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University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

Student Retention Policy

**UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE POLICIES AND
PROCEDURES**


 University of Fort Hare <i>Together in Excellence</i>			
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Policy on Student Retention

1. Definition of terms

Extended programme	<p>'An <i>extended curriculum programme</i> is a first degree or diploma programme that incorporates substantial foundational provision which is additional to the coursework prescribed for the standard programme. The foundational provision incorporated must be (a) equivalent to one or two semesters of full-time study, (b) designed to articulate effectively with the regular elements of the programme, and (c) formally planned, scheduled and regulated as an integral part of the programme.' (DoE 2006)</p>
Foundational provisioning	<p>'Foundational provision is (the offering of) modules, courses or other curricular elements that are intended to equip underprepared students with academic foundations that will enable them to successfully complete a recognised higher education qualification. Foundational provision focuses particularly on basic concepts, content and learning approaches that foster advanced learning. Even where the subject matter is introductory in nature, foundational provision must make academic demands on the students that are appropriate to higher education.' (DoE 2006)</p>
Retention	<p>The process of retaining students who enroll for a qualification and remain at a particular institution until they complete their studies for that qualification. Crosling, Thomas and Heagney (2008)</p>
Student life cycle	<p>A cycle made up of the following phases: aspiration raising, pre-entry phase, admissions phase, first term/semester/year, progression through the course, seeking employment (Higher-Education-Funding-Council-for-England 2001)</p>
Throughput rate	<p>The calculation of how many students in a given cohort complete their degrees and graduate within the stipulated time, how many drop out and how many take longer (Scott, Yeld and Hendry 2007)</p>

2. Acronyms

CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CIO	Chief Information Officer
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic and Research)
HOD	Head of Department
HR	Human Resource Department
LAU	Learning Advancement Unit
QMA	Quality Management & Assurance Unit
TLC	Teaching and Learning Center
SSASE	South African Survey on Student Engagement
SRC	Student Representative Council

3. Preamble

Retention of students in higher education is a multi faceted and complex issue, affecting a broad spectrum of areas within the university. To pay attention to student retention necessarily means a focus on the whole student experience, from recruitment (pre-entry) to employment. Concepts such as 'student value chain' and 'student life cycle' are useful in identifying and organising the focal areas that need attention for the improvement of student retention. Scott, Yeld and Hendry (2007) argue that "improving the effectiveness of the educational process in higher education is an essential element in improving graduate output". They argue for systemic change in the South African higher education sector, claiming that systemic change is equally critical at institutional level, if student retention is to be improved. Student engagement, curriculum responsiveness, improving the quality of teaching and learning, recognition and rewarding of teaching, professionalisation of teaching staff are some of the areas to focus on as part of the institutional mission to improve student retention. Tinto (2006) argues that "high expectations of student performance" is one the five conditions that have to be established within institutions if student retention is to be promoted.

The (UFH) SANTED II project focused on 'crucial areas of access and retention in order to stem the unacceptably high attrition rates of students within the institution and improve student success'. The project identified six key result areas, including *Enrolment Management*, where faculties have to develop and implement comprehensive recruitment and enrolment management strategies (including school outreach), and *Student Tracking*, an early warning system to identify at risk students. Activities flowing from this project have raised the level of institutional responsiveness towards student retention.

Engagement with different stakeholders during policy development revealed that areas that should be prioritised for attention include residences and student life, student financial assistance, first year support, access into and support for post graduate studies and student involvement and contribution in retention improvement strategies. Students expressed a need to be more involved in governance issues affecting overall student experience. Stakeholders further expressed a need to maximise services that are already in place to improve student retention: services like student counselling, the student tracking system, post graduate research support and the training of students to provide peer assistance should be more extensively utilised, whilst gaps and inadequacies in student service delivery that have already been identified in self-reviews and the institutional audit require urgent solutions.

The UFH *Strategic Plan 2009-2016: Towards Our Centenary* provides a systemic view aimed at improvement of the whole educational process in the institution. The identified overall strategic objective, which is excellence in teaching and learning, research and community engagement, is supported by six enablers. Each of these addresses the different aspects that affect student retention. More specifically improvement of student experience, promotion of service culture and financial ability and sustainability articulate more closely with strategies in support of student retention. Achieving objectives set in the plan will contribute significantly to the improvement of student retention.

Participation of UFH in the South African Survey on Student Engagement (SASSE) will be useful in providing data to inform further planning in improving student retention in the institution. The benefits of using such a nationally and internationally benchmarked instrument should be maximised. The survey, used together with other mechanisms to generate relevant data (like the Student Tracking System) will provide clear pointers to inform further prioritising of activities for the improvement of student retention.

4. Policy statement

It is the policy of the institution to

- (a) recruit and admit students into the university by means of effective enrolment management strategies
- (b) increase access to both under- and post graduate studies
- (c) reduce the attrition rate of registered students during their course of study
- (d) improve student retention and progression from first year to all other subsequent years of study leading to completion of qualification within the minimum required period
- (e) improve graduation and employability rates while maintaining the highest academic standards possible

5. Principles on which the policy is based:

- (a) The institution takes responsibility for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning so as to promote student retention.
- (b) Institutional commitment towards the promotion of student retention will be made visible throughout the university through the planning and resource allocation processes in academic and support service departments
- (c) Retention strategies will be supported through careful collection and analysis of relevant data so as to lead to informed decision making
- (d) Accountability for student retention will be spread across the different role players and university levels of operation, i.e. executive management level, support unit (directorate) level, faculty, department, programme and student leadership level, as well as among students themselves
- (e) Appropriate monitoring and evaluation tools and processes will be used to track progress and provide early warning signs throughout the implementation of the targeted interventions and implementation of retention strategies will form part of performance agreements of all role players
- (f) Actions of all role players should adhere to the charter of ethics and values

6. Policy objectives

The overall goal of the policy is to reduce the high attrition rates of students within the institution and improve throughput rates through well planned strategies, including setting institutional targets and meeting national norms. The following objectives are critical in contributing towards achieving the goal:

- (a) Institutionalise university-wide and faculty-based interventions to improve student retention by designing targeted strategies, mobilizing and dedicating appropriate resources
- (b) Isolate and designate specified responsibilities to different role players, especially for monitoring and evaluation of selected strategies and improvement plans.
- (c) Use student retention as one of the drivers for continuous improvement of teaching, learning, research and community engagement processes and systems throughout the university, including national and international benchmarking
- (d) Harness relevant data that will continually profile institutional performance in relation to national goals for higher education

7. Support for policy implementation

1. Planning for student retention, accompanied by appropriate resource allocation, should form part of the institutional planning framework as well as the planning and budgeting undertaken by Faculties, departments and other entities, academic and non-academic, whose activities are related to the student experience
2. Action plans from faculties and academic support units that are directly linked to initiatives (strategies and interventions) to promote student retention should be subjected to the university's quality assurance processes, and should be part of performance appraisals of those accountable, at management level as well as line and staff level
3. The design and successful implementation of innovative and creative strategies and interventions should be duly recognized and rewarded
4. Where possible, interventions should be implemented from a centralised point so as to share resources and maximize impact in an efficient and effective manner, ensuring that best practice is institutionalised and generalised- not limited to isolated 'pockets of excellence'
5. Established interventions that already have a history of success should serve as bench marks and lessons learned should be well documented and published within the institution, e.g., the Thuthuka BCom Accounting Programme experiences
6. Though responsibility for the promotion of student retention will be spread across the institutional role players, overall accountability lies with the DVC
7. The SRC and other student structures should be requested to perform the role of strategic partners to management and faculties in developing and implementing incentives (and penalties where relevant) so as to create an institutional culture that promotes student retention and participate in recognising and rewarding students who distinguish themselves by taking responsibility for their success.

8. Initiatives to inform action plans / time frames/status progress reports

The pillars identified in the *Strategic Plan 2009-2016* can be used to organise action plans and initiatives/interventions to address student retention from all sectors and levels of the university. The list is not exhaustive.

Develop Human Resources	
Effective staff retention strategies (refer to Staff Retention Policy)	HR and Deans
Professional development , training of teaching staff	TLC, Deans and HODs
Improved leadership for teaching and learning	TLC and Deans
Improved student engagement strategies at classroom level: teaching & facilitation methods, learning styles and assessment strategies	TLC, Deans and HODs
Continuous curriculum development and renewal for responsiveness and adaptability	TLC and Faculties
Scholarly research based projects to enrich discourses on student retention leading to peer reviewed publications	Faculties and Research Centre
Training in research, research supervision, and scholarly writing	Research Centre
Foster Service Culture	
Institutional register of all retention related initiatives	DVC Dean of Research
Pre-entry and recruitment strategies	Marketing (student recruitment)
Counseling Services (preventative and remedial)	Student Counseling Unit
Alignment of Student Retention interventions and strategies (including policy reviews and closing policy gaps)	DVC Registrar
Infusing the focus on student retention into institutional planning, monitoring and evaluation framework	University Planner DVC
Recognising and rewarding excellence and innovation in relation to retention of students	DVC Registrar
Improve Student Experience	
First Year Experience project [orientation, peer help, academic literacy, mentorship programmes], survey/questionnaire, orientation	Deans, student counseling, student-run programmes
Extended curricula & Foundational Provisioning: curriculum design, development, and review	Deans Foundation Programme Coordinators and Faculties

Study/academic skills programme	TLC/LAU and Faculties
Mentoring and tutoring services	LAU and Faculties
Improving residence life for academic success	Student Affairs, Residence Management
Student/course experience surveys	TLC, QMA Unit and Faculties
Development of learning materials to institutional quality standards that are monitored on a regular basis	TLC, QMA Unit and Faculties
Student experience and preparation through exposure to the job market	Student Counseling Unit and Faculties
A clearly defined SRC portfolio that supports the implementation of strategies on student retention	DVC, SRC, Faculties, Student structures, Postgraduate Forum, Dean of Students
Research training and support for postgraduate studies	Dean of Research
Harness Technology	
Student tracking, testing and profiling	CIO Faculties QMA Unit
The use of technology to enhance teaching, assessment and facilitation of learning	E-learning Manager and Faculties
Financial Sustainability	
Organising / systematising Financial Support for deserving students, including postgraduate grants and scholarships	CFO & Financial Aid Unit