



*How are we the problem?*

*Exploring the student voice for student success*

E Bernard  
Siyaphumelela conference 2024

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*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives through quality, impact, and care.*

VISION **130**  
Renew and Reimagine  
for 2034

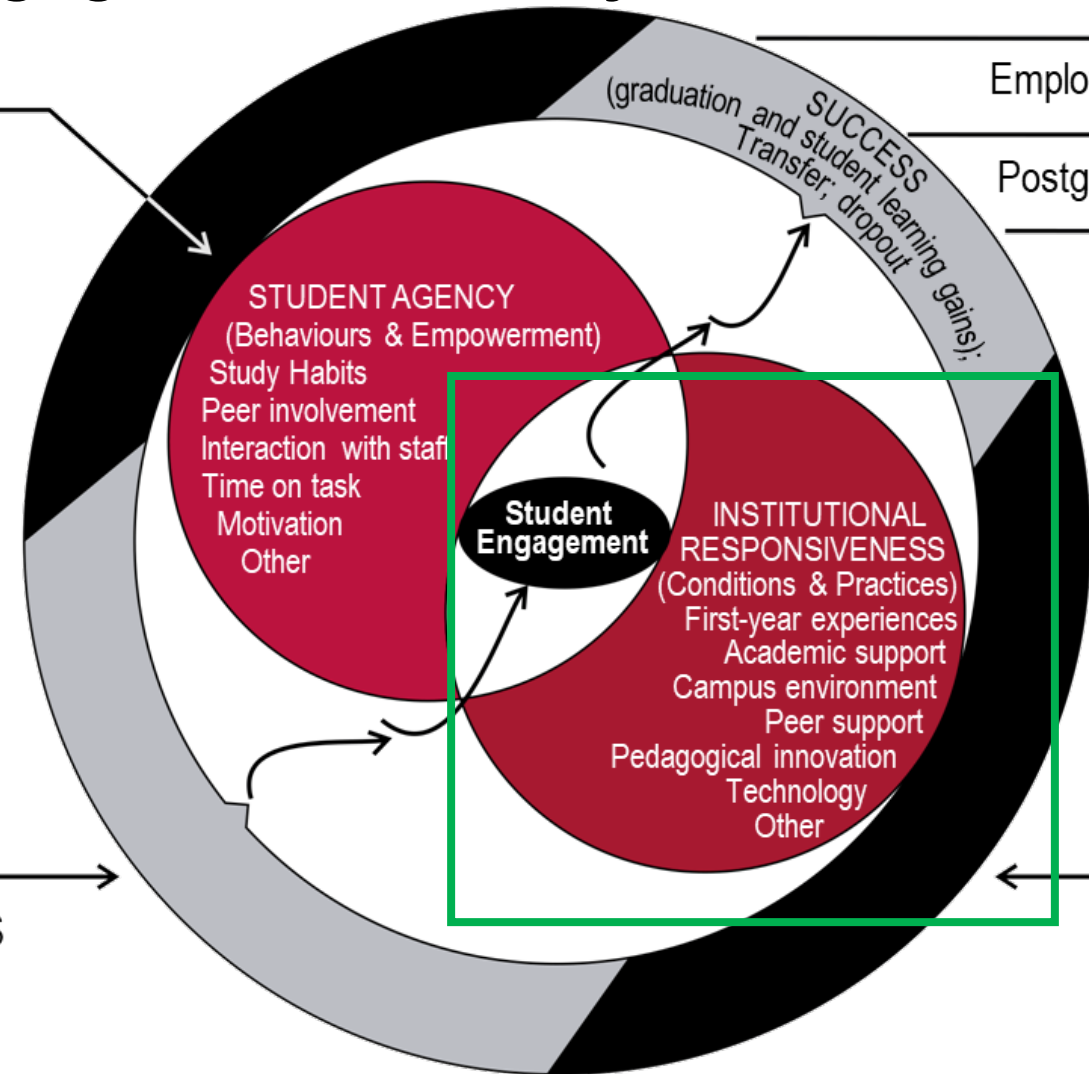
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FREISTATA



# Students' engagement as catalyst for student success

**INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES**  
 Globalisation  
 Competitiveness (Rankings)  
 Economic forces  
 Socio-political challenges

**PRE-TERTIARY EXPERIENCES**  
 Enrolment choices Academic preparation (incl. numeracy & literacy) Aptitude & motivation  
 Family & Peer support Demographics



Employment  
 Postgraduate / Professional Study  
 Graduate attributes, e.g.  
 Lifelong Learning

**NATIONAL PRESSURES**  
 Provincial & National policy  
 Accountability  
 Socio-economic challenges  
 (Poverty & inequality)

# The importance of the student voice

When did you last speak with a student, and asked them how they were doing academically?

# The importance of the student voice

*Listening to and acting on student preferences, interests, and perspectives helps students feel invested in their own learning and can ignite passions that will increase their persistence. (Kendel and Brie, 2017)*

# Process of data collection and analysis

SASSE 2022

Exploratory

Voices of 5967 students (qualitative); 7 South African institutions

Open-ended question:

**“What one change would most improve the educational experience at your institution?”**

Coded and thematically analysed (aligned with *institutional responsiveness*, including aspects such as [first-year experiences](#), [academic support](#), [campus environment](#), [peer support](#), [pedagogical innovation](#), [technology](#), and other); also considering the “[student voice](#)”.

Data is de-identified



# Process of data collection and analysis

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“to read *through* the data means drawing on the analytic imagination to see, not just what ‘evidence’ there is, but how one snippet of conversation might relate to another spoken some time later; it means building a picture of the lives narrated, rather than simply documenting their component parts; it involves looking for the absences, as well as the presences to see what is missing and perhaps explain why.”

(James, 2012)



## Findings: aligned to **institutional responsiveness**

“What one change would most improve the educational experience?”

### REGISTRATION PROCESSES

The way they do things more especially during registration their system, technology to be specific is very poor if they can change that I think things will be better since **we struggle a lot during registration with no help because whenever we email those are supposed to help us with registration they always bluetick us.**

...the struggles we go through when its registration time and we do not get emails, for example this year I did not receive any email from the academic advisor before I can continue with registration and **I had to come from the villages and register manually.**



# Findings: aligned to **institutional responsiveness**

“What one change would most improve the educational experience?”

## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Regular check on students' mental health, listen to their struggles and try meet them halfway.

Give more mental or psychological support to students as they are going through a lot regarding academics.

...there are students, plenty of them, who feel that way because of the academic pressure. This institution must therefore provide better support for students, and that way I guarantee that this institution's academical excellence will improve as students' mental health's would have been better.

Treat student with compassion.





# Findings: aligned to **institutional responsiveness**

“What one change would most improve the educational experience?”

## FINANCIAL RELIEF

Provide free meals sometimes for students who do not have funding because other students sometimes miss lecturers due to hunger or not having enough money for transport and that leads to them losing time for studies and end up dropping in academics.

It'd be really great if the institution paid for the clean, drinking water. As a NSFAS student, R290 is not even enough for my toiletries and I still have to stretch it to get my toiletries and have money left over to buy clean drinking water. Sometimes, I just drink the tap water even though I can clearly see that it's brown because what else can I do?

If only they could also think of the unfunded students (like me), they should try by all means for us not to think of dropping out because of our financial issues.



# Findings: aligned to **institutional responsiveness**

“What one change would most improve the educational experience?”

## EFFECTIVE LECTURER COMMUNICATION

More engagement between students and lecturers.

I would like for lectures to give feedback to students, face to face, and one on one.

Lecturers should communicate with us effectively and on time, for example if we have an online class, they must tell us a day or two in advance that the class is online so that we don't need to run and catch a taxi only to find out the class is online. It is frustrating for some of us.

Lecturers need to listen to students more often and take their views into consideration.

The dedication of studies in both students and lecturers. If the relationship between student and lecturer could change then the university could be the best ... university around S.A.



# Findings: aligned to **institutional responsiveness**

“What one change would most improve the educational experience?”

## TUTORIALS

Tutoring for all modules

...for nursing, having mentors and tutors would have helped me out out so so much, we do not have such.

... hiring tutors for some of module because we don't afford to pay tutors on our own.

Provide extra classes for students or tutorials where student can engage and improve their learning from other graduated students.



## Findings: aligned to **institutional responsiveness**

“What one change would most improve the educational experience?”

### HOW LECTURES ARE DELIVERED: the blend

I would like to attend all my classes face-to-face because online classes contribute to my procrastinating sometimes and I am afraid I will struggle because my exams are face-to-face but I was lectured online.

The balance of online and face to face classes with practicals in order to have experience not with only theory but also on the field.

Study groups online on blackboard.

I will prefer all the classes to be attended on campus. For us to interact with our lecturer well and I feel like when it comes to them explaining modules on campus it is much better and understandable than online.

Unless you live on campus there isn't any university life. I spent most of my degree complete online and coming back to campus feels very useless with nothing to offer.



# Findings: aligned to **institutional responsiveness**

“What one change would most improve the educational experience?”

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR APPLICATION OF CONTENT

The institution should have projects for every school, where students go out into communities and make a difference. This could serve as the practical component to the learning experience.

An emphasis on entrepreneurship from first year level, across all faculties so that students do not think of only studying to get employed but rather think of applying their studies to solve real world problems and create employment.

It would be that lecturers make use of practical learning (beside practical sessions), engaging in practical activities with means of learning to apply what you are learning. This should be implemented at all undergrad year not only when one does postgraduate or last undergrad year.

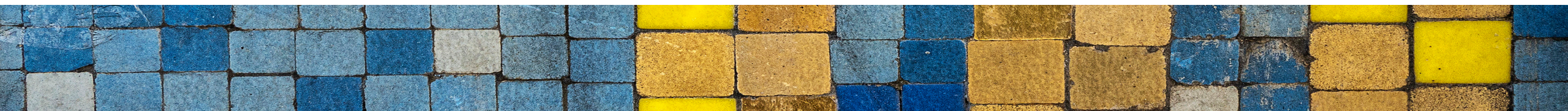
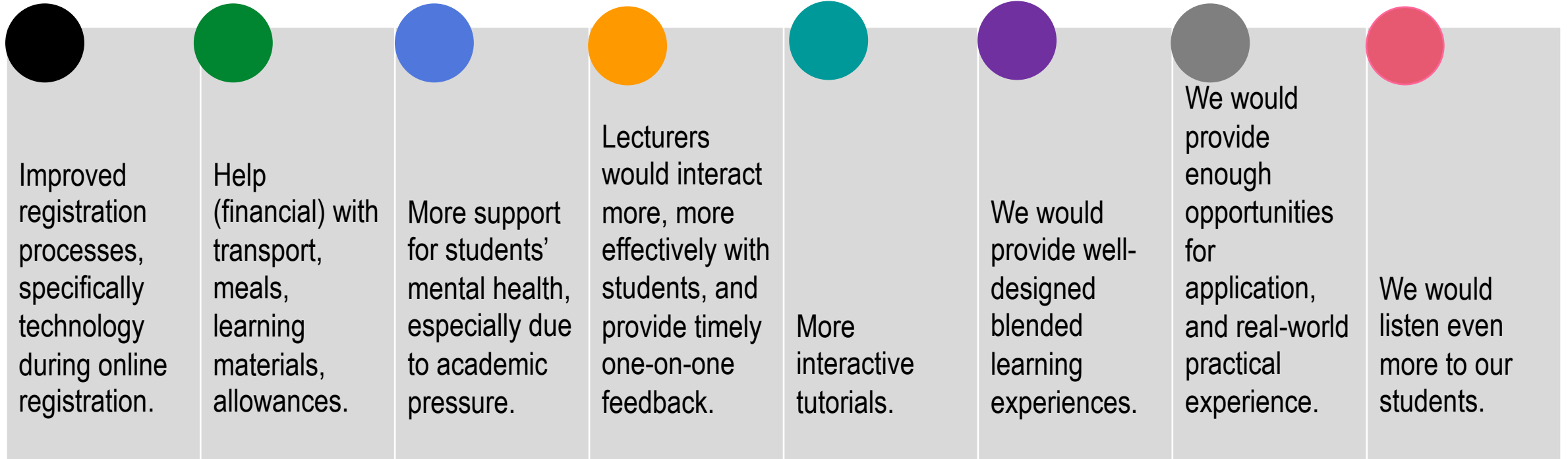
# Why do students feel their voices matter? And how should we listen?

- Regular check on students' mental health, listen to their **struggles** and try meet them halfway.
- Listening to the **needs** of students.
- Listening to the students' financial **concerns** and help solve the delay of allowances in order for them to buy all the learning materials they need.

- **Lecturers** need to listen to student more often and take their views into consideration.
- Listening to the struggles of the students with the **learning program** and helping them with the problem instead of just offering support or encouragement.

- The Institution should try to at least **listen to our suggestions prior to making changes** that affect us students most.
- The change where students are listened to when they voice out their needs and **where the institution tries to find a common ground with students and meet them halfway.**

# Final reflection: What would happen if we listened to our students?



In conclusion

***“Students need to feel that they matter, and they have a voice.”***



To end

When do you plan on talking to a student, and to ask them how they are doing academically?



# Thank you

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