

Making a case for a decentralised framework of student counselling in a tertiary institution



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1. Purpose of this paper

- Examine the different counselling models at UKZN
- Using the decentralised model of counselling of the science access programmes as a case study:
 - Tracked how students utilised counselling services from registration to the end of the access year
 - Tracked the academic standing of students
 - Analysed the issues at risk students reported that were barriers to academic success
 - Reported on the interventions provided by the counsellors to at risk students
 - Examined how students responded to these interventions
- Discuss how best we can address the needs of students and support the academic endeavour

2. INTRODUCTION

- Student counselling centralised at UKZN until reorganisation
- Student counselling devolved to the Colleges in 2012
- Became decentralised
- Previous framework: faculty-based counselling of SFP which was a pilot

Science access decentralised counselling

- Rationale: students under-prepared, lacking in skills, social and personal problems (Boughey 2007)
- A holistic framework (Grayson 1996, 1997)
- Way of improving retention rates
- Previous research showed that counselling positively contributes to retention and achievement (Turner and Berry, 2000; Maple and Alonso, 2004; Jones et al, 2008; Morrison et al, 2006)

3. THE CONTEXT

- Centre for Science Access (Kioko et al, 2012)
- Located within Faculty of Science and Agriculture at UKZN
- Provided access to science related degrees to students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Four years to complete a 3 year degree
- Focus on BSc4 Foundation and SFP 2006 - 2011

BSc4 Foundation

- Full matric exemption/NSC deg
- Modification of the SFP from 1991
- Full year foundational courses in:
 - Mathematics
 - Biology
 - Chemistry
 - Physics
 - Communication in science
 - Life skills

SFP

- Same as B.Sc4 Foundation
- Except for students who did not have a full matric exemption/NSC degree



Psychosocial issues (Letseka, 2007; Akhurst, 2005, Thomas, 2006)

Counselling

- Compulsory, weekly timetabled life skills sessions
- Access to individual counselling
- Academic monitoring and support (LEC)
- Career and curriculum planning
- Understanding and navigating university procedures
- Mediation and advocacy
- Peer mentoring and group study support

Summary of differences

Services	Student Counselling Centre	Science access counselling programme
History	A long established, rich history common to most institutions in South Africa (the dominant model)	A framework which was new to tertiary institutions and which was pioneered from 1991 to 2012 in the science access programmes and which acted as a pilot project
Target	All students	Science and ex-science access students
Life skills	Offered on an ad-hoc basis and advertised, students would volunteer and small groups (of about ten students) would be held	Compulsory, weekly 90 minute life skills workshops for groups of about 40 students integrated with the curricula
Individual counselling	Mostly one-hour long appointments made by students as they felt the need; usually with a waiting period of about a week except for clients in crisis	Mostly 30 minute appointments usually with a waiting period of 24 hours at most and immediate assistance for clients in crisis
Referral source	Mostly self-referred	Equal numbers of students self-referred and referred by academic staff as well as identified by the student counsellors themselves

Summary of differences

Services	Student Counselling Centre	Science access counselling programme
Main therapeutic interventions and primary theoretical orientation	Generally an eclectic mixture but with a significant number of clients receiving psychodynamic psychotherapy.	Mostly problem-solving, brief solution-focused therapy (de Shazer 1988), cognitive-behavioural psychology (Howatt 2000), positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Linley and Joseph 2006) i.e. a non-pathological model, focussing on constructing solutions, using existing client resources, mobilising and utilising the client experience.

Summary of differences

Services	Student Counselling Centre	Science access counselling programme
Linkages with academic staff	Some involvement with presence on faculty boards and on university-wide appeal and exclusion committees	Very close linkages with attendance at weekly staff meetings, active participation in faculty board and in faculty appeal and exclusion committees, active participation in leadership roles of the access programmes e.g. Acting director and deputy-director positions occupied by student counsellor. Regular meetings with heads of schools to ascertain needs and design intervention programmes.
Academic monitoring and support	Some involvement but mostly responding to self-referrals by academically at risk students who were advised to go for counselling by the faculties	Active involvement in the proactive identification of at risk students at least three times a year (April, July and September) which included contacting academically at risk students and following up on their progress with regular report backs to staff.
Space	A central student counselling unit	Physically located on the Faculty of Science and Agriculture premises

Summary of differences

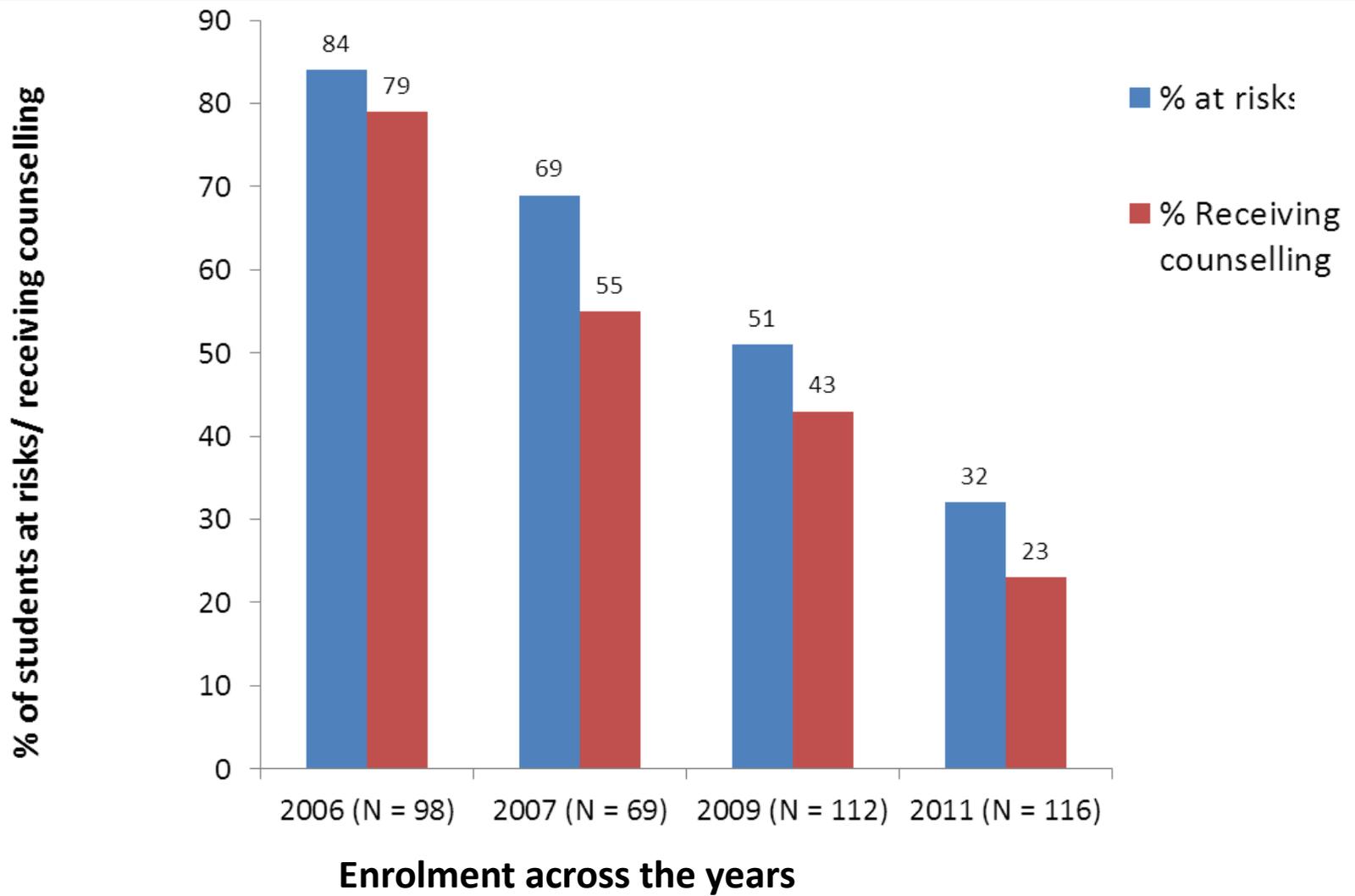
Services	Student Counselling Centre	Science access counselling programme
Line management	The Director of Student Counselling who reports to the Dean of Student Services	The Director of the CSA who reports to the Dean of the Faculty
Funding	Main budget (student services)	Partly funded by external funders, Dept of Higher Education and the Faculty main fund
Measurement of success	Based largely on the numbers of students seen and feedback questionnaires	Annual student evaluations by QPA and evaluations by independent consultants (Edunet, Peacock, Southway-Ajulu) as well as throughput rates of science access students

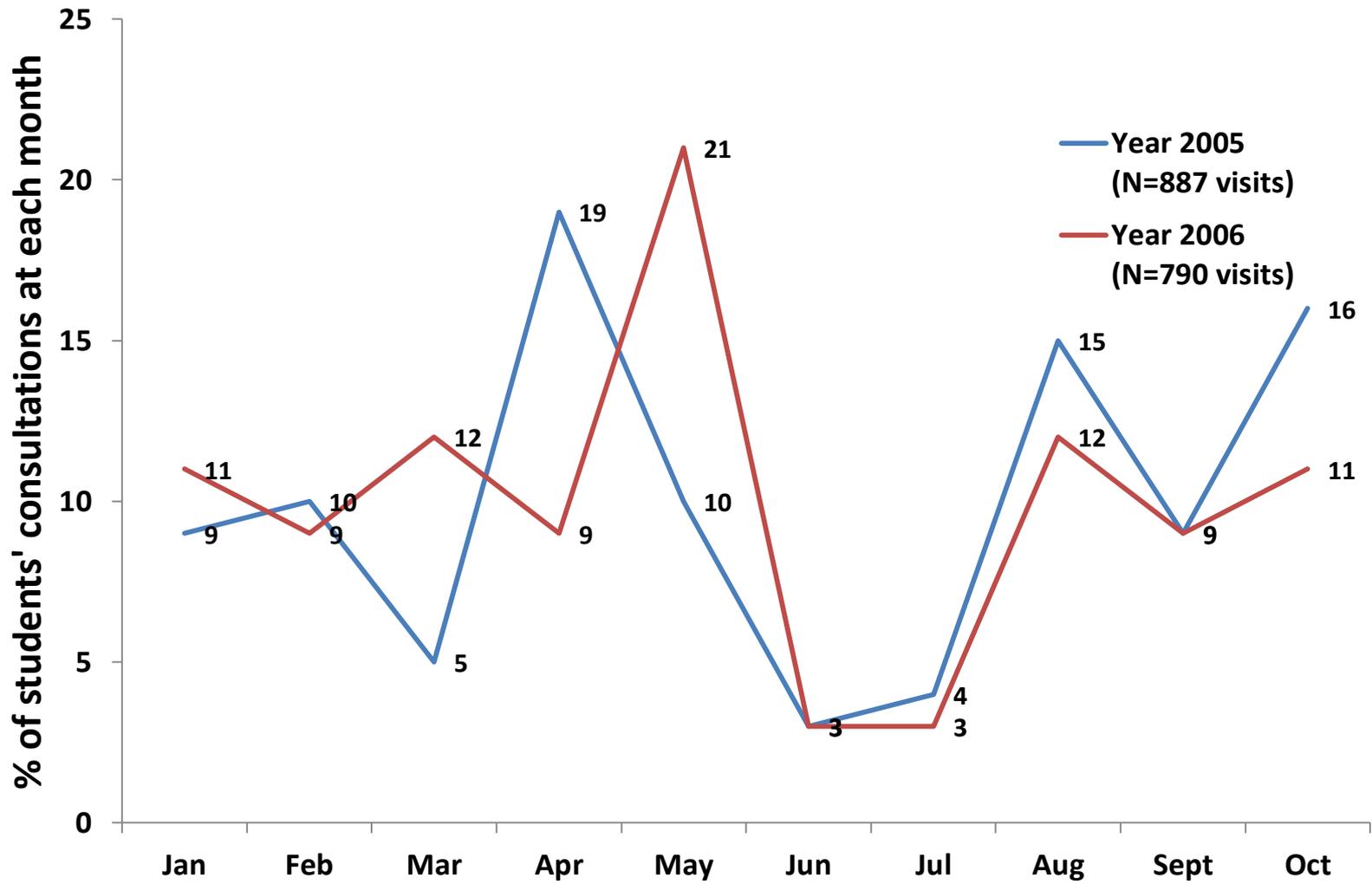
3. THE STUDY

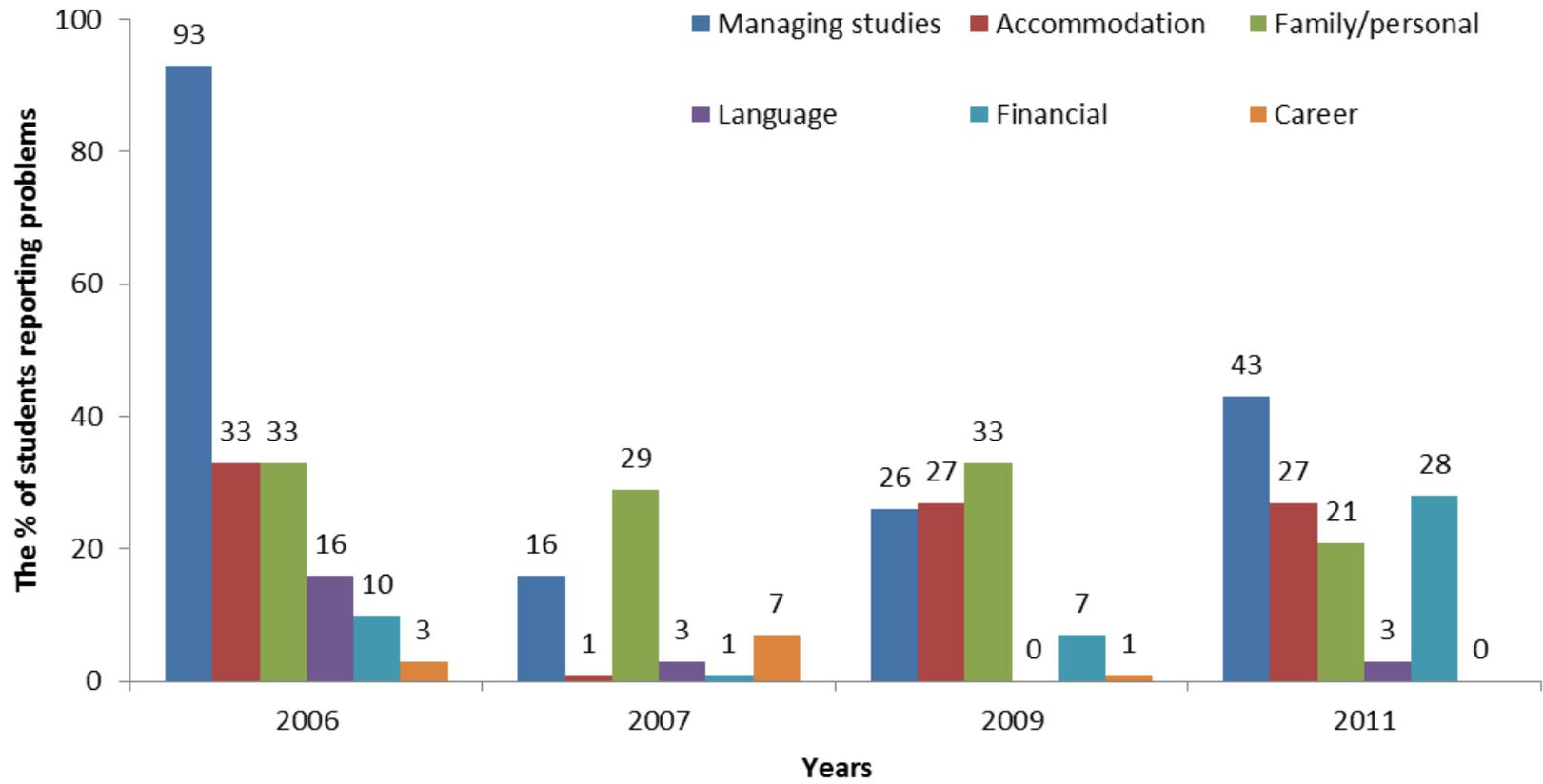
- Methodology:
 1. Frequency counts
 2. Student evaluations
- Mostly qualitative
- Retrospective pattern analysis

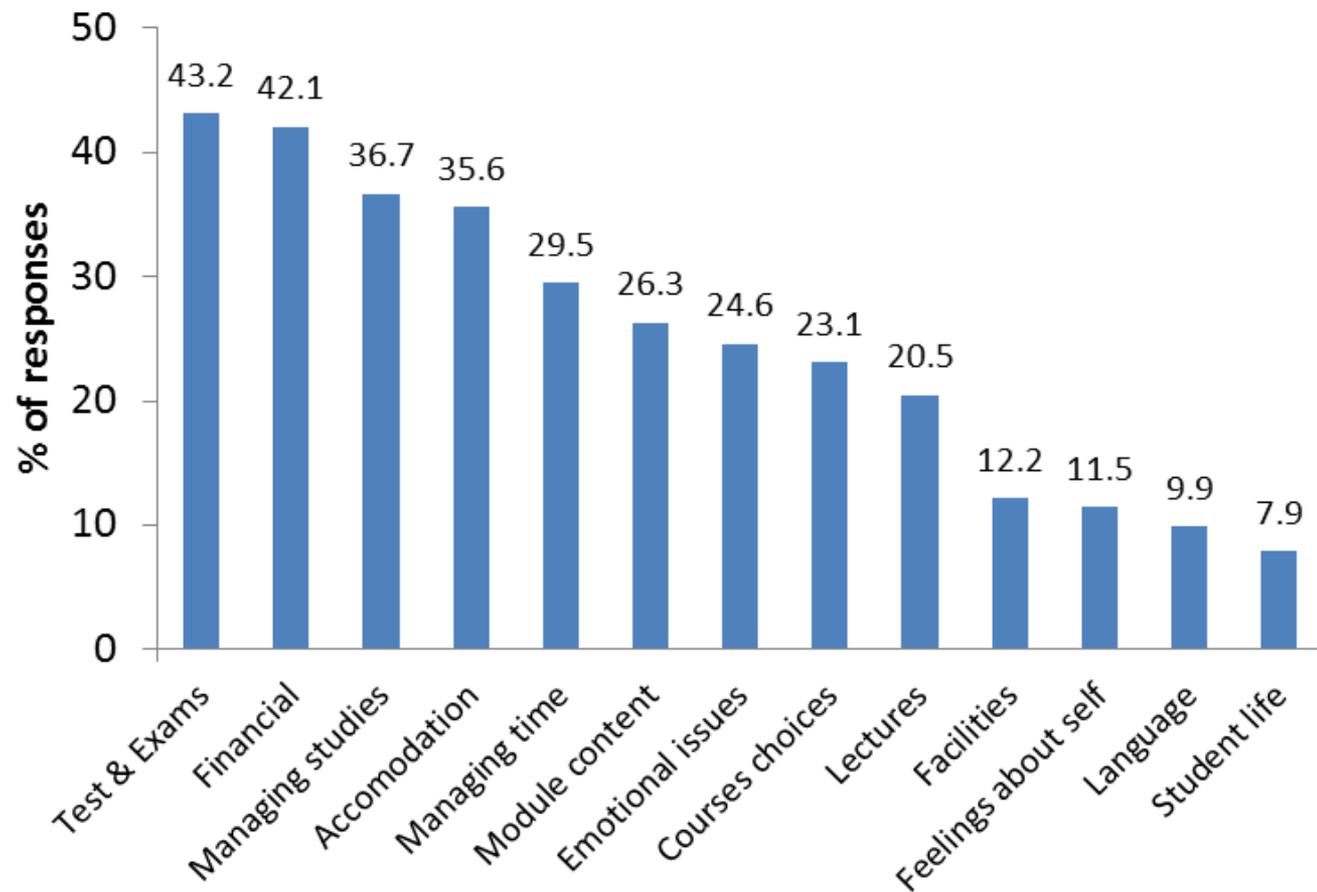
4. RESULTS

- **Academic status across the years**
 - Student enrolment
 - % of students at risk
 - % of students who received counselling
- **Trends on how students utilise individual counselling**
 - Registration
 - April & May
 - August
 - October
- **Issues reported**
- **Interventions by Student counsellors**
 - Individual counselling
 - Life skills workshops
 - LEC
- **Students responses to the interventions**
 - Life skills workshops
- **Peer-support**
 - Potential for academic & non-academic problem-therapy



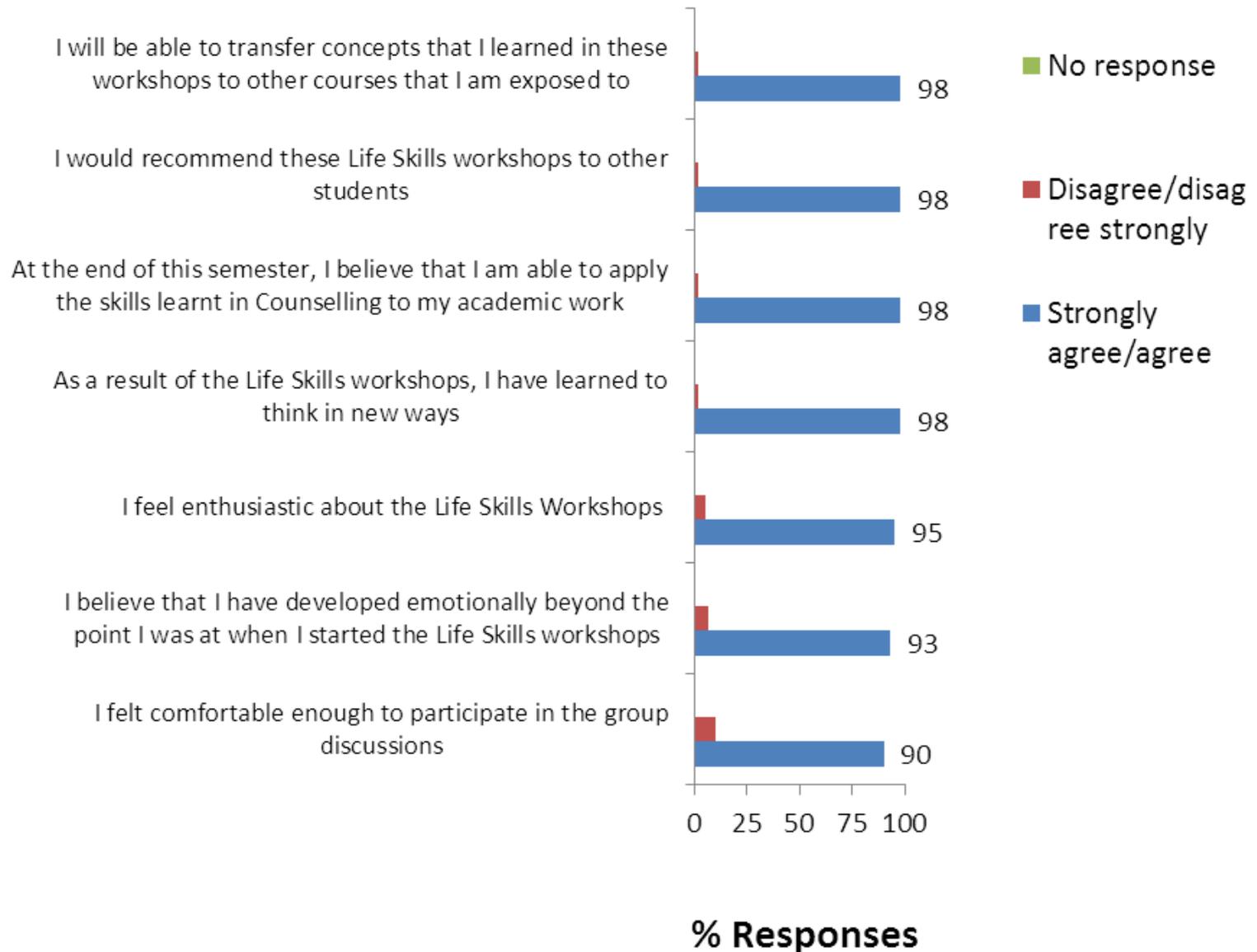


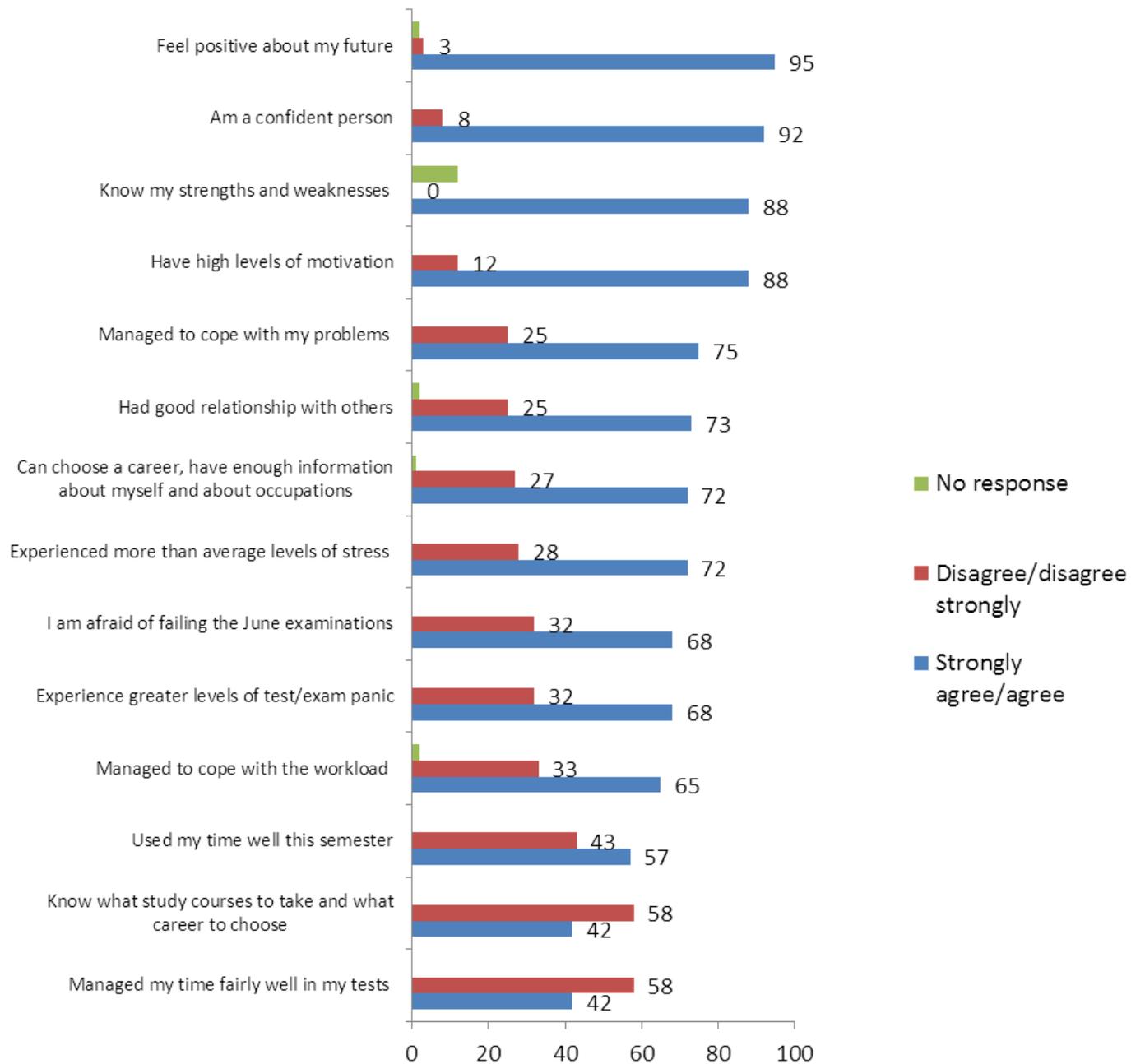




Issues reported during LEC in 2010

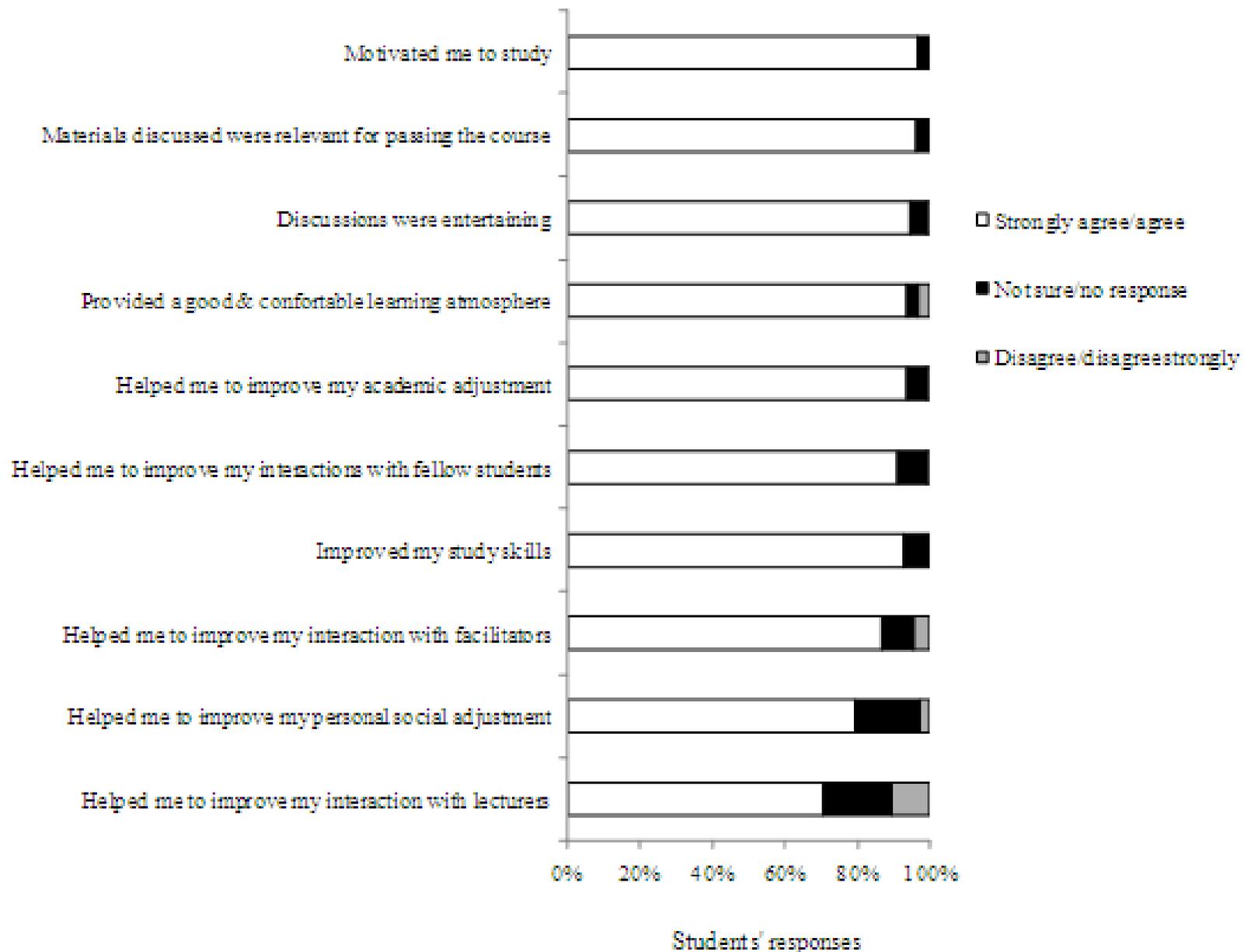
Responses





Lecture Theatre turned into a workshop





Summary

- Students come to the University with problems
 - Tests and exam time adds more stress and aggravates already existing problems
- Student counsellors provide indispensable services to students and help students spot the light in the midst of their problems
- Students are informal resources to counsellors, through peer based support we can create group support that has potential to provide coping strategies for both academic and non-academic problems

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6. Discussion

1. An integrated approach:

Integrated, coherent approach (Jones et al. 2008) bridges the divide between student services and academic departments -> enhanced relevance, increased interaction between academics and students

- School boards and school meetings
- High visibility
- Ownership by faculty
- Dissemination of information
- Increased referral
- Improved academic and social interaction

Discussion contin.

2. Is proactive:

- Does not only rely on students' referring themselves
- Interventionist approach of tracking and monitoring -> focus on prevention

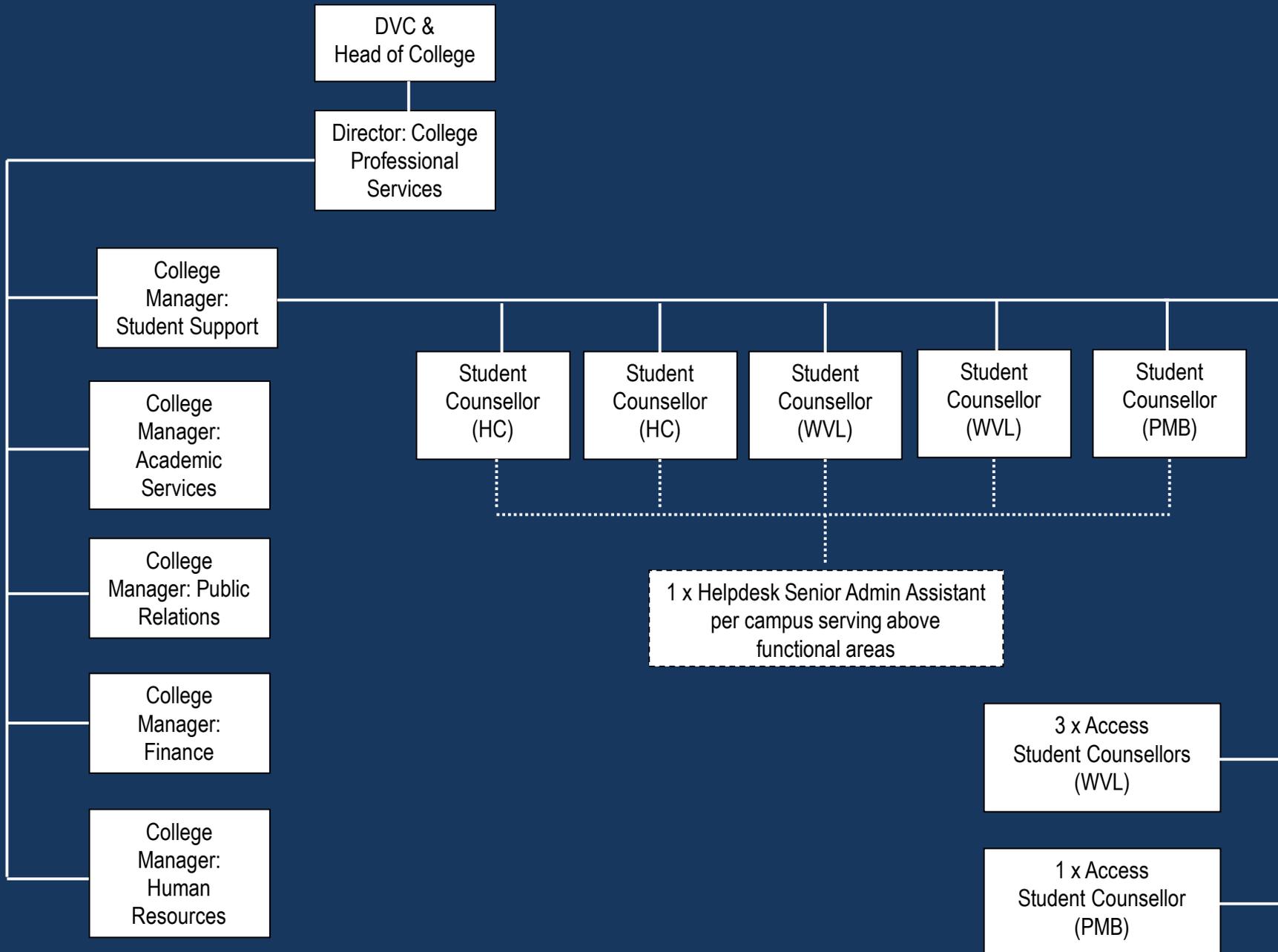
Discussion contin.

3. Improves retention and throughput

- Go "beyond seat time and student satisfaction" (Kerr and Tweedy, 2006)
- Graduation rate: 50% (Kioko et al, 2012)
- National average : 30% (DOE, 2005)

Challenges

- Primary weakness: isolation and lack of co-ordination University wide
- Other issues:
 - student resistance
 - those who are uncertain of their career direction
 - resources



The reorganisation

- Initial resistance from those in central unit
- Working in “silos”
- Lack of co-ordination university wide i.t.o policy
- Applying policies differently
- How to manage residence work where there are different colleges
- Resource allocation (staffing, psychometric tests etc.)
- Accreditation (HPCSA)

The reorganisation contin.

- Opportunity to make history
- Pioneer
- Streamline systems
- Work much closer with academics

7. CONCLUSION

- Limitations of the study:
 - Small, qualitative study
 - Hard to prove the effect of counselling when there are so many other variables

Questions?

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