

## Interrogation of the Role of First Year Student Experiences in Student Success at a University of Technology in South Africa

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**Abstract :** This ongoing research explores what could be the components of a comprehensive First-Year Student Experience (FYSE) at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) and the preferred implementation modalities. In light of the Siyaphumelela project, this interrogation is premised on the need to glean data for the institution that could be used to ascertain the role of FYSE towards enhancing student success. The research proceeds by examining prevalent models from other South African Universities and beyond in its quest to get at pragmatic comprehensive FYSE programme for DUT. As DUT is a student centered institution and amidst the ever shrinking economy, this research would aid higher education practitioners to ascertain if the hard earned finances are being channelled to a worthy academic venture. This research seeks to get inputs from a) students who participated in FYSE and are now in second and third years at DUT b) students who are currently participating in FYSE c) former and present Tutors d) departmental coordinators e) academics and support staff working with the participating students. This exploratory approach is preferred since 2010 DUT has grappled with how to implement an integrated institution-wide FYSE. This findings of this research could provide the much-needed data to ascertain if the current FYSE package is pivotal towards attainment of DUT Strategic Focus Area 1: Building sustainable student communities of living and learning. The ideal is to have DUT FYSE programme become an institution-wide programme that lays the foundation for consolidated and focused student development programmes for subsequent undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study. Also, armed with data from this research, DUT could develop the capacity and systems to ensure that all students get diverse on-time support to enhance their retention and academic success in their tertiary studies. In essence, the preferred FYSE curriculum woven around DUT graduate attributes should contribute towards the reduction in the first-year students' dropout rates and subsequently in undergraduate studies. Therefore, this on-going research will feed into Siyaphumelela project and would help position 2018-2020 FYSE initiatives at DUT.

**Keywords :** challenges, comprehensive, dropout, transition

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