

# It's Not About Being Black: Factors Predicting Progression Rates among Humanities and Social Science Students at a South African University

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# The research context

- Over the past 20 years equity concerns have allowed black students increased access to Higher Education Institutions in South Africa (Kotta et al., 2014)
- Physical access has not translated into academic success (Badat. 2010) - particularly among black, second language, “previously disadvantaged” students
- Educational practices designed to address these challenges have shown little evidence of efficacy (Boughey, 2010; Smith et al.,2014).

# From correlation to explanation...

- How can we explain the correlation between being black and academic progression rates?
- How can this explanation assist us in establishing more rational entry criteria and in identifying potentially at risk learners?

# Possible explanatory variables...

- Possible explanatory variables for which “being black” is a proxy variable:
  - Matric points (as per matric certificate)
  - Poverty (as per quintile system)
  - Dysfunctional schooling (as per Department of Education matric pass rates for schools).
  - Matric subject choices:
    - English first versus second language (as per matric certificate)
    - Maths versus Maths Literacy (as per matric certificate)
- Gender

# An exploratory cohort study of 1<sup>st</sup> year progression rates...

Sample	Sample size	Predictor		Outcome variable
		Model 1	Model 2	
All first year/first time students registered for Humanities and Social Science degree at UKZN in 2012.	1,473	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Race</li> <li>- Gender</li> <li>- Matric points</li> <li>- School: quintile</li> <li>- School: matric pass rate</li> </ul>	Model 1 plus +  Matric subject choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- maths/maths lit.</li> <li>- English: 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> lang</li> </ul>	Sufficient 1 <sup>st</sup> year credits at the end of 2012 to proceed to 2 <sup>nd</sup> levels studies

# Model 1

- Predictors of first year progression failures

Predictor	Odds ratio
Being black African	1.90
Lower matric points	1.30

- Not significant:
  - gender,
  - school quintile,
  - school matric pass rate

# Model 2

- Predictors of first year progression failures

Predictor	Odds ratio
Maths lit (rather than maths )	3.20
English 2 <sup>nd</sup> lang (rather than 1st)	2.10
Lower matric points	1.30

- Not significant:
  - race
  - gender,
  - school quintile,
  - school matric pass rate

# Why does maths/English matter?

- Greater exposure to logical thinking required for engaging with subject matter in the Humanities and Social Sciences?
- Greater familiarity with being taught at a higher level in a second-language?

# Tentative conclusions...

- Matric subject choice mediates the relationship between race and 1<sup>st</sup> year progression rates
- Attempts to identify students at risk for 1<sup>st</sup> year progression failure need to focus on both quantitative (matric points) and qualitative (subject choice) aspects of matric performance.

# Limitations

- Am I just replacing one correlation with another?
- What are the dynamics of the relationship between matric subject choice and 1<sup>st</sup> year progression rates?
- Have all potential predictors been considered (e.g., funding, food security, familiarity with academic discourse, etc, etc.)?

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