UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

Discussion document:
Understanding the dynamics of part-time studies at UWC[1]

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1. Introduction

This study into understanding the dynamics of part-time studies at UWC is part of ongoing institutional research that is required to improve the conditions of and services to part-time students at UWC. Approximately 23% of UWC's students are part-time in any one year. One of DLL's mandates is to grow and develop the part-time programme. Through the DLL Board there has been an enquiry into financing part-time students through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). This has lead the Board to pose questions about the dynamics of the part-time programme and what it means to be part-time at UWC[2]. This paper is a preliminary report in progress and covers three of the following research aims. A subsequent paper will cover recommendations for improving the quality of part-time programme.

2. Research aims

2.1 To help the institution think about the future of the part-time programme amidst the many shifts in national policy that affect the part-time programme.

2.2 To create clarity about the part-time terminology.

2.3 To get a better understanding of the actual dynamics of the part-time programme at UWC and the student profiles in terms of study patterns, class attendance (during the day or during after hours), payments records and need for financial aid.

2.4 To generate practical recommendations for quality enhancement of the part-time programme in terms of protocols for quality improvement and contractual obligations, staff development processes and student support.

These research aims can be distilled into three areas of focus, namely part-time terminology, dynamics of UWC's part-time programme and quality enhancement of the part-time programme. The following questions were developed to examine these three areas.

Part-time terminology
- Is it necessary to continue to differentiate between part and full-time study in terms of student classification?
- What would be lost and gained by doing this either administratively, financially, pedagogically or politically?
- What are the practices in some comparable countries?
- What are the views of the NSFAS, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Department of Education (DoE) on part and full-time students? What would they say about maintaining or doing away with the distinction?

UWC's part-time programme
- What is the process of classification as a part-time student?
- Who decides to classify themselves in that way and why?
- What assumptions can we make about the study patterns and class attendance of those who classify themselves as part-time?
- Is it correct to assume that they are studying in the evening?

Quality enhancement of the part-time programme
- What quality enhancement measures must be put in place to improve the delivery of the part-time programme?

3. Research methodology

Data collection took various forms: Internet searches; telephonic and face-to-face interviews; questionnaires; analysis of data available in the Discovery database; and revision of previous research conducted at UWC. Additional information on the research process, including details on the profile of the student sample, can be found in Appendix A.

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[2] Since 1997 work has been done to try to deepen understanding of UWC's part-time programme and to improve it. See, for example, Juggling With our Futures: Part-time students speak, 1999; Koetsier, J., 1998. Lifelong Learning at UWC: A study of the part-time accredited programme. We are grateful to the Senate Research Committee (SRC) for allocating some resources to support this study. It is part of a bigger ongoing investigation into working adults in higher education.

A two-pronged approach was followed in order to obtain information from the student body. Firstly all students who have activated their UWC email accounts (GroupWise) received a request on 30 July 2003 to complete the questionnaire. Responses were obtained from 317 students. This gave a random sample of students who use email. Secondly, six classes across four faculties where there was likely to be a predominance of part-time students, were visited and the same questionnaire was distributed. In addition, students in English 1 were asked to complete the questionnaire. The same lecturer presents the lecture three times during the course of a day and all three sessions were visited. This yielded a sample of 266 students. The combined student sample size obtained via email or by class visits was 724 or approximately 5% of the current student population. Forty-one of the emailed responses were either blank or duplicates. This gave a final sample of 683 students.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with representatives for the following faculties: Arts; Economic and Management Sciences (EMS); Education; and Law. These faculties were selected as they have most of the part-time students. The representatives were mostly Faculty Officers and other administrative staff, but in one case a lecturer attended as well. The same interview schedule was followed at each meeting, but the interviews differed as an open-ended structure was used.

Informal interviews were conducted with all lecturers whose classes were visited. More detailed interviews will be conducted with lecturers who teach in the part-time programme. The results of these interviews will be included in the next report which will focus on improving the quality of the part-time programme.

The Internet was searched for comparative information on local and international institutions of higher education to develop an understanding of how part-time is currently being understood in terms of policy and practice at these institutions. In addition, key persons in the DoE and CHE were interviewed telephonically.

Finally, an analysis was made of the material available in the workbooks on the Discovery database (MIS) covering the period 1998-2003.

4. Background to the research

Historically, universities around the world provided higher education to people who had recently completed their secondary education. The students tended to be young and relied on financial support from their parents or obtained study bursaries, few had personal financial obligations. However since the eighties, in response to a range of socio-economic factors and the massification of higher education, universities around the world have seen an expansion of numbers of students which has led to a shift in their **traditional student body**. The student body in general became older, tended to come after a few years of work experience, chose to study locally and had a variety of personal financial obligations. Many of these students did not have parents who had attended university. These students have become known as **non-traditional students** and their form of studying tended to be part-time, usually because they were combining work and other adult responsibilities with learning.

Internationally, some universities responded to this growth in non-traditional students by diversifying both horizontally (new content) and vertically (new levels) as well as providing new modes of provision (distance programmes, online learning). Universities also started to provide face-to-face classes for more hours of the day and in blocks periods such as during a summer break. Universities were also faced with having to become increasingly flexible and to re-think their policies regarding fees and 'time to degree' or throughput rates.

In South Africa, it was particularly at the historically black institutions established in the 1960s that part-time programmes were established and this was to cater mainly for the upgrading of teachers and civil servants within the apartheid government structures. Here the term part-time referred to working students who came to classes in the late afternoon or evening.

UWC is no exception to this shift in an increase in non-traditional or part-time students. The next section examines the work and learning patterns of UWC students.

5. How 'traditional' are UWC students?

The following aspects of our student body will be analysed in terms of age, mode of learning how they combine work and learning and the time taken to complete their degree.

Age

As the table below indicates, since 1999, there has been a gradual increase in age of the overall student. Currently 3,876 (27.7%) of all students are over the age of 30 and 1426 of these students are registered as full-time students.

	Full-time students			**Part-time students**			**Total of students**		
Table 1 **Comparison of shifts in age (+/- 30 years) among** **part-time and full-time students during period 1999-2003**									
Year	Total number	Over 30 years		Total number	Over 30 years		Total number	Over 30 years	
		Number	%		Number	%		Number	%
1999	7,592	1,133	14.9%	1,770	1,233	69.7%	9,362	2,366	25.3%
2001	8,519	1,277	15.0%	2,196	1,642	74.8%	10,715	2,919	27.2%
2003	10,961	1,426	13.0%	3,041	2,450	80.6%	14,002	3,876	27.7%

Source: Discovery/Management Information System, UWC

The following table reflects the ages of all UWC students in July 2003[3].

Table 2 **Age of students at UWC in 2003**						
Age	**Full-time students**		**Part-time students**		**Total**	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
18-20	4,067	37.1%	18	0.6%	4,085	29.2%
21-24	3,939	35.9%	144	4.7%	4,083	29.2%
25-29	1,529	13.9%	429	14.1%	1,958	14.0%
30	1,426	13.0%	2,450	80.6%	3,876	27.7%
Total	**10,961**	**100.0%**	**3,041**	**100.0%**	**14,002**	**100.0%**

The above table indicates that:

- 42% of all students are over the age of 25.
- 27% of full-time students are over the age of 25.
- 95% of part-time students are over the age of 25.

- 28% of all students are over the age of 30.
- 13% of full-time students are over the age 30.
- 81% of part-time students are over the age of 30.

The registration figures in 2003 show that UWC is following the international trends described by Schuetze and Slowey (2000) which indicates that universities in Sweden, England and the USA report that up to 45% of their students are over the age of 25.

In July 2003, at faculty level, Education was the 'oldest' faculty with 89% of all their students being over 30 years of age. The 'youngest' faculty was Science with 11.2% of their student body being over the age of 30 followed by Dentistry at 14.1%. In the remaining faculties slightly more than 20% of the students were over the age of 30. The details of the breakdown appear in Appendix B of this document.

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[3] Table developed by Jos Koetsier on 8/7/03 using data on website: http://ntapps.uwc.ac.za

Modes of learning

This research revealed that Arts, EMS and Law Faculties are offering their programmes in two modes, namely a face to face presentation during the day and a similar presentation again in the evening. If the course is particularly large then the lecture is repeated in the afternoon. Faculties that have large numbers of students registered as part-time do not, as a rule, offer classes on Saturday or in block sessions during a vacation. An exception to this is the Education Faculty who offer their programmes at satellite venues, on Saturdays and in a block format.

There is an increase in the use of e-learning across campus as departments experiment with communicating with students in this way. Departments are also developing a variety of distance or resource based teaching models. There is the beginning of an e-learning strategy being developed presently.

Although a lecture is repeated in the morning and evening sessions and students sit the same examinations, the classes tend to be different because of the input of the students. The evening classes tend to be attended by more mature learners who bring their work experiences into the classroom. This view was confirmed by lecturers and students. The Faculty Officers of EMS mentioned that they knew of older, female students who were unemployed and had registered full-time, but now chose to go to the evening classes as they found them more enjoyable. Other faculties also mentioned this practice which, although allowed as no registers were taken, was not generally encouraged.

Twenty-five of the students in the sample acknowledged that they attend classes during the day as well as in the evening, only two of these students are registered as part-time students.

The following table shows the increasing trend in students opting to register as part-time students. In 2003, there has been a significant increase in student numbers in both full and part-time programmes.

Table 3								
Comparison of part-time and full-time registrations								
Type	**1996**		**1998**		**2000**		**2002**	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Full-time	11,259	82%	9,431	82%	7,753	80%	9,982	77%
Part-time	2,531	18%	2,036	18%	1,933	20%	2,980	23%
Total	**13,790**	**100%**	**11,467**	**100%**	**9,686**	**100%**	**12,862**	**100%**

Work and learning

The two tables below have been drawn from the data obtained through the research.

Table 4						
Extent of employment of UWC students						
n=683						
Employment status	**Full-time students**		**Part-time students**		**Total**	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Employed	104	18.9%	127	94.8%	231	33.8%
Unemployed	387	70.5%	6	4.5%	393	57.5%
Unknown	58	10.6%	1	0.7%	59	8.6%
Total	**549**	**100.0%**	**134**	**100.0%**	**683**	**100.0%**

The above table indicates that:
- 231 (34%) of students are employed.
- 104 (19%) of students registered as full-time are employed.
- 6 (4.5%) of part-time students are unemployed.

This table indicates that many students, irrespective of their status as full-time or part-time are combining work and learning. The table below indicates the level of employment by full-time and part-time students who formed the research sample. Students were asked how many hours they worked per week.

Table 5 Level of employment n=231						
Number of hours per week	**Full-time students**		**Part-time students**		**Total**	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<10	18	17.3%	6	4.7%	24	10.4%
10-19	44	42.3%	2	1.6%	46	19.9%
20-35	24	23.1%	8	6.3%	32	13.9%
>35	14	13.5%	107	84.3%	121	52.4%
Unknown	4	3.8%	4	3.1%	8	3.5%
Total	**104**	**100.0%**	**127**	**100.0%**	**231**	**100.0%**

The above table indicates that in the research sample of students

- 121 (52%) of students work more than 35 hours per week.
- 14 (2.6%) of students registered as full-time work more than 35 hours per week.
- Most part-time students (84.3%) workat least 35 hours per week.

Koen (2001:29) found that two-thirds of the postgraduate students in his sample held permanent positions, with a third of these students being registered as full-time students.

These tables indicate that UWC students are following the international trend of combining work and learning. The figures also indicate that students spend substantial portions of their time at work, which impacts on the time they can allocate for learning[4]. Discussions on this trend highlight the need for higher education institutions to adapt, not only in terms of mode of provision, but also in terms of the needs of students who bring their work experience into the classroom.

In summary, 42% of all UWC students are over the age of 25 and 22% are registered as part-time students. In the research sample, 34% of students indicated they were employed with 53% of them working more than 35 hours per week. Thus many of the students at UWC can not be regarded as 'traditional' in terms of their age, the mode in which they are studying and how they are combining work and learning. In addition to these categories UWC students are often 'first generation' students who come from social groupings that have not commonly attended university.

These factors indicate that it is inadequate to reduce the complex category of part-time to 'students who study in the evening'. The following section examines more closely the notions of full-time and part-time.

6. What does it mean to be 'part-time' or 'full-time'?

Definitions of part and full-time are not straight forward, neither is the choice of being classified asone or the other. There is no clear definition of either category that we have found. One that has been used at UWC at times is, "part-time means that you attend classes in the evening," i.e., the time you attend face-to-face sessions. Another is more about the study load, i.e., if you're full-time you have a 100% study load for a particular period of time.

The definition used by Vincent Morta is that a part-time time student can have a maximum Full-time Equivalent (FTE) rating of 0.75[5]. He stated that he was aware of students registered as full-time who had an FTE rating as low as 0.25 and felt that, to be regarded as full-time, a student should have a rating of at least 0.50.

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[4] Pechar and Wroblewski (2000:14) refer to this as a 'time budget', i.e., the time available for study after meeting other commitments.

[5] Personal communication: 23 October 2003.

The research revealed that the terms are, in many instances, almost meaningless as descriptions of when, where, for how long or how students study.

The labelling of students who have adult responsibilities is complex and is resolved in different ways. In Australia they have done away with the distinction of part and full-time. Students are on a continuum from 100% to 1% in terms of study load. Everything then is calculated proportionally. In the UK they still use the distinction of full and part-time and its descriptive power is as limited there as it is here. With the movement towards greater flexibility in delivery of learning the categories are becoming even less useful, as are the categories of distance and residential or face-to-face. At other institutions of higher education within South Africa the distinction remains unclear with no institution providing a clear institution-wide definition of part-time.

It would appear that at UWC, it is the students themselves who choose the label of either part-time or full-time. The questionnaire distributed to students asked a variety of questions concerning the status of students. Students had no problem completing this and were even able to state which of the courses they attended were part of the part-time or full-time programme, irrespective of the mode of provision.

An analysis of current practices at UWC indicates that students choose to register as full-time for a variety of reasons other than being unemployed. Responses from our sample included the following reasons for registering as a full-time student:

• I am an international student and must be registered full-time to keep my study visa even though I attend three, two-week sessions per year.

• I want to be in residence so I must register as a full-time student.

• I am over 21, but I want to remain on my parents' medical aid.

• I wanted to get a student bursary.

These four examples indicate that certain practices, currently in operation at UWC, would have to be reviewed if the distinction between part-time and full-time was removed. The last statement carries the most significant implication. A number of students in the sample voluntarily stated (it was not a direct question) that getting access to NSFAS was the main reason for studying full-time.

Conversely students change to part-time registration because the academic exclusion criteria are less strict. For example in EMS, full-time students must obtain 90 credits to proceed, but part-timer students only require 50 credits. A similar scenario exists in the Law Faculty.

These examples indicate that students who are not succeeding are encouraged by some Faculty Officers to register as part-time students rather than being told they have to leave the University. This provides students with another opportunity to succeed without being labelled as a failure.

A more complex issue regarding the removal of the label part-time lies in finding a new way to label the older, non-traditional student. Much has been written about the different kinds of learning needs and expectations of these students.

From a UWC student perspective there are advantages and disadvantages to retaining the distinction of part-time and full-time. Three areas are probed to demonstrate some of the practices currently in operation on campus. These are:

• Why students register as full-time, but attend part-time classes?

• What is the 'time to degree' difference between part-time and full-time?

• Is there a difference in the number of modules part-time and full-time students register for?

Students registering as full-time, but attending part-time classes
In the Arts Faculty there are some students who do shift work and so vary their attendance according to the shift they are working. An example given was of a fire fighter who works 24-hour day shifts one week and is off the next. During his off week he attends day and night classes to catch up. He is an 'A' student and often emails his assignments to lecturers. They also know of final-year students who attend both part-time and full-time classes to try and avoid studying an additional year. They think there are probably 5% of part-timers masquerading as full-timers, most of these are older students. Registers are not taken at any of the lectures so students can attend any lecture, in English 1 for example, the same lecture is repeated three times in a day.

In the EMS Faculty some of the postgraduate classes are only offered in the evening due to insufficient numbers of students to run the class twice, so both part-time and full-time students attend the same class. Students in this instance choose to register as either full-time or part-time as the Faculty makes no distinction. Another reason is when there is a clash in the full-time classes, a student can attend the part-time or evening course.

In the Law Faculty there is no academic exclusion for part-time students, but full-time students are only allowed to repeat a course twice. Thus students sometimes change from full-time to part-time to avoid 'exclusion'. If an elective course clashes, then students can attend the part-time equivalent.

In the Education Faculty[6] there are no undergraduate students and most are registered as part-time students. Most students work full-time. The BEd (Hons) programme consists of eight courses and students can register as full-time (eight courses in one year) or part-time (four courses per year). The students attend exactly the same classes irrespective of how they are registered. The distinction lies in the time to degree.

Postgraduate students in Science, EMS and Arts indicated that they were registered as full-time students, but attended all or most of their classes after 16h00. Faculty Officers stated that this was due to the limited number of students in each course and programme times were established at the convenience of the majority of the students.

Time to degree
The UWC General Year Book (2003:58) states the following rule for Baccalaureus degrees.

6.3 (a) (i) Save with the permission of Senate, a student not in his/her final year of study will not be allowed to renew his/her registration as a candidate for a degree, diploma or certificate in a particular faculty, if, in terms of the rules of such faculty, he/she has failed in two attempts to gain promotion to the next year of study. (See note below)

(ii) Save with the permission of Senate, a student in his/her final year of study (or any other student to whom the provisions of (i) above are not applicable) will not be allowed to renew his/her registration for a degree, diploma or certificate in a particular faculty, if in terms of the rule of such faculty, he/she has failed in three attempts to complete all the requirements for the particular degree, diploma or certificate.

(iii) The provisions of (i) and (ii) above shall not be applicable to students registered in faculties or for degree, diploma or certificate where the rules of such faculties or the rules for such degrees, diplomas or certificates create specific conditions relating to renewal of registration.
Note: With regard to (a) (iii) see rules D.7, D.13 and D.23 (Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences)[7].

Note: A student who, owing to unsatisfactory academic progress, has been refused permission to register in terms of the foregoing regulations, will only in exceptional circumstances be allowed by Senate to re-register as a student of this university.

Faculty calendars state individual rules for promotion. For example, the Arts Faculty requires BA students to obtain 90 credits to be promoted into their second year.

The above extract indicates that students who are not being promoted by a faculty will usually be asked to leave after two years of not progressing into the following year. This means that a student is given a maximum of six years to complete a three-year degree. The rule does not indicate what happens with students who are registered as part-time students. According to Vincent Morta, in practise, this rule is only applied to full-time students and no academic exclusion rules or promotion rules are applied to part-time students.

The time to degree is linked closely to state funding formulae. Current proposals suggest that higher education institutions that have high throughput rates will be privileged. Should this become a reality, the formula will be in conflict with policy initiatives aimed at widening access and encouraging older,

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[6] The BEduc students are registered in the Arts Faculty.

[7] These rules refer to the required number of credits a student needs to obtain in order to be promoted in the EMS Faculty. This Faculty has a cut off of seven years.

working adults to return to learning. The current average for completing a three-year bachelor degree at UWC is 4.5 years.

According to Koen (2001:21) research conducted at UWC in 1999 indicated that 30% of first-time entering students in 1995 completed their three-year undergraduate programmes in the three years, 16% completed in four years and 12% more than four years. The remaining 42% dropped out before completing their programme. Vincent Morta is currently completing research which looks at specific cohorts in terms of efficiency rates, time to degree levels and 'stopper' subjects. This research indicates that professional degrees have the highest rate of completion within the specified time. For example, over 95% of dentistry students complete their Bachelor degree within the specified five years.

In the Law Faculty the course selection is structured so that part-timers complete the 23 courses in the programme in five years and full-timers in four years. In 2001, 13% of full-time students completed their LLB programme in four years. No final information is available about the completion rate of the five-year part-time LLB stream, as the first cycle of that stream will be completed in 2005.

In the table below the majority of students responding were first-years (62%). Although the selection of English 1 contributed to this response, it is also relevant to note that 135 of the 317 email responses were from first-year students.

However in terms of this discussion, the table indicates that in this student sample 12 students who are registered as full-time students and nine part-time students have been on-Campus for more than six years. A further 42 students (6%) have been registered for four to five years.

Table 6 Number of years at UWC of student sample n= 683						
Number of years at UWC	**Full-time students**		**Part-time students**		**Total**	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	361	66.0%	63	46.3%	424	62.1%
2-3	141	25.8%	48	35.3%	189	27.7%
4-5	31	5.7%	11	8.1%	42	6.1%
>6	12	2.2%	9	6.6%	21	3.1%
Unknown	2	0.4%	5	3.7%	7	1.0%
Total	**547**	**100.0%**	**136**	**100.0%**	**683**	**100.0%**

Number of modules

The following table is based on information collected during the research. Students were asked to state the number of courses they had attended the previous semester and then to list the actual courses. Although it is possible, due to time constraints, the information provided by students was not verified, for the same reason an analysis has not been made concerning the credit rating of the courses. Therefore, the students who reported doing more than seven courses last semester could have been all half courses. At this stage the information must be considered as reported as it is still valid to compare the extent of commitment by full-time and part-time students.

The table indicates that there are a considerable number of students who are registered as part-time students and are carrying a considerable study load.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="7">Table 7
Comparison of the number of courses part-time and full-time students reported doing in the first semester of 2003
n=683</td></tr>
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Number of courses	Full-time students		Part-time students		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	7	1.3%	8	5.9%	15	2.2%
2	11	2.0%	28	20.6%	39	5.7%
3	40	7.3%	28	20.6%	68	10.0%
4	259	47.3%	43	31.6%	302	44.2%
5	93	17.0%	12	8.8%	105	15.4%
6	72	13.2%	7	5.1%	79	11.6%
7	32	5.9%	3	2.2%	35	5.1%
8	7	1.3%	2	1.5%	9	1.3%
9	1	0.2%	0	0.0%	1	0.1%
Not given	25	4.6%	5	3.7%	30	4.4%
Total	547	100.0%	136	100.0%	683	100.0%

- 18% of all students in the sample took less than four modules in the semester.
- 44% of students (full-time and part-time) chose to take four modules in the semester.
- Twelve part-time students reported taking six or more modules in a semester.
- Seven full-time students were registered for only one module.

The Law Faculty discourages catching up and does not allow a student to take more than normal in any year. There are eight semester courses scheduled in the first year and nine in the second, third and fourth. The maximum number of courses for full-time, usually third years, who are catching up on their electives, is 11. They have rearranged the programme to prevent students taking too many courses. There are now three one-hour sessions on four evenings per week, the first period is for extras such as tutorials and the other two periods are doubles, so a student can only take four subjects at a time.

In the Arts Faculty there is no restriction on the number of modules a part-time student can attend, but most usually register for two or three. Full-time students register for four courses. It is possible for a part-time student to complete a degree of 360 credits in three years.

In the EMS Faculty full-time students can register for a maximum of 120 credits (12 modules) and part-time can register for between 60 and 80 credits.

In summary, the above comparison demonstrates that there appears to be no clear distinction between students registered as part-time or full-time in terms of when they attend classes, how long they take to complete their degree and the number of modules they take per semester.

Describing part-time
In terms of the above discussion, ways of describing a part-time student more accurately could be:
Legal/bureaucratic definition of part-time
A student who has registered for less modules than the prescribed full-time load, (equivalent to one FTE).

Lifestyle definition within the context of UWC
A mature, mostly employed student with an average age of 32 years, who has to juggle multiple responsibilities (work, community, family, study, self-care) and who predominantly attends the University's afternoon or evening classes.

Curricular definition
A student who registers as part-time and mainly follows the part-time programmes and their specific timetables as developed by the faculties and units.

7. Views of NSFAS, CHE and DoE on part-time versus full-time

According to the NSFAS website, a student qualifies for a NSFAS loan if he/she is:

• A South African citizen registered at a South African university or technikon

• An undergraduate, studying for a first tertiary educational qualification, or studying for a second tertiary qualification if this is necessary to practise in your chosen profession (e.g., LLB or HDE)

• Able to demonstrate potential for academic success

• Financially needy

These criteria do not mention that a student must be studying full-time. However, in practice part-time students are excluded, except for UNISA students. This is why some students classify themselves full-time even though they are studying part-time.

On the DoE side, they do not use the part or full-time distinction. They therefore do not have definitions for these. They use the concept of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) and they fund according to this. In telephonic conversation with Professor Bunting of DoE, when he was asked whether the new funding formula would disadvantage institutions with large part-time student numbers because of the assumed longer time to degree, he said not. He stated that, "the graduation rates were proxies for cohort figures," and these would change when cohort studies had been completed over the next three years. He urged UWC to do cohort studies in order to understand more details about throughput and drop out rates. The DoE makes a distinction between 'on-campus' and 'off-campus' students.

From the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) point of view, they do not distinguish between full and part-time students. The essential issue will be to ensure the quality indicators used will take into account the essential conditions for all students, be they part-time or full-time, on-campus or off-campus. In discussion with Ms Jenny Glennie of the South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE), she stated that they were wanting to infuse the needs of distance students into the mainstream. In many instances they will be similar to part-time students.

In a discussion with Ms Glennie about the adv,antages and disadvantages of maintaining the distinction between 'distance' and 'contact' students, given the fact that, particularly with the use of ICT the distinction is becoming more blurred, she felt that there was some advantage presently for maintaining the `distance` category. One of the reasons was to be able to advocate for the improvement of their conditions. The same argument could perhaps hold for part-time students.

From the national perspectives, there does not seem to be a strong argument for maintaining the distinctions between part and full-time students within UWC. The position of part-time students with NSFAS needs to be challenged. The issue of financial need, regardless of full or part-time status, would seem to be more in line with DoE policy. The HEQC quality indicators also need to be scrutinised to ensure that the interests of part-time students are infused. UWC's own quality indicators would need to be developed to ensure that the needs of all students are taken into account.

8. Other ways to define students: 'traditional' and 'non-traditional'

As mentioned previously higher education institutions around the world are grappling with identifying their student body. Very often the issue is not just the label, but is linked to broader policy issues concerning widening access, addressing equity issues and state funding. A few examples are given below.

Pechar and Wroblewski (2000:14) who are based in Austria, suggest that there are three variables for categorising students. These are: the nature of their entrance qualification (conventional or alternative); timing of the participation (straight after school or later); and their mode of study. This is a multi-level categorisation that enables an institution to identify students who may have specific learning needs.

According to Pat Davies (2003), in the United Kingdom they retain the full and part-time categories and the policy is to draw a distinction between learners based on who is paying. Thus for full-time students

there is a financial partnership between the state and the individual and part-time is based on a financial partnership between the state, employer and the individual. As in South Africa, this distinction is becoming less useful, but it is only in Scotland in the UK that part-time students can apply for state funding.

At Linkoping University, Sweden (LIU) programme length is based on numbers of points or credits. One point is equal to one week of full-time study. One year of full-time academic study at LIU is equal to 40 points or 60 ECTS credits (European Credit Transfer System). A Bachelor degree requires 120 points and usually takes three years of full-time study. Students are able to register as part-time students. This is defined as less than 14 credits in six months.

Bron and Agelii (2000:86) state that in Sweden, undergraduate and postgraduate students are entitled to financial support. Undergraduate students must obtain a certain number of credits each year, usually 30, to retain their loan which must be repaid when studies are completed. Students also receive a grant which does not get paid back. Undergraduate students have the right to the maximum study loan (including the grant) for 12 semesters, but people over the age of 45 do not usually qualify. The size of the loan is reduced if the student is employed.

At British Columbia University students are able to register as full-time or part-time based purely on their credit load. The average credit load taken by students is 33 per session, and normal completion time is four to five years. In order to be considered as full-time, a student must carry a credit load in the Winter Session[8] that is equal to at least 80% of the standard credit load for the year. A student who has a credit load that is less than that required for full-time status shall be considered as a part-time student. A part-time student will not normally be eligible for scholarships or for a Degree with Distinction.

In 2001, at the University of Missouri (St Louis), 43% of students were registered as part-time with 54% of all students receiving one or more forms of financial assistance. In order to retain financial assistance, students are required to complete their undergraduate programme within 12 full-time equivalent semesters and maintain an average of at least a Grade C. The status part-time or full-time is based on the number of credits a student is enrolled for per semester or the number of contact hours per week.

9. Conclusion

At present part-time is used as a catch all for students who are mature (meaning older), working (not always) and financially independent (not necessarily). This research has indicated that there is not a clear distinction between full-time and part-time students, although it can be said that we are more likely to find the older students attending evening classes. It would appear that it is the students who are choosing to register as either full-time or part-time. In terms of the institutional and administrative needs of UWC the distinction does not appear to be useful. To use the imperative within the White Paper of 'widening access for workers and adult learners' would be a more useful, strategic way of focussing attention within UWC on older, more mature, first generation, working students. This has some resonance with the distinction used by Pechar and Wroblewski which allows students to be classified according to their learning needs. They distinguish between students who come straight from school or who come later – this highlights age which comes with adult responsibilities. In the final analysis, it is these responsibilities that are most important for curricula design, student development, service provision, teaching and learning methodologies and delivery strategies.

In the light of this research we recommend that:

1. The use of the term part-time is retained in the meantime until the institution has decided on more useful ways of describing its adult learners and workers, but that descriptive categories for regular monitoring and analysing students' progress, development and growth are refined. These categories would include age, work, and other categories which capture their adult responsibilities.

2. Consider the way students are defined to consider the nature of their entrance qualification (conventional or alternative), the timing of the participation (straight after school or later) and their mode of study (based on number of credits being taken per semester as well face-to-face, distance, e-learning etc).

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[3] Equivalent to a full academic year as the Summer session is like a 'catch up' session.

3. The DLL's mandate shifts from `growing and developing the part-time programme` to that which is concerned with `widening access to adult learners and workers` (this includes RPL students). This would put pressure on the institution to define adult learners and workers and to develop strategic quantitative and qualitative targets to be attained in the next planning cycle.

4. The Registrar's Office examines policies and regulations for anomalies which relate to part and full-time students. A rule is developed for the maximum number of years a student can register for a Baccalaureus degree.

5. Students on registration are presented with the times and modes in which classes will be offered, in order to be more responsive to students' preferences and to encourage flexible approaches to teaching and learning.

6. The funding from NSFAS to UWC is distributed according to need not in terms of part and full-time categories.

7. This discussion paper is circulated in the institution in order to obtain comments and feedback.

Division for Lifelong Learning
27 October 2007

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University of Cape Town	www.uct.ac.za
University of Natal	www.und.ac.za
University of South Africa	www.unisa.ac.za
University of Western Cape	www.uwc.ac.za
University of Witwatersrand	www.wits.ac.za
University of Stellenbosch	www.sun.ac.za
Linskoping University	www.liu.se
University of Missouri	www.umsl.edu
University of Technology Sydney	www.uts.edu.au
University of British Columbia	www.ubc.ca

Appendix A: Research methodology

In obtaining information from the students, a two-pronged approach was followed.

Interviews with part-time classes

The Director of DLL approached all Faculty Deans asking them to suggest part-time classes they felt would be suitable to interview. A number of leads were obtained in this way and date classes in Arts, EMS, Law and Education Faculties were visited. The interview was in the form of a short questionnaire aimed at finding out why students had selected the part-time option. Questions of a demographic nature were included to assist the researchers in obtaining a better profile of part-time students. In addition questions were asked to determine the extent of blurring between part-time and full-time class attendance.

The questionnaire was also distributed to students who were attending an English 1 class. The same class is held three times during the day and each class was visited to assess the balance between part-time and full-time students.

To date this has yielded a total of 407 completed questionnaires.

Email to students

On the morning of Wednesday 30 July, all UWC students who have activated their UWC email accounts were emailed using Group Wise. The same questionnaire, as above, was sent to students in the body of an email, i.e., not as an attachment. The message line contained the following message: UWC wants five minutes of your precious time so we can deliver a better quality programme. The actual email is attached in Appendix C.

This strategy was completely untested and researchers decided to use it more as a trial of a research method than to obtain results as they expected very little response. At one stage researchers even considered offering a financial reward to encourage students to respond. Within 30 minutes of the email being sent out, five responses were received and by 16h30 a further 56 responses had been received. By 13h00 on 31 July, a mere 24 hours later, a total of 125 responses had been received.

By 1 October a total of 317 emailed responses had been received. This is roughly a 2% response rate. The quick response rate indicates that this could become a useful research tool.

One of the limitations of the research method is that the researcher has no face-to-face contact with the student and therefore cannot contextualise the questionnaire or clarify student's understanding of the questions. This could result in responses being less reliable than normal. The researchers were unable to use 41 of the responses as they were either blank or duplicates.

The combined student sample size obtained via email or by class visits was 724 or approximately 5% of the current student population. Of the emailed responses, 41 were either blank or duplicates and this gave a final sample of 683 students.

Information from faculty officers and lecturers

Face-to-face interviews were held with representatives for the following Faculties: Arts, EMS, Education and Law. These faculties were selected as they have most of the part-time students. The representatives were mostly faculty officers and other administrative staff, but in one case a lecturers attended as well. The same interview schedule was followed at each meeting, but the interviews differed as an open-ended structure was used. Information was obtained on the following areas:

• The working definition used by the faculty to label part-time versus full-time students

• How and why a student acquires such a label

• The difference in the faculties between part-time and full-time, including subject choice, differences between the courses and the number of modules allowed per semester

• Why a student may register as full-time, but attend part-time and vice versa.

Appendix B – Data on student sample

Table 7 Profile of respondents by faculty n=683				
Faculty	**Students responding**		**Students in faculty**	
	Number	% of 683	Number	% of faculty
Arts	317	46%	2,566	12.35%
Community and Health Sciences	16	2%	1,986	0.81%
Dentistry	9	1%	342	2.63%
Education	22	3%	1,233	1.78%
EMS	186	27%	3,932	4.73%
Law	56	8%	1,885	2.97%
Natural Science	77	11%	1,873	4.11%
Total	**683**	**100%**	**13,817**	**4.94%**

Table 8 Comparison of students over the age of 30 by faculty						
Faculty	**Full-time 2003**		**Part-time 2003**		**Total number of students**		
	Total	Over 30	Total	Over 30	Total	Over 30	%over 30
CHS	1,749	276	230	211	1,979	487	24.6%
EMS	2,909	219	1,063	722	3,972	941	23.7%
ARTS	2,308	347	294	235	2,602	582	22.4%
DEN	327	33	7	14	334	47	14.1%
EDU	317	231	1,021	963	1,338	1,194	89.2%
LAW	1,552	158	338	257	1,890	415	22.0%
SCI	1,799	162	78	48	1,877	210	11.2%
Total	**10,961**	**1,426**	**3,041**	**2,450**	**14,002**	**3,876**	**27.7%**

Source: Discovery/Management Information System, UWC

Appendix C – Copy of Email message to students

Dear Student,

Welcome to the new Semester!

You have been selected to participate in this research project, which is aimed at improving UWC as a lifelong learning institution. The institution has approved the research. Please take a few minutes to complete it. All information will be treated confidentially and anonymously. The final results will be posted by the end of August by e-mail to all students who participated in the research.

How to reply

Maximize the size of this message (click on the 2 squares at the right top corner of the window). It makes reading this message much easier.

1. Activate the reply button on the left side of this window (second from the top).

2. Choose the option Reply to sender (including message).

3. Complete the questions.

4. Activate the "Send" button on the left side of this window (first button on top).

Thank you very much for your co-operation.

Jos Koetsier, Kathy Watters
Researchers for the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL)
Tel: 021 959 3787

Questions

1. Programme you are registered for, e.g. BSc, Bcom.

2. Number of years at UWC.

3. Will you complete your programme this year?

4. Are you registered as a full-time or part-time student?

5. If you are registered as a part-time: what was the main reason for your choice?

6. If you are registered as a full-time: what was the main reason for your choice?

7. Are you attending:
   7.1. Full-time classes
   7.2 Part-time classes
   7.3 Both
   7.4 I don't know.

8.1 List the courses you did last semester.
   Course 1.
   Course 2.
   Course 3.
   Course 4.
   Course 5.
   Course 6.

Course 7.

Course 8.

8.2 Time of the Courses: State whether the class was held
in the morning (till 12:00)

afternoon (till 16:00)

or evening (16:00 onwards).

Course 1.

Course 2.

Course 3.

Course 4.

Course 5.

Course 6.

Course 7.

Course 8.

8.3 Full-time or part-time course
Indicate whether the course you are doing is part of the full-time or part-time programme. If you
are not sure just write "dont know".

Course 1.

Course 2.

Course 3.

Course 4.

Course 5.

Course 6.

Course 7.

Course 8.

9. Employment
9.1 Are you employed?

9.2 If yes, how many hours do you work a week

10. Gender and Age. Please indicate you choice with a cross (X)
10.1 Male

10.2 Female

10.3 Under 23 Years

10.4 Over 24 years

Sender
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