The ‘added value’ of a foundation programme

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Abstract

This article will discuss the findings from an analysis of focus group interviews held with former Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Foundation Programme students, in which they were asked to elaborate on their experience of the foundation programme. The data analysis revealed that the foundation programme has a far reaching effect on all aspects of the students’ lives and not only on their academic performance. Results from a longitudinal study show that students who complete a foundation year do tend to perform better in later degree studies than directly admitted students with similar academic profiles. However, this research has highlighted the fact that the students themselves place a high value on the non academic benefits of the course. The link between academic and life skills development will be explored and recommendations emanating from the findings will be made for the future design of foundation programmes.

INTRODUCTION

In marketing terms, the ‘added value’ of a programme refers to the benefits it can offer the consumer in addition to its core purpose (Kotler and Andreasen 1996, 423). The core purpose of a foundation programme is to provide students with alternative routes of access to tertiary education, by equipping them with the necessary academic knowledge and skills. Research conducted in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Foundation Programme (UFP) indicates that a well-constructed foundation programme not only achieves its core purpose, but also provides the students with a broad range of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes outside of the purely academic sphere. This ‘added value’ contributes greatly to student academic success while simultaneously fostering development on a social and emotional level, enabling them to be successful in all facets of university life.

This article will discuss the findings from an analysis of focus group interviews held with former UFP students, in which the students were asked to elaborate on their experience of the foundation programme. The data analysis revealed that the
foundation programme has a far-reaching effect on all aspects of the students’ lives and not only on their academic performance. Preliminary results gleaned from a longitudinal study (Lithauer in progress) show that students who complete a foundation year do tend to perform better in later degree studies than directly admitted students with similar academic profiles. However, our research has highlighted the fact that the students themselves place a high value on the non-academic benefits of the course and are, in fact, ambiguous about their cognitive development during the foundation year. The link between academic and life skills development will be explored and recommendations emanating from the findings will be made for the future design of foundation programmes.

OVERVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION PROGRAMME (UFP)

The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Foundation Programme (UFP) was introduced in 1999 as an alternative access programme for students who did not meet faculty admission requirements. Due to the legacies of Apartheid, the majority of South African learners have been ‘disadvantaged’ by the school education system and a foundation year not only grants these students access, but also allows them to develop the necessary skills, knowledge, attitude and values which will prepare them for success at tertiary level. The foundation programme therefore widens access for South African students with no matriculation exemption (a matriculation exemption is required for university entrance), South African students with matriculation exemption but who did not meet additional faculty requirements and international students whose qualifications are not accepted by the South African authorities as the equivalent of a matriculation exemption.

Students completing the UFP successfully, by passing all the required modules, are guaranteed admission to a degree programme at the university. Initially, the programme was only offered to prospective students in the Faculties of Science and Commerce, and the Department of Pharmacy in the Faculty of Health Sciences. Within two years, due to increasing demand, it was expanded to include streams leading to all mainstream academic programmes at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU).

Currently, there are three streams in the programme: Business, Science and Humanities. Between them, they offer subjects to prepare the student for entry into their respective faculties. In addition to specific subject modules, all foundation students take English for Academic Purposes and Academic and Life Skills as core subjects. Students can also take a computer module to match their level of computer literacy. The programme is based on a centralized model and is managed independently from the faculties but with close consultation on module design. It is very student-centred, featuring small group teaching, mentoring sessions and a
focus on the holistic development of the student. The foundation programme is currently offered on four campuses of the NMMU, to enable students to become accustomed to the environment where they will be continuing their studies.

The primary aim of the programme is the preparation of under-prepared students for further studies. Students gain access to the UFP either through direct application to the programme or by referral, after failing to meet faculty entry requirements. South African students are accepted into different UFP streams based on their performance both at school and in the Admissions and Placement Assessment Battery (APAB), developed and administered by the university. International students do not write the APAB, but are accepted on the basis of their previous academic performance.

APAB is a test battery that measures generic entry level competencies in academic literacy, English language proficiency, numerical skills, elementary algebra in the case of prospective science and economic science students, as well as a number of non-cognitive factors such as motivation and career readiness. It was developed by the Admissions and Placement Assessment Programme (APAP) at the University of Port Elizabeth and is based on the American ACCUPLACER™ Computerized Placement Test.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of the research was to evaluate the effect of the foundation programme on the holistic development of the students. Although there are quantitative data to indicate that former UFP students perform as well as, and often better, in degree studies than comparable students who enter directly into mainstream (Lithauer in progress), the researchers were interested in determining if the students perceived the programme to be of value in other areas.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The researchers wanted to evaluate the effect of the Foundation Programme on the holistic development of the student. The research question was formulated as follows: ‘What is the holistic effect of the Foundation Programme with regards to preparing the student for mainstream studies?’

RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative approach was adopted since the researchers wished to understand and represent the students’ perceptions and points of view within the context in which they find themselves (Hammersley 2000, 393). They wanted to comprehend and describe the deeper meaning of the students’ experiences of being on the UF programme (Creswell 1994, 162; Rubin and Babbie 1997), believing that such a phenomenological approach would result in a truer reflection of what the experience meant to the students (Creswell 1998, 4).
RESEARCH DESIGN

Sampling

Ex-UFP students who would be most likely to reflect the characteristics that were to be researched were purposively selected (Strydom and de Vos 1998, 198). Only those who had been successful in the UFP programme and were continuing to study at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University could be contacted for the research, therefore availability sampling was also employed (Grinnell 1988, 251).

Data gathering

Invitations were issued to all ex-UFP students to participate in focus group interviews, with the incentives of refreshments and a movie to ensure that the students would attend (Krueger 1994, 145). A total of 53 students were divided into three focus groups, each containing 15–17 students with one interviewer. Although focus group size should ideally be between 9–12 participants (Schurink 1998, 314), the researchers were forced to continue with the higher group numbers because one facilitator did not arrive. Focus group interviews were chosen since this method allows the researchers to ‘capitalize on the interaction within a group to elicit rich experiential data’ (Asbury 1995, 414). The group processes facilitate participants to ‘explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview’ (Webb and Kevern 2001, 800).

One open-ended question was asked in order to spontaneously draw the information from the participants and to avoid biasing them (Morgan 1995, 519). The interview question asked was: ‘What was your general experience of the UFP programme?’

Data analysis

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were then analysed to identify patterns and themes which emerged from the data (McMillan and Schumacher 1993, 480), following the eight steps of Tesch, in Creswell (1994, 155). The emergent themes will be discussed with reference to participant quotes and relevant literature.

Measures to ensure trustworthiness

In an attempt to ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the following measures were employed according to Guba’s model (Krefting 1991, 212–214)

• Truth value

In an attempt to establish truth value, the researcher needs to ask how much confidence can be placed in the findings. Credibility is the criterion to check how
true the findings are for the subjects in the context of the research. In this study, the criteria applied to ensure credibility consisted of triangulation of investigator (an observer and a re-coder was used); triangulation of sources (interview data, field notes and literature); and piloting of the interview question.

- **Applicability**

  Applicability is established by asking whether the findings can be applied to other settings or populations. The criterion for obtaining applicability is transferability. In this case, transferability was attained by providing data that is rich in description, so that comparisons to other research were able to be made. The literature control also served to improve applicability.

- **Consistency**

  The consistency of the research refers to the question of how much of the data would be replicated if it were to be repeated in similar circumstances or with the same subjects. Dependability is the criterion for determining how consistent the results are. The methods used in this study to attain dependability were the preservation of raw material; applying a uniform research procedure throughout; and the use of the code/re-code procedure.

- **Neutrality**

  Poggenpoel (1998, 350) defines neutrality as the ‘freedom from bias in research procedures and results’. In qualitative research, when the researcher has prolonged contact with the participants and is an integral part of the process, it is arguable whether he or she can be free from bias. Therefore, the neutrality of the data is emphasized over the neutrality of the investigator. Confirmability is the criterion used to determine neutrality. In other words, how far is the data confirmed by people other than the researcher? In order to increase confirmability in this study the data were re-coded to compare the re-coder’s findings to those of the researcher and a literature control was undertaken to compare findings to other research.

**ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations were adhered to by ensuring that all the participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study, participation was voluntary and the anonymity of the participants was assured (Lipson 1994, 343).

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

When the data were analysed, three main themes emerged, as indicated in Table 1. Each of these themes and sub-themes will now be discussed, using participant quotes and relevant literature to support the theme.
Table 1: Themes emerging from the data analysis.

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**Theme 1: The UFP was generally experienced positively by students**

Students were of the opinion that the UFP was beneficial because they perceived it as helping them to bridge the gap between school and university, but that its true value only became apparent in hindsight.

- **It helped to bridge the gap between school and university**

Students acknowledged that the UFP helped them to cope with the new experience of tertiary education and the resultant demands on them.

When you first come, you are away from home and no-one to tell me what to do, and then you keep on trying to change your life and that sort of thing, and now you lack other things, you don’t concentrate on your work. So I think it really bridged the gap, you learn to adapt to the tertiary life.

University life is more demanding than school, in that students need to learn to be independent and control their own lives (James 1970; as cited by Ferreira 1995). They have to learn to balance their study time with socializing. In addition, many students struggle to cope with factors such as homesickness, loneliness and peer pressure and their academic performance suffers as a result. As access to tertiary education has widened, so a more diverse range of students with differing
academic abilities, social backgrounds and economic resources is being admitted. Unfortunately, this increased access has also resulted in higher failure rates and longer throughput times (Zeegers and Martin 2001). This is not only a South African problem, since international research has indicated that new student entrants at tertiary level are often not sufficiently prepared to cope with the demands made on them by the new environment (Maloney 2003, 664; McKenzie and Schweitzer 2001). However, in a country which is attempting to reconstruct its social and educational infrastructure, this situation calls for urgent attention.

The participants in this study were of the opinion that the UFP provided them with the time and the skills to adapt to university life. This is one of the principle aims of the FP, and it adheres to a growth model (Moulder 1991) of ‘looking forward not backwards’, in its quest to provide students with the skills needed to cope at first year level (Snyders 2004).

- **The true value of the programme was recognised in hindsight**

Although some of the students did not realise the value of the programme when they were doing it, in hindsight they acknowledged that it did help them. Some of the negative experience of the UFP stemmed from the fact that students did not understand why they were not admitted directly to mainstream studies. Others were sensitive to the fact that the other students in degree courses did not consider the UFP to be a valuable programme.

But when I look back I think, the timetable, the experiential things like conflict management, some of them are, although I don’t practice all of them but really in the whole they helped me.

So people were making fun of that so it was making us feel uncomfortable, but as time goes on we managed to feel confident about what we were doing because it was helpful in many ways.

This would suggest that, as the students’ metacognitive skills develop in later years, they are able to make the connection between what they learnt in the foundation programme and their current performances. This aspect has to be addressed in foundation programmes, since student perceptions tend to influence academic achievement and development of key life skills (Lizzio, Wilson and Simons 2002, 27). Students who have a negative opinion of their course tend to have a surface approach to learning, whereas those who are positive tend towards deep learning. Perception of learning environment (e.g. course content, teaching, workload, assessment practices) has been found to be a stronger predictor of learning outcomes at university than prior school performance (Lizzio et al. 2002, 50).
Theme 2: Students were ambiguous about the value of academic preparation

The participating students perceived the academic benefits of the programme to have both positive and negative impact. Although they believed that the programme did help to prepare them for mainstream in terms of content, skills and general knowledge, they also complained of repetition of content, little cognitive development and the irrelevancy of some subjects for specific degree courses. In addition, although they valued the close interaction with the UFP staff, it did not prepare them for the informal relationships with lecturers they experienced in their first year.

- The programme equipped them with a good foundation for mainstream subjects but there was too much repetition of content

  Like with maths, it really helped me, because when I was doing special maths for me it was easy see, and commercial maths helped me with statistics, 1, 2 and 3, it really helped me.

  However, in some subjects there was too much overlap with the first year content, resulting in students losing interest in that subject and developing poor attitudes and study habits, even although their marks were good.

  It’s like Chemistry and Physics, I’m doing it for the third time now, because I was doing it in Matric, now I did it last year and I’m doing it for the third time, how many times

  Students thought that they could even be exempted from some first year modules, since they are more or less repeating work they did in the UFP.

  Why don’t they actually exempt us, and maybe let us do extra modules or maybe second year modules, you see, the other lectures are repeating the very same thing that we did in the previous year.

  The students experienced repetition in Business Management, Chemistry, Physics and Anatomy especially. They felt that this kept them back and experienced it as ‘being in the one place for ever and ever’.

  One student recounted how he managed to attain 98% for special mathematics without attending lectures because the course was a repetition of the UFP – in this case he even had the same lecturer! Another student told how ex-UFP students scored much higher marks in Business Management because ‘we have already did [sic] this’. Although higher marks are generally regarded as a positive thing, the negative side of repetition is that it develops bad attitudes and habits.

  I don’t know how many times I’ve done maths special, I only go there to write tests
on Friday, I didn’t even bother, but guess what, I got something like 98% for the June exams. People who did UFP, I’m telling you, they were getting bored there.

Ja, you get bored actually, because basically like, in a way, if you repeat the thing twice you are more like somebody who failed

One of the main aims of a foundation programme should be to instill a positive attitude and motivation in the students, but due to the repetition of content, the students’ motivation and enthusiasm for learning may be diminished, a fact which may dampen their enthusiasm towards their studies in later years. This is an important factor as it has been acknowledged that attitude and motivation play an important role in student academic success (Foxcroft 2003). This link has led to the inclusion of measures of motivation in the university’s entrance tests that all first year applicants have to complete. The results of these tests determine whether the student is placed in mainstream, referred to the foundation programme or declined admission.

- The programme equipped them with the necessary academic skills (research, computer, assignments, presentations) but cognitive development minimal

Students were of the opinion that the UFP helped them to develop skills to cope with the academic demands of first year, such as research skills, being able to do academically acceptable assignments and computer and library skills.

Especially for assignments, because I have to say that, the assignments that I’m dealing with for BA, it’s just assignments, when I compare myself with other students that haven’t done UFP, they cannot reference

However, they did not experience the same development in terms of cognitive skills, such as critical thinking.

As a person you grow from strength to strength, but academically you do not grow so much, you might have the knowledge to use next year but in a way you are still in the same place.

When asked to describe the UFP in three words, one student replied ‘Not challenging enough’. Students thought that more time should be spent on doing case studies and discussing topics from all perspectives in order to equip them for the critical thinking that is required of them in first year.

Cognitive skills such as the ability to analyse and synthesise information and to think critically before forming well-justified opinions are prerequisites for students to succeed in tertiary studies (ICAS 2002, 9). If a foundation programme is to equip students for this, it is imperative that the imparting of content information does not take priority over development of skills and academic literacy.
Development of cognitive skills at the foundation level is essential as it has been found that these skills are not developed at school level in the current South African educational context (Mumba, Rollnick and White 2002, 149).

They experienced an increase in general knowledge but found some subjects to be irrelevant for degree choices

Some subjects were experienced as being irrelevant for degree courses, such as Business Management, by students who were going on to do science or humanities. However, it did have relevance for some of the students, in that they recognized its value for preparing them for the workplace.

So, at least to have a background in business management, it’s worth it.

Most students also thought that the language course did not help, because it was so general and did not focus on preparing them in the discourse that they would need for further studies. Since the focus groups were conducted, the NMMU foundation programme has recurriculated its language modules to cater for the specific discourse of the stream that the students are entering and now offers English for Business, English for Science and English for Humanities.

Some students did not see the value in doing mathematics for humanities, but according to input from the faculties, a certain degree of numerical proficiency is necessary in order to perform well in courses such as Law, Psychology, Social Work (Wood and Free 2004). Again, due to their limited experience and perspectives, students are not always aware of what can be of benefit to them, but in order to avoid negative attitudes and subsequent loss of interest, the advantages of such courses should be explicitly spelt out for students.

The close interaction with UFP staff helped increase confidence but did not prepare them for the informality of first year

UFP modules are taught in small groups of 32 in most subjects, with groups being further split into 20s for language and life skills. UFP staff also tend to be very student centred and approachable, and students are encouraged to make use of consultation times. As one student put it, visiting the lecturer in his/her office was a comforting experience:

It was like a second home.

For the most part, the relationship between staff and student is informal and students can consult lecturers at any time, and for any problem. This student-centred approach provides the basis for optimal life skills teaching and modeling (Johnson, Monk and Hodges 2000, 180).
They are friendly and they come at a personal level.

This relationship provides them with support and confidence, but does not necessarily prepare them for the ‘cold’ relationship that they experience with most mainstream lecturers.

In UFP it’s like an interaction between students and staff, because it was a growing bond, unlike the first years, the lecturer will just come and lecture and leave.

However, this does not mean that foundation programme staff should mimic their mainstream counterparts, since the benefits of a student centred approach far outweigh any drawbacks. A supportive and caring environment will improve student self-efficacy, which results in increased confidence to deal with difficult situations in the future (Milner and Woolfolk Hoy 2002, 4). The mentoring-type relationships between students and staff in the foundation programme, specifically with the life skills lecturers, offer an ideal space for the development of emotional competencies which have been shown to be positively related to academic and social success (Van der Zee, Thijs and Schakel 2002; Slaski and Cartwright 2002).

Theme 3: The ‘added value’ of UFP – intrapersonal and interpersonal growth

Students were unanimous in their perceptions that the UFP enabled them to grow in areas other than academic. They stated that they developed self-knowledge, an improved sense of self-worth, self-management and communication skills and that their attitudes in general became more positive. The experience of spending a year on the foundation programme also enabled them to build up lasting support networks. This development is closely linked to academic performance, since optimal learning only takes place when social, physical and intellectual spheres are functioning well (Struthers and Perry 2000, 252).

You see it also taught me life skills you know, because if maybe I did not do it, I was going to fail in mainstream, because that UFP thing really helped me, because I was able to make friends and socializing with people and being involved in societies and sport, so it helped me.

Walberg (2003, 3) asserts that life skills teaching improves academic learning. This in turn impacts positively on classroom climate and produces learners who are more ‘inspired’ and interested in learning. The following factors were highlighted by the participants, as contributing to their intrapersonal and interpersonal growth.
Development of self-knowledge

During the course of the foundation year, the students were able to develop a higher degree of self-knowledge, which is the first stage in the formation of a healthy self-concept. A good self-concept is a prerequisite for academic success (Zins, Weissberg, Walberg and Wang 2004; Elias 2003, 8; Cove and Love 1996).

It helped me to discover who I am and what I can do.

Such self-knowledge also enabled them to reassess their career options and make changes where necessary.

but in the middle of the year, June, I decided, well I didn’t want to actually do science anymore.

Another student said she came to the realization that IT was not for her, it was only what her father had wanted her to do, and she realized that she wanted to do psychology. This space to develop self-knowledge and recognition of strengths and weaknesses is vitally important to prevent students from registering for degrees to which they are either unsuited or in which they have little interest. Both these factors will negatively affect the student’s later performance in the course. Registering for a degree that they are motivated to complete will most likely have a positive influence on the throughput time to graduation, a factor which is becoming increasingly important in light of the Government’s funding policies for Higher Education and Training (Department of Education 2004).

Improved sense of self-worth

Students developed improved self-esteem, mostly due to the fact that UFP lecturers, and the academic and life skills lecturers in particular, believed in them and gave them much support.

As for me it was the best experience we were given the opportunity to develop confidence in ourselves, and the facilitators were very good, they were easy-going, easy to talk to, we can even go to building 10 just to talk about general stuff.

A learner-centred approach to teaching boosts a student’s feelings of self-worth, since he/she feels they are valued by the teacher (Wiest 1999, 264). Students still return to UFP staff when they have problems, rather than go to mainstream lecturers or student counseling.

I think that UFP staff is like, right now, when I struggle with something, I can go back.
The staff’s attitude played a large part in motivating students and helping them to understand.

She loves biology, that’s why she’s teaching it, and she was enjoying teaching it if you don’t understand, she could see that you don’t understand, before you even say I don’t understand, she could see and she would try and explain it, and you would finally get it, so that was nice.

According to Hutchinson, Cantillon and Wood (2003, 812), ‘enthusiasm for the subject’ and ‘interest in learner’s experiences’ help to keep learners interested and motivated and improve understanding, whereas boredom and an apathetic attitude have the opposite effect. Research has shown that the teachers who are most likely to increase learners’ commitment to learning are those who enjoy teaching and like the learners; are easy to talk to; do not complain about the programme or the learners; have a sense of humour; make lessons stimulating, relevant and interesting by linking them to real-life experiences; are fair and act in a calm manner in the class; encourage questions; enjoy explaining; and never give up on learners (Rudduck, Day and Wallace 1997, 86). This implies that selection, induction and training of staff for foundation programmes is of vital importance to maintain the benefits of a student centred environment.

- Development of self-management skills

Students valued the skills that they acquired during their time in the foundation programme. They perceived themselves to be equipped for mainstream and were able to cope better as a result.

It did help, especially also UPA [academic and life skills module], how to take, be social and to help yourself to be assertive, skills like you know, time management and everything, because that is very important.

The sense of mastery gained from such skills improved student’s confidence to cope with the tertiary environment. There is a high positive correlation between student self-belief and academic success (Linnenbrink and Pintrick 2003, 134). These skills will not only aid the student throughout his/her time at university, but will be of lifelong benefit (Vermaak 1995, 1). Increased self-efficacy, which enables students to believe in their ability to successfully perform the tasks required of them (Bandura 1997) should be one of the main aims of any foundation programme. Increased self-efficacy of students will lead to them taking greater responsibility for learning (Moore and Esselman, 1992), having more perseverance (Millner and Woolfolk Hoy 2002, 4), coping with setbacks and being more
enthusiastic about their studies (Allinder 1994, 87). Foundation programmes need to make every effort to ensure that students develop a sense of self-mastery and believe in their ability to manage their own lives.

- **Improvement in attitude**

  Student attitudes also improved as a result of the UF programme. Improved attitudes lead to improved behaviour, resulting ultimately in a higher standard of academic performance (Rosenholtz 1985, 353). The foundation programme accorded some students a better insight into their academic life.

  I should think I developed as a person after doing the programme, because I think that is where the foundation is, where you teach somebody to have an interaction between his studies and life in general, to be balanced in all areas so it helped me to discover who I am and what I can do and what subjects I like.

  I got into UFP with a negative attitude you see, but during the course of the year I started to change my attitude towards certain subjects I started to enjoy them.

  A positive attitude towards studies, and towards life in general, will enhance the student’s ability to cope with his/her circumstances and any problems with which they are faced, both at university and later in life (Whitelaw, Milosevic and Daniels 2000, 111).

- **Improved communication skills**

  Their UFP experience helped students to form relationships and access resources on campus. For most students, coming to university is the first time that they are exposed to so many different cultures, races and languages and this calls for adjustment on their part.

  UPA helped me how to cope and deal with people with different behaviours.

  We develop confidence to talk to people, communication skills and things like that.

  The ability to communicate well is a skill that will benefit the students throughout their lives and is one that is sought after by employers (Kirkland 2000, 49; Pratt 2001).

- **Formation of support systems**

  When students arrive at university for the first time, they are often lonely and have no-one they can turn to for help. Such feelings of loneliness can lead to depression.
and withdrawal on the one hand, or giving into negative peer pressure on the other, just to feel accepted. The support systems created by the UFP staff and students helped to make students feel comfortable and free to concentrate on their studies.

I’ve got this woman, she is a UPA lecturer, even now she is like my friend, she is always supporting me. It has really benefited me, it really helped me in a way.

All the friends that I have right now, are the friends that I made in UFP.

If students feel supported and enabled, their commitment to their studies will be higher and their performance is more likely to be superior (Avalos 2000, 4). The support systems formed in the foundation year therefore have lasting benefit for the student throughout his/her university career.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DESIGN OF FOUNDATION PROGRAMMES**

Based on the discussion of the themes, recommendations will now be made for the design of foundation programmes to ensure that they contribute to the holistic development of the student and thereby have ‘added value’.

The participating students perceived the academic, social and emotional skills they acquired as being very beneficial in helping to prepare them for mainstream studies. As far as we are aware, the NMMU FP is the only foundation programme in South Africa which offers a separate academic and life skills module, backed up by mentoring of students. and it is recommended that other foundation programmes explore the possibility of integrating social and emotional learning into their programmes. Such a module should encompass the development of intra- and interpersonal skills, an internal locus of control and the habit of frequent self-reflection (Wood and Olivier 2004, 189).

The students also valued the positive, approachable attitude of the foundation programme lecturers. Ensuring that foundation lectures are willing and able to encourage a positive attitude and high self esteem in the students will help to develop the student in a holistic sense. Even although students later perceived the lack of personal attention in mainstream as a shock, the boost to their confidence and self-esteem that resulted from the approach in the UFP, did help them to deal with it. The advantages of the student-centred approach in terms of emotional and academic development, far outweigh the chances that it will make students unable to cope with the informal style of teaching in mainstream. It is therefore recommended that foundation level academics be carefully selected for their student-centred teaching and learning practices in order to foster the type of caring learning environment which is necessary for the academic, social and emotional wellness of the student. Subject content of foundation programmes must be carefully checked against the school curricula and the content of first year modules in order to avoid repetition which frustrates and bores the students. The foundation
course should focus on developing cognitive skills within the subject discourse, since this is one area where students thought that they were not developed to a sufficient degree.

CONCLUSION

The students who participated in this study have benefited from the foundation programme in more ways than just academically. They attributed their personal development to the input they received in the foundation programme, and this personal development in turn was perceived to contribute greatly to their academic success. Although they did complain about the content of some subjects and lack of cognitive development, the increased knowledge and skills and the more positive attitudes they experienced were directly attributed to the UF programme. These skills, knowledge and attitudes are of lifelong benefit to the students and will assist them to be successful in all aspects of their lives. It can be concluded, therefore, that the foundation programme experience has ‘added value’ for students who have the opportunity to complete it.

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ICAS see Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates.


