# DUT

**DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**
**INYUVESI YASETHEKWINI YEZOBUCHWEPHESHE**

## ENVISION 2030

transparency • honesty • integrity • respect • accountability
fairness • professionalism • commitment • compassion • excellence

THE WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2021 TOP 500

# Academic Performance and Success: Leveraging Student Activism: Inculcating Student Agency for Enhanced Outcomes

Ntsikelelo Nhlenyama & Mzwandile Khumalo

# Introduction

The pervasive dissatisfaction with performance indicators within higher education institutions underscores a pressing need for transformative action. Despite concerted efforts to address issues such as retention rates, student success, and low throughput rates, the status quo often remains unchanged. The Durban University of Technology, like other institutions, faces these challenges, identifying factors such as student academic withdrawal, protests, and diminished morale as contributing to a bulging phenomenon characterized by high access and low throughput.

# Figure 1:%student success rates, 2018-2023



%student success rates

2018: 88%, 2019: 88%, 2020: 89%, 2021: 89%, 2022: 86%, 2023: 84%
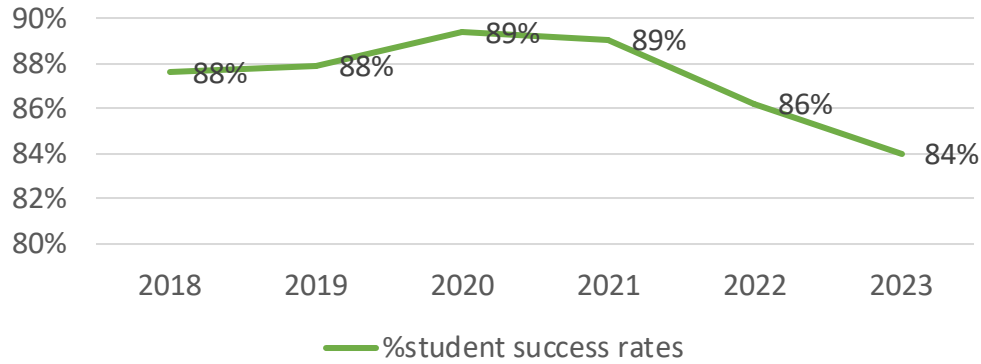
Decrease in academic performance indicators post COVID-19. Assumptions are; delayed effects of the pandemic, socialization since COVID-19, linked with what is perceived as student withdrawal

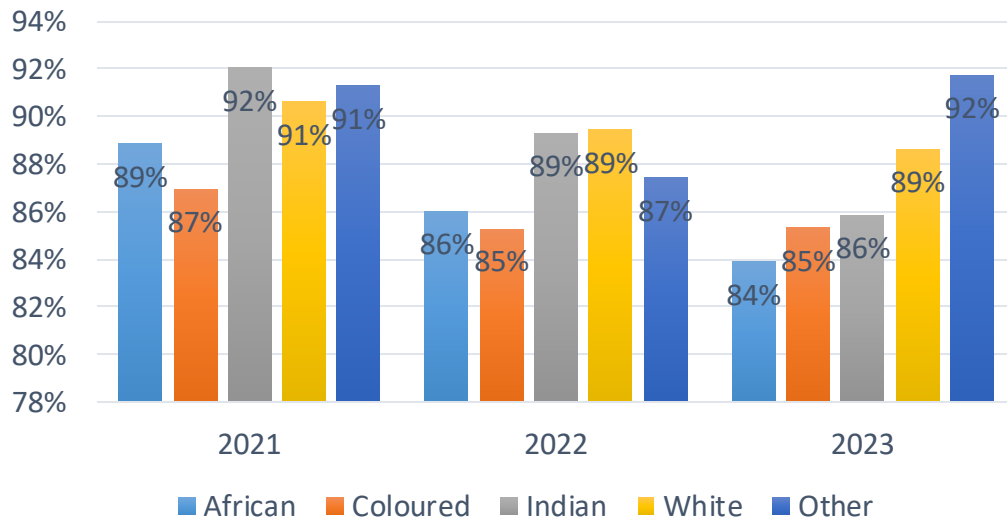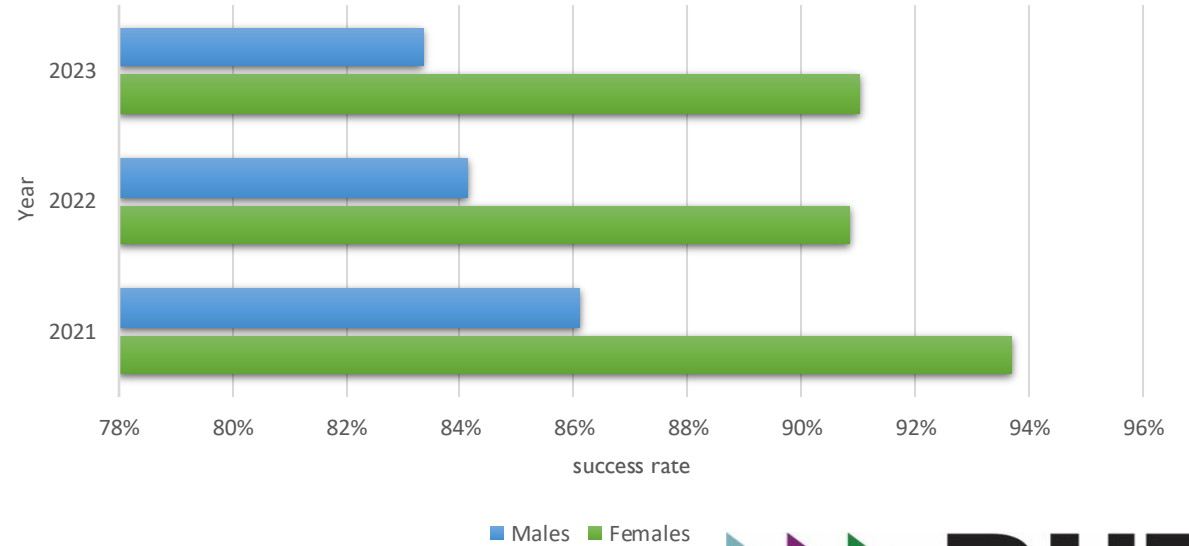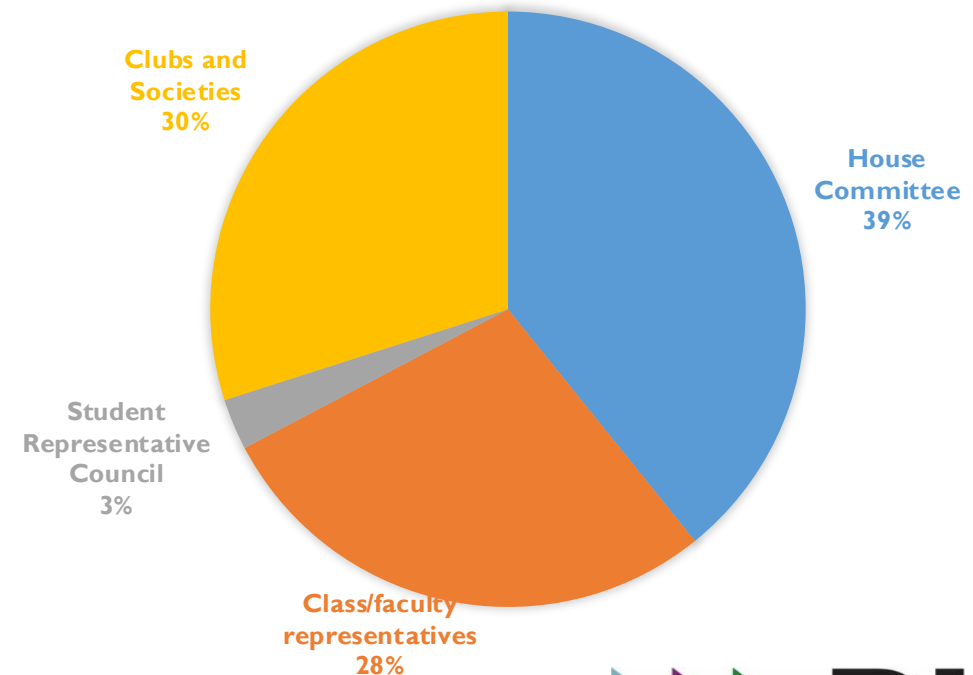## Figure 2: %success rates by population group,2021-2023



2021: African 89%, Coloured 87%, Indian 92%, White 91%, Other 91%
2022: African 86%, Coloured 85%, Indian 89%, White 89%, Other 87%
2023: African 84%, Coloured 85%, Indian 86%, White 89%, Other 92%

Legend: African, Coloured, Indian, White, Other

**Figure 3**: %success rates by gender,2021-2023



Legend: Males, Females

ENVISION 2030

transparency • honesty • integrity • respect • accountability
fairness • professionalism • commitment • compassion • excellence

THE WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2021 TOP 500

DUT
DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
INYUVESI YASETHEKWINI YEZOBUCHWEPHESHE

# Academic Activism

There arises a necessity for student activism to emerge as a potent force capable of advocating for change, amplifying voices, and challenging entrenched norms. As primary stakeholders, students possess a unique role in demonstrating their steadfast commitment to fostering a more equitable campus environment and in collaboratively devising sustainable solutions to prevalent challenges. Aligned with the ethos of ENVISION2030, which espouses a people-centred approach to university governance, this presentation seeks to examine the significance of student activism, delineating its impact, challenges, and transformative potential in shaping the trajectory of higher education.

## STUDENT LEADERS DISTRIBUTION

Clubs and Societies 30%

House Committee 39%

Student Representative Council 3%

Class/faculty representatives 28%

# Historical Context

Student activism has been integral in shaping South Africa's broader revolution, striving to establish equilibrium in the triad of inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Post-apartheid movements have continued to drive social change and educational reform, addressing persistent disparities and advocating for a more just society.

**Soweto Uprising (1976)**: In response to the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools, as was driven by the apartheid regime.

**Rhodes must Fall (2015):** Called for the decolonization of education, the removal of colonial symbols, and greater representation of black academics

**Fees must fall(2015-2016):** Free, quality education for all; an end to financial exclusion of poor students; and systemic transformation of higher education institutions

**ENVISION** 2030

fairness • professionalism • commitment • compassion • excellence
transparency • honesty • integrity • respect • accountability

# Common thread in the Student Activism Movement

- Responsive, with a deficit framing: Often from a point of discomfort

- Often backward looking: draws inspiration from the apartheid era, with similar underlying narrative

- Lean more towards a particular race

- Perceptions: Thin line between Activism and hooliganism

- Holding Institution accountable, but what of the students

fairness • professionalism • commitment • compassion • excellence
transparency • honesty • integrity • respect • accountability

# Language: Passive viewing of Students
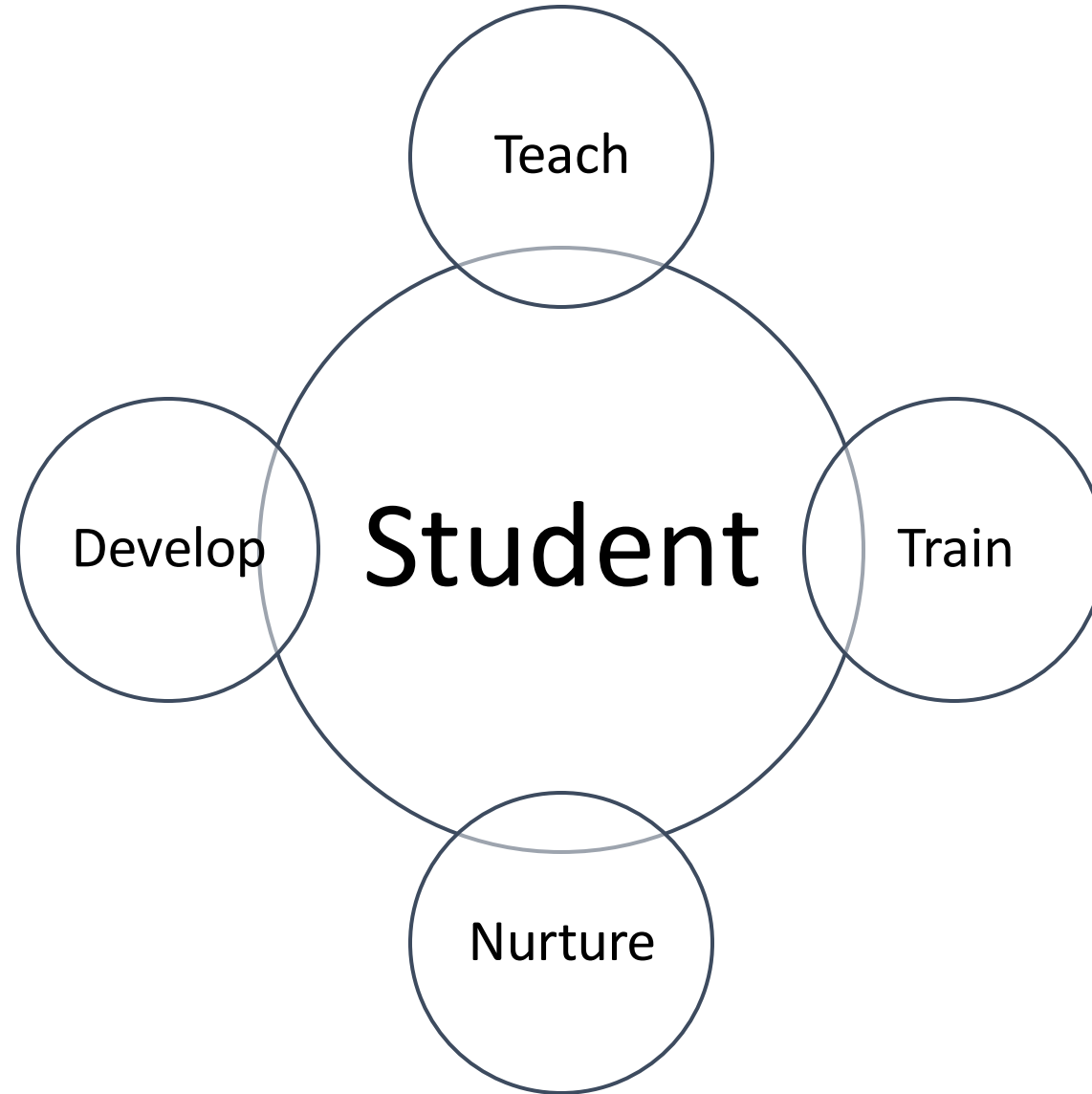
# The University Community

Individual Identity

+

Institutional memory and Culture

→

The concept of "I" & "We" to build a Community with a shared goal
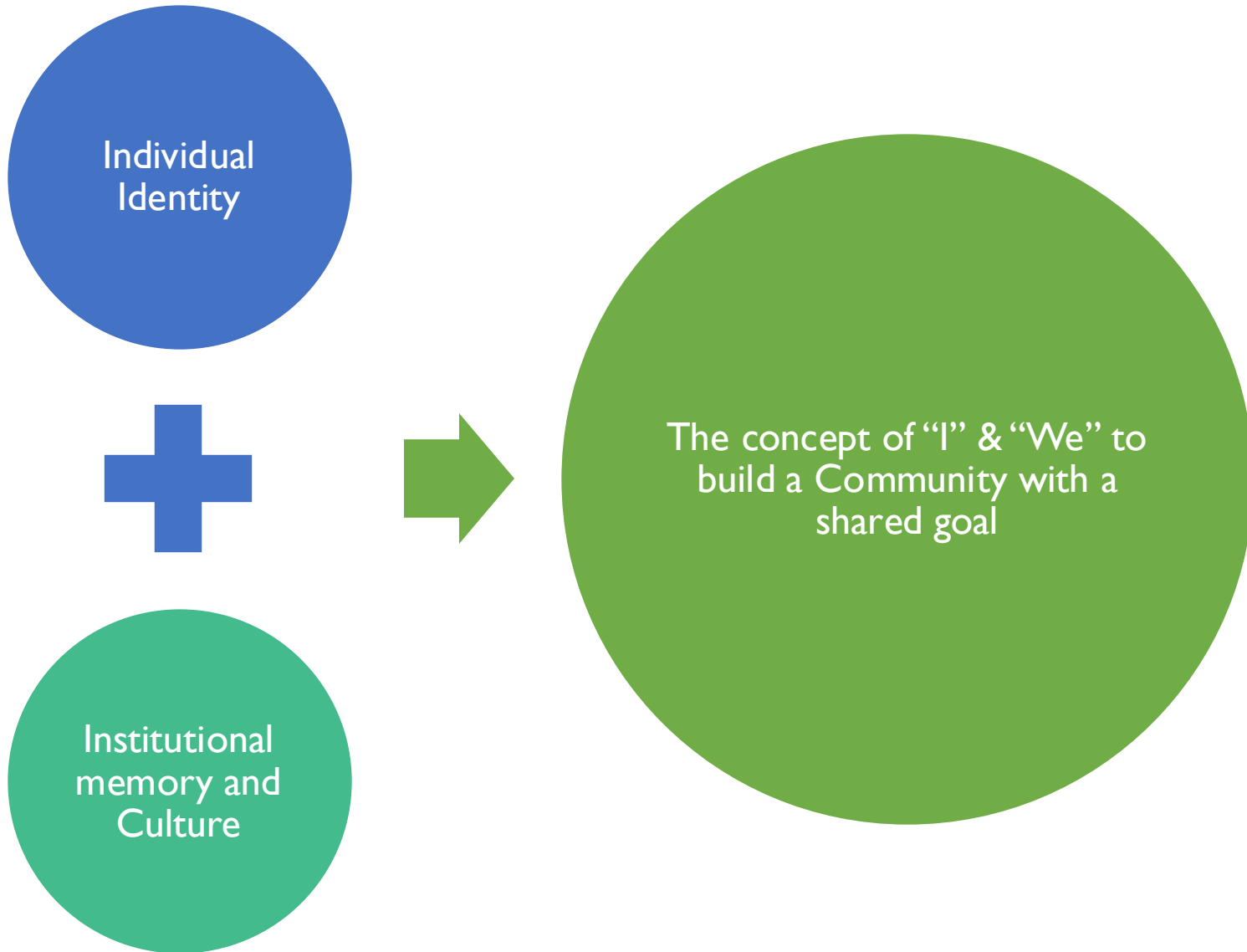
Emphasis on understanding students and proactively cultivating a culture of partnerships and synergies to achieve student success. How does the institutional infrastructure ( perceptions, policies, language etc) can shape the student we want, against the students we have

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Understanding your students (who, what, why, where and when)

2. Un-silencing the student voices (#nothing for us without us)

3. Co-creation and collaboration of all university stakeholders (people vs student centered)

4. Enhanced student cycle (can either enable or inhibit student motivation, active participation, success and institutional culture)

5. Measuring tools for impact (improved success, active participation, demonstration of graduate attributes
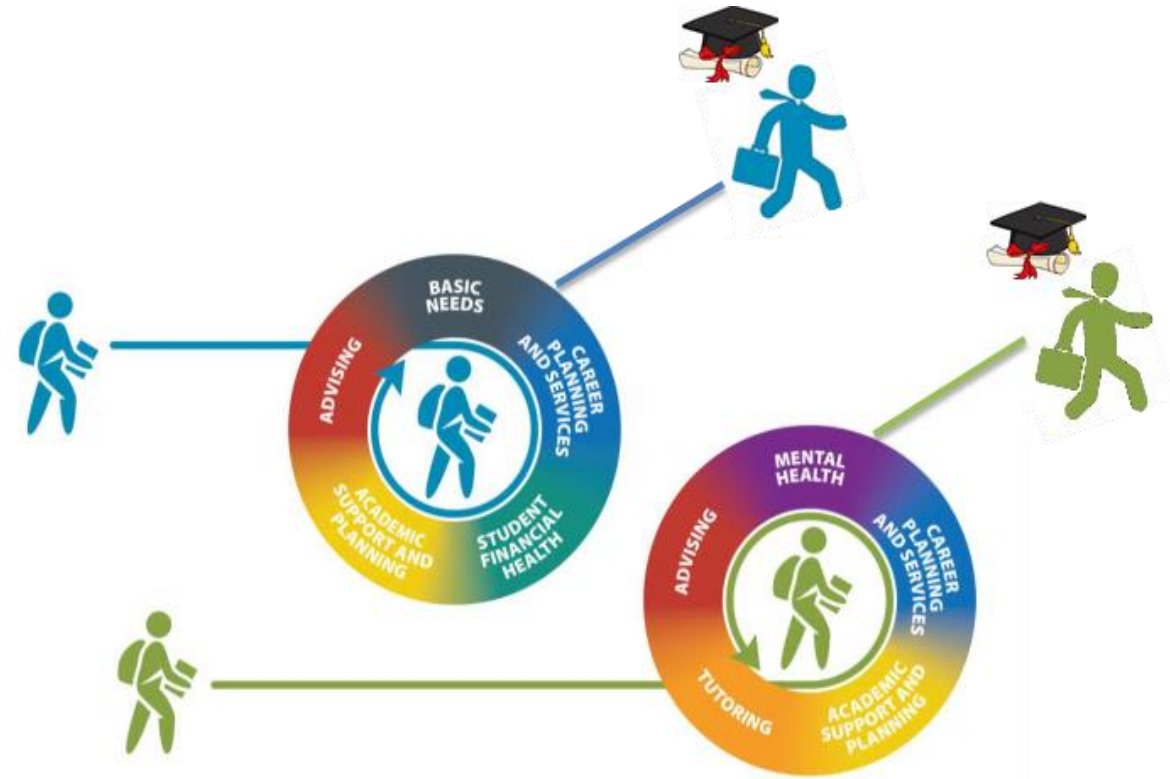
# STATEMENT OF INTENT

-Our people will be creative, innovative, entrepreneurial and adaptive to changes in the world;

-Our people will participate productively in the development of our region, country and the world;

-Our state-of-the-art infrastructure and systems will enhance an ecosystem created to achieve this vision.



Adaptive Graduates

Stewardship

Distinctive Education
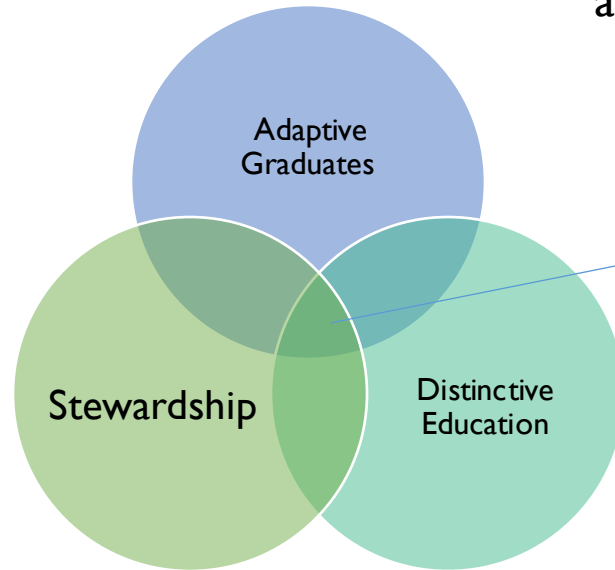
*"A holistically developed student, with the agency to influence decisions, engage in critical dialogues and innovative and glocal relevance "*

fairness • professionalism • commitment • compassion • excellence
transparency • honesty • integrity • respect • accountability

# Context- Nothing for us without us

*Whose knowledge and voices are we legitimizing ??*

Widening participation in higher education

Greater access- but what of greater student success

Skewed throughput and retention rates



Black students in South Africa not succeeding at the same rate or same level as white students(CHE,2013)

**ENVISION 2030**

fairness • professionalism • commitment • compassion • excellence
transparency • honesty • integrity • respect • accountability

# IDENTITY, CULTURE AND BEHAVIOUR

The Idea Of The Thing (University)

Is Embedded On The People(staff and Students)

Whose Lived Values; -Principles; Ideas and Customs Based on the University Culture

Whose Focus Is on

The Advancement Of The University and Its Tenet of Pursuit of Knowledge and Truth
and who Acts And Exhibit Behavior that Fosters

Meeting the Needs of The Present Without Compromising the Ability of The Future Generations to Meet
their Own Needs

# IDENTITY-CULTURE GRID

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Transformative Learning

More focus on academic achievements, more about grades than knowing

Active participation, good sense of self, DUT pride,

Co-curriculum (sport, activism, clubs and societies)

Main curriculum

*Active & Inactive actors*

"The self" self disconnected, no accountability, alienating campus environment

Active participation, holistic growth and professional growth

Legitimation code theory: semantic waves, specialization plane
Tait's Framework

Tinto's theory of student integration Pascarella. Chickering's seven vectors of student development

Academic and Campus Transition (orientation, First Year Student Experience Programmes

Where are we picking our students from? Does basic education prepare students for higher education? Exposure to previous knowledges that either enables/ inhibit their transition to higher education… student profiles (1st generation etc)

DUT DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

## Using design thinking to co-create with the students

**How Might we:**

- Use our agency to contribute to student success
  - Improve the current academic performance Indicators
- Position student support initiatives in a way that enables and is supportive of the lived and academic experiences

ENVISION 2030

fairness • professionalism • commitment • compassion • excellence
transparency • honesty • integrity • respect • accountability

## Students' definition of Success in DUT

''A Successful student would be a student who is financial wise, care about their grades, willing to improve and learn new things, take opportunities when offered, join and start clubs to enhance their knowledge'' (group2)

'' A successful student must have great communication skills, be innovative (new ideas and think outside the box), they must be willing to follow rules and regulation and be teachable. They must have engaged in extra-mural activities, be financially literate, must be confident and demonstrate graduate attributes with good association'' (group 10)

"DUT attributes, we want students to embody the graduate attributes from their attitudes, language/tone and behaviour, they must not be graduate by certificates but by knowledge they hold. A student with an acumen to initiate and adapt to changes"

ENVISION 2030

fairness • professionalism • commitment • compassion • excellence
transparency • honesty • integrity • respect • accountability
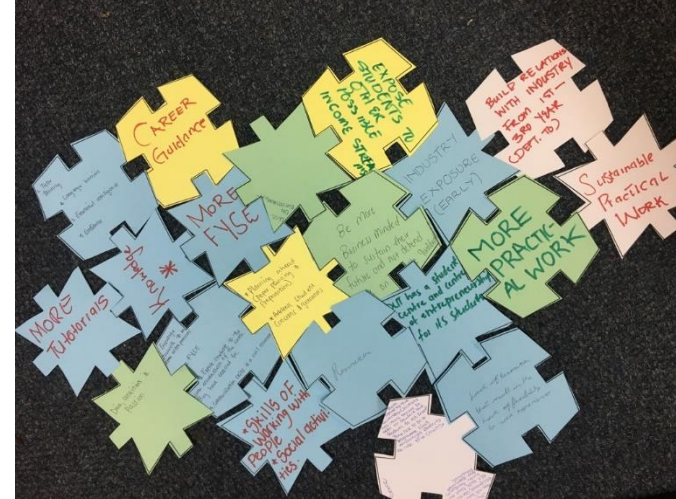
# Factors affecting Student Success

**Student Engagement and accountability**
student academic withdrawal, and participation student
accountability, procrastination, lack of motivation
**Language proficiency**
Language barrier

**Social and personal factors**
mental health- pressures
Alcohol & drug abuse

**Infrastructure**
Poor wifi
Cold water and power outages
Not so conducive residences

**Mental health as a contributing factor**

*Student realize the inter-connectedness of the services, but also student involvement in co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes*

# Perceptions of student leaders

*"Academic excellence is one of our key values, we isolate members who do not demonstrate this"*

*"Lectures needs to do their job, which is to teach and not read slides"*

## Advocate for student success
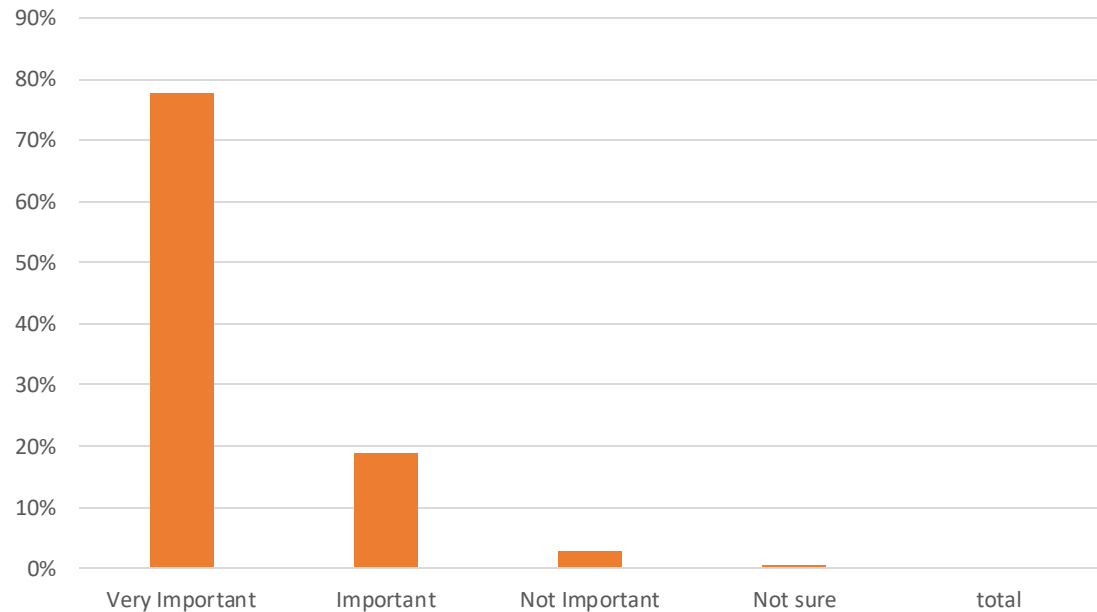


## Contribution to academic excellence
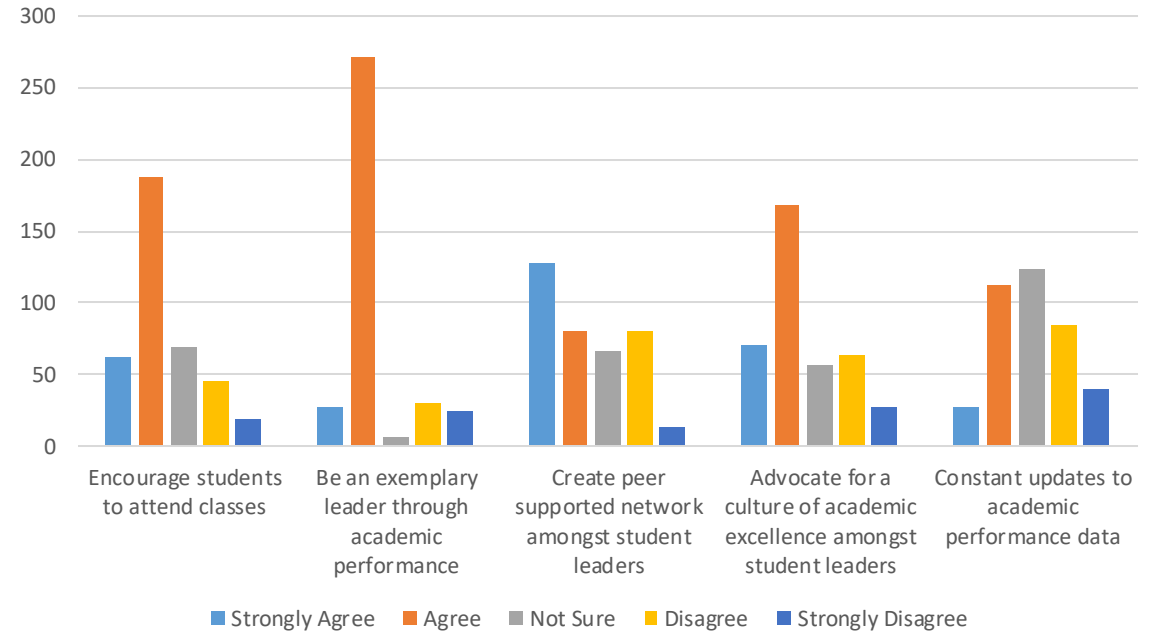
# DUT Navigator Application

# #Depression has no colour: Awareness Campaign







*In response to an increase in suicide cases in residence*

# Recommendations

Create spaces for student engagements and collaborations

Strategies and methodologies for students to collaborate meaningfully

Offer training and development for student leaders

THANK YOU