

**2016 Southern African Accounting
Association (SAAA)
National Teaching and Learning and
Regional Conference Proceedings**

ISBN number: 978-0-620-74761-5



**EDU 03: AN ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS CONTRIBUTING
TO ACADEMIC EXCLUSION: A CASE STUDY IN THE
FACULTY OF ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL SCIENCES AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper is to analyse the reasons academically excluded undergraduate (UG) students provided, as contributing factors, that led to their unsatisfactory academic performance resulting in their academic exclusion from the Faculty of Economic and Financial Sciences (FEFS) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). The research method used was a case study.

Students can appeal their academic exclusion. Results obtained from the electronic appeals process in June/July 2015 and January 2016 were used to extract the reasons provided by these UG students that led to their academic exclusion. The reasons were categorised, as being academic or non-academic, and were then further divided into seven areas. Overall the main reasons provided by the students that contributed to their academic exclusion was financial difficulty followed by academic difficulty.

The findings from the study could indicate to the Faculty the high risk of allowing students to enter the Faculty without knowing their ability to sustain their studies financially. A practical implication of the findings will allow the Faculty to create a more inclusive environment by supporting the students it accepts. A limitation is that the findings are based on students that appealed their academic exclusion in FEFS at UJ and can therefore not be generalised. This study could, however, contribute value by providing lessons for developing countries in Africa relating to the admission of students.

Keywords: academic exclusion, undergraduate students, unsatisfactory academic performance, on line appeals process, financial difficulty, academic difficulty

INTRODUCTION

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) is an urban residential comprehensive university in Johannesburg South Africa. UJ has nine faculties of which the Faculty of Economic and Financial Sciences (FEFS) is the largest in terms of student numbers. According to the Academic Rules and Regulations of the University of Johannesburg 2016 (UJ ARR 2016, 6.13), students are allowed to register annually on the condition that they have passed a certain number of modules, as specified by the specific Faculty's Qualifications and Regulations.

The overall undergraduate (UG) enrolment in FEFS for 2015 was 20% of the overall UG enrolment of UJ. The Faculty had 9 361 full time UG students registered in 2015¹. The overall number of diploma students (inclusive of the advanced diploma students) were 3 360 (36%) and 6 001 (64%)¹ degree (inclusive of extended degree) students. The faculty offers four undergraduate degree programmes, three extended undergraduate degree programmes, two diploma programmes and four advanced diploma programmes. Advanced diploma students were excluded from this study because of relatively small enrolment numbers and those being students enrolled for a second qualification.

In FEFS, every student's academic performance is assessed at the end of each semester. A result code (status) (see Table 1) is allocated to them, based on their academic performance at the end of the semester and subsequent supplementary exam (if relevant). Their academic performance reflects on the Tertiary Software Administrative System (ITS) system, their academic record, the student portal and their result letters.

A FEFS student may register for the following academic year if they have passed at least 60% of their modules in the previous year of study (FEFS) Qualifications and Regulations 2016 (FEFS QR) 2016, EF.5). If a student passes less than 40% of their modules they will receive an academic warning. An E1 (proceed pass all courses November) result code will be awarded after semester one or an E2 (proceed pass all courses June) after semester two.

Despite passing less than 40% of their modules students are given the opportunity to continue with their studies in the following semester, subject to the following conditions. Firstly, they have to attend the Study and Read programme (free of charge), offered by the Academic Development Centre (ADC). Secondly, the student has to pass all modules for which they are enrolled for or allowed to register for in the following semester. These students are often also referred to the Centre for Psychological Services and Career Development (PsyCaD) for personal and career counselling. The Study and Read programme offered by the ADC assist students on

an academic warning with reading strategies, academic skills and academic support such as study guidance, literacy skills and writing skills. Students on an academic warning are not allowed to cancel any module(s) during the semester while they are on an academic warning. If the student fails to meet these mentioned conditions, they are academically excluded from further studies within FEFS. Their academic exclusion is indicated by an F7 (re-admission refused) result code awarded after semester one or a BF (re-admission refused) result code after semester two. Students who have been academically excluded are given the opportunity to appeal their academic exclusion.

In the past students had to manually submit their BF/F7 appeal forms at the Faculty office. The high student numbers in the Faculty led to the development of an online appeal process for students that were academically excluded (awarded a BF/F7 result code). The online pilot project was conducted after the first semester of 2015 and repeated after the second semester of 2015. The online process allowed students to appeal, off campus, from anywhere as long as they had internet access with a smartphone or any other electronic device. This streamlined the appeals process and was subsequently easier to manage, by both students and Faculty alike, than the related paper process.

Once received appeals are reviewed and considered, at Faculty level, by the Faculty Appeals Committee. This committee reviews all appeals and consideration will be given to any mitigating circumstances provided by the students that contributed to their unsatisfactory academic performance and resulted in academic exclusion (BF/F7), as well as investigating their academic records in detail. The Faculty Appeals Committee will either re-admit the student or retain their academic exclusion from the Faculty. The decision of the committee is final and no further appeals are allowed (UJ ARR 2016, 6.13 (e)). All students that had a successful appeal after either the first or second semester of 2015, were placed on an academic warning (FEFS QR 2016, EF. 7). The conditions of the academic warning as explained above needs to be met, in order for the student to be allowed to continue with his/her studies. If re-admitted and the student fails to meet the set conditions, as explained to them when they were re-admitted, the student will be refused continuation of their studies (academically excluded) and no further appeals will be allowed (UJ ARR 2016, 6.9).

CLASSIFICATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

A result code is allocated based on a student's academic performance in the relevant semester and/or academic year. This is calculated according to the promotion requirements of the Faculty which are based on the number of registered modules passed for the specific semester.

Table 1 below explains the results codes for the first and second semester respectively for the UG qualification types (summary from FEFS QR 2016, EF.7).

Table 1: RESULT CODES FOR SEMESTER ONE AND TWO

MEANING OF RESULT CODES FOR SEMESTER ONE AND TWO FOR ALL UG QUALIFICATION TYPES			
Number of Registered modules passed	Result Code		Meaning
	1 st Semester	2 nd Semester	
Less than 40%	F7	BF	Re-admission Faculty refused
Between 41% - 49%	E1	E2	Academic warning
Between 50%-59%	P5	P5	May continue with studies
More than 60%	P4	P4	Promoted to next academic year

CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

This study focused on students who were academically excluded and were all given the opportunity to appeal their academic exclusion. These students were excluded in June/July 2015 after semester one or in November/December 2015 after semester two.

The following key concepts used in this study are clarified below: Student, Academic Exclusion and Faculty Appeals Committee.

For the purpose of this study a **student** is referred to as a person registered for a qualification at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), in the Faculty of Economic and Financial Sciences (FEFS).

Academic exclusion means termination of a student's registration on academic grounds resulting in exclusion from the Faculty. This is represented by a BF/F7 result code. Academic exclusion occurs when a student is not allowed to continue with their studies, after not meeting the minimum promotion requirements for the qualification (UJ ARR 2016, 6). For the purpose of this study academic exclusion refers to students who were academically excluded and given the opportunity to submit an appeal in order to be allowed to be re-admitted and consequently to be placed on an academic warning status.

The Faculty Appeals Committee (as approved on Senate S374/2010(3)) is the committee that considers all appeals. The committee comprises of the following:

- (i) The Executive Dean/Vice Dean/any other Senior Academic staff member given authority by the Executive Dean to act as the Chairperson;

- (ii) The Programme Advisor acts as the secretary noting all the decisions; and
- (iii) A representative from the Student Advisory Council (SAC)/Student Representative Council (SRC). This member only serves in an advisory capacity on the Faculty Appeals Committee meeting.

The decision whether or not to retain the BF/F7 result code is made by the Chairperson; the decision of the committee is final.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to provide an analysis of the reasons provided by UG students, with a further focus on first year students that contributed to their academic exclusion in FEFS at UJ in 2015. The reasons were categorised into seven areas being academic difficulty, family problems, financial difficulty, health problems, personal problems, transport problems and other problems. Information obtained from the electronic appeal forms, from both the June/July 2015 and January 2016 appeals process, was used to elaborate on certain assumptions.

One certainty in life is that everything is subject to change; this is also the case within the higher education environment in which students find themselves. To be able to address reasons contributing to academic exclusion, it is necessary to understand the type of environment students live in. Certain aspects needs to be taken into consideration such as, how they experience their environment, as well as what their problems are that is making it difficult for them to study, and to progress in their chosen programme. Therefore, these aspects should be considered in order to determine their contribution to the students' difficulties which resulted in academic exclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“High attrition and low graduation rates largely neutralized important gains” (Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2013) in the South African higher education system. Fischer and Scott (2011) as cited by the CHE (2013), describes the South African Higher Education system as a “low participating high attrition system”. To proof this fact the CHE then states that roughly only one in four degree students (17% for diploma students) in contact institution graduate in regulation (minimum) time. The CHE continues to say that only 48% of contact students graduate within five years. This leads to a high rate of attrition (40%) by the end of regulation time. This report also indicates that first-year attrition, a longstanding problem in South Africa, is very high – one in every three students whom entered the higher education system in 2006 were lost after their first year of study for various reasons. One of these include bad academic performance.

There are numerous factors such as race, gender, age and socio-economic status that affect a students' academic performance (Shoukat, Haider, Khan & Ahmed, 2013). A large number of factors thus have a causative effect on whether or not a student drops out from university studies (Murry, 2014).

Students' poor academic performance in South Africa's higher education system is well documented. A 2008 study by Letseka and Maile found that the overall graduation rate of South Africa is amongst the lowest in the world (15% across all South African based Universities). Their finding suggests that lack of available funding as well as the articulation gap between secondary education and higher education were the main cause of high dropout rates.

Following Letseka (2009) and Murry (2014), for the purpose of this research, a university dropout is defined as a student who for whatever reason chooses not to re-register for their chosen qualification. A student's academic performance affects whether the student will become a dropout (St John, Gabrera, Nora & Asker, 2000). Poor academic performances thus make it more likely for students to become dropouts (Neethling, 2015). Research by Ishitani and DesJardin (2002), Stratton, O'Toole and Wentzel (2008) as well as Sampaio (2012) indicates that financial aid is an important factor impacting student dropout. Financial aid typically includes loans which students have to repay. Murry's (2014) research findings also indicate that financial aid status is an important determinant of student dropout.

Literature provides definitions for two types of dropouts; the first being a voluntary dropout where a student with a good academic record decides to discontinue their studies and secondly an involuntary dropout, where a students' discontinuation of academic studies is because of academic exclusion (Murry, 2014). A student can be academically excluded from studying further because of unsatisfactory academic performance. Reasons for voluntary dropout may include poor academic performance before any major exams are written, the influence of factors such as family or financial problems or realising that they have registered for a degree that is unsuitable or incompatible. Reasons for involuntary dropout can be because a student failed the same module a number of times, or because the student did not meet the annual progression requirements for their degree (Neethling, 2015).

Poor academic performance could lead to involuntary dropout (academic exclusion). With this context in mind, it is important for FEFS to try and identify the reasons contributing to academic exclusion. These reasons can help FEFS to identify factors that will define a dropout-prone student. Efforts to better support these students can aid FEFS in reducing the academic exclusion (dropout) rate.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section discusses and justifies the methodology that was used for this paper.

Research design

This case study was done at UJ – an urban residential comprehensive university in Johannesburg, South Africa. FEFS is the largest of the nine faculties of UJ by on average contributing 22% of the overall student number of 48 500 students that are spread across four campuses.

FEFS offers both UG and Post Graduate (PG) programmes. UG programmes offered consists of four undergraduate degree programmes, three extended undergraduate degree programmes, two diploma programmes and four advanced diploma programmes. Advanced diploma students were excluded from this study because of relatively small enrolment numbers and those being students enrolled for a second qualification.

The case study design was used for this study. Godfrey (2012:8) defines a case study design as a design that focuses on a phenomenon to be studied, the case, unit of analysis and the focus of the study. In this paper the phenomenon is the reasons that contribute to academic exclusion and the case is academically excluded students. Academically excluded students that appealed their academic exclusion in FEFS at UJ 2015/2016 were the unit of analysis. The focus of this study is the reasons (phenomenon) that contributed to academic exclusion.

Case studies are widely used in organisational studies and across the social sciences (Kohlbacher, 2006:2). Case studies allow researchers to obtain a holistic and meaningful understanding of real-life events (Yin, 2003:2). A case study research design is thus best suited to gain an understanding of the reasons contributing to academic exclusion. Case studies are often the preferred method when the “how” and “why” questions are being asked, when the researchers have little control over the events, and the focus is on an existing phenomenon within a real life context (Kolhacher, 2006:4). Therefore, the case study design enabled the researchers to gain an understanding of the reasons that contributed to academic exclusion from the information obtained from the electronic appeal form.

The case study design adopted for this study consisted of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The quantitative part of the study examined the association between variables such as gender, race, age grouping and previous year’s activity. The qualitative part of the research design (reasons listed by students)

attempted to explore why these reasons contributed to their academic exclusion being the dependent variable.

Population of the study

The population for this study consisted of 976 students that appealed their academic exclusion in FEFS at UJ in 2015/2016.

Sampling

Participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling. It was a non-probability sampling procedure in which the researcher purposely decided which participants to select, that would be relevant to the research topic (Godfrey, 2012:9). Table 3 indicates that from the population of 1 423 UG students, 409 students were first year students that were academically excluded in FEFS 2015/2016. The researchers purposively included only the 976 students, of which 167 were first year students, which appealed their academic exclusion. Purposive sampling enabled the researchers to focus the research on the participants who supplied reasons that contributed to their academic exclusion.

Method of data collection

More general/overall data were collected from the ITS system, Management Information System (MIS) and the Higher Educator Data Analyser (HEDA). Detailed data was also collected for this case study from the electronic appeal forms of students academically excluded in the first and second semester of 2015 that completed the appeals process. Data used to develop a more comprehensive picture of an academically excluded student, included demographic information (race, gender and age grouping), number of students academically excluded, number of UG students that appealed their academic exclusion, number of first year students that appealed their academic exclusion, students' previous year activity, the contributing reasons that lead to unsatisfactory academic performance and their NSFAS status.

All students that wanted to appeal their academic exclusion had to complete an online appeal form. The appeal form is of a qualitative nature and it assisted in identifying the reasons that contributed to UG students' academic exclusions.

The online appeal form asked questions about issues not evident from their academic records. This included questions relating to the main reason(s) that contributed to their unsatisfactory academic performance, how these reasons affected their academic performance, their plan(s) to resolve the problem(s) and whether they enrolled for a different qualification previously or studied at a another tertiary institution.

Content analysis

Qualitative content analysis can be viewed as a comprehensive approach to data analysis, which seems to be especially suitable for case study research (Kolbacher, 2006:18). The examination of content recorded information is involved in content analysis (Godfrey, 2012:12). The reasons contributing to academic exclusion were analysed from the information obtained in the electronic appeal form. This made the content analysis very useful for studying reasons contributing to academic exclusion. Content analysis also enables the researchers to compare first and second semester appeals, the students' age grouping and previous year's activity as well as their NSFAS status. The data from the content analysis was used to cross check the trustworthiness of the data. Another advantage of content analysis is that, unlike humans, documents are non-reactive (Godfrey, 2012:12) and as a result, the data that has been gathered is reliable.

Ethical clearance

The researchers obtained consent from the FEFS Ethics committee to execute this study.

Limitations of the study

The disadvantage of this case study is that the findings are based on students that appealed their academic exclusion in FEFS at UJ and therefore cannot be generalised. The findings of this study are therefore generalisable to all academically excluded students in FEFS at UJ. However, the findings illuminate the reasons contributing to academic exclusion which might be similar for students in other Faculties and/or Universities. A limitation of the study was that students that did not appeal their academic exclusion were not included in the study. A second limitation was that these students were not contacted to find out what they would have indicated as the reason(s) that contributed to their unsatisfactory academic performance.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ELECTRONIC APPEAL FORM

Based on past experience and with reference to the paper based BF/F7 appeals process, an electronic appeal process and related electronic appeals form (template to be completed) was developed whereby students were allowed to follow an online process to appeal against their academic exclusion.

This electronic appeal form, including questions that probed reasons that possibly could have contributed to these students being academically excluded, was made available to all students who received a BF/F7 re-admission refused result code. To assist the students with access to the appeals process the link to the online appeals form was emailed and sms'ed to all students academically excluded. The link to the online appeals form was also placed on the faculty website.

STUDENTS ACADEMICALLY EXCLUDED

UG students for this study represent students studying toward a three year diploma or are studying for a four year extended degree or a three year degree. Table 2 below indicates the number of students for UG and Postgraduate (PG) that were academically excluded (BF/F7 for UG and DF/7F for PG result code) in 2015's first and second semester.

Table 2: NUMBER OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ACADEMICALLY EXCLUDED

NUMBER OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ACADEMICALLY EXCLUDED											
After 1 st Semester 2015						After 2 nd Semester 2015					
UG		PG		Overall		UG		PG		Overall	
500	93%	35	7%	535	100%	966	84%	182	16%	1148	100%

NUMBER OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ACADEMICALLY EXCLUDED (continue)					
2015					
UG		PG		Overall	
1466	87%	217	13%	1683	100%

The focus of this study will be on the UG students, as well as providing additional detail on first year students, in FEFS that were academically excluded, after the first and second semester of 2015, based on their academic results only. The UG students include students in all study periods. After semester one of 2015, 500 UG students were academically excluded and after semester two 966 UG students. The 1 466 UG students academically excluded represent overall 16% of the 9 361 UG students for 2015. It also represents 87% of the overall UG and PG students academically excluded of the faculty.

Table 3 below indicates the number of UG students that were academically excluded per semester and per qualification type.

Table 3: DISTRIBUTION OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ACADEMICALLY EXCLUDED PER SEMESTER AND QUALIFICATION TYPE

NUMBER AND % OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ACADEMICALLY EXCLUDED PER SEMESTER AND QUALIFICATION TYPE						
Qualification Type	After 1 st Semester 2015		After 2 nd Semester 2015		Overall 2015	
	Nr of UG	% of UG	Nr of UG	% of UG	Nr of UG	% of UG
Diploma	169	34%	387	40%	556	38%
Extended Degree	59	12%	114	12%	173	12%
Degree	261	52%	433	45%	694	47%
Overall (excluding Advanced Diploma)	489	98%	934	97%	1 423	97%
Advanced Diploma	11	2%	32	3%	43	3%
Overall	500	100%	966	100%	1 466	100%

From the overall number (1 423) of UG students academically excluded in 2015 694 (47%) were degree students followed by 556 (38%) diploma students. This is in line with the registrations per qualification type. It is noteworthy to mention that the percentage of students academically excluded increased for the diploma students but decreased for degree students in the second semester of 2015, compared to the first semester of 2015. The percentage for the extended degree students remained at 12%. The numbers of advanced diploma students academically excluded are small, and they represent on average only 3% of the overall number of UG students. Because of this small number, the advanced diploma students were excluded from the analysis and discussions to follow.

As stated in the literature review one in every three students that enter the higher education system in 2006 were lost after their first year. Therefore, it is also important to also focus the research on first year students.

Table 3.1 gives a breakdown of the number of first year students academically excluded per semester and per qualification type.

Table 3.1: DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS ACADEMICALLY EXCLUDED PER SEMESTER AND QUALIFICATION TYPE

NUMBER AND % OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS ACADEMICALLY EXCLUDED PER SEMESTER AND QUALIFICATION TYPE									
Qualification Type	After 1 st Semester 2015			After 2 nd Semester 2015			Overall 2015		
	Nr of 1 st Years	% of 1 st Years	% of Overall UG students	Nr of 1 st Years	% of 1 st Years	% of Overall UG students	Nr of 1 st Years	% of 1 st Years	% of Overall UG students
Diploma	54	49%	32%	130	44%	34%	184	45%	33%
Extended Degree	3	2%	5%	9	3%	8%	12	3%	7%
Degree	54	49%	20%	159	53%	37%	213	52%	31%
Overall	111	100%	22%	298	100%	31%	409	100%	29%

Of the 489 UG students academically excluded after the first semester of 2015, 22% (111) represented first year students. After the second semester 31% of UG students were first year students. Overall 29% of UG students academically excluded were first year students. Looking at the overall information for 2015 it can be seen that, diploma first year students academically excluded were the highest at 33%, closely followed by first year degree students at 31%.

THE APPEALS PROCESS

All students that are academically excluded have the opportunity to lodge an appeal against their academic exclusion of the Faculty (UJ ARR 2016, 6.13). All applicants wanting to appeal must follow the prescribed administrative procedure stipulated by the Faculty.

The Faculty Appeals Committee will consider the appeals and may refuse or allow re-admission. Students are informed of the outcome of their appeal via sms and email. The Faculty tries to keep this timeline no longer than 10 working days, in order to give students the opportunity to make the necessary arrangements should their appeal be successful or unsuccessful. The decision of the committee is final (FEFS QR 2016, EF.9).

ANALYSIS OF APPEALS IN FEFS (First and Second Semester 2015)

Analyses of the undergraduate appeals, in FEFS, for both the first and second semester of 2015 were done. The students' reasons, as provided by them contributing to their academic exclusion, was analysed using the answers they supplied in the

completed electronic appeal form. Biographical detail not available on the completed electronic appeals form (e.g. gender, race and previous year's activity) was extracted from MIS used by the University to supplement the data obtained from the electronic appeal form.

Number of Appeals

The following table gives a breakdown of the overall number of appeals:

Table 4: DISTRIBUTION OF APPEALS PER SEMESTER AND QUALIFICATION TYPE

NUMBER AND % OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS PER QUALIFICATION TYPE THAT APPEALED						
Qualification Type	1 st Semester 2015		2 nd Semester 2015		Overall 2015	
Diploma	105	29%	259	42%	364	37%
Extended Degree	42	12%	89	14%	131	13%
Degree	208	59%	273	44%	481	50%
Overall	355	100%	621	100%	976	100%

The majority (50%) of the overall number of appeals came from the degree students, followed by the diploma students (37%). This is once again in line with the faculty's enrolment numbers for the respective qualifications.

From Table 3 (overall exclusions) and Table 4 (appeals) above it can be concluded that the appeal rate for UG students was 73% at the end of the first semester and 65% at the end of the second semester. On average the UG students have an overall appeal rate of 68%. It is thus clear that the majority of UG students take the opportunity to appeal their academic exclusion.

From the information above it can be seen that degree students make up the majority (59% and 44% respectively) per semester of the UG students that appealed their BF/F7 re-admission refused status followed by the diploma students. This relates well to the overall number of students registered for a degree or diploma. Interesting to note is that while the percentage of degree students that appealed their BF/F7 status from semester one to semester two increased with only 31% (208 to 273 students) the diploma students increased dramatically by 147% (105 to 259 students).

Table 4.1 gives a breakdown of the number of first year students that appealed. This allows for a comparison between the overall UG number of appeals and first year appeals.

Table 4.1: DISTRIBUTION OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS THAT APPEALED PER SEMESTER AND QUALIFICATION TYPE

Qualification Type	NUMBER AND % FIRST YEAR STUDENTS PER QUALIFICATION TYPE OF UG APPEALS					
	1 st Semester 2015		2 nd Semester 2015		Overall 2015	
Diploma	15	39%	48	38%	63	38%
Extended Degree	1	2%	8	6%	9	5%
Degree	23	59%	72	56%	95	57%
Overall	39	100%	128	100%	167	100%

The majority (57%) of the overall number of first year appeals came from the degree students followed by the diploma students (38%). This is once again in line with enrolment numbers for the respective qualifications. From the table above, it is clear that, the first year students that appealed follows the same appeals pattern as the overall appeals pattern for all UG students.

From Table 3.1 (first year exclusion) and Table 4.1 (first years appeals) it can be seen that the appeal rate for first year students was 35% at the end of the first semester and increased to 43% at the end of the second semester. On average first year students have an appeal rate of 41%, that is much lower than the 68% appeal rate of the overall UG students. This could be because first year students are still new to university life and might not be aware of the appeals process available to them. It could also be that they did not appeal because they realised that the qualification they were registered for is not meeting the expectations of the career they want to pursue.

Undergraduate student profile per qualification type

The table below presents the profile of the students that appealed their academic exclusion in terms of gender and race.

Table 5: DISTRIBUTION OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PROFILE FOR THOSE THAT APPEALED PER SEMESTER AND QUALIFICATION TYPE

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PROFILE FOR THOSE THAT APPEALED PER SEMESTER AND QUALIFICATION TYPE						
Qualification Type	1st Semester 2015					
	Gender		Race			
	Male	Female	African	Coloured	Indian	White
Diploma	53%	47%	98%	1%	1%	0%
Extended Degree	65%	35%	93%	2%	5%	0%
Degree	52%	48%	86%	2%	7%	5%
Overall semester one	54%	46%	91%	2%	4%	3%
2nd Semester 2015						
Diploma	46%	54%	97%	1%	2%	0%
Extended Degree	49%	51%	96%	2%	2%	0%
Degree	53%	47%	88%	3%	7%	2%
Overall semester two	49%	51%	93%	2%	4%	1%
Overall 2015						
Diploma	51%	59%	98%	1%	2%	0%
Extended Degree	57%	43%	95%	2%	3%	0%
Degree	53%	47%	87%	3%	7%	3%
Overall for all qualification types	53%	49%	93%	2%	4%	1%

From the table above the following key observations were made:

- the proportions of male and female students (Male 53% and Female 47%) that appealed are in line with the overall profile of the Faculty for UG students (Male 54% and Female 46%)¹; and
- the race proportions of students that appealed (African 92%, Coloured 2%, Indian 4% and White 2%) are also in line with the overall profile of the Faculty for UG students (African 92%, Coloured 3%, Indian 3%, White 2%)¹.

Students profile per age grouping and previous year's activity

The table below provides more information on the students profile per age grouping and previous year's activity, in order to determine whether there is a relationship between a student's age and/or previous year's activity.

Table 6: AGE GROUPING AND PREVIOUS YEAR'S ACTIVITY PER QUALIFICATION TYPE

AGE GROUPING AND PREVIOUS YEAR'S ACTIVITY FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS PER QUALIFICATION TYPE							
Qualification Type	Age grouping				Previous year's activity		
	18-20	21-22	23-24	25-29	Secondary school student	University student	Working
Diploma	6%	55%	32%	7%	4%	88%	8%
Extended Degree	19%	28%	36%	17%	0%	95%	5%
Degree	30%	41%	22%	7%	4%	74%	22%
Overall of all qualifications	21%	44%	27%	8%	3%	82%	15%

The table above indicates that the majority (44%) of UG students that obtained an academic exclusion result code are in the age grouping of 21-22 year old. If this is related to the previous year's activity it indicates that 82% of them were university students in the previous year. This further shows that students in this category are more senior students (students near completion of their qualification) and therefore take the opportunity to appeal their academic exclusion.

The following table gives further insight into the age grouping and previous year's activity of first year students in order to compare it with the overall UG student profile.

Student profile of first year students per age grouping and previous year’s activity

Table 6.1: AGE GROUPING AND PREVIOUS YEAR’S ACTIVITY OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS PER QUALIFICATION TYPE

AGE GROUPING AND PREVIOUS YEAR’S ACTIVITY OF FIRST YEAR STUDENTS PER QUALIFICATION TYPE								
Qualification Type	Age grouping					Previous year’s activity		
	18-20	21-22	23-24	25-29	30-34	Secondary School student	University student	Working
Diploma	48%	25%	19%	8%	0%	29%	17%	54%
Extended Degree	25%	25%	38%	13%	0%	13%	13%	74%
Degree	54%	35%	8%	1%	1%	52%	8%	40%
Overall of all qualifications	50%	30%	14%	5%	1%	41%	12%	47%

The table above indicates that the majority of first year students for the diploma and degree that obtained an academic exclusion are in the age grouping of 18-20. But for the extended degree the majority of students were in the age grouping 23-24. The percentage of students that worked in their previous year is high for both the extended degree and the diploma first year students. This could be why 56% of extended degree students list financial difficulties as one of the main reasons contributing to their academic exclusion. It relates back to the fact that these students (75%) were working in the previous year(s) to earn money to pay for their studies and don't have a monthly income anymore. This also corresponds with the high percentage (54%) of diploma students that were working in the previous year. Interesting to note is that the majority (51%) of degree students were secondary school students in the previous year. This is much higher than for the extended degree students (13%) and also the diploma students (29%).

MAIN REASONS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO UNSATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

In the online appeal form students were given the opportunity to select the reason(s), from a drop down list of possibilities, which in their opinion mostly contributed to their unsatisfactory academic performance. The drop down list was created based on years of experience with the manual appeals process. Students then also had to explain how

the reason(s) listed affected their studies and subsequently contributed to their unsatisfactory academic performance.

The table below, listed by undergraduate qualification types, indicates an overall summary of the main reasons listed by the UG students that contributed to their unsatisfactory academic performance and resulting academic exclusion. These reasons were extracted from the online appeal form.

Table 7: REASONS PROVIDED FOR UNSATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS PER QUALIFICATION TYPE

REASONS PROVIDED FOR UNSATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE PER QUALIFICATION TYPE				
Reasons	Diploma	Extended Degree	Degree	Overall for UG students
Academic difficulty	18%	19%	26%	22%
Family problems	14%	13%	11%	13%
Financial difficulty	47%	55%	45%	47%
Health	11%	8%	9%	9%
Personal	4%	2%	5%	4%
Transport problems	1%	0%	1%	1%
Other	5%	3%	3%	4%
Overall	100%	100%	100%	100%

From the information above it is clear that financial difficulty is overall by far (47%) the main reason that contributed to the students' unsatisfactory academic performance. This is also true for each of the UG qualification types individually. Extended degree students seem to be the students that experience the most financial difficulties (55%), followed by diploma students at 47% and degree students at 45%, which is still relatively high.

The reason secondly overall listed by UG students was academic difficulties; overall at 22% ranging from 26% for degree students to 18% for diploma students. Interesting to note is that the degree exit level is on level 7 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) while the diploma is on NQF level 6. This could explain why more degree students listed academic difficulties as a contributing reason.

Other and personal problems (both at 4% overall) as well as transport problems (1% overall) seems to be the lowest reasons that contributed to academic exclusion of UG students.

Other key observations, for UG students per qualification type, made from the table above are as follows:

- in terms of family problems the diploma students (14%) were the group with the highest percentage of students claiming that they experienced family problems followed closely by the extended degree students (13%);
- health problems affected 11% of diploma students followed closely by 9% for degree students; and
- personal, transport and other problems affected only a very low percentage overall of UG students per qualification type.

Table 7.1 below provides more detailed information on the reasons provided by first year students per qualification type.

Table 7.1: REASONS PROVIDED FOR UNSATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE BY FIRST YEAR STUDENTS PER QUALIFICATION TYPE

REASONS PROVIDED FOR UNSATISFACTORY ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE BY FIRST YEAR STUDENTS PER QUALIFICATION TYPE				
Reasons	Diploma	Extended Degree	Degree	Overall for first year students
Academic difficulty	15%	22%	27%	22%
Family problems	10%	0%	9%	9%
Financial difficulty	58%	56%	48%	52%
Health	8%	22%	7%	8%
Personal	3%	0%	3%	3%
Transport problems	3%	0%	1%	2%
Other	3%	0%	6%	5%
Overall	100%	100%	100%	100%

From the first year information above it is clear that financial difficulty is also by far the overall (52%) main reason that contributed to their unsatisfactory academic performance. This is also true for each of the qualification types individually. This reflects the same overall pattern as seen in Table 7. First year diploma students seem to be the students that experienced the most financial difficulties (58%), followed closely by extended degree students (56%) with first year degree students at 48%, that is still relatively high. A possible explanation of extended degree students' financial difficulty could be because extended students usually only get financial assistance in the form of bursaries or sponsors in their second year of study. This

would be only after they have successfully completed the extended year of the qualification and they start with the first year of the mainstream degree.

The reason secondly listed by first year students was academic difficulties at 22% overall, ranging from 27% for degree students to 15% for diploma students. These reasons, as well as the other reasons listed by first year students also follow the overall UG pattern as seen in Table 7.

As discussed above financial difficulties seem to be the main contributing reasons (factor) leading to being awarded a BF/F7 result code both overall for UG students as well as for first year students. The following table compares the UG students that listed financial difficulties as the main problem with their National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) status.

Table 8: NSFAS STATUS PER QUALIFICATION TYPE

QUALIFICATION TYPE AND NSFAS STATUS					
Qualification Type	Reason	NSFAS Status Description ¹			
	Financial difficulty	Applied for & eligible but not awarded	Applied for & has NSFAS award	Applied for but was not eligible	Did not apply
Diploma	47%	19%	6%	12%	63%
Extended Degree	55%	29%	0%	7%	64%
Degree	45%	8%	3%	11%	78%
Overall	47%	19%	3%	10%	68%

From the information above it is clear that overall 47% of UG students' listed financial difficulties as a contributing reason to their unsatisfactory performance. While overall 68% did not apply for NSFAS financial aid while only an alarming low 3% was awarded NSFAS financial aid. It could add value to contact the 19% of students that were not awarded financial assistance, even though they were eligible, to try and find out why they were not awarded financial aid. One reason could be that their past academic performance (for senior students) was not seen as satisfactory and therefore they did not qualify for financial aid.

It is interesting to note that while 55% of the extended degree students experienced financial difficulties, 64% of them did not apply for NSFAS financial aid according to the data available¹. Of the 45% of degree students that experienced financial difficulties 78% of them did not apply for NSFAS.

The large number of students that experience financial difficulties is alarming; it means that the majority of their families are responsible for their financial needs. Research by Fowler (2003), shows that students with financial difficulties not only have to pay for their class fees but they are also liable for books and transport. The parents and community generally assist with the payment of the registration fee. The students then have to make adequate plans for the payment of the bigger amounts of fees still outstanding. Students are then usually strapped for cash and have to manage their finances carefully; they often take up part time jobs to assist them with their financial needs. The part time jobs can cause students to miss classes. Students with financial difficulties often remain on campus all day long in order to avoid paying unnecessary transport fees. Students sometimes make use of the overnight study facility to sleep in just to ensure that they save on transport money and use the money to buy food. It could add value to determine whether adequate study areas and other facilities are available for students that have to stay on campus all day long.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO AVOID POTENTIAL ACADEMIC EXCLUSION?

Students should only be finally excluded on account of poor academic performance as a last resort, after all other avenues have failed to restore their academic performance to the required level, and provided that the necessary academic support to assist students was given. It is also clear that alternative means of financial support (not only NSFAS) for students' needs to be investigated.

It is the responsibility of both the staff (academic and support) and students of FEFS to ensure that as many students as possible are given the opportunity to be successful in their studies.

Staff have the responsibility of selecting, admitting and orientating students carefully; delivering excellent teaching and fair assessment; ensuring that students have the opportunity and means to assess and monitor their performance on a regular basis; and providing appropriate academic support and feedback to students.

Students have the responsibility of committing themselves fully to their studies; monitoring their performance in their studies; and utilising all the available support resources (academic counselling by PhyCaD, academic support by the ADC as well as career and personal counselling) to successfully complete their studies. This should preferably be done in the minimum time for their qualification but not exceeding the maximum time allowed.

Faculties should implement some initiatives to try and alleviate the academic as well as financial problems that students are experiencing. FEFS already has good measures in place to assist students academically.

To try and assist students with their financial problems it can be useful to consider some of the following:

- the possibility of other types of funding mechanisms available (Fowler, 2003:16);
- investigate the alternatives of more innovative and entrepreneurial ways to guide students to provide their own funding needs;
- provide students with practical budgeting guidelines to assist them in planning their finances; and
- assist students with financial difficulties with a meal a day to ensure they do not have to study or attempt assessment opportunities while being hungry.

SUMMARY AND POSSIBLE FUTURE STUDIES

This paper presented a case study in the form of an analysis of the reasons contributing to academic exclusion in FEFS at UJ. It was shown that after the first semester 93% of the total number of UG and PG students that were academically excluded were UG students and 84% were UG students after the second semester of 2015. Overall for 2015 it was mostly degree students (47%) followed by diploma students (38%) that were academically excluded for 2015. The same can be seen for first year students, where 52% of the first year students that were academically excluded represented degree students followed by diploma students at 45%.

Overall UG students have an appeal rate of 68%; this indicates that the majority of UG students take the opportunity to appeal their academic exclusion. The majority of overall appeals came from degree students (50%) followed by diploma students (37%). This is in line with the faculty's enrolment numbers per qualification type. First year students have an appeal rate of only 41% compared to the overall appeal UG rate of 68%. It could add value to determine why the appeal rates for first year students are lower when compared to the overall UG appeal rate.

The analysis of the reasons contributing to students being academically excluded lead to two important conclusions:

- 47% of UG students listed financial difficulties as the main reason contributing to their unsatisfactory academic performance. Extended degree students seem to be the students that experience the most (55%) financial difficulties. First year students also indicated that financial difficulties were by far overall (52%) the main contributing reason; and

- academically difficulty at 22%, overall ranging from 36% for degree students to 18% for diploma students, was the second highest reason listed by UG academically excluded students. First year students indicated that academic difficulties, also at 22% overall, were the second highest contributing reason.

The results of this study suggest that the Faculty and possibly the University should implement some initiatives to try and alleviate the financial as well as the academic difficulties students are experiencing.

Extracting and analysing the data obtained from the BF/F7 online appeals process should be part of an on-going research project within the Faculty and possibly the University. If more data is obtained relating to the academic exclusion of students the sooner solutions to the problems, being academically or non-academically, could be found and this could possibly positively influence the graduation rate of the Faculty.

Future studies could include the following:

- obtain information from the students that did not appeal their academic exclusion to find out their reasons; and
- track the progress of students, that had their BF/F7 lifted and subsequently received an academic warning, to monitor their academic performance in order to see if the academic warning received and subsequent interventions assisted them in improving their academic performance.

Future studies in these areas could assist the Faculty and University to design and implement strategies and innovations specific to the needs of academically excluded students, based on the data extracted from the online academic appeals process.

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