



The Need for Senior Student Support in Higher Education

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Defining Student Engagement

Student engagement focuses on activities that contribute to students' university experiences and the outcomes thereof, which constitute student success (Strydom et al., 2017).

- Components of student engagement:
 1. The time and efforts students spend on academic activities
 2. The allocation of resources and services institutions provide to students
- What students do and what institutions do (Kuh et al., 2010).

Student Experience

Student experience is a complex concept entrenched in university practices and can be defined differently (Benckendorff et al., 2009).

Four dimensions that explain student experience:

1. Institutional dimension – improving and bettering the learning experiences of students
2. Student dimension – the quality of student experience, student retention, and student satisfaction determined by individual characteristics of students.
3. Sector-wide dimension – the involvement of universities in the broader system (cross-institutional collaborations).
4. External dimension – the influence of external trends from technological advancements, economic pressures, and government regulations and policies.



What is Student Support?

Student support in institutions of higher education consists of academic or non-academic services.

- The purpose is to enhance students' academic performance to ensure success
 - Plays a role in sustaining students in universities
 - Assist students in capacity building for academic success, personal well-being, and excellence through transition
 - Transitioning period:
 - Critical period for students to settle into university
- Essentially, support services assist students in various ways to enhance the capacity of all students for academic success, personal well-being, and excellence through transition. Without these services, students will experience problems that will place them at risk of failure.

The Need for Senior Student Support

Little is being done to support senior students

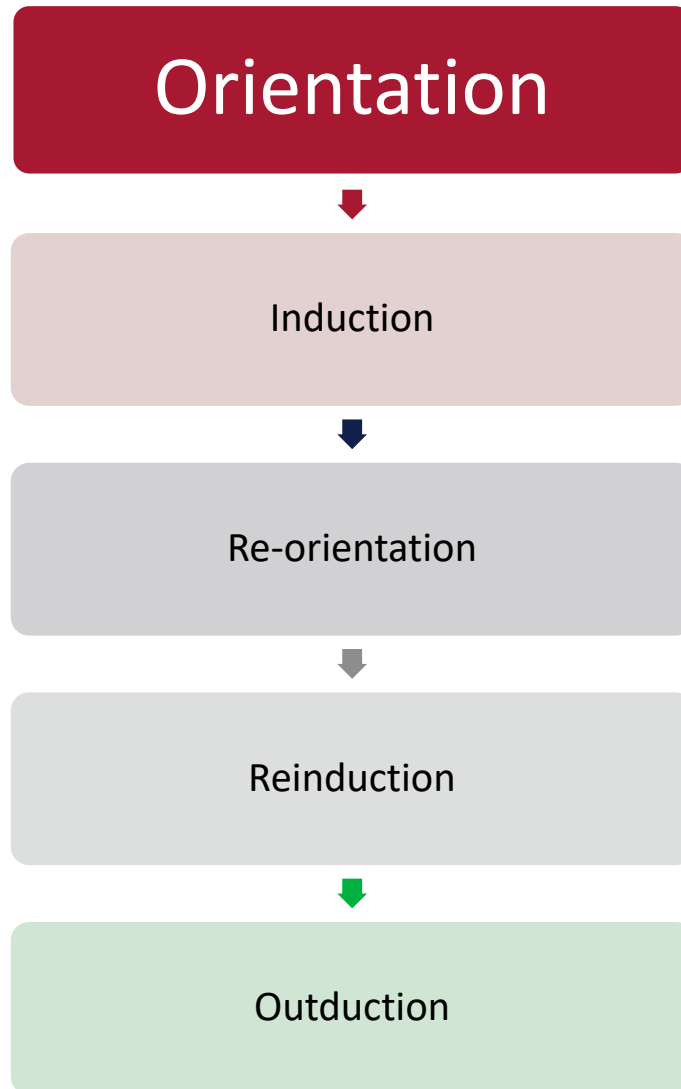
A finding from the Journey Mapping study conducted at the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in 2019. To engage students about factors that facilitate their success and get a deeper understanding of students' educational experiences (Loots, 2019).

- Students feel like not much effort is being put in as they transition into their senior years.
- All students go through the same stages of settling in and progressing in their studies
- As students transition from the first year, they still require the same support into the second year and onwards.

- All students require the same information applicable to their different levels of study.
- Carving a new student life cycle consisting of Orientation, Induction, Re-orientation, Reinduction, and Outduction



The New Student Life Cycle



The New Student Life Cycle

- All students require the same information applicable to their different levels of study.
- Carving a new student life cycle consisting of Orientation, Induction, re-orientation, reinductions, and Outduction
- Presenting universities with an opportunity to focus on the outduction process.
- Less time is spent on preparing students to exit university and adapt to life post-studying
- How can the outduction process be achieved:
- Cultivating academic development through foundation-building activities for personal growth

Journey Mapping Report Findings

The qualitative data present students' educational journey from the first year, students' experiences from the second year onwards

Students reflected on the guidance they still need and the challenges they face.

1. Transitioning challenge
2. The need to manage academic expectations and scaffold learning
3. Reflections on what assists students in succeeding
4. Support for senior students
5. Lack of awareness of support structures

Senior students perceive support to be absent from them and the unawareness of various support services

Student Reflections:

Transition Challenge:

So, after first year, it's like everything changes. Like the fun ends. The amount of work increases and you have to fight on your own. The Varsity doesn't really say it, but not much attention is paid to you from second year onward and the workload is a lot. And honestly, I mean, in my second year, I was struggling, I didn't know how to get help.

The need to manage academic expectations and scaffold learning:

During registrations, when you are second year or third year, they sometimes treat you in a way that they think that you've been here before, you already know what's going on. We also need guidance because these things change, the system changes, everything changes. We need academic advising each and every year, just to check, are you on the right path, are you still going to get a degree.

There's a huge gap between first year content and second year content. First year Accounting, you calculate. That's it, you just calculate. With second year Accounting, first semester, you're expected to write. Now, I was calculating, now I'm expected to write, what's going on?

I had the shock of my life this semester because last year everything was multiple choice, surface knowledge, and all of a sudden you get to second year, you are thrown into the deep end. Now, you must apply.

Student Reflections (cont):

Professional Development:

What pushes one through senior years is seeing yourself on that Callie Human stage getting that degree and making yourself and your family proud, especially if you're the first one to go to Varsity.

Students' expression of less support:

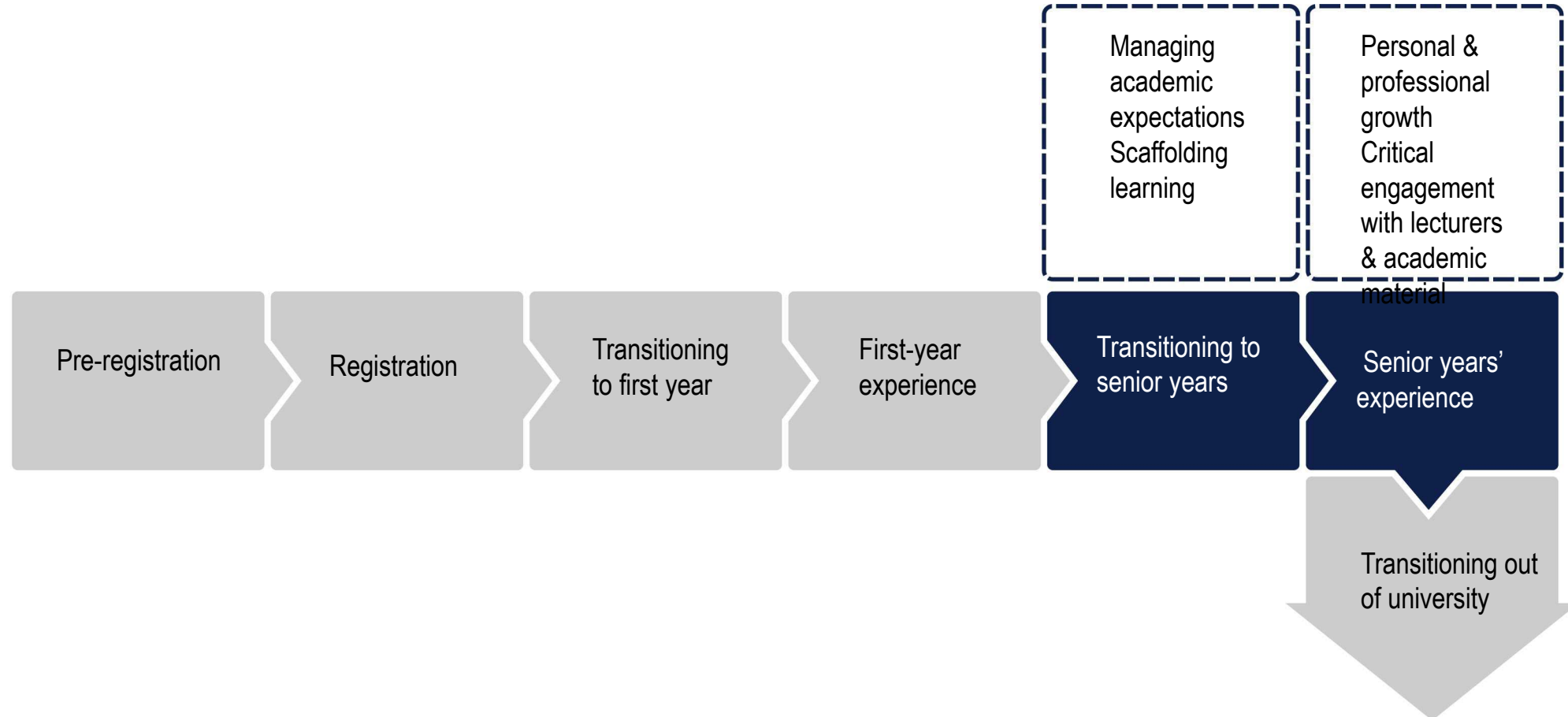
It feels like when you move to second year, no one is supporting you and now you're on your own for real.

When you move to second year, no one cares about your mental well-being and I'm talking from experience. Everyone's focusing on the first years. No one cares how is second year treating you? Is the workload still the same? No one cares.

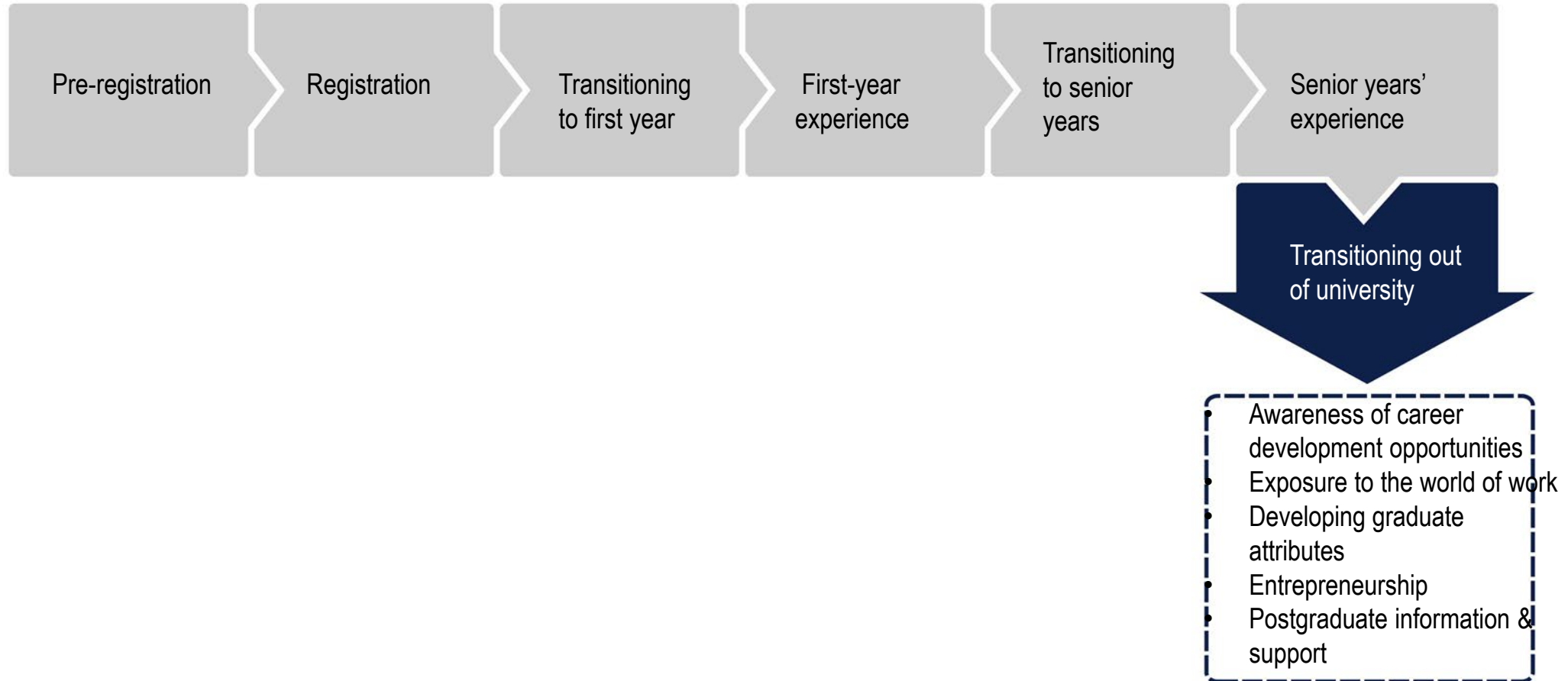
And then I got with my senior year, I just feel like maybe less emphasis is on the senior years because there's an assumption maybe that you're OK now, you know what you're doing because you've been here for a long time.

As a senior the workload gets a lot, combined with family problems back home, because there are people who are first generation students, for example. Their hope is on you, it's like you are the one who holds the future of your family, your parents sent you to school to go work so that you can school your little sisters.

Senior Experience



Transitioning out of university:



South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE)

SASSE collects information of students' participation in programmes and activities for the promotion of learning and personal development.

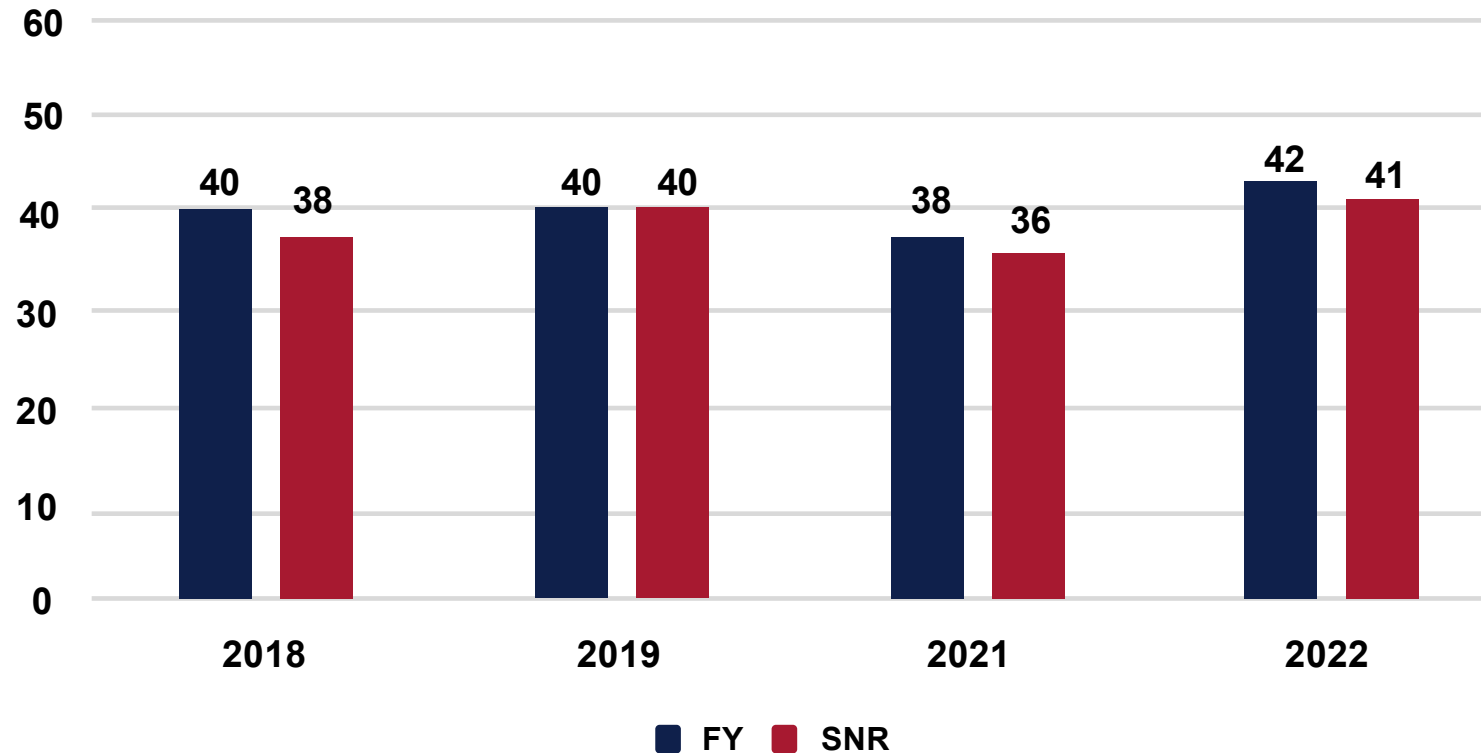
- Student engagement data indicators provide an estimation of what students spend their time on and what they gain during their university journey.
- Identifies how student experiences can be improved through changes in practice and policy.

An indicator identified to emphasize the need for senior student support:

- Supportive Environment Indicator
- Illustrates the difference between First-years and Seniors' scores on how much their institutions emphasize support for them.
- Senior students (last 4 years) scored lower than first years
- Indicator illustrates that their institutions place less emphasis on support for them



SASSE: Supportive Environment indicator



SE				
	2018	2019	2021	2022
FY	40	40	38	42
SNR	38	40	36	41

Source: Evidence-Based Change (CTL), University of the Free State

Lessons Learned:

- Institutions of higher learning need to reflect on students' educational journeys
- To identify student needs and key trends that affect student participation
- Manage student expectations which affect student retention





Senior Student Support UFS

Student Journey Mapping leading to the inception of Senior Student Experience (SSE)

- The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), under the focus area of Student Learning and Success (SLS)
- Promotion of student development
- Started with virtual orientation
- Provided academic support

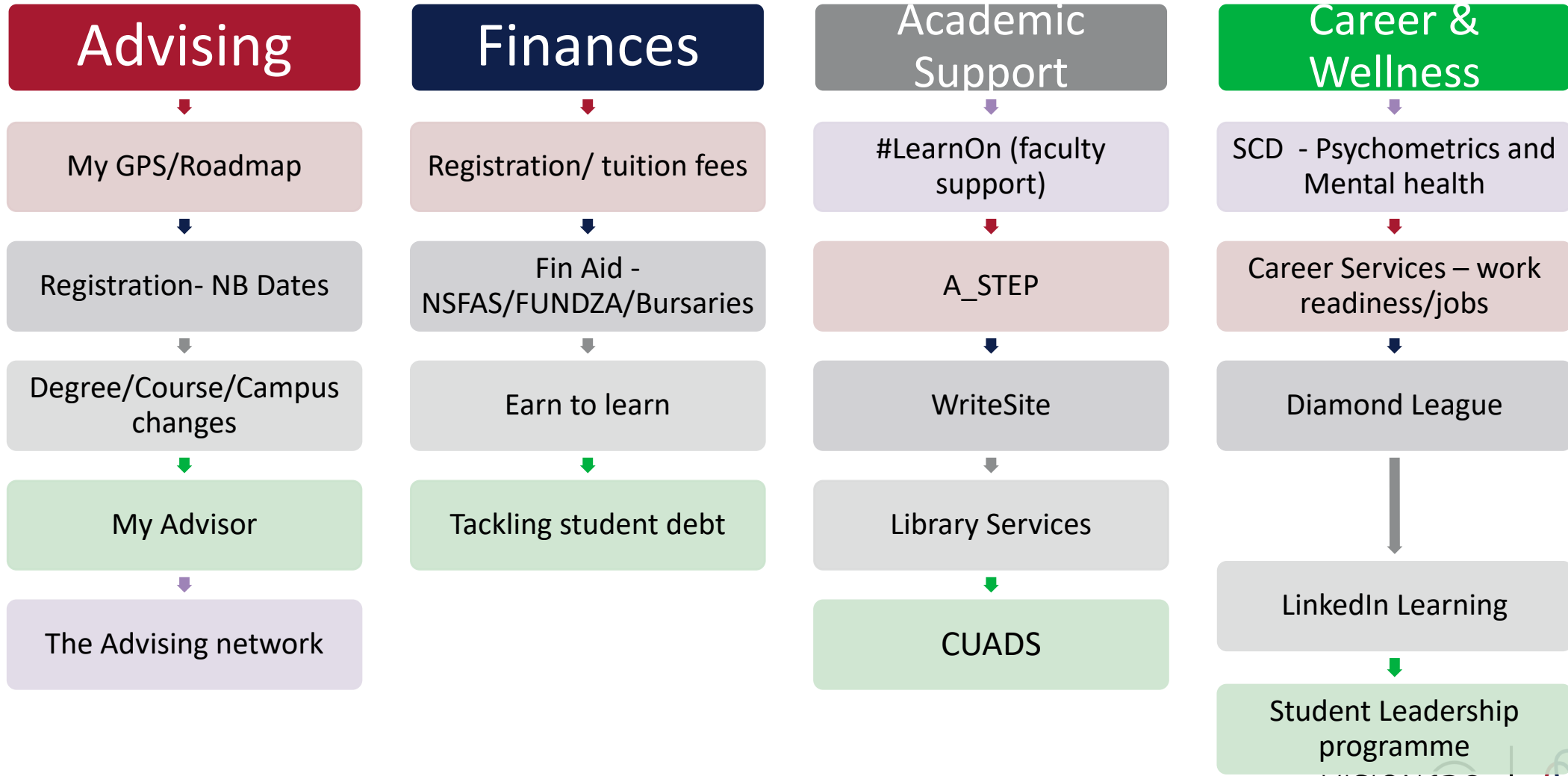


Senior Student Support UFS

#SecureTheGrad

- Initiative that promotes student engagement, learning, and progress
- Provides senior UFS students with an opportunity to network with the campus community
- Fosters a sense of belonging for students
- Enables senior students to access support services available

#SecureTheGrad Themes:



Student Reflections

The support in first year was unknown and student experienced depression because of not knowing where to ask for help. Currently, the student is more aware of support services, such as blackboard and WriteSite. Knows more about support services now.

I learnt that UFS provides support for students and the various options available for funding besides NSFAS. Student has improved a lot and attempted to make use of Standard Bank when NSFAS was giving problems with my funding.

I feel like as senior students are too focused on academics. Need support to be reminded that we are human, we need to breathe and take a moment off academics and breath. Lack of human support. From experience, we don't take a step back as senior students, we have certain things we want to achieve but we are only focused on academics. You are not a student by birth, you become a student as you grow up.

Student Engagements:



Conclusion

- Essential to reflect on whether the university infrastructure and resources support students
- Reflect on what students are doing in their student journey and how they respond to student engagement initiatives
- Find out how students remain engaged as they transition to different levels of studying
- Have initiatives to enhance and promote student participation
- Allowing students to access the support services (navigating campus, access to academic support, career development, wellness, and personal development) available at the university for them to succeed holistically.

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Thank you!

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