

Students' readiness for university education

by

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“WE ARE OF DIFFERENT RACES
NOT FOR STRIVE BUT TO WORK
TOGETHER FOR THE COMMON WELFARE”

Cartier, 1865

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SUMMARY

The aim of the thesis is to investigate the readiness characteristics that determine risk for either failure or withdrawal before students enter university. These relationships are investigated and explained with a literature discussion that includes readiness for university education, student transition, retention and withdrawal theory. The motivation for this research emanates against the challenges that the South African Higher Education in general faces as well as the demands placed on the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences to supply for the high demand for well equipped financial service professionals.

The research project was completed in three phases. In the first phase a structured questionnaire was developed to measure the non-cognitive factors relating to readiness for university education. The purpose of the 'Academic Readiness Questionnaire' is to function as a screening test for first-year students that enter university. The Academic Readiness Questionnaire went through a scientific process of test development and standardisation. The overall Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire is 0.87, which indicates good internal consistency reliability for the scale with this sample. In the second phase the Academic Readiness Questionnaire was administered to the 2008 cohort of first-time entering students from the faculty of Economic and Management Sciences during the first-year orientation week. The total number of students in the sample is 829 students. In the third phase the students who withdrew from their studies were interviewed telephonically. A total of 42 students were interviewed to determine the salient reasons for withdrawal. Quantitative data were analysed using various descriptive and inferential statistical methods. These include factor analysis, regression analysis and multiway frequency analysis. The telephonic interviews were analysed with content analysis.

The main findings reveal that the readiness characteristics show a direct relationship with academic success and intention to withdraw. The number of variables able to predict risk for either failure or withdrawal differ. More variables show a significant relationship with risk for failure than for withdrawal. Furthermore, the research results show that African students have higher academic achievement and are less likely to



withdraw, when compared to white students. African students also tend to have higher academic success, compared to white students. The differences in academic success and withdrawal rates among African and white students are due to high school achievement and the number of credits the students register for. White students are also more likely to withdraw voluntarily, mostly within the first couple of weeks or months mainly due to choosing an incorrect study choice.

KEYWORDS

Achievement motivation

Academic success

First-year student

Goal orientation

Non-cognitive

Readiness for university

Retention

Learning-efficacy

Transition

Withdrawal