an increasingly rapid rate as a result of strategic goals of countries and organisations such as the United Nations promoting the notion of education for all people (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009). The aim of the strategic goals adopted by developing countries in particular is to enhance the human capital or skills and knowledge of its people since education is a known contributor towards economic, social and political development. Higher Education in particular is known to contribute towards the human capital and economic development of a country. The Higher Education sector in South Africa for instance contributes approximately 1.5% to the country's gross domestic product (GDP), significantly higher than other industry sectors (apart from gold and agriculture) in the country (van Heerden, Bohlmann, Giesecke, Makochekanwa, & Roos, 2007). Figure 1.1 provides a context of the relevant importance of the higher education sector towards economic growth.
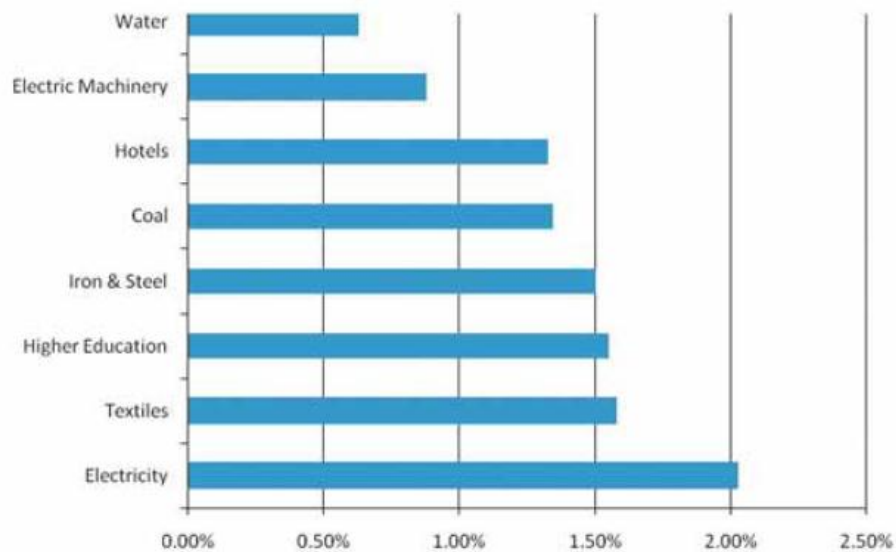
**Figure 1.1 Relative sizes of selected South African industries (%GDP)**
(van Heerden, Bohlmann, Giesecke, Makochekanwa, & Roos, 2007)

Despite the importance of this sector in South Africa's economic development, Higher Education has undergone significant challenges in the last decade that influence the progress and development of human capital. The largest challenge facing this sector is the retention and successful throughput of students into the labour market. There are an increasing number of students who do not graduate from their respective courses, which places strain on the country in terms of supplying the demands of a skilled labour force as well as ensuring consistent increases in economic development. The inability of this sector to supply the needs of the market increasingly threatens the survival of Higher Education Institutions.

Additional threats to Higher Education Institution's are seen in the growing competitive environment where students have increased choice of service providers brought about through technology and globalisation. Private institutions are a growing threat to traditional public Institutions making up approximately 30% of global enrolments, thus representing the fastest growing sector in the world (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2009). Due to the increases in competition, Higher Education Institutions are increasingly recognising that Higher Education is a service industry, and are placing greater emphasis on meeting the needs of their customers, that is, students (De Shields, Kara & Kaynak, 2005: 129). De Shields et al (2005) go on to state that the customer orientation has been underemphasised in colleges and

universities compared to profit-oriented organisations. For service businesses like Higher Education Institutions however, a loyal customer base is known to lead to enhanced business success (Rowley, 2003: 249).

While numerous studies on student success have focused on the factors relating to students themselves (such as academic preparedness; financial support etc), not many studies have focused on areas that are within the institution's ability to affect. Tinto and Pusser (2006) therefore designed a model for institutional action in order to provide guidance to Higher Education Institutions in meeting the needs of their students. This model is based on student development theory and outlines five conditions or factors that are necessary in order for students to succeed and be retained in the system. The five factors are a) Institutional commitment, b) Expectations, c) Support, d) Feedback and e) Involvement. These factors formed the basis for the study and are discussed in more detail in chapter three.

## 1.2    Statement of the problem

There is a need to explore the factors affecting student success that are within the institutions ability to effect with the aim of retaining students in the Higher Education system.

Student development research shows that Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) should create an environment whereby students are able to become involved in educationally purposive activities, interact with peers and faculty staff, and where there are sufficient resources available to support learning. Successful implementation of these factors is known to contribute towards student persistence and retention. Retention is further acknowledged in business literature as an important consideration of an organisation's success. This perspective has become increasingly important for HEI's where there is growing competition for customers who have a wider choice of service provider supplied by the global market. Meeting the needs of the customer is as important as ever before.

## 1.3    Aim of the study

The primary aim of the study was to evaluate final year undergraduate students' perceptions of institutional actions that promote student success.

## 1.4    Methodology

A quantitative evaluative exploratory-descriptive survey research design was employed in the pursuance of the aim of this study.

An online survey based on Tinto and Pusser's (2006) model of institutional action was developed according to a five point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Coolican (1999) states that a survey consists of a series of questions that ask people about their attitudes, beliefs, life satisfactions and concerns and was therefore deemed an appropriate data collection method for the current study.

### 1.4.1   The sample

The target population for this study consisted of undergraduate students registered in their final year of study at a specified South African Higher Education Institution. This population group was selected because final year students have been in the system for some time and have persisted through their respective qualifications, thus making their feedback valuable. Non-probability convenience sampling was used to target students from this population group.

### 1.4.2   Data analysis

Data was analysed according to descriptive statistics of means, standard deviations and frequency counts in response to the aim of obtaining an overall view of the perceptions that students have of the institution's actions to support student success.

## 1.5    Outline of the study

The study is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter outlines the study, problem statement and methodology.

Chapter two will focus on managerial considerations within Higher Education. The chapter takes into consideration the broad macro context within which this sector finds itself and pays particular attention to customer relationship management as a means towards customer retention.

Chapter three discusses student development theory in order to better understand the development of the customers of Higher Education and the factors associated with their success. In particular, Tinto and Pusser's (2006) Model for Institutional Action is discussed as this model forms the basis for the questionnaire in this study.

Chapter four briefly outlines the problem being explored as well as the aim of the study.

Chapter five highlights the research methodology and the research approach employed in order to answer the aim of this study.

Chapter six presents the empirical results of the study and a discussion concerning areas that were identified by respondents as requiring attention from the Institution's management.

Chapter seven highlights conclusions, limitations and recommendations for future research concerning the study.

# CHAPTER 2

# MANAGERIAL CONSIDERATIONS WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION

## 2.1. Introduction

Increasing pressure to align education strategies with global goals of education for all people, as well as an increasingly competitive market mean that institutions within the Higher Education sector will be required to be managed more as a business in order to ensure survival. Generally, the business environment is considered to be dynamic whereby it changes constantly and businesses must be in step with the changing environments in order to remain relevant to customers. Successful businesses and organisations take note of changes within the immediate operational environment as well as changes in the broader environment within which they operate. The higher education (HE) sector is no exception to the rule. The HE sector has been impacted by macro-environmental developments and changes largely brought about through globalisation as well as increasing pressure to align education strategies with global goals of education for all people.

The environments within which businesses operate typically consist of three levels, namely: (a) the micro or internal environment, (b) the market environment and (c) the macro environment, or external environment. Environments are important to note, as they influence how businesses conduct themselves (Nieuwenhuizen, Badenhorst-Weiss, Rossouw, Brevis & Cant, 2009).

This chapter therefore outlines the three environments within which Higher Education Institutions operate in order to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence the management of Institutions as businesses. Within the umbrella role that Higher Education plays in the economic development of a country particular attention is given to the competitive nature of Higher Education, the view of students as customers and the importance of customer retention through relationship building.

## 2.2.    Macro-economic contribution of Higher Education

The link between education and economic growth has been established through various research studies over the years (Burda and Wyplosz, 2009). Education contributes directly to the growth of national income by improving the skills and productive capacities of the labour force. The economic growth of a country is strongly affected by the skills of its workers, where "a more skilled population almost certainly, including both a broadly educated population and a cadre of top performers, results in stronger economic performance for nations" (Hanuskek and Wößmann, 2007: 76), (Burda and Wyplosz, 2009:86). As such, human capital becomes an important consideration for growth. Human capital is affected by available physical capital that provides for job creation, a labour force to meet job demand, as well as government infrastructure and the health and wellness of employees. Human Capital has been central to theories on economic growth and development for many years. A study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers in 2007 defined Human Capital as "the stock of knowledge and skills embodied in an individual as a result of education, training, and experience enhancing his or her productivity" (van Heerden, Bohlmann, Giesecke, Makochekanwa & Roos, 2007: 8).  The concept that investment in human capital promotes economic growth essentially dates back to the time of Adam Smith and the early classical economists, who emphasized the importance of investing in human skills (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 2005:15). Burda and Wyplosz (2009: 85) mention that an input such as human capital is a feature that distinguishes rich, fast growing countries from poor, stagnating ones. Countries that invest more in education and training therefore tend to be more economically stable in the long term.

The idea of human capital being a positive contributor to economic growth means that many countries have followed productive strategies of raising the schooling levels of the population in order to enhance the economic stature of that particular country.  The 'Education for All' initiative and a central element of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) outlined by the United Nations follows this approach. South Africa's development strategy in the form of JIPSA (Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition) and ASGISA (the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for

South Africa) is in line with the MDG's, and places a central focus on education and skills training.

The strategic priorities set by countries in order to develop human capital are supported by several international studies that provide evidence of the importance of Higher Education in particular towards economic growth (van Heerden, Bohlmann, Giesecke, Makochekanwa & Roos, 2007; Burda and Wyplosz, 2009). As a result, emphasis on economic arguments, such as the development of human capital in line with a country's needs is being brought to the fore. The latter sees a shift in focus from the traditional research-oriented role of a University, to one of demand and supply of a labour force. Many advocate that the contributions of Higher Education should be seen more broadly, including less tangible aspects such as building better lives, creating informed citizens, deepening democracy and promoting social inclusion and cohesion (van Heerden, et al 2007: iv). According to the Department of Education (1997), Higher Education in South Africa is intended to provide for individual aspirations for self-development, supply high level skills for the labour market, generate knowledge that is of social and economic benefit, and develop critical citizens (Council on Higher Education, 2009). Scott, Yeld and Hendry (2007: 1) bring together both sets of arguments where they state that it is "widely accepted that in the contemporary context of the knowledge society and economic globalisation, higher education is vital for development in all its facets".

"The South African higher education system has strengths and immense potential to contribute to the economic and social development needs of South Africa, the Southern African region and the African continent" (Council on higher Education, 2000:12). It is however important to note that as a developing country, South Africa is faced with the dilemma of addressing social problems, establishing a productive niche as well as trying to avoid falling too far behind the developed world. The role of Higher Education in this regard is undisputed. Higher Education is increasingly viewed as a major engine of economic development (Altbach, et al 2009: xii), where knowledge production is especially important for developing countries with the return on investment being much higher. As a developing country, McGrath and Akoojee (2007: 428) mention that South Africa's development strategy is in line with international trends in thinking about globalisation, the knowledge economy and the

link between education, skills and competitiveness. Globalisation has and will continue to play an important role in influencing the macro-environment within which the Higher Education sector operates. The macro-environment is considered in the subsequent section, where broad effects of globalisation are discussed.

## 2.3.   Macro context of Higher Education

Globalisation can be defined as the "reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology (ICT), the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions" (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2009:iv).  The information age, or knowledge society, as this era is termed has an important impact on the education sectors in various countries in the global arena (Altbach, et al, 2009).

The Higher Education sector in particular has experienced significant changes over time. According to Oldfield and Baron (2000: 86), competitive advantage was an alien concept in 1990. Nowadays there is more pressure on institutions to become world class and competitive, as well as to facilitate an effective education process (Liebenburg & Barnes, 2004: 2). This is supported by Ivy (2001: 276) who states that tertiary institutions in the United Kingdom and South Africa are undergoing fundamental metamorphosis, where changes in government funding as well as globalisation mean an increasingly competitive market. In the 21st Century context, it is consequently important that the Higher Education sector acknowledges that it is in a market (Oldfield et al, 2000) supplying a service to customers and as such is influenced by factors occurring in the macro environment. One such factor includes how the Higher Education sector is viewed by whom. This viewpoint has an impact on how institutions in this environment are managed. The management of institutions depends largely on whether Higher Education is viewed as a public or a private good. Traditionally Higher Education has been seen as, and therefore managed as a public good, contributing to society through educating citizens, improving human capital, encouraging civil involvement and boosting economic development.  In this sense, the customer of higher education is society, particularly if viewed in macro-

economic terms. The importance of this outlook was noted in the previous section where Higher Education contributes towards human capital and development of a country.  According to Burda and Wyplosz (2009: 95) public goods have two characteristic features, namely, a) they are non-excludable (the consumer cannot legally or physically prevent others from using it simultaneously) and b) they are non-rivalrous (consumption by one person does not affect others' ability to enjoy it). Knowledge is considered to be a public good for the above mentioned reasons.

In the past several decades however, Higher Education has increasingly been seen as a private good, largely benefitting individuals. The cost of education, and Higher Education in particular, often excludes certain segments of the population in that the cost becomes the responsibility of the customer (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2009: xii). The authors go on to state that approximately 30 percent of global enrolment in Higher Education is private,  representing the fastest growing sector worldwide (Altbach,et al, 2009: xiv) and is gaining increasingly more attention in Africa. Marketing efforts and branding of Institutions provides evidence of the fact that market share for public institutions is being competed for or reduced (Liebenberg & Barnes, 2004).

The business implication of private versus public goods in a business sense pertains to resource allocation and funding, where public infrastructure is provided for by governments at no or little cost. In the South African context, in the period between 1996 and 2008, government funding for public Higher Education increased from R5.2 billion to R14.8 billion (Higher Education South Africa, 2008: 2), and by a further R4 billion in 2010/2011 (Council on Higher Education, 2010). Despite the increases in funding, several institutions struggle to continue to fund their activities, partly due to the relationship between funding and student enrolment. Increased enrolment results in increased government funding for that particular institution. However, the inability of students to pay fees and the institution to collect fees, results in increased debt (Council on Higher Education, 2000: 19). The resultant increase in institutional debt has management implications in terms of providing resources to customers as well as maintaining general stability of the organisation and good management practice. Coping with increases in debt has invariably meant that institutions moving towards models of privatisation or self-generated income.

Increased debt and privatisation of public universities is a global trend where countries such as Australia and China have been asked to earn more of their operating expenses by generating their own revenue. Apart from tuition fees, public universities obtain income from research funds, income from the sale of university-related products, consulting and research services as well as university-industry linkages  (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2009: xv), thus taking on elements of being a private good.  This is true for the South African context, where funding from privatisation and self-generated income is needed to address the demands brought about through increased access to education outlined by the country's strategy for growth. It must be noted that South Africa's educational history under apartheid policy was not designed to provide the majority of the South African population with the human capital necessary to perform skilled work. The country's education strategy therefore has its roots in redressing past inequalities brought about through the apartheid regime while simultaneously meeting the demand and supply of the global labour market and ensuring the growth and development of the economy and its citizens.

The reality of the situation in South Africa is that institutions who are managing limited budgets and staff capacity are reliant on self-generated income for financial stability. The additional income assists in increasing staff capacity in order to cater for the demands of increased access of students as a means to enhance student retention and throughput rates.  In order to generate sufficient income, Institutions need to position themselves within the market, and become competitive in order to attract and retain customers. The market of Higher Education is discussed in the subsequent section, with brief mention of South Africa's education structure. Particular attention is paid to the result of the macro environmental strategy of increased access to students who may not be well prepared for the tertiary sector and the ensuing high dropout rate.

## 2.4.    The market of Higher Education in South Africa

According to Nieuwenhuizen et al, (2009), the term market refers to the consumer and his needs, where Hoffman and colleagues (2005) state that a market refers to

any individual, group or organisation willing, able and capable of purchasing a firm's product. The potential consumers therefore make up the market.

Consumers of education in South Africa are guided by the structure of the education system, and the level at which they are capable of purchasing the product. Capability is determined largely by achieved academic level. South Africa is on the lower end of academic achievement with illiteracy levels estimated to be at approximately18% of adults over 15 years of age (Big Media, n.d).  Furthermore, matriculation rates for 2010 were 67.8%. Of these learners who achieved a matric pass, only 23.5% achieved university entrance (News24, 2010).

Based on the latter-mentioned level of academic achievement, there are various routes that South African citizens can employ in order to enhance their skills.  The structure of the education system provides these routes that can be pursued. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) frames the recognition of the educational qualification levels in South Africa and attempts to provide for varying levels of education and training of all South Africans. The NQF currently recognises three bands of education, namely, a) General Education and Training, b) Further Education and Training, and c) Higher Education and Training as illustrated in table1.

**Table 2.1: Structure of South Africa's education system**
(Big Media, n.d)

| BAND | SCHOOL GRADES | NQF LEVEL | QUALIFICATIONS |
|---|---|---|---|
| HIGHER | | 8 | Doctors degree |
| | | 7 | Masters degree Honours degree Postgraduate diploma |
| | | 6 | General first degree Professional first degree postgraduate Bachelors degree |

| | | 5 | First diploma |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Higher certificate |
| | | | Certificate |
| **FURTHER** | 12 | 4 | Diplomas |
| | 11 | 3 | Certificates |
| | 10 | 2 | |
| **GENERAL** | 9 | 1 | Grade 9/Adult Basic Education and Training level 4 |
| | 8 | | |
| | 7 | | |
| | 6 | | |
| | 5 | | |
| | 4 | | |
| | 3 | | |
| | 2 | | |
| | 1 | | |
| | 0 | | |

The recognised bands of education as outlined in Table 1 above are designed in order to support the strategy of education for all citizens. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note the context within which the market of Higher Education operates. Attention is given to this sector alone since the other categories are beyond the scope of the current study.

In line with the education for all initiatives, Higher Education institutions in South Africa have been mandated to provide increased access to all students. Increased access to Higher Education however is not equated with increases in quality education. Yorke and Longden (2004: 2) state that "policies of greater access to education capture students who may not be so well prepared, informed, or likely to possess the cultural and social capital necessary to support success". This may lead to many students dipping in and out of programmes. While increased access to education has benefits in creating a knowledge economy and providing workplace skills, the present system also has a number of fundamental problems and weaknesses as a result of its apartheid past and developments in the past decade

(Council on higher education, 2000). According to Rowley (2003: 249) "widening participation in Higher Education, increased student numbers, and a more diverse student population coupled with arrangements relating to student funding, have put the issue of retention more firmly on the agenda" since "part of the constraints affecting Higher Educations' transformation goals include the inefficiencies in the system in terms of low throughput and graduation rates" (Higher Education South Africa, 2008:2). Similarly, Tinto and Pusser (2006:3) mention that although "access to Higher Education has increased and gaps in access between groups has decreased, rates of college completion generally and gaps in completion between high and low income students have not followed suit." South Africa, for instance, is on the lower end of the scale when it comes to numbers of employees with post-school degrees and diplomas (Meyer and Rourke, 2003:116).

South Africa is experiencing a situation where unacceptably large numbers of graduates drop out of the system each year. According to statistics taken in 2000, the total number of students that drop out of South African universities and technikons was at least 100 000 students per year out of an enrolment of approximately 600 000 students (Council on Higher Education: size and shape of higher education task team, 2000: 17). A study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 2008 reported that, "of the 120,000 first-year students in higher education institutions in the 2000 cohort, 36,000 (30%) dropped out in their first year of study, and a further 24,000 in their second year. Of these 120,000, only 26,500 (22%) graduated" (Council on Higher Education 2010: 236). These figures increased by 2005, where the dropout rate stood at 50% of the total number of students enrolled nationally (Council on higher education 2010: 236). These statistics have consequences in terms of funding in a public as well as private capacity, and in matching Higher Education output (supply) and the demands of the modernising economy.

The importance of developing a knowledge economy relates to the understanding that South Africa could manage and mediate the effects of globalisation and the competitive demands of the modernising economy (Council on Higher Education (2000:27). However, Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009:v) state that African universities in particular have found it challenging to find their place in the global

Higher Education context where they "barely register on world institution rankings and league tables and produce a small percentage of the world's research output". The lack of competitive advantage has an effect on attracting customers as well as obtaining self-generated income.

In addition to increased competition, the effects of globalisation are further seen in 'brain migration' where skilled people seek out countries that offer greater rewards for the individual concerned. The result is felt economically and socially, where the short supply of graduates to replace this brain drain mean that specialist posts are not filled. Increased competition effectively means that in order for South Africa to meet global demand, its economic policies need to continue to meet this international competitiveness. An inability to compete will increasingly marginalise the South African economy and have profound effects on its rate of growth and consequences for the social wellbeing and stability of South African society (Council on Higher Education (2000: 27).

In order for South Africa to effectively develop and nurture a knowledge economy that is able to meet "individual aspirations for self-development, supply high level skills for the labour market and develop critical citizens" (Department of Education, 1997), Higher Education Institutions first need to consider the low retention and throughput rates of their students or customers and the implications that this has for managerial decision-making. Consideration of the retention and throughput rates should be institution specific and would relate to the internal functions or micro-context of the particular institution. The following section considers the micro-context of institutions or businesses within Higher Education. The service orientation of Institutions towards their customers is discussed, with consideration given to the notion that students are in fact customers. The notion of customer relationship management is a consideration within the following section as it relates to customer satisfaction and retention.

## 2.5. The micro context of Higher Education

The micro-context of a business refers to the internal operations of that particular business as it conducts itself within the market and macro arena. Higher Education

institutions (excluding distance education) operate as service businesses due to the concept of inseparability (Hoffman, Czinkota, Dickson, Dunne, Griffin & Hutt, 2005). The concept of inseparability can be broken down into three characteristics as follows:

a. Service provider involvement: refers to the physical presence of the service provider when offering a service. The service provider becomes part of the physical experience upon which customers base their experience. Staff at HEI's have direct contact with students within a lecturing capacity as well as in a resource or administrative capacity. The contact that staff has with students directly impacts the experience that the students have with the institution.

b. Customer involvement: service firms design their operations to accommodate the customer's physical presence. An increasing trend is to incorporate customer participation in the service delivery process. That is, the customer co-produces the service and frees up the service provider to tend to customers who require additional assistance. Increased access to students has resulted in bigger classes and the building of lecturing venues to accommodate the increased numbers. As a result, students are encouraged to take part in more group work activities that allow the lecturing staff to assist individual students more effectively.

c. Other customer involvement:  occurs when several customers share a service experience, for example a learning experience in a classroom. Involvement with lecturing staff as well as peers is noted to be a strong indicator of student success and retention (Astin, 1985; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Involvement as it pertains to student development is discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. For now it is sufficient to take note that involvement is relevant in impacting student success and is a key feature of service firms and the relationship with customers.

(Adapted from Hoffman et al, 2005)

Research surrounding service firms typically makes reference to customers who purchase specific services. There is much controversy in the literature concerning the notion that students are customers. Franz (1998) for example, mentions that students are not passive recipients of knowledge that rely on the institution to delight or entertain them. Rather, the student plays an active role in the learning process. However, given the characteristics of a service firm mentioned above, the customer indeed plays an active role in the activities of the service firm.

The customer matter needs further consideration when one considers who the customer actually is. Quinn, Lemay, Larsen and Johnson (2009) mention that there is difficulty within the literature to define the customers of HE, as these may be internal (students, other units/departments) or external parties (society, parents). The purpose of HE is considered in Emery's (2001) perceptive, where the author mentions two different educational philosophies adopted by institutions, namely, a student-customer programme and a product approach. Under the student-customer programme, students obtain a service from the institution that supports their self-development needs. Student satisfaction is known to increase with this model, at the expense however, of programme quality as the author maintains that Institutions may become too focused on pleasing the customer. Conversely, the product approach shifts the focus from student satisfaction to student capabilities, where the institution is responsible for producing knowledgeable and effective students who possess skills and talents. In this sense society becomes the customer, where a country develops through increased human capital. Considering the South African Department of Educations statement that the role of HE is to meet "individual aspirations for self-development, supply high level skills for the labour market and develop critical citizens" (Department of Education, 1997), both these approaches to understanding the student as a customer as well as a product bear relevance. The one view supports the macro environmental needs, while the other considers the micro-environmental approach of the organisation.

Saunders (2011) mentions that an understanding of students as customers is consistent with free-market logic, where the relationship between students and institutions becomes defined in economic terms. This is supported by Bejou (2005), who mentions that although administrators find it difficult to accept students as

consumers, in reality that is in fact what they are. The author goes on to state that students are buyers who register for courses, apply for graduation and make donations as alumni, and that as long as this relationship benefits both parties, it will continue in this manner.

The fact that Institutions are becoming increasingly competitive regarding market share supports the argument that students are customers. For the purpose of this study, attention is given to the micro-environment of a HEI as a service business and therefore supports the argument by Saunders (2011) and Bejou (2005) that students are customers. Customer retention is an important consideration for the long term profitability of businesses in general, but in particular in HEI's due to the increasingly competitive global arena. The following section outlines the value attached to retaining customers in business as well as the idea that customer satisfaction leads to retention.

## 2.6. Customer retention

Early business literature was concerned with creating the customer (attracting and generating customers) as a means towards business success. In recent years however much attention has been focused on retaining the customer. Gupta, Lehman & Stuart (2004) states that a one percent increase in customer retention had almost five times more impact on firm value than change in discount rate or cost of capital. Ang and Buttle (2005) support this where they mention that there is general consensus in the literature that focusing on customer retention can yield many economic benefits.

Customer retention is influenced by a number of factors, including customer satisfaction. Factors affecting customer retention are discussed briefly, with reference to the importance and benefits of customer satisfaction.

Firstly, retaining customers in a service industry is often linked to whether the customers' expectations match up with their perceptions of the service. Lovelock (1991) mentions that in "people processing" services, such as educational

institutions, those providing a service are often evaluated by the customer with regard to their technical or customer-related skills, personality, consistency of performance and appearance. The above mentioned evaluation is tied to the level of satisfaction that customers experience.  Customer satisfaction is thus linked to customers' perceptions of the value they receive (Oldfield and Baron, 2000; Hoffman, et al 2005) and has been described as a cognitive or affective reaction in response to a once-off or multiple set of service experiences (Hu, Kandampully & Juwaheer 2009).  McDougall and Levesque (2000: 393) view this concept more broadly and state that customer satisfaction should be viewed as customers' overall evaluation of the service provider and not the service alone.

Benefits of customer satisfaction include increased effectiveness in business operations, due to the institution's knowledge of the customer, higher profits and increased retention. Customer satisfaction has also been linked to customer loyalty which results in higher rates of customer retention (Zeithaml et al., 2009; Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003**).**

A second factor influencing retention includes customer interaction with one another. Oldfield and Baron (2000) mention that student interaction, and their influence upon one another is a powerful determinant of overall satisfaction concerning the institution. Therefore, customer retention in the context of Higher Education may be influenced by the interaction between students. Student development theory supports the notion that student involvement with peers has an effect on student retention in the system (Astin, 1985).  The current study consequently supports the view that involvement is important for retention, although particular attention is paid to institutional involvement as opposed to student interaction with peers. In this sense the focus is on the overall perception of the service provider and its importance for customer satisfaction and retention.

Customer relationship management has been found to have an effect on retaining customers. A brief overview of customer relationship management is provided in the subsequent section as well as how this approach might look within a HEI.

## 2.7.   Customer relationship management

In today's competitive environment brought about through technology and globalisation, consumers are now more selective and have a larger variety of choices for their needs than ever before (Nyadzayo & Roberts-Lombard, 2010). As a result, Mostert and De Meyer (2010: 27) state that "organisations are increasingly focusing on building long-term relationships with customers, thereby increasing their probability for success by offering customers higher levels of satisfaction, increasing customer loyalty, and ultimately retaining customers. Rowley (2003) states that for businesses like Higher Education, a loyal customer base leads to enhanced success. The author further states that the nature of the relationship that the student forms with the institution is paramount. This approach is referred to as customer relationship management (CRM), and is gaining popularity amongst marketers.

According to Ngai, Xiu and Chow (2009), there is no accepted definition of customer relationship management (CRM), although it typically comprises a set of processes and enabling systems that support a business strategy as well as to build long-term, profitable relationships with customers. Similarly, Buttle (2004) states that CRM can be defined as a core business strategy that integrates internal processes and external networks to create and deliver value to customers at a profit.  According to Day (2002), CRM seeks to understand and influence customer behaviours through meaningful and mutual communication with customers to improve customer acquisition, retention, loyalty, value and profitability over time.  Similarly Mostert et al (2010) state that building relationships with customers will increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, leading to retention. The authors further state that even if the customer does not form a relationship with the organisation, the organisation's efforts to build a relationship could result in greater levels of customer satisfaction and retention.  Finch (1994) mentions that a strong relationship with clients is based on the customer feeling completely satisfied and appreciated,  where there is a feeling of trust and dependence on the service provider, and where the customer feels that the services offered are reliable. Similarly, Hoffman et al (2005) outline a number of retention strategies that businesses can employ, including building trusting relationships. Trust in this sense is made up of the service provider's

expertise, the service provider's reliability and finally, the service provider's concern for the customer.

Bejou (2005) outlines a model of CRM that is drawn from research in interpersonal relationships, family and marriage relationships, marketing, sales and sales management and services marketing. According to this model, all relationships go through four stages as follows:

a) Exploration: A successful encounter results in mutual perception of benefits. Attraction is encouraged and promises are made. If both parties perceive that a relationship could be equitable and neither perceives the other as being opportunistic, then a "sale" takes place. The relationship is forged and from this point could either continue or dissolve.

b) Expansion: As the relationship develops, confidence is raised and an ethical concern is established. Trust is built through overcoming obstacles. If the seller's actions improve the quality of the relationship, the relationship can expand, either through additional sales or through referrals to new customers.

c) Commitment: This stage is marked by increasing satisfaction and loyalty. The seller encourages positive word of mouth as a means of promotion. Both sides perceive new benefits and rewards, which are higher than the perceived rewards of switching to a new relationship.

d) Continuation or dissolution: At this stage the buyer can decide whether to continue the relationship or end it. The buyer compares original expectations to current reality and compares past experiences with the seller. If the buyer continues with the relationship, the pattern of expansion is repeated. However, if the seller has failed to maintain satisfaction, the buyer's loyalty may be worn to the extent that the perceived benefits of continuing the relationship appear lower than the benefits of exploring a new one. At this point the relationship is dissolved.

According to Bejou (2005), Virginia State University's Business School applied principles of CRM which helped students become involved from recruitment through to post-graduation. As stated previously, involvement is noted to be a key factor in student persistence and student success (Astin 1985; Kuh, 2001) and is noted in business literature to contribute towards service industries retention of customers.

Both viewpoints are important for the current study in understanding areas of consideration for managing retention rates in HEI's. Bejou (2005) states that applying the CRM model to students needs to be adapted only slightly.

The exploration stage would typically involve recruitment of new students through various marketing initiatives. Stage two, expansion, would refer to enrolment management. In this sense, the focus is on new student orientation and advising services relating to financial aid, course selection, accommodation and psychosocial development opportunities through the course of their time with the institution. Stage three, the commitment stage refers to retention and progression of students. The latter is accomplished through continuous mentoring of students, correct registration of modules and providing meaningful experiences through internships and interactions with faculty. The author states that if the institution successfully manages this stage, it will carry the student (customer) through a degree programme and into alumni activities. Rowley (2003) mentions that customer relationship management provides a more holistic view of, and set of strategies for working with students. While a customer relationship model was not employed for the current study, elements of the stages within customer relationship management are explored as a means to evaluate the overall perceptions that customers have of the institution in question. Stages two and three mentioned above are of particular importance and are explored further in Tinto & Pusser's (2006) model in chapter three.

## 2.8. Conclusion

The Higher Education sector is an important contributor to the advancement of the human capital and economic development of a country. However, changes in the macro environment, such as globalisation and the strategic priorities of education for all, have meant that Higher Education Institutions are faced with challenges of increased access, an increasingly competitive environment and low customer retention and throughput rates.

The challenges brought about through macro-environmental policies and developments are not going to change. Low retention rates within a service oriented

business have important managerial considerations. As such, institutions need to look to the business environment to consider strategies for customer retention.

Customer relationship management provides an understanding of the benefits of approaching students as customers as well as factors that customers may see as important for the relationship to continue. In the HE context this is important in promoting student retention. Bejou (2005) outlined four steps in relationship management particularly as it may relate to HE. These steps support and build into Tinto and Pusser's (2006) model of institutional action, upon which the current study is based.  Chapter three outlines aspects of student development theory as it relates to student success, with particular emphasis placed on Tinto and Pusser's (2006) model of institutional action.

# CHAPTER 3

# STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND STUDENT SUCCESS; MODELS OF INSTITUTIONAL ACTION

## 3.1 Introduction

Chapter two introduced the idea that students are customers of higher education. It was also noted that as higher education institutions move into a more competitive market, market share and customer retention is important for institutions' survival. Understanding the market and knowing the customer is therefore vital for the business of higher education.

Student development theory provides an understanding of how students develop as well as the factors that are considered vital for student success. Research on student development thus provides an important context for the current study. The subsequent sections provide a brief overview of student development theory particularly as it pertains to student success.

## 3.2 Student success

Student success has been defined in the literature in many ways. Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie and Gonyea (2008) mention that research on student success has typically focused on persistence and degree [or qualification] attainment as the primary measures of student success. Tinto and Pusser (2006) mention that there has been an assumption that knowing what influences students to leave (attrition) is the equivalent of knowing what makes them stay (persist) and succeed, which is not the case. The authors mention that persistence in a qualification is a component of success, but should not be considered as the mirror image of the process of leaving. They mention further that a core feature of student success needs to centre on student learning as an overall measure.  A student that persists and is retained in the system, but who undergoes no learning or development cannot effectively contribute to the notion of human capital and development. Learning and skills attainment is supported by Chickering's first vector of psychosocial development, which identifies learning or the acquisition of skill and intellectual competence as fundamental for

student development. Chickering's theory of student development is discussed in more detail in the subsequent section.

According to Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek (2007) student success should be considered more broadly than learning skills. Student success should include factors such as academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposive activities, satisfaction, the acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives and post-college performance. The authors mention further that many models that study student success include five sets of variables, namely a) student background characteristics including demographics, b) structural characteristics of the institution, such as size, mission and selectivity, c) interactions with faculty, staff members and peers, d) student perceptions of the learning environment and e) the quality of effort students devote to educationally purposive activities. These factors then need to be considered in terms of how they relate to gender, ethnicity and race.

For the purposes of the current study, student success is considered to encompass elements of persistence as outlined by Tinto el al (2006), as this links with the focus of this study being that student retention and persistence is vital for development in all its facets, and that attrition of students is a management, economic and psychosocial concern. Student development theory provides some insight into student success and the development of students. Different theories and models of student development or change have been proposed over the years, where at least two general perspectives are evident. One perspective considers the process of individual human growth, namely psychosocial developmental theories. The other focuses on environmental or sociological origins of student development, or impact models (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991: 17). Environmental models focus less on internal processes of student change and more on the process and origins of change. Both these approaches are discussed in the subsequent section. Particular emphasis is placed on environmental theories as opposed to psychosocial theories of student development as the former relates directly to the focus of the current study. Three psychosocial theories are discussed briefly in order to gain a broad overview of individual development of students. Although there are many more theories from which to draw information, the scope of the study precludes in-depth

analysis. The three psychosocial theories were chosen in order to provide a context regarding student development as it links to identity formation.

## 3.3    Psychosocial models of student development

Psychosocial development refers to a process where an individual is required to accomplish tasks at different and sequential stages. Routes of these models typically originate from the work of Erik Erikson and other developmental psychologists. Three such models are described briefly, namely, Chickering's seven vectors, Marcia's ego identity status and Heath's maturity model.

Perhaps the most prominent theory of psychosocial development as it pertains to students has been that of Arthur Chickering's seven vectors (Chickering, 1969). Chickering maintains that identity development is crucial for growth, which is accomplished through stimulation from the environment.  Chickering mentions that students move through various stages of development that focus on intellectual competence and the attainment of skills, emotional maturity, and the development of a strong self-concept that although autonomous is interdependent with others. In addition, the individual develops an understanding and appreciation of diversity, which has become significant in recent years with increased access of students with differing demographic characteristics. Finally the student develops a sense of purpose and integrity as this links to his or her identity and allows his/her behaviour to be influenced by values and beliefs that have been learned over the years. Thus behaviour is congruent with intellectual competence and a sense of future purpose, understanding of the self as an interdependent individual, and the understanding that diversity is to be appreciated. According to Chickering, the development of identity is based on stages, but also involves interaction with and understanding of the environment. James Marcia also speaks of stages of development. However, the author refers primarily to individual development rather than interaction with the environment.

Marcia's model of ego identity status holds that individuals form their identity based on resolving two psychosocial tasks, a) experience of a crisis, which involves

choosing between meaningful but competing alternatives and b) occupational and ideological commitments. Marcia identifies four responses in this regard.

    i.    Identity diffusion: individuals have not experienced the crisis of searching for an identity, nor have they made any occupational choices.

    ii.    Identity foreclosure: individuals have not undergone any crisis, but have made occupational commitments. These commitments tend to be based on external influences, such as parents.

    iii.    Identity moratorium: individuals are actively involved in a crisis period where they are searching for or defining their identity. Commitments at this stage may still be emerging.

    iv.    Identity achievement: individuals have successfully weathered the crisis and have made commitments in terms of occupation, sex roles and values.

<div align="right">Adapted from Pascarella and Terenzini (1991: 25)</div>

The individual therefore gains a sense of identity from resolving internal crises at certain stages.

Similar to Chickering, Heath's maturity model (1968) outlines five dimensions of maturing, namely, a) ability to symbolize an experience, through writing, drama, music or mathematics for example; b) becoming more allocentric (other centred); c) becoming more integrated; d) becoming more stable ; e) becoming more autonomous (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991). Similarities between Chickering and Heath are seen in areas of gaining skills, allocentrism, integration with others, as well as gaining a sense of autonomy.

Psychosoical theories of development have many similarities. Miller and Winston (1990:101) identified five core developmental principles that are consistent across literature:

1) Psychosocial development is continuous in nature and occurs regardless of the environment, although not independent of it.

2) Psychosocial development is cumulative in nature, where tasks must be accomplished before higher level ones can be taken on.

3) Psychosocial development progresses along a continuum from simpler to more complex behaviour.

4) Psychosocial development is normally orderly and stage related

5) Psychosocial development is reflected in developmental tasks

(Miller & Winston, 1990:102)

From a student development point of view, commonalities between the three theories mentioned above relate to the fact that the formation of identity is crucial for success; particularly as this identity relates to others and as it forms one's choices regarding roles in occupations, gender identity and behaviour. Identity formation occurs through interactions with one's environment, although it would occur in spite of it.

While psychosocial development is important and relevant to understand in terms of holistic student development and has relevance in understanding student success, the purpose of this study focuses on the factors in the student's environment that promote success. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the environmental angle of student development as it pertains to the scope of the current study. Four approaches are discussed in the subsequent section, namely, Astin's theory of involvement, Pascarella's model for assessing change, Tinto's theory of departure and Kuh's theory of student engagement. These four theories were selected for the notable impact that they have had on student development literature in that they are specific to the college or university environment with a less explicit base in other theories, for example, sociology, organisational impact or industrial psychology (Pascarella et al, 1991).

## 3.4 Environmental models of student development

### 3.4.1 Astin's theory of involvement

Similar to the view that higher education supplies human capital necessary for development, Astin (1985) is of the opinion that the purpose of higher education is talent development, where the institution maximises the intellectual and personal development of its students. Under this approach, the institution invests its energy and resources in maximizing involvement and in helping students develop their

talents and abilities to the fullest.   The author maintains that for an institution to effectively do this, the learning environment must support three conditions, namely, student involvement, high expectations, assessment and feedback.

Astin (1985) defines involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the learning experience. In this sense a highly involved student is one who, for example, "devotes considerable energy to studying, spends a lot of time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (Astin, 1985:36). Therefore the concept of involvement is equally applicable to students as well as to faculty and staff.

### 3.4.2  Pascarella's General model for assessing change

Pascarella (1985) gives consideration to an institution's structural characteristics and general environment as important in the development of students. He suggests that this development is a function of the direct and indirect effects of five major variables (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991: 53).

1. Structural and organisational characteristics
2. Student background/pre-college traits
3. Institutional environment
4. Interactions with agents of socialisation (Faculty and peers)
5. Quality of student effort

The five variables mentioned by Pascarella each have an effect upon one another and shape how successfully a student learns. In this model, the structural features of an institution are considered to have an indirect effect on student development, where student development is directly affected by the institutions general environment, quality of student effort and students interactions with staff and peers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

### 3.4.3 Tinto's theory of student departure

Similar to Pascarella's model, Tinto believes that students enter university with different personal, family and academic characteristics as well as intentions and goals that are shaped during the student's time at the institution. According to Tinto, successful integration into the system occurs when students feel satisfied with formal and informal encounters with the academic and social systems of the institution. This integration provides students with a sense of belonging, where the student shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty and follows the formal and informal requirements of the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Conversely, negative interactions reduce integration and belonging, increasing the possibility for voluntary withdrawal. The author acknowledges that involuntary withdrawal often occurs as a result of financial strain or family commitments, however, these factors are outside the scope of this study to explore.

### 3.4.4 Kuh's theory of student engagement

George Kuh (2001) built onto theories by the likes of Astin and Tinto in his theory of student engagement. In this sense student engagement refers to the amount of time and energy that students devote to educationally purposeful activities, as well as the institution's allocation of resources that induce student's participation (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). Zhao and Kuh (2004) state that student engagement refers to a range of behaviours which institutions can influence through teaching practices and programme interventions.

Research by Kuh et al (2008) indicate that student engagement positively affects academic grades in both the first and last years of study, as well as persistence to the second year at the same institution. These results were the same even after controlling for pre-college characteristics and variables such as merit aid and parental education. Of significance is that the effects of engagement move in the same positive direction for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. It must be noted however, that these results are based primarily on a western sample population.

### 3.4.5 Similarities between environmental theories of student success

Similarities between each of these theories mentioned above lie in the fact that there is a mutual relationship that needs to exist between students and the institution itself. In summary, Pascarella (1985) considers student development to be a function of students' background characteristics, interactions with faculty and students, and the quality of effort in learning and developing (Pascarella and Terenzini (1991:55). Astin's (1985) theory of involvement and persistence highlights the fact that students who are involved in academic activities are more likely to persist through difficulties and therefore remain in the system. In this sense persistence affects retention and would typically describe student success. More recently, Kuh (2001) speaks of student engagement as the time and energy that students put into educationally purposive activities as well as the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices. An engaged student will therefore be more likely to use resources effectively and develop in areas of choice. Retention would thus be linked to prospects for individual development.

Similar to both Astin (1985) and Kuh (2001), Tinto's (1975) student departure theory emphasizes the process of social and academic integration as critical influences on student persistence, that is, the higher the levels of integration into the social and academic systems of an institution, the less likely the student is to withdraw voluntarily. Persistence therefore becomes a mark of successful adjustment.

While each theorist mentioned above uses different terminology, common features of the theories are related to student involvement or engagement and institutional engagement that leads to persistence.

Engagement from an institutional perspective, as proposed by Kuh (2001) is an important consideration for the current research since the focus of the research is to evaluate the conditions within a Higher Education Institution that are known to have an effect on student success. The model of choice that the current study utilised was Tinto and Pusser's (2006) Model for Institutional Action. No recent models that focus

on the institution itself while still considering the importance of student development theory were found. As such, this model found preference within the context of the present study and is discussed briefly in the following section.

## 3.5    Tinto and Pusser's model of institutional action for student success

Tinto and Pusser (2006) indicate that literature typically identifies five factors in an environment that are considered necessary for student success, namely a) institutional commitment, b) expectations, c) support, d) feedback and e) involvement.

The following diagram illustrates the model as described by Tinto et al (2006).
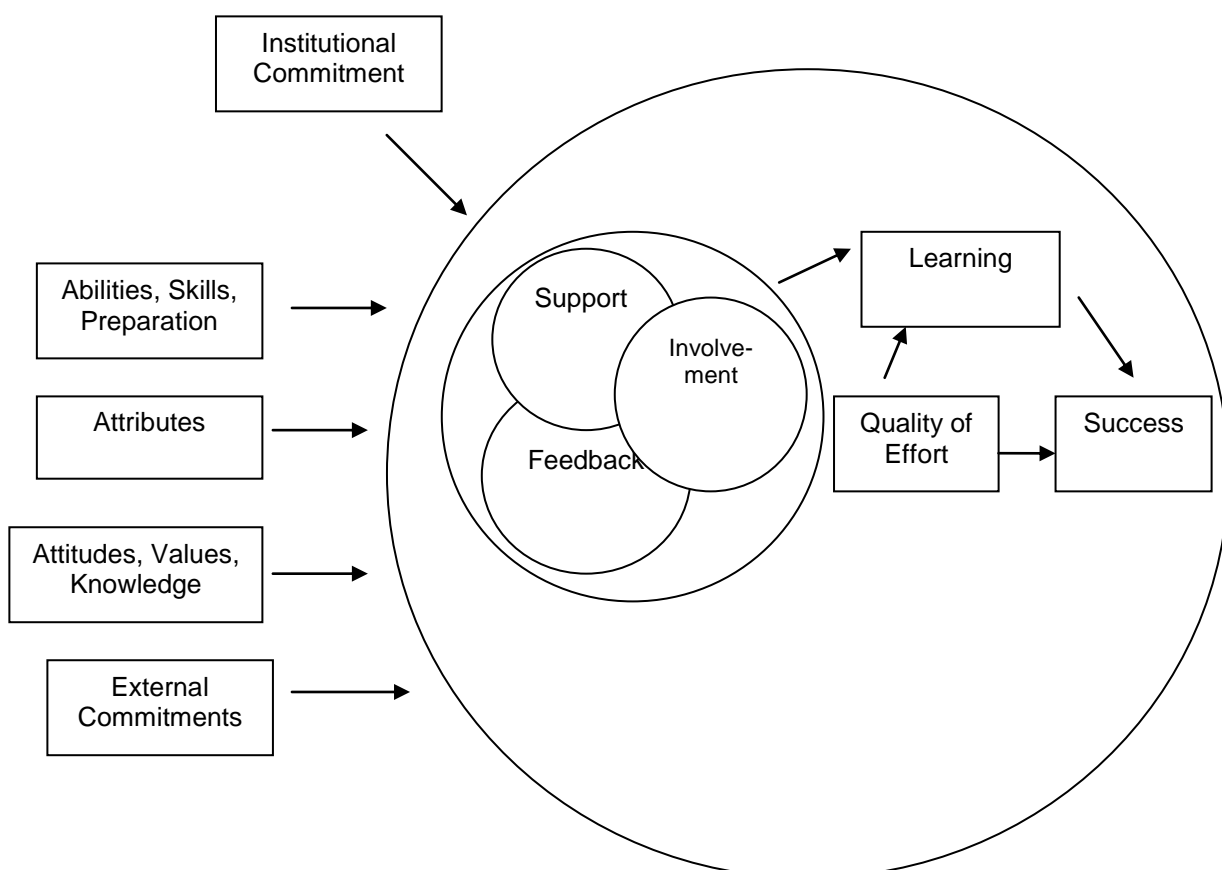


**Figure 3.1. Structure of a preliminary model of institutional action**

(Tinto & Pusser, 2006: 9)

Tinto et al (2006) state that students enter the institution with attributes and skills, and operate within an external system of friends, family, and work for example, that continues to place demands upon them once they enter the institution. These aspects are in a sense fixed, and not within the institutions ability to affect. However, aspects for institutional action that are not considered to be fixed include the expectational climate established by members of the institution (this includes staff and other students), the academic, social and financial support offered, and the academic and social activities that contribute towards involvement. The five variables that make up the model are discussed in greater detail below.

### 3.5.1  Institutional commitment

Institutional commitment forms the umbrella of the model in a sense, where each corresponding aspect is influenced by whether or not the institution is committed to student success. This aspect of the model is influenced to a large extent by the leadership of the institution, both at a top level as well as through leadership of faculty managers and deans, which in turn flows to staff at an operational level. Institutional commitment is more than just a verbal commitment to student success, but incorporates allocation of resources and the investment in programmes and activities that enhance the success of students.

### 3.5.2  Expectational climate

The expectational climate refers to the organisational culture or campus climate. That is, the expectations that the institution has for its members, including staff as well as students. The quality of student effort is influenced when it is believed that the institution places students in high regard or that faculty believe in their ability to perform. In particular, the head of the institution plays a significant role in creating a climate that is committed to student success.

### 3.5.3 Support

Support encompasses many angles, such as academic support, financial support, social and personal/emotional support. Each of these is discussed briefly below.

Research indicates that in terms of financial support, work-study programmes (or in service learning) assist students in paying fees while simultaneously involving students with other members of the institution as well as networks in industry. In the South African context, government provides support through NSFAS (National Student Financial Aid Service) which supplies bursaries and loans to students who have significant financial difficulties. A disadvantage with this approach is that students do not experience the effects of involvement that are provided for through the work-study programmes. Work study programmes are only available to students in certain courses, and are referred to as in-service training or internships. Not all of these placements are paying and normally take place in the final year of study.

Personal and emotional support or advising differs according to the particular institution. Some institutions make use of Faculty staff alone and others employ professionals in the form of an advisory centre or counselling service. In addition, some institutions make use of trained peer advisors or helpers. Of importance is that students are able to obtain relevant and accurate information when they require it.

Academic support encompasses aspects such as supplemental instruction (SI) for high risk modules and availability of learning communities. New student orientation is also considered to be a form of academic support.

Social support includes clubs and societies where students can formally and informally interact with their peers. Tinto and Pusser (2006) state that social support is particularly important where minority students are concerned and state that more formal support is often found through mentoring or peer help activities.

### 3.5.4 Feedback

Another term for feedback is assessment, and according to Tinto et al (2006), takes many forms. At entry, students are normally assessed or screened in terms of placement into a programme. This access assessment helps to identify students who may require additional developmental content in their respective courses.

Once students enter their respective courses, assessment commences. Early warning assessment may take place as early the first semester in order to provide faculty and students with information regarding performance. At this time, students who are not performing as well as they could be can be linked with available resources in order to assist.

Another form of assessment or feedback is continuous learning. Research has shown that class-based or continuous learning has a positive impact upon persistence, with many lecturers introducing portfolios into their assessment toolkit. The advantage of continuous learning is that it provides the Faculty with information as to what is being learned and where there may be difficulties. In addition, students are able to monitor their own progress, and become involved in the learning experience.

### 3.5.5 Involvement

Involvement or engagement has been proven over the years to contribute towards student persistence, where students who are more engaged with peers and faculty are more likely to persist through difficulty. In addition, involvement also shows increased learning, a central element of student success.

Due to the changing nature of Universities and the increasing demands placed upon students outside of the institution, there are limited opportunities for students to become involved. The classroom thus becomes the primary source of academic and social integration. The introduction of cooperative and collaborative learning, such as group work facilitates this process as well as the idea that many institutions begin

introducing learning communities. Learning communities provide the opportunity for the same group of students to co-register for classes and form a sort of study team. It may also be the case that students with a common interest in a particular topic are encouraged to share ideas and material, thus creating an interdisciplinary network around a certain theme or topic.

## 3.6    Conclusion

Definitions of student success differ in the literature, although there is support for the idea that student success refers to persistence in a qualification as well as learning that takes place. Persistence has relevance when one considers the idea of retention, and learning becomes vital for the development of human capital and the economic arguments outlying the importance of higher education.

The factors that are known to have an effect on student success were outlined through both psychosocial and environmental theories, with particular emphasis on environmental theories as it pertains to the aim of the current study. Environmental factors relating to institutions themselves are summarised well in Tinto and Pusser's (2006) model for institutional action and include a) institutional commitment, b) Expectational climate, c) Support, d) feedback and e) involvement. This model underpins the questionnaire that was used to assess student perceptions of the institution in the study.

The subsequent chapter outlines the problem statement as well as the aim and objectives of the current study as this pertains to student retention.

# CHAPTER 4
# PROBLEM

## 4.1 Problem statement

The retention of students in Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) and the successful throughput into the labour market has become a growing concern for HEI's on both a national and global scale. As mentioned in previous chapters the micro or institutional environment is important in determining whether or not a student will persist in a qualification.

Student development research shows that HEI's should create an environment whereby students are able to become involved in educationally purposive activities, to interact with peers and faculty staff, and where there are sufficient resources available to support learning. Successful implementation of these factors is known to contribute towards student persistence and retention. Retention is further acknowledged in business literature as an important consideration of an organisation's success. This perspective has become increasingly important for HEI's where there is growing competition for customers who have a wider choice of service provider supplied by the global market. Meeting the needs of the customer is as important as ever before. Building relationships with customers is a vital predictor of retention and is reiterated by student development theory.

It is because of these issues that the primary aim of the research was to explore and describe a South Africa Higher Education Institution's actions for student success based on Tinto and Pusser's (2006) model for institutional action. This was accomplished by exploring final year undergraduate students' perceptions of institutional action.

A description of the methodology used in this study with reference to the main aim as well as specific objectives is discussed in the subsequent chapter.

# CHAPTER 5

# METHODOLOGY

## 5.1    Research design

A research design refers to the structure of research that is designed to answer the research question and includes the planning of the research procedure as well as the procedure for data analysis and collection (Allison, 2000). The design is the blueprint for conducting the research and includes the aims of the research, the form of research conducted, such as quantitative or qualitative; the sample targeted as well as the data analysis techniques.  Coolican (1999:20) defines the research design as the "overall structure and strategy of the research study".

A quantitative evaluative exploratory-descriptive survey research design was employed in the pursuance of the objectives of this study. Each design element is described in the elements hereunder.

The current research was evaluative in nature as it relied on "the systematic acquisition and assessment of information to provide useful feedback about some object", namely university actions that promote student success (Trochim, 2006). Trochim (2006) mentions that the term object could refer to a program, policy, person, technology or activity where the goal is ultimately to provide feedback that aids decision-making. The current research made use of process evaluation techniques, where students were asked to evaluate what the institution is doing to promote students success. Process evaluation "fulfills the need for information on program implementation, which is important in interpreting program outcomes and informing future efforts in similar areas" (Dehar, Casswell & Duignan, 1993). Neuman (2006:543) states that "evaluation can be quantitative or qualitative involving existing statistics, experimental design, surveys, historical documents or field observation". Neuman (2006) mentions further that the goal of this type of research is to determine how well a program or policy is working or reaching its goals and objectives. The acquisition of information in this study related to students' perceptions of how well a University supports student success.

Exploratory research typically involves gaining insight into a situation, area of interest or phenomena where there is little information available. This form of research provides a path for further exploration into a topic. While there is significant research on Higher Education and student development, not many have studied students' perceptions towards the institution itself as it relates to success. Traditionally, models of student success include five sets of variables, namely a) student background characteristics including demographics, b) structural characteristics of the institution, such as size, mission and selectivity, c) interactions with faculty, staff members and peers, d) student perceptions of the learning environment and e) the quality of effort students devote to educationally purposive activities (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). The study was therefore exploratory in that it aimed to gain additional insight into student success from a student perspective. Descriptive elements were noted where the researcher aimed to describe or understand the way students feel about the institution in question. Various types of descriptive research exist in order to record the experiences of a particular group, for example observational methods, case study methods as well as interview or survey methods (Gaziano & Raulin, 2000). The current study made use of survey research in order to support the primary aim of evaluation and specific objectives of exploration and description.

According to Gaziano and Raulin (2000: 139) "survey research utilizes several research procedures to obtain information from people in their natural environments". Surveys consist of a series of questions that ask people about their attitudes, beliefs, life satisfactions and concerns. Advantages of this method include the ease and speed with which it can be completed; lower expense for the researcher in terms of time spent; less influence from dynamics of interpersonal variables found in an interview setting and less biasing of answers since questions are structured (Coolican, 1999).

The survey approach does not manipulate variables, but does impose some constraints by using a specific survey instrument (Graziano et al, 2000). Disadvantages of this method include the fact that structured questions may miss more informative data; respondents have no time to trust the interviewer or clarify questions; the answers may be more likely to produce public responses not the

respondents own ideas since the effect of social desirability may be higher. Despite these disadvantages, the researcher felt that the advantages of conducting a survey for the current research would be most suitable in meeting the aim and objectives of the study. In addition, the ease of completion was considered an advantage given the target population being students who have varying schedules, time constraints and other demands. The structured questions build onto the exploratory nature of the research by providing information for future research in this area. The survey was conducted electronically where the sample could respond in their own time without seeing the responses of peers thus reducing some of the disadvantages mentioned above.

The survey design was supported by the data collection method, which was quantitative in nature, that is, it focused on collecting numerical data obtained in the form of a questionnaire. "This form of data collection is valuable for social scientists in that it provides information regarding beliefs, attitudes or emotions. In addition, one is able to organise, summarise and simplify information obtained from data" (Gavin, 2008:66). Respondents are typically asked about their unique experiences or personal thoughts (Gavin, 2008) and in the current research, these thoughts related to students' beliefs about institutional action that support student success. University management should take cognisance of the information gained, particularly considering the increasing concerns in the Higher Education arena.

## 5.2    Participants and Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of undergraduate students registered in their final year of study at a specified South African Higher Education Institution. This population group was selected because final year students have been in the system for some time and have persisted through their respective qualifications, thus making their feedback valuable. The value of these responses lies in the fact that the institution would then be better able to consider gaps in the ways that customers perceive the institution's means of promoting student success.

Non-probability convenience sampling was used to target students from this population group. Convenience sampling makes use of participants who are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. An advantage of this type of sampling is the ease with which it can be carried out. However, a disadvantage of this sampling method is that it cannot be representative of the target population (Coolican, 1999). The purpose of this study, however, is less to generalise than it is to inform about an area not previously observed and make provision for future research in this area.

According to Gavin (2008:161), the sample size required for a survey differs depending on the statistical quality needed for survey findings. The author states that "typical large-scale surveys of a national population use a sample size of 1000 respondents" where small-scale surveys have a sample size of between 200-300 respondents. An online sample calculator indicated that 357 responses would be sufficient based on a population size of 4879 final year undergraduate students (Raosoft, 2004).

## 5.3    Instrument

The existence of a measuring instrument that assesses Higher Education Institutions' actions of promoting student success was not found. Although research on service quality in Higher Education has been conducted using a questionnaire termed SERVQUAL (Oldfield & Baron, 2000; Singh & Khanduja, 2010), the purpose of this study was not to explore service quality. Rather, the researcher was interested in generating knowledge as to how students or customers perceive the Institution. Perceptions of the Institution were related to areas identified by student development literature as being important for success.

A questionnaire based on Tinto and Pusser's (2006) model of institutional action was not found to exist. As such, a decision was taken to construct a questionnaire assessing factors affecting student success from an Institutional perspective. A full version of this questionnaire can be obtained in Appendix one.  Core concepts underpinning the questionnaire included a) commitment and leadership, b)

expectational climate, c) support, d) feedback and e) involvement. The survey was closed-ended in nature due to the quantitative design of the study. Disadvantages of this method include a lack of subjective information; however the benefits of this method include focusing responses as well as speed and ease in coding responses.

All items in the questionnaire were positively worded, that is the items were phrased in a positive manner, for example "I have access to resources" as opposed to a negatively worded statement such as "I do not have access to resources". Sauro (2011) mentions that there has been a long tradition of using both positively and negatively worded items in research in order to reduce response bias and acquiescence bias (answering in auto-pilot). The author states however that there is little evidence that by including both positive and negative items the problem is reduced.  Advantages of using positively worded items include the ease of coding responses by assigning a quantitative number to a qualitative statement that is consistent throughout the questionnaire.  Furthermore, "users may respond differently to negatively worded items such that reversing responses from negative to positive doesn't account for the difference.  There is evidence that this lowers the internal reliability, distorts the factor-structure and is more problematic in cross-cultural settings" Sauro (2011). The author mentions a further advantage where it is less likely that participants will accidently assign an unintended score to an item if all the items follow a similar format.

There were 41 items in total that were constructed based on key defining features outlined by Tinto and Pusser (2006). The questions in the above-mentioned survey were anchored on a five-point Likert scale. Likert type questions can ascertain how strongly respondents agree with a particular statement (Beck, 2011).The items were scored from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Each item was thus scored according to the numerical value attached to the response. A raw score for each concept was obtained by adding the scores for all the items in that particular subscale. The total raw score was obtained by adding the concept raw scores for commitment and leadership; expectational climate; support; feedback; involvement. These raw scores, per concept and for the total score of factors affecting student success, were then converted into percentages.

## 5.4    Procedure

An online survey based on Tinto and Pusser's (2006) Model of Institutional Action for student success was constructed in order to evaluate final year undergraduate students' perceptions of institutional action. The proposed study and questionnaire followed a departmental ethics approval process.  Once approval was granted, an emailed invitation to participate in the study was sent electronically through the student email system (see Appendix two for emailed letter sent to participants). A separate email distribution list for final year students was not available from the institution. As a result, an email communiqué went out to all students requesting them to complete the survey if they were final year undergraduate students. In addition, students could access the survey through a link that was marketed on the Institution's Facebook page as well as on the institutional student portal.

Students gave their consent to participate in the study through the use of an informed consent button on the first page of the online survey. Three hundred and fifty responses were hoped for, although the invitation went out to all students who meet inclusion criteria, namely that they are in their final year of study. Two emailed reminders were sent encouraging students to complete the survey.

The data was analysed using the Statistica software package by the Institution's Unit for Statistical Consultation.

Final copies of the treatise were submitted to the NMMU Business School, research supervisor and to the library in hard copy and electronic form, as per university protocol.  Finally, research findings were provided to the Executive Deans and Faculty managers at the Institution where the research was conducted.

## 5.5    Data analysis

Data was analysed according to descriptive as well as inferential statistics. Data analysis techniques that were applied are discussed briefly below.

### 5.5.1  Sample description

Basic descriptive statistics in the form of means and standard deviations were conducted in response to the aim of obtaining an overall view of the perceptions that students have of the institution's actions to support student success.

Firstly, descriptive statistics in the form of means, standard deviations, and frequency counts were used to describe participant demographic characteristics and faculty affiliations.

### 5.5.2  Item analysis

The data was analysed according to the five factors outlined by Tinto and Pusser (2006), namely, institutional commitment, expectational climate, support, feedback and involvement. The five factors were assessed for internal reliability of items using Cronbach's alpha. Item analysis depends on how peoples' responses vary on individual items. If they tend to vary a great deal on individual items when compared to the overall test, the test is considered unreliable and a low value for alpha is achieved. Coolican (1999) states that Cronbach's alpha is the most widely used statistic for estimating a test's reliability on non-dichotomous items, where high values range from 0.75 to 1. The accepted alpha cut-off for a set of items to be considered reliable varies depending on the application of the method and the nature of questionnaire (Gigawiz, 2011) although the values 0.7or 0.75 are often used as cut-off values for Cronbach's alpha and thus for the reliability of the test (Christmann & Van Aelst, 2005). A value of 0.7 was used as the cut off score to indicate test item reliability.

### 5.6  Ethical considerations

### 5.6.1  Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity of participants was guaranteed due to the structure of the survey being online. This meant that the researcher was unable to view the details of those who had responded. Confidentiality was therefore also maintained since participants were unknown to the researcher.

### 5.6.2  Participant risks and benefits

Questions were not highly sensitive in nature and therefore the risk to participants was low.  Benefits to completing the research were indirect and related to being able to express feelings regarding the institution.

### 5.6.3  Institutional risks and benefits

Care was taken to protect the name of the Institution in question throughout the study, particularly where findings were considered to be sensitive in nature. The latter refers to findings which may reflect negatively upon the Institution and potentially undermine the Institution's marketing and branding efforts in attracting new customers. The researcher has therefore chosen to omit the institution's name from the research. Therefore there was no reputational risk to the institution involved.

### 5.6.4  Community risks and benefits
There were no risks or benefits to the immediate or extended community where this study took place.

# CHAPTER 6

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 6.1    Introduction

This chapter discusses the results obtained in this study. Firstly, overall test reliability values are discussed as well as the reliability of each item in the questionnaire. Secondly, a brief overview of the demographic information of respondents is provided. Finally overall perceptions of institutional actions that support success are discussed.

## 6.2    Explaining test reliability

The current study employed internal test reliability techniques to determine whether the items in the questionnaire measured the same construct. Because the current study used a self-constructed questionnaire it was necessary to determine that the questionnaire was reliable. Each factor's reliability is discussed in greater detail below.

### 6.2.1  Factor reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the items in the survey, where overall reliability of 0.7 is considered good.

**Table 6.1 Cronbach's alpha for five factors measured**

| Factor | Cronbach's alpha |
|---|---|
| Institutional Commitment | 0.7 |
| Institutional Expectations | 0.71 |
| Support | 0.73 |
| Feedback | 0.81 |
| Involvement | 0.67 |

The first four factors achieved a Cronbach alpha of 0.7 or higher. The last factor achieved an alpha value of 0.68. While this is slightly below the 0.7 value considered to be good, it is considered acceptable for social science research (Gliem & Gliem, 2003: 87).  The subsequent section considers each factor's item reliability.

### 6.2.2 Item reliability

The overall alpha value is influenced by individual items with low item reliability scores. Low values indicate that those particular items are not completely consistent with the themes in the surrounding factor. Individual item reliability of 0.25 is considered average, with a value of 0.5 and higher being good (Pieterson 2011). If the items with the lower scores were omitted the overall alpha would increase. Item reliability for each of the five factors measured is discussed in more detail below.

#### 6.2.2.1    Institutional Commitment
Table 6.2 indicates the item reliability for factor one, namely Institutional Commitment.

**Table 6.2 Item reliability pertaining to Institutional Commitment**

| Question number | Item reliability | Alpha if Item was deleted | Description of item |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.60 | 0.64 | The university is committed to student success |
| 2 | 0.59 | 0.64 | Allocation of resources promoting success |
| 3 | 0.40 | 0.67 | Alignment of the university mission statement with actions |
| 4 | 0.44 | 0.67 | Allocation of technological resources to specific courses |
| **5*** | **0.24** | **0.72** | **Financial rewards for academic success** |
| 6 | 0.48 | 0.66 | Recognition for academic success |
| **7*** | **0.06** | **0.76** | **Awareness of the Deans of Faculties** |
| 8 | 0.60 | 0.64 | Management's commitment to student success (Deans & Faculty Officers) |
| Cronbach Alpha 0.7 | | | |

*Bolded items are<0.25

The majority of items in the first factor (institutional commitment) are considered to be reliable. However, two items in particular indicate low reliability, namely, question

5 and question 7. Question 5 pertains to financial rewards for academic success and question 7 pertains to awareness of Deans and Faculty staff. A recommendation for future research in this area would be to consider rewording these items and testing for reliability again, or alternatively deleting these items from the measure.

### 6.2.2.2    Expectations

Table 6.3 refers to the item reliability of the second factor measured, namely Expectations.

**Table 6.3 Item reliability pertaining to Expectations**

| Question number | Item reliability | Alpha if Item was deleted | Description of item |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | 0.30 | 0.70 | Institution's belief in student ability |
| 10 | 0.30 | 0.70 | Positive encounters with staff on daily basis |
| 11 | 0.50 | 0.66 | Lecturers belief in student ability |
| 12 | 0.43 | 0.67 | Vice-chancellor belief in student ability |
| 13 | 0.49 | 0.66 | Knowledge of rules for degree attainment |
| 14 | 0.45 | 0.67 | Knowledge of performance expectations |
| 15 | 0.41 | 0.68 | Knowledge of general rules of Institution |
| 16 | 0.38 | 0.69 | Complaints procedure against institution |
| Cronbach Alpha 0.71 | | | |

All items in the second factor (institutional expectations) are considered to be reliable.

### 6.2.2.3 Support

Table 6.4 refers to the item reliability of the third factor measured, namely Support.

**Table 6.4 Item reliability pertaining to Support**

| Question number | Item reliability | Alpha if Item was deleted | Description of item |
|---|---|---|---|
| 17 | 0.49 | 0.70 | Availability of Supplemental Instruction |
| 18 | 0.41 | 0.71 | Availability of Financial support |
| 19 | 0.54 | 0.69 | Perceived non-discrimination |
| 20 | 0.52 | 0.70 | Perceived fair treatment by institution |
| 21 | 0.30 | 0.73 | Confident use of student counselling services |
| **22*** | **0.15** | **0.76** | **Awareness of Peer Help support** |
| 23 | 0.52 | 0.70 | Ability to obtain accurate information |
| 24 | 0.38 | 0.72 | Willingness to use writing centre |
| 25 | 0.53 | 0.69 | Awareness of developmental opportunities outside of the classroom |
| Cronbach Alpha 0.73 | | | |

*Bolded items are<0.25

All but one item are considered to be reliable. That is from the item surrounding awareness of peer help support. Rewording this item for future research may be an option in order to ensure adequate reliability without losing this important item.

### 6.2.2.4  Feedback

Table 6.5 refers to item reliability for the fourth factor measured, namely, Feedback.

**Table 6.5 Item reliability pertaining to Feedback**

| Question number | Item reliability | Alpha if Item was deleted | Description of item |
|---|---|---|---|
| **26*** | **0.15** | **0.83** | **Awareness of access assessment into the University** |
| 27 | 0.60 | 0.77 | Regular feedback on academic performance |
| 28 | 0.65 | 0.77 | Approachability of lecturers |
| 29 | 0.50 | 0.79 | Opportunity for feedback on modules |
| 30 | 0.68 | 0.77 | Perceived flexibility of lecturers in their teaching practice |
| 31 | 0.27 | 0.82 | Referral to support services following poor performance |
| 32 | 0.63 | 0.77 | Feelings that lecturers support student learning |
| 33 | 0.76 | 0.75 | Feedback from lecturers in first semester regarding inadequate progress |
| 34 | 0.39 | 0.80 | Regular assessment opportunities to monitor progress |
| Cronbach Alpha 0.81 | | | |

*Bolded items are<0.25

All but one item in this factor are considered to be reliable. That is, awareness of access assessment. This item could be deleted for future research, since it does not affect student already in the system as to whether or not they are aware of the institutions access initiatives.

**6.2.2.5   Involvement**

Table 6.5 refers to the fifth factor measured, namely Involvement.


**Table 6.6 Item reliability pertaining to Expectations**

| Question number | Item reliability | Alpha if Item was deleted | Description of item |
|---|---|---|---|
| 35 | 0.44 | 0.63 | Opportunities to meet classmates |
| 36 | 0.27 | 0.69 | Attendance of first year orientation programme |
| **37*** | **0.18** | **0.69** | **Part of an orientation buddy group** |
| 38 | 0.45 | 0.62 | Sufficient campus activities for socialising |
| 39 | 0.51 | 0.60 | Opportunities for developmental workshops |
| 40 | 0.37 | 0.64 | Provision of information regarding campus events |
| 41 | 0.57 | 0.58 | Site on campus to learn and connect with peers |
| Cronbach Alpha 0.67 | | | |

*Bolded items are<0.25

The majority of items in the fifth factor (involvement) are considered to be reliable, apart from the item concerning belonging to a buddy group. Consideration of this retrospectively, is that the Institution does not provide a formal buddy system for senior students, who made up the sample. This item could therefore be deleted for future research, unless such a system is in place at another Institution.

Overall the items in this study were considered to be reliable. Further analysis could therefore be conducted.

## 6.3    Demographic information

The targeted population of this study was students in their final year of undergraduate study at a tertiary institution in South Africa. Forty three students responded to the online survey. Sample descriptive statistics are visually depicted in below.

### 6.3.1  Gender
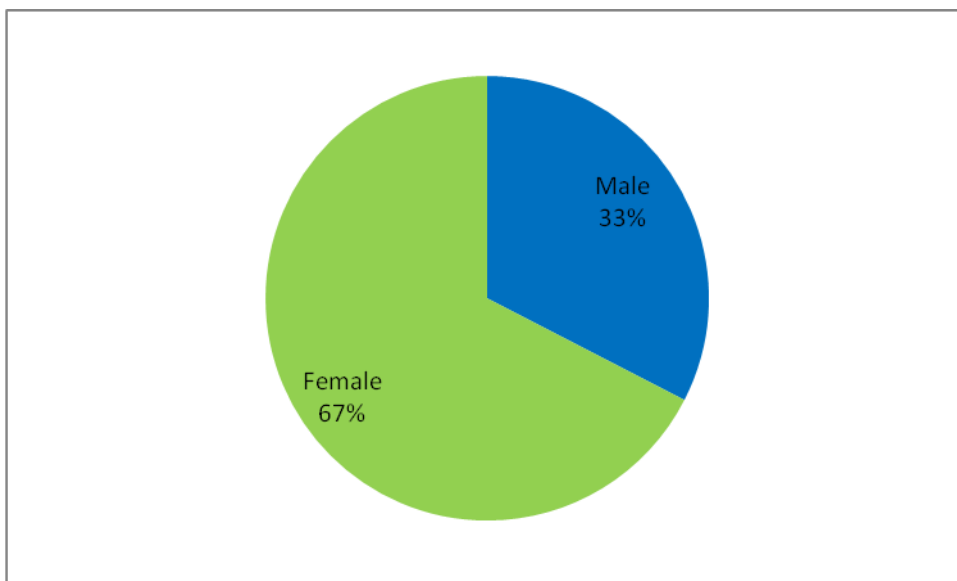


**Figure 6.1 Gender profile**

The gender profile was made up predominantly of female respondents. Females accounted for two thirds of the sample while accounted for approximately one third of the sample.

### 6.3.2 Language
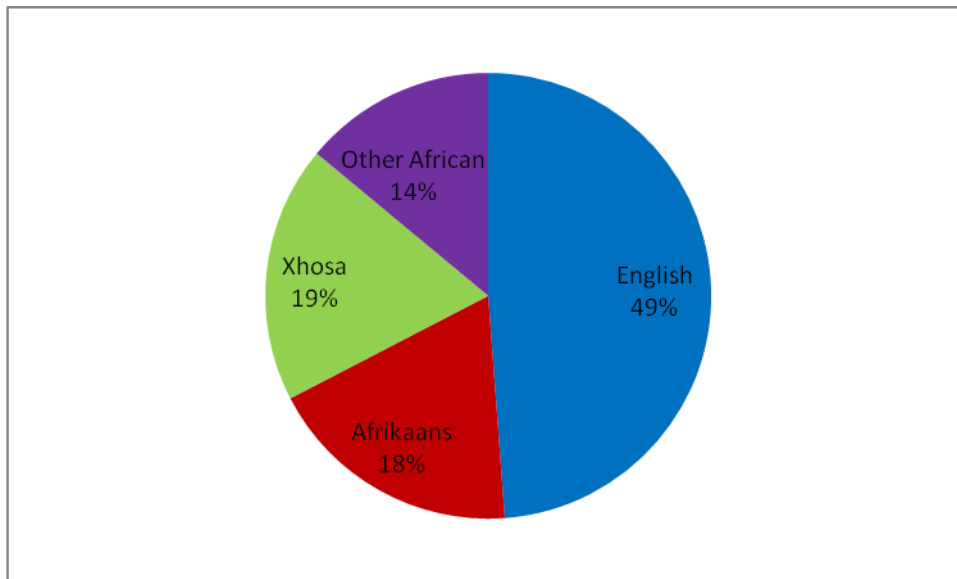


**Figure 6.2 Language profile**

The language profile of respondents consisted predominantly of English speaking students follwoed by Afrikaans and Xhosa speakers. "Other African languages" represents Zulu, Sotho and additional languages.

### 6.3.3 Faculty



**Figure 6.3 Faculty profile**

The Faculty profile consisted predominantly of Health Science and Business and Economic Sciences students.

## 6.4    Results

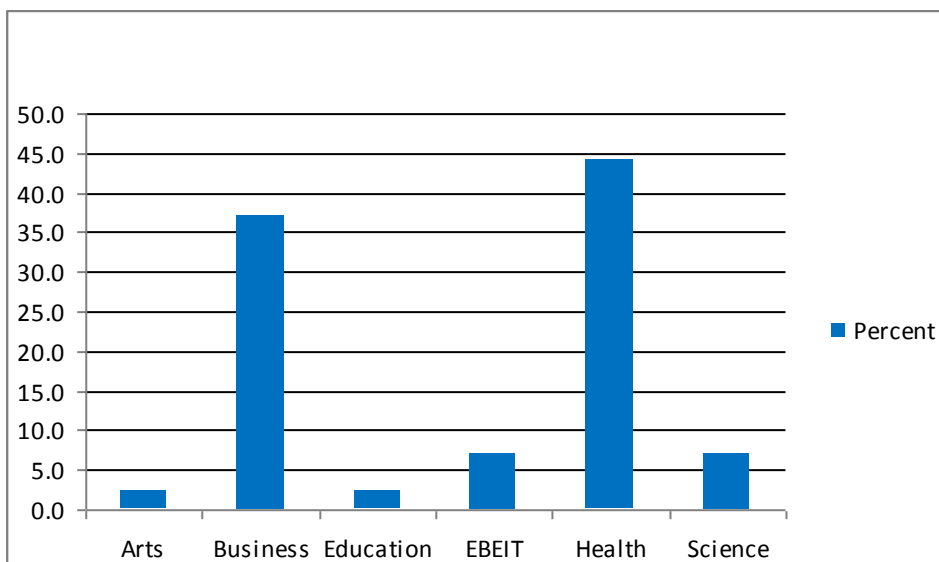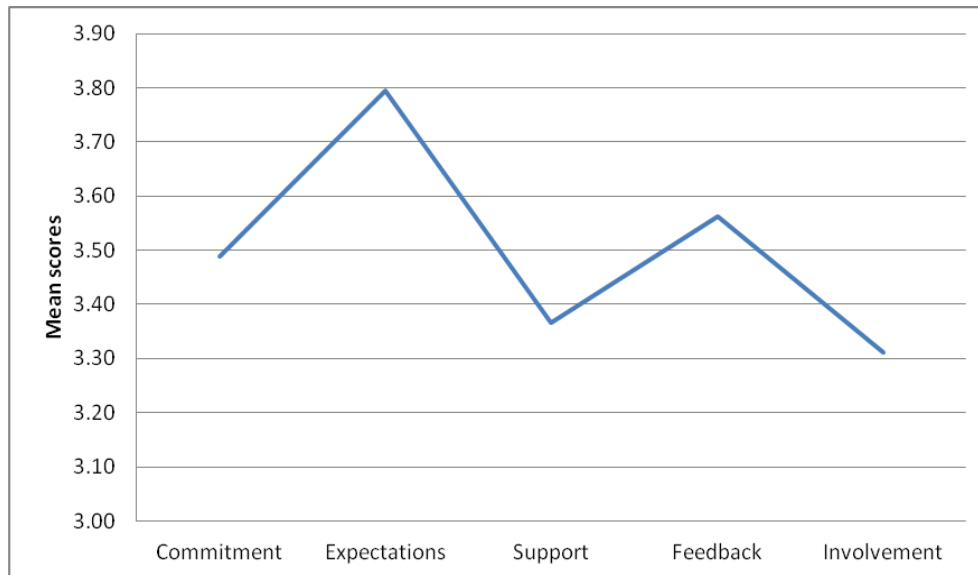Overall perceptions of students were based on combined mean scores for each of the factors analysed, namely: Institutional commitment; Institutional expectations; Support; Feedback and Involvement.



**Figure 6.4 Overall perceptions of students regarding institutional action**

Interpretation of mean scores was based on a 5 point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The results of the mean scores ranged from 3.3 to 3.8, indicating that students generally perceive the institution as contributing towards the five factors of student success as outlined by Tinto et al (2006). Particular areas where students felt that the Institution contributed favourably towards student success were Expectations and Feedback. Areas that were seen less favourably included Commitment, Support and Involvement.
The subsequent section considers responses to each of the five factors in more detail.

### 6.4.1   Institutional commitment

Table 6.7 below outlines the results of the items related to the first factor, namely, commitment.

**Table 6.7 Results for Institutional Commitment**

| N | Mean | % Strongly Disagreed | % Disagree | % Neutral | % Agreed | % Strongly Agreed | Description of item |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 43 | 3.74 | 2.33 | 4.65 | 20.93 | 60.47 | 11.63 | The university is committed to student success |
| 43 | 3.77 | - | 11.63 | 11.63 | 65.12 | 11.63 | Allocation of resources promoting success |
| 43 | 3.4 | 4.65 | 11.63 | 27.91 | 51.16 | 4.65 | Alignment of the university mission statement with actions |
| **43\*** | **3.35** | **2.33** | **18.6** | **25.58** | **48.84** | **4.65** | **Allocation of technological resources to specific courses** |
| **43\*** | **3.21** | **6.98** | **20.93** | **25.58** | **37.21** | **9.3** | **Financial rewards for academic success** |
| **43\*** | **3.19** | **4.65** | **20.93** | **30.23** | **39.53** | **4.65** | **Recognition for academic success** |
| 43 | 3.72 | 4.65 | 18.6 | 4.65 | 44.19 | 27.91 | Awareness of the Deans of Faculties |
| 43 | 3.53 | - | 6.98 | 46.51 | 32.56 | 13.95 | Management's commitment to student success (Deans & Faculty Officers) |

*Bolded item indicate areas of concern

An overwhelming majority of students (73%) indicated that they had knowledge of who the Deans of their Faculty were. This is important because Dean's represent part of the Institution's leadership. Tinto and Pusser (2006: 12) indicate that research has found a direct link between leadership and leadership style to institutional effectiveness generally as well as to the institutional climate and expectations. Additional items where students indicated agree responses were for the first three items in this factor. In particular students felt the institution itself was committed to their success, that they had access to necessary resources that promote success and that the institution aligned its actions with its mission statement.

Items with a concerning number of neutral responses were the allocation of technological resources; financial rewards for academic success as well as personal recognition for academic success. Responses related to access of technological could be considered to be course specific and may explain the neutral responses in this instance. However, financial and psychological rewards for achievement are areas that the institution could consider in the near future.

A particularly noteworthy result was that approximately 47% of students were neutral in their responses towards management's (Deans and Faculty Officer's) commitment to their success, while a further 7% disagreed that Dean and Faculty Officers were committed to their success.

### 6.4.1   Institutional Expectations

Table 6.8 below outlines the results of the items related to the second factor, namely, expectations.

**Table 6.8 Results for Institutional Commitment**

| N | Mean | % Strongly Disagreed | % Disagree | % Neutral | % Agreed | % Strongly Agreed | Description of item |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 43 | 3.76 | 2.38 | - | 23.81 | 66.67 | 7.14 | Institution's belief in student ability |
| **43\*** | **3.79** | **-** | **4.76** | **30.95** | **45.24** | **19.05** | **Positive encounters with staff on daily basis** |
| 43 | 3.83 | - | 4.76 | 26.19 | 50 | 19.05 | Lecturers belief in student ability |
| **43\*** | **3.45** | **2.38** | **11.9** | **35.71** | **38.1** | **11.9** | **Vice-chancellor belief in student ability** |
| 43 | 4.24 | - | 4.76 | 2.38 | 57.14 | 35.71 | Knowledge of rules for degree attainment |
| 43 | 4.29 | - | 2.38 | 4.76 | 54.76 | 38.1 | Knowledge of performance expectations |
| 43 | 4.19 | - | 4.76 | 9.52 | 47.62 | 38.1 | Knowledge of general rules of Institution |
| **43\*** | **2.81** | **14.29** | **21.43** | **35.71** | **26.19** | **2.38** | **Complaints procedure against institution** |

*Bolded item indicate areas of concern

Generally, the majority of students were in strong agreement with regards to knowledge about the general rules of the Institution. Items in the agree category were related to the Institution's belief in student ability, lecturers' belief in student ability, knowledge of the rules for degree attainment and knowledge related to expectations of student performance.

Items where there were strong neutral responses related to daily encounters with staff being positive, the vice-chancellor's belief in students ability to succeed as well as having the confidence to lay a complaint against the Institution should the need

arise. These neutral to disagree responses are important for management to consider since students do not appear outwardly satisfied with their interactions with staff and feel unable to express this dissatisfaction through institutional channels. The latter could give rise to negative word of mouth marketing for prospective students and may equally influence perceptions of the peer group on campus. Tinto and Pusser (2006) indicate that top management (the vice-chancellor) is an important figure in translating the message that the Institution believes in and is committed to success. Given students uncertainty in this regard, the vice-chancellor could focus on communicating this message to undergraduate students more effectively.

### 6.4.2  Institutional support

Table 6.9 below outlines the results of the items related to the third factor, namely, support.

**Table 6.9 Results for Institutional Support**

| N | Mean | % Strongly Disagreed | % Disagree | % Neutral | % Agreed | % Strongly Agreed | Description of item |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **43*** | **2.81** | **19.05** | **23.81** | **23.81** | **23.81** | **9.52** | **Availability of Supplemental Instruction** |
| **43*** | **3.56** | **7.32** | **12.2** | **19.51** | **39.02** | **21.95** | **Availability of Financial support** |
| **43*** | **3.71** | **2.38** | **9.52** | **21.43** | **47.62** | **19.05** | **Perceived non-discrimination** |
| 43 | 3.52 | 2.38 | 16.67 | 16.67 | 54.76 | 9.52 | Perceived fair treatment by institution |
| 43 | 3.71 | 4.76 | 14.29 | 16.67 | 33.33 | 30.95 | Confident use of student counselling services |
| **43*** | **2.55** | **23.81** | **33.33** | **16.67** | **16.67** | **9.52** | **Awareness of Peer Help support** |
| 43 | 3.4 | 2.38 | 14.29 | 33.33 | 40.48 | 9.52 | Ability to obtain accurate information |
| 43 | 3.67 | 2.38 | 14.29 | 14.29 | 52.38 | 16.67 | Willingness to use writing centre |
| **43*** | **3.38** | **7.14** | **9.52** | **33.33** | **38.1** | **11.9** | **Awareness of developmental opportunities outside of the classroom** |

*Bolded item indicate areas of concern

Strongly agree responses were related to students' perceived fair treatment by the Institution, confident use of student counselling services as well as having the ability to obtain accurate information when required.

Majority agree responses were given in relation to students' willingness to use the writing centre.

Neutral responses related to the availability of financial support, perceived non-discrimination, and awareness about developmental opportunities outside of the classroom environment.

Negative results pertained to students' perceptions regarding the availability of academic support in the form of supplemental instruction (SI), as well as peer help support from trained peer helpers.

The Institution may need perform a needs analysis regarding supplemental instruction, exploring whether students have access to such a support service including the times and means that this service is delivered. A follow up to this would be to invest additional resources into supplemental instruction, and possibly move towards electronic means of support which would mean reaching more people and reduce costs of delivery substantially. A disadvantage of moving toward electronic SI support alone is that the senior students who provide this service benefit from the experience, involvement and financial reward.

Regarding peer help support, marketing initiatives could be better implemented in order to make students aware of the availability of peer help support.

### 6.4.3 Feedback

Table 6.10 below outlines the results of the items related to the fourth factor, namely, feedback.

**Table 6.10 Results for Feedback**

| N | Mean | % Strongly Disagreed | % Disagree | % Neutral | % Agreed | % Strongly Agreed | Description of item |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 43 | 4.1 | 2.5 | 10 | 5 | 40 | 42.5 | Awareness of access assessment into the University |
| **43*** | **3.48** | **4.76** | **16.67** | **21.43** | **40.48** | **16.67** | **Regular feedback on academic performance** |
| 43 | 3.98 | 2.38 | 7.14 | 11.9 | 47.62 | 30.95 | Approachability of lecturers |
| 43 | 3.95 | 2.38 | 4.76 | 14.29 | 52.38 | 26.19 | Opportunity for feedback on modules |
| 43 | 3.69 | 2.38 | 9.52 | 19.05 | 54.76 | 14.29 | Perceived flexibility of lecturers in their teaching practice |
| **43*** | **2.19** | **33.33** | **35.71** | **14.29** | **11.9** | **4.76** | **Referral to support services following poor performance** |
| 43 | 3.69 | 2.38 | 4.76 | 16.19 | 54.76 | 11.9 | Feelings that lecturers support student learning |
| **43*** | **3.05** | **11.9** | **21.43** | **26.19** | **30.95** | **9.52** | **Feedback from lecturers in first semester regarding inadequate progress** |
| 43 | 3.98 | 2.38 | 7.14 | 9.52 | 52.38 | 28.57 | Regular assessment opportunities to monitor progress |

*Bolded item indicate areas of concern

Especially positive results were found regarding the approachability of lecturers as well as awareness of access assessment into the Institution. The latter has implications in terms of the first stage of customer relationship management, namely exploration or recruitment.  Students' awareness of the institution's commitment towards increasing access could positively affect recruitment and marketing initiatives.

Approachability of lecturers is important for stage two and three of customer relationship management, where trust is built and commitment to the Institution is established. Retention is strengthened if this stage is in place.

Agree responses related to the perception that lecturers support student learning and are flexible in their teaching practices. In addition students felt that there are regular assessment opportunities where they can monitor their progress as well as

opportunities to provide feedback regarding modules. While the majority of students agreed with the item related to obtaining regular feedback on academic performance, there were some neutral, disagree and strongly disagree responses to this item that warrant further attention.

### 6.4.4 Involvement

Table 6.11 below outlines the results of the items related to the fifth factor, namely, involvement.

**Table 6.11 Results for Involvement**

| N | Mean | % Strongly Disagreed | % Disagree | % Neutral | % Agreed | % Strongly Agreed | Description of item |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 43 | 3.98 | 2.38 | 2.38 | 11.9 | 61.9 | 21.43 | Opportunities to meet classmates |
| 43 | 3.4 | 19.05 | 19.05 | - | 26.19 | 35.71 | Attendance of first year orientation programme |
| **43*** | **2.1** | **23.81** | **57.14** | **7.14** | **9.52** | **2.38** | **Part of an orientation buddy group** |
| **43*** | **3.02** | **11.9** | **23.81** | **23.81** | **30.95** | **9.52** | **Sufficient campus activities for socialising** |
| **43*** | **3.28** | **10** | **17.5** | **22.5** | **35** | **15** | **Opportunities for developmental workshops** |
| 43 | 4 | 2.38 | 4.76 | 9.52 | 57.14 | 26.19 | Provision of information regarding campus events |
| 43 | 3.4 | 4.76 | 21.43 | 11.9 | 52.38 | 9.52 | Site on campus to learn and connect with peers |

*Bolded item indicate areas of concern

Generally results from this factor are fairly contradictory to the pattern of agree to strongly agree responses seen in the previous tables. There appears to be general discontent regarding this element.

Firstly, very positive results were seen with regard to attendance of the first year orientation programme with the majority of respondents agreeing. However, there were just fewer than 40% of respondents who did not attend the first year orientation programme. Orientation is noted to be important for retention in both customer relationship theory as well as student development theory. Exploration of more recent statistics regarding attendance of Orientation would be relevant.

Agree responses were seen with regards to having the opportunity to meet classmates as well as being provided with information regarding campus events. Especially negative results are noted in response to being part of a buddy group; however, retrospective analysis revealed that a buddy programme that focuses on senior students was not in existence at this Institution. Further exploration could be done to determine whether there is a need for such a system. Negative results were also noted regarding sufficient campus activities for socialising as well as opportunities for developmental workshops. Numerous student development theorists point to the importance of involvement in campus activities and socialising activities as important to promote student success (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 2001). With this in mind, the Institution could focus more on creating a social climate that is conducive to the needs of its customers whilst simultaneously balancing activities related to learning.

## 6.5  Conclusion

Overall, the Institution in the study is performing well in terms of the five factors affecting student success. Certain areas may require attention from management in ensuring that customers continue to perceive the institution to be positively contributing to their success. Particular areas where students felt that the Institution contributed favourably towards student success were Expectations and Feedback. Areas that were seen less favourably included Commitment, Support and Involvement. The subsequent chapter outlines recommendations for management in areas that were seen to be a concern. In addition limitations that pertain to this study are outlined followed by concluding remarks.

## CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter outlined this study's main findings, the present chapter is designed to make sense of those findings by integrating it with the theories described in chapters two and three above.

The reader will firstly be presented with conclusions derived from the results of each survey section, followed by limitations to the study and recommendations for future research.

### 7.2 Conclusions per institutional action

### 7.2.1 Commitment

Commitment as defined by Tinto and Pusser (2006) refers to the willingness of an institution to invest resources into student success. It considers how closely aligned the Institution's actions are to its mission statement as well as the recognition that students get for their success experiences.

Overall the Institution was evaluated positively in the area of commitment. There were however several areas where the Institution's management may need to pay attention. Firstly, the allocation of technological resources needs to be explored further with the question in mind of whether students have access to sufficient and relevant technological resources to allow them to be competitive in the global technological market.

Secondly, students remarked that they did not feel that they were rewarded for their academic achievements, either financially or psychologically. While financial constraints facing institutions limit the financial reward system, recognition by significant people (lecturers, faculty staff and Deans) could assist the Institution in building stage two of Bejou's (2005) customer relationship model, that is the expansion stage. The expansion stage emphasises the building of a trusting relationship between parties, increasing confidence and establishing a sound ethical

concern. At this stage the customer decides whether to expand the relationship based on the Institutions actions. Psychological rewards could be introduced through linking to the internal electronic student results system. This provides an opportunity for lecturers and Dean's to provide positive affirmation and recognition for students who are consistently showing improvement in their academic performance, but who might not form part of the top cadre of performers. This process could enhance the commitment and expansion stages of customer relationship management (CRM).

Thirdly, a notable area of concern is that students doubted middle managements (Deans & Faculty Officer's) commitment to their success. This has an effect on both stage two (expansion) and three (commitment) of the CRM model described by Bejou (2005). According to Bejou (2005) enrolment management takes place in the second stage of customer relationship management practice and includes course selection and advising. The mentoring of students, correct registration of modules and providing meaningful experiences and interactions with faculty form part of stage three of CRM (the commitment stage).

Customer relationship management practices that focus on these two stages could be introduced to better support students' perceptions of institutional commitment, particularly focusing on the Deans of the Institution and relevant management personnel. More effective course advising and the creation of meaningful opportunities for involvement with relevant Faculty members are important for students to feel that the faculty is committed to their success and that they can extend their relationship with the institution. Involvement with Faculty staff is further supported by student development theory to be an important contributor towards student success (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 2001).

In addition to efforts made in building relationships, Deans of Faculties may consider more effective marketing strategies concerning the roles of Faculty Officers as well as their own role and commitment towards student success.

### 7.2.2 Expectations

Expectations as outlined by Tinto et al (2006) refer to the expectational climate that the Institution creates on campus and is noted to influence the performance of students. That is, the quality of student effort is influenced when it is believed that the institution places students in high regard or that the faculty believes in their ability to perform. The head of the Institution plays a particularly important role in creating this climate.

A similar pattern emerged in this factor as compared with the previous one. The majority of the items were considered to be positive although there are areas requiring attention.

Firstly, students indicated fairly neutral responses in their daily encounters with staff being positive. Negative interactions with front-line staff can influence the degree of satisfaction that a customer experiences (Oldfield & Baron, 2000), which in turn may influence retention. Middle management could play a role in exploring possible barriers towards service delivery on a daily basis amongst front-line staff.

Secondly, responses were neutral to disagree concerning students having the confidence to lay a complaint against the Institution if required. Possibilities for these responses could relate to the perceived bias that may result from laying a complaint or alternatively not knowing where one could take complaints or grievances. Having a complaints procedure is important for the internal workings of an organisation as well as for maintaining customer satisfaction. An anonymous process of submitting complaints could be considered, alternatively implementing a customer service division that monitors customer satisfaction and retention alone could be considered for the future.

Thirdly, responses concerning the vice-chancellor's (VC) belief in student ability also had neutral to disagree responses. Considering that the vice-chancellor relays the culture to rest of the organisation, more attention could be given to the formal messages (directly from management) or informal messages (general perceptions amongst peer groups) that students are receiving in this regard. Customer

relationship management and marketing processes could be explored as a means of linking the VC with students and in communicating the belief in their ability for success.

### 7.2.3  Support

Support as defined by Tinto el al (2006) refers to opportunities related to academic support, financial support, social and personal/emotional support. Results indicated a number of areas of concern in this factor.

Firstly, availability of financial support was considered to be a concern for students. Given the financial constraints facing the current economy including the Higher Education sector this response is not surprising. Creating opportunities for increased access into the Higher Education system however means having the necessary support structures in place to support the increasing number of students entering institutions. While the National Student Financial Aid scheme (NSFAS) caters to a significant number of students, there is still a concern for students surrounding the availability of financial support.

Secondly, students were uncertain in their responses to perceived non-discrimination by the Institution and did not feel that they were treated fairly. Feelings of being discriminated against could significantly impede the Institution's mission as well as the retention of students who may not feel a sense of belonging or involvement with the Institution. Student development theorists discussed in chapter three outlined the importance that a sense of belonging, identity establishment and involvement has in promoting student success. Without a sense of belonging to the institution, it is unlikely that students will become involved in classroom and extra-curricular activities, which in turn may affect persistence through difficulties. This response therefore requires further attention and research in the perceived experiences of discrimination and fair treatment of students.

Thirdly, awareness of peer help support was negatively reported upon. Attention could be given to the activities within this programme where students could become

aware of peer helping as a support resource. Marketing activities could be employed to raise more awareness around this programme.

A further area of concern was that students indicated that they were unaware of developmental opportunities outside of the classroom. In order for the Institution to promote and support student success, involvement in campus-based activities is of key importance. This begs the question, are the developmental opportunities that are on offer based on sound knowledge of the target population and their needs? A needs analysis could therefore be conducted in order to understand the kinds of developmental opportunities that the Institution's customers require or would devote time to.

Finally a significant area of concern related to the availability of academic support in the form of supplemental instruction (SI). Student responses tended towards the neutral, disagree and strongly disagree categories in this item. Investing additional resources into supplemental instruction may prove valuable in promoting this area of support. Another possibility is to move towards electronic means of support which would mean reaching more people with a significant reduction in delivery costs. Should this be introduced senior students who provide and benefit from offering this service in the form of financial and experiential rewards would need to find other means of engagement with the Institution.

### 7.2.4  Feedback

According to Tinto et al (2006), feedback refers to the assessment or monitoring of students. Feedback takes many forms with the goal of helping both students and lecturers and faculty staff monitor progress and address any concerns early on. Overall this factor performed positively, with three areas that could warrant attention.

Firstly, while the majority of students indicated that they did obtain regular feedback on their academic performance, there were some students who felt neutral or who disagreed with this item. Attention could be given to how students interpret obtaining regular feedback and whether this was perhaps confused with timeous feedback.

The latter could be an item that could be included in the questionnaire for further research.

Secondly and possibly linked to the previous statement was that students felt that they did not obtain feedback on inadequate progress from lecturers during the first semester.  Obtaining feedback from lecturers when performance is not of the required standard is important to assist students in redefining their goals or to alert the lecturer to potential difficulties, wither academically or personally that they may be experiencing. This can prevent later warning systems needing to be put into play.

Thirdly, students indicated that when they had performed poorly they had not been referred to the Institution's support services. This has an impact on reaching students who may be facing certain difficulties that are impeding upon their academic performance and possible persistence in their programmes. It has additional implications for the building of trust in stage two of Bejou's (2005) customer relationship model. That is, students may not feel that the Institution acknowledges them as individuals, with whom they would like to pursue a relationship and who notices their difficulties. Customer relationship marketing could be introduced or strengthened between support services and academic staff who may not be aware of this important referral system.

### 7.2.5  Involvement

Involvement refers to the time and energy that students devote to educationally purposive activities. According to Tinto et al (2006), involvement or engagement has been proven over the years to contribute towards student persistence, where students who are more engaged with peers and faculty are more likely to persist through difficulties. In addition, involvement also shows increased learning, a central element of student success.

Given the importance of this factor in promoting student success, the Institution in this study will need to consider the relevance of these findings.

Firstly, a large number of students indicated that they did not attend their first year of Orientation. Latest statistics regarding Orientation at this Institution would need to be considered against these results since the target population of final year students

would have attended Orientation a number of years ago. This finding therefore needs to be considered tentatively.

Secondly, students indicated that there were insufficient opportunities on campus for socialising with peers. Again, management may need to consider the needs of the target market in order to more effectively meet the needs of their customers.

Thirdly, students indicated that there were insufficient opportunities for developmental workshops. Consideration could be given to how students define their developmental needs and for the relevant departments to cater more to these needs. An area of concern may be the timing of these workshops that clash with academic priorities. Consideration could be given to online developmental opportunities. A disadvantage of this is that one may lose the involvement angle, unless the institution introduces an online learning community. A learning community provides the opportunity for the same group of students to co-register for classes and form a sort of study team. It may also be the case that students with a common interest in a particular topic are encouraged to share ideas and material, thus creating an interdisciplinary network around a certain theme or topic. Creating an online learning community surrounding choice topics for development may answer both the students' needs for developmental workshops and the institutions needs to provide relevant information and learning opportunities. Furthermore it is in line with global social networking trends where Graphics. ms (2011) indicates that 73% of teens and young adults are a member of at least one social network and spend on average 55 minutes per day online connecting with peers.

## 7.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research

A number of limitations to this study were noted retrospectively. Firstly, the small sample size limited the scope of the research to an exploratory descriptive content only. Group differences could not be explored. It is recommended that the study be replicated with a much larger sample to allow for group comparisons. The low response rate was likely due to the timing of the survey being distributed during students' examination period.

Secondly, results of this study cannot be generalised to the greater population. It is recommended that the study be replicated with a much larger sample before findings can be generalised to the greater population. A second recommendation is that this

study be replicated at other Higher Education Institutions with similar strategic actions to support student development and success.

Finally it is recommended that the survey designed for this study is amended as per the suggestions in chapter 6 above, before further research is conducted.

## 7.4  Conclusion

The role of increased student retention in the context of Higher Education is widely acknowledged to play a vital role in the economic and social development of any country, particularly as the competitive forces of globalisation continue to influence development. While many studies focus on students themselves, not much research has been conducted regarding the Institutions impact on student success.

This study represents the beginning of what is hoped to be an emerging stream of management research in South Africa. Through research into an Institution's impact on student success, it is hoped that Institutions can better meet the needs of their clientele, mediate the barriers affecting retention of students, and as such serve broader development in South Africa and the global economy.

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## Appendix 1: Questionnaire

The following questions are based on Tinto and Pusser's (2006) model of institutional action for student success and are outlined under the respective variables.

**Instructions:**
Complete the following questions by marking the response that applies to you, that is,

- ⁻ Strongly disagree
- ⁻ Disagree
- ⁻ Neutral
- ⁻ Agree
- ⁻ Strongly Agree

**The first set of questions relate to your views on your university's commitment to student success:**

1. I feel that my university is committed to my success

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

2. I feel that my university has adequate resources to promote my success

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

3. I feel that my university lives up to it's mission statement

   "The University is an engaged and people-centred university that serves the needs of its diverse communities by contributing to sustainable development through excellent academic programmes, research and service delivery"

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

4. I feel that my university has sufficient technological resources for my course

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

5. I feel that my university rewards my academic success through financial incentives

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

6.  I feel that my university rewards my academic success through positive recognition

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

7.  I know who the Dean of my Faculty is

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

8.  I feel that the Dean and Faculty Officers are committed to student success

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

**The second set of questions relate to your views on your university's expectations**

9.  My university, as an institution believes in my ability to succeed

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

10. My daily encounters with staff at my university are positive

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

11. My lecturers believe in me

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

12. I feel that the Vice-Chancellor has high expectations for my success

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

13. I am aware of the rules to obtain my degree

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

14. I know what is expected of me in terms of my performance

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

15. I am aware of the consequences of breaking the rules at my university

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

16. I feel confident that I would be able to lay a complaint about my university should I feel the need to

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**The third set of questions relate to your views on your university's support**

17. I am able to attend Supplementary Instruction (SI) for the majority of my modules

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

18. I have access to financial support opportunities (bursaries or loans)

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

19. I do not feel discriminated against by my university as an institution

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

20. I feel treated fairly by my university as an institution

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

21. I feel confident in making use of student counselling services

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

22. I know who the peer helpers are on my campus

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

23. I am able to obtain accurate advice or information when needed

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

If you agreed to the statement above, from where do you obtain this advice?

_____

_____

24. I would make use of the writing centre's services if I required them

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

25. I am aware of the opportunities at my university to develop myself beyond the classroom

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

**The fourth set of questions relate to your views on your university's system of feedback**

26. I am aware that my institution makes use of access testing (for students who might not meet direct entry requirements)

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

27. I regularly obtain feedback from my lecturers about my academic performance

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

28. I feel that my lecturers are approachable

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

29. At the end of a module I have the opportunity to provide feedback of the module

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

30. I feel that my lecturers are flexible in their teaching practices

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

31. I have been referred to support services (such as student counselling) when I have not done well in a module

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

32. I feel that my lecturers support my learning

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

33. My lecturers will let me know in the first semester if my progress is not what it should be

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

34. There are regular assessments (such as class tests) where I can monitor my progress

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

**The fifth set of questions relate to your views on opportunities for Involvement at your university**

35. I have the opportunity to get to know my class mates

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

36. I attended the first year Orientation programme at the beginning of my first year

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

37. I am part of an orientation "buddy group"

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

38. There are enough activities on campus in which to socialise and get to know other students

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

39. I have the opportunity to take part in developmental workshops

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

40. My university regularly provides me with information on campus events

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

41. I have a place on campus where I can learn and connect with my peers

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

**Appendix 2: Emailed invitation to participants**

Attention all Final year Students

Does your University support student success?

We need your input!

Go to the new student portal and click on the icon at the bottom "Evaluate"
You can also visit the facebook page

Or click on http://websurvey.███████.ac.za/q.asp?sid=369&k=pgenhxbuer