UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF

ACADEMIC MONITORING AND SUPPORT

Meeting dates: 13 – 15 September 2011

Highly Confidential

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The panel for reviewing Academic Monitoring and Support (AMS) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal was constituted in response to a resolution of Senate adopted in November 2010. The deliberations included meetings and interviews with a broad spectrum of stakeholders from all the Faculties. These included Deputy Deans, Deans' Assistants and other academic staff responsible for monitoring and support procedures, AMS coordinators, Academic Development Officers (ADOs), mentors, tutors and many of the students who were experiencing, or had experienced, academic support, in the form of Supplemental Instruction (SI), extra tutorials, group meetings or one-on-one counselling. The Panel did not meet with members of the Students' Representative Council. The schedule of interviews and meetings is contained in Appendix 1. In preparation for the review, and during the course of the deliberations, panel members were provided with copies of a number of documents.[1]

The broad framework within which the panel undertook its task is encapsulated in the following three questions:

- What is working well with regard to Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes at UKZN?

- What is not working well with regard to Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes?

- How can Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes at UKZN be improved?

This report begins by sketching the background against which the review was conducted. It notes that, after the merger of the former Universities of Durban-Westville and Natal in 2004, the university adopted a college structure, with four colleges, each housing two faculties, functioning on one or more of the five campuses.

The Report then outlines the background to the origins of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes.

The next section describes in broad outline the programmes in each faculty. Section 4 identifies some issues of concern to the Panel, while the next section lists a number of commendations.

The Panel was impressed by the positive attitude and dedication of so many of the staff and students involved in the Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes. External members of the Panel all commented that no AMS programmes similar to those at UKZN existed at their four institutions. Expressions of appreciation by students reinforced these positive perceptions, and the Panel was left with the impression that, on the whole, the systems and programmes were working well. It was recognised that there were substantial variations between faculties, and that there were areas where improvements could be effected.

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[1] See p. 4-5.

The Panel concludes with a set of recommendations in respect of the future of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes, bearing in mind that the university will be restructured from January 2012. These are summarised below.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Academic Development Officers

    a. The use of Academic Development Officers and mentors must continue, and their appointments must be renewed wherever possible. Indeed the Panel recommends that more ADOs should be appointed if at all possible. Given that the appointment of ADOs had been made possible in the first instance by funding from the Department of Higher Education and Training,[2] it was realised that this would now have financial implications for the university, but the Panel believed that the success of the system thus far warranted further expenditure, at least in the immediate future. The Panel recommends that every possible additional avenue of funding should be explored to strengthen the support system, and to aid in sustaining the programme with a more stable and permanent support structure. This should include comprehensive capacity building as ADOs and mentors often have to deal with issues that are beyond those for which they were trained.

    b. Allied to this is the need to provide suitable office accommodation for the monitoring and support personnel, especially when the faculties cease to exist, and the activities are taken over by the schools.

2. Mentors and SI tutors

    a. In regard to the mentorship system, the Panel recommends that mentors, mentees and SI tutors should be identified as soon as possible after registration, and that the process should not be delayed until the end of the first semester, but should be streamlined as well as open and transparent. Mentors' roles should be clarified and all mentees should be made aware of these roles at the outset.

    b. The Panel heard that, in some instances, promises made to mentors in respect of payment for services were not honoured, and that these mentors often had to call students on their own cell phones without reimbursement for air time used. The panel recommends that all faculties should pay urgent attention to correcting this unacceptable situation.

    c. The Panel recommends that processes should be harmonised across campuses. As an example, it was noted that there were Faculty of Law mentors at Howard College, while the SCC provided the mentoring system in the Pietermaritzburg section of that Faculty.

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[2] Funding for the Academic Monitoring and Support system as a whole was multi-pronged; an earlier report states, "In addition to their own funding, the DVC: Teaching and Learning made available funding from the DOHET Teaching Development Grant and the (university's) own main fund budget to faculties to this end". (*Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011,* Appendix B, *Academic Monitoring and Support Draft Report 2009 – 2010*, p. 4.)

d. The panel encourages Faculties to emulate the examples of the Faculties of HDSS and Science and Agriculture by making use of Saturdays for mentoring sessions if at all possible.[3]

3. The Panel recommends that Academic Support Coordinators, ADOs and mentors should investigate ways of working with students so that they are encouraged to become independent, and are weaned from the support programmes as soon as possible. Every effort must be made to prepare students to succeed in higher education, to be able to identify and solve their learning problems, and to manage their learning.

4. Further to this point, the Panel urges faculties and schools to release assignment and test marks regularly and timeously, to assist with continuous monitoring and to enable timeous decisions to be made.

5. The Panel recommends that the Writing Place, or a similar facility, should be made accessible to all students, and not just to those registered in the College of Humanities. However, the Panel cautioned against this resource becoming a clinic, where students took their written work for comment and correction prior to submission. It was felt that it would be far more beneficial if the Writing Place became a development centre, with the express purpose of training students in skills such as academic writing, correct referencing, the use of footnotes, access to academic discourse, etc.

6. The Panel noted that the Faculty of Law had decided in 2009 to embed as much of the academic support as possible within the core modules of the LLB degree. The Panel was of the view that, in the long run, this would be an effective approach for all the Colleges, and the Panel members accordingly recommend that, where possible, such support should be integrated into the mainstream courses.

7. The Panel encourages the Student Counselling Centre to work more with other faculties than Law and Science and Engineering, to extend the use of the LEC as soon as possible. To this end, the Panel recommends that serious attention should be paid to increasing the resources available to the SCC.

8. Notwithstanding Commendation 5 above, there were a few reported instances of academic staff who did not observe their own advertised consultation times. The Panel recommends that faculties take steps to ensure the consistent availability of staff at the stated consultation times.

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[3] The Panel was informed that, in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, attendance at Saturday mentoring sessions increased markedly immediately before tests and examinations.

1.   Background to the Review

The panel for reviewing the Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal was constituted in terms of a Senate resolution passed at a meeting held in November 2010. The proposal is contained in the *Report on Academic Monitoring and Support in UKZN, 2009 – 2010*: "An independent evaluation by QPA is proposed to identify effective interventions and strategies that have yielded greatest successes for wider dissemination of what works in academic monitoring and support as well as flagging areas that require improvement and related action plans."[4]

Panel members and signatories to the report

The panel consisted of:

- Dr Florence Southway-Ajulu, Quality Promotion and Assurance, UKZN (Chair)

- Ms Rose Masha, Deputy Director, Extended Studies Academy, Walter Sisulu University

- Dr Manyane Makua, Director Quality Management, Mangosuthu University of Technology

- Dr Cosmas Maphosa, Reseacher UTLO, University Teaching and Learning Office, UKZN

- Dr Rejoice Nsibande, Education Consultant, University of Pretoria

- Dr June Pym, Director, education Development Unit EDU) Commerce, University of Cape Town

- Professor George Trotter, Retired Registrar, QPA, UKZN (serving as scribe)

The panel met and deliberated over a period of three days (13 – 15 September 2011). The deliberations included meetings and interviews with a broad spectrum of stakeholders from all the Faculties. These included Deputy Deans, Deans' Assistants and certain other senior academic staff responsible for monitoring and support procedures, AMS coordinators, Academic Development Officers (ADOs), mentors, tutors and many of the students who were experiencing, or had experienced, academic support, in the form of Supplemental Instruction (SI), extra tutorials, group meetings or one-on-one counselling. The Panel did not meet with members of the Students' Representative Council. The schedule of interviews and meetings is contained in Appendix 1, the had to be changed slightly due to some staff members not being available. In preparation for the review, panel members were provided with copies of the following documents:

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[4] *Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011,* Appendix B, p. 13.

- *Report on Academic Monitoring and Support in UKZN, 2009 – 2010*, submitted to Senate on 3 November 2010.

- *Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011*, containing a report almost identical to that listed in a. above, as well as reports submitted by all eight faculties.

- *Academic Monitoring and Exclusions Policy*, approved by the UKZN Council.

- *AEACOM Decision Categories, Outcomes and Pro Forma letters,* together with the chart entitled *Undergraduate Academic Monitoring and Exclusion Policy (to be applied when performance in end of semester examinations is considered)*.

During the course of the Panel's deliberations, the following additional documents were distributed:

- Print-out of e-mail message from Ms Margot Freedman, with subject, "Law Probation Students PMB Campus – Academic Monitoring and Support Systems Evaluation Feedback", and attached print-outs of (i) "Power Point Presentation concerning Learning Enhancement Checklist (LEC) Group Feedback on Law Probation Students"; and (ii) "LEC Summary Profile".

- Erica Wille, *UKZN Law Faculty – Pietermaritzburg Campus, Probation Report June 2011*

- *Proposed Template for Faculty Academic Monitoring and Support*.

- *1st Year LLB: Academic Skills Manual, Semester 1, 2011.*

- *Introduction to Law 2011 - Evaluation of Academic Skills Lectures* and *Introduction to Law 2011(Part-time) - Evaluation of Academic Skills Lectures.*

- *Probation Report 2011 – UKZN Law Faculty – Pietermaritzburg Campus.*

The broad framework within which the panel undertook its task is encapsulated in the following three questions:

- What is working well with regards to Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes at UKZN?

- What is not working well with regards to Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes?

- How can Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes at UKZN be improved?

This review must be considered in the context of the merger between the former Universities of Durban-Westville and Natal, which took effect when the University of KwaZulu-Natal came into being on 1 January 2004. Consideration was given to the formation of colleges, and the principles underlying the College Model were approved by an overwhelming majority of the Senate of the new University on 28 June 2004 and by Council on 14 October 2004. The Governance Structure incorporating four Colleges, each comprising two faculties, was then

adopted. Each faculty in turn housed a number of schools. The structure is set out in the table below.

COLLEGES, FACULTIES, AND SCHOOLS

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Faculty of Engineering
    Bioresources Engineering and Environmental Hydrology
    Chemical Engineering
    Civil Engineering, Surveying and Construction
    Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering
    Mechanical Engineering

Faculty of Science and Agriculture
    Agricultural Sciences and Agribusiness
    Biological and Conservation Sciences
    Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology
    Chemistry
    Computer Science
    Environmental Sciences
    Geological Sciences
    Mathematical Sciences
    Physics
    Statistics and Actuarial Science
    Centre for Science Access

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

Faculty of Education
    Adult and Higher Education
    Education and Development
    Education Studies
    Social Science Education
    Language, Literacy, Media and Drama Education
    Science, Mathematics and Technology Education

Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences
    Anthropology, Gender and Historical Studies
    Architecture, Planning and Housing
    Development Studies
    isiZulu Studies
    Language, Literature and Linguistics
    Literary Studies, Media and Creative Arts
    Music
    Philosophy and Ethics
    Politics
    Psychology
    Religion and Theology
    Social Work and Community Development
    Sociology and Social Studies

COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

Faculty of Health Sciences
    Audiology, Occupational Therapy and Speech-Language Pathology
    Dentistry
    Medical Sciences
    Nursing
    Pharmacy and Pharmacology
    Physiotherapy, Sport Science and Optometry

Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine

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        Clinical Medicine
        Laboratory Medicine
        Maternal, Child and Women's Health
        Family and Public Health
        Surgical Disciplines
        Undergraduate Medical Education
COLLEGE OF LAW AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES
    Faculty of Law

    Faculty of Management Studies
        Accounting
        Economics and Finance
        Information Systems and Technology Management
        Public Administration and Development Management
        Graduate School of Business
        Faculty Education Unit
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The faculties were unified across all campuses of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, as were the individual schools within the Faculties.

2.   The Origin of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Virtually since the establishment of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2004, there has been concern about the need to improve student throughput and graduation rates. Part 2 of the *Academic Monitoring and Support Draft Report 2009 – 2010*[5] analyses trends in graduation, exclusions and dropouts of different undergraduate cohorts over the years 2004 to 2007. The findings are many and varied, and include the following:

- For three-year academic and three- and four-year professional degree programmes, the dropout rate was consistently higher than the academic exclusion rate;

- For the first two of these categories, dropout rates are above 20%, and for the third, they are above 15%;

- In the 2007 cohort, the Faculty of Science and Agriculture had more students who dropped out or were excluded than those who graduated, while in the case of the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences (HDSS), there was the same rate of 25% for both student loss and for graduation; and

- The 2005 cohorts for Management Studies and Engineering had student loss rates in excess of 40%.

These and many other similar findings stimulated the university's desire to improve student throughput and graduation rates. The need for programmes to assist this drive culminated in the drafting of an Academic Monitoring, Support and Exclusions Policy, which was adopted by Senate at the end of 2006, and thereafter approved by Council. Included in the Preamble

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[5] *Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011,* Appendix B, pp. 14-23 and Appendices.

to the Policy is this statement: "The University acknowledges that academic support is important to retain students through a wide range of student-focused support systems and learning environments that enable them to complete their studies successfully."[6] The purpose of the policy is set out in Clause 3, "Objectives of the Policy": "The purpose of the Academic Monitoring and Exclusions Policy is to ensure that as many students as possible are successful in their studies and this is the responsibility of both staff and students."[7]

An integral part of the Academic Monitoring and Exclusions Policy is the so-called "robot system", which identifies students as being in one of three possible categories. Their status can be:

- Green – in good academic standing. This will apply to new students, and to those who have received no warning term decision code at the last Examination Results Schedule session;

- Orange – "at risk". This applies when students have not passed at least 75% of their required modules.

- Red – on probation. Students may be either on strict probation or on final probation, the latter being when they have appealed successfully to either the Faculty or the University Exclusion Appeals Committee.

In August 2008, Senate requested the University Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC) to prepare a report on academic monitoring and support systems in the faculties. This report proposed a set of minimum criteria for evaluating AMS across the faculties, and, in November 2008, Senate urged faculties to agree on these criteria and report back to the UTLC.

The next report compiled by the UTLC was the one made available to the current Panel, as cited in Section 1 above. This contains a summary of the self-assessments by the faculties made first in January 2009 and again in 2010.[8] The summary in Appendix 3 below indicates that the number of faculties reporting that they complied with the criteria increased in the case of 16 of the 18 criteria. In the second submission, all faculties complied in respect of two of the criteria, seven faculties in the case of three of the criteria, and six in the case of two other criteria.

3.   Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes in the Faculties[9]

The panel noted that Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes vary considerably between faculties. In most cases, there are even some variations between campuses in the

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[6] p. 2. Policy on Monitoring and Support

[7] *ibid.*

[8] See *Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011,* Appendix B, *Academic Monitoring and Support Draft Report 2009 – 20,* p. 2.

[9] The most recent faculty AMS reports are appended to the set of documents cited in footnote 6.

same faculty, but the Panel was pleased to note that some form of AMS exists in every section of every faculty. This was clearly appreciated by many of the students, but not always utilised by the groups for whom it was intended: the "at risk" students. It was obvious that, in several instances, the appreciation extended to a somewhat inappropriate dependence on mentoring and supplemental instruction. Several of the students interviewed expressed the wish for Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes to be continued into the second and subsequent years of study.

The section that follows below, summarises the main features of these programmes in all eight faculties, drawing from faculty reports and the interviews to indicate the structures existing in each; the challenges perceived by staff and students; and suggestions for improving the systems.

3.1   Faculty of Education

The Panel conducted the interviews for this Faculty on the Edgewood campus, as this is the only campus at which the Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree is offered.

The Panel established at the interviews that the Academic Monitoring and Support Coordinator, working closely with the Deputy Dean and the BEd Academic Coordinator, is responsible for implementing the Academic Monitoring and Support system in the Faculty of Education. The Faculty Report[10] indicates that there is no additional administrative support.

The Report identifies the following Academic Support interventions:

- Workshops, which are held once a week. Workshops are designed according to the need-based areas that students reported interest in during the registration period. These areas include time management, study skills, academic literacy, report writing and examination preparation.

- The Monitoring Chart System. According to this system, students must meet twice each semester with their module tutors, module co-ordinators, and academic counsellors. Each staff member must comment on the student's progress and sign his or her chart after each meeting. A monitoring chart must be completed for each module in which the student is enrolled. The Deputy Dean then comments on the progress of each student at the end of the semester.

- Academic Counselling. One-on-one academic counselling is provided by the Academic Monitoring Coordinator for students who need academic guidance or advice.

- Mentorship which involves senior students appointed by the faculty.

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[10] *Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011,* Appendix J.

According to the Faculty Report, out of 178 students [11] who attended the Academic Monitoring Programme[12] in the first semester of 2010, 133 students' results have shown improvement and 45 students have not yet improved their performance.

During his interview the Deputy Dean identified a lack of language proficiency as a major challenge, and he referred to certain compulsory modules: English, academic literacy and conversational language. He told the Panel that there were plans to put forward a proposal for a Writing Place on the Edgewood Campus.

When the Deputy Dean was asked what was needed to improve the throughput rate, he replied that the faculty needed a permanent structure of academic support on a long-term basis. Moreover, the review processes need to be improved, and there should be more qualitative engagements with the students.

The Academic Monitoring and Support Coordinator, after explaining her role to the Panel, indicated that the Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes were not compulsory, and expressed the view that they should somehow become compulsory for "at risk" students. She said that a great deal of effort, on the part of herself, the Deputy Dean and the BEd Academic Coordinator, went into determining what each student should be advised: which workshops they should attend, and whom they should meet. Despite the use of bulk SMSs and e-mails, the response was poor, and it became necessary to post student numbers up on campus notice boards.

The Panel interviewed the mentors in this faculty as a group, and established that they applied for advertised posts, and believed that they were chosen on the basis of their levels of study and their academic performance. They had a one-morning training session, consulted from time to time with the lecturers, and met on Fridays with the Academic Monitoring and Support Coordinator. The panel believes that there is a good backup support for mentors.

When asked with what challenges they were confronted, and what could be done about these, they highlighted the following:

- The mentees frequently do not turn up for the mentoring sessions; in many cases, e-mails do not work, and mentees ignore notices. Mentors then have to use their own cell phones. They felt they should be reimbursed for the use of their personal air time.

- They also regretted the fact that the programmes were not compulsory – although it was evident from the interview with students that they believed attendance was compulsory.

- Insufficient time (15 minutes) is allocated to their sessions with mentees.

The group of students interviewed by the Panel were enthusiastic about the value of the STudents At Risk (STAR) programme, and were particularly complimentary about the role

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[11] This represents just over 10% of the total number of undergraduates, 2700.

[12] Also known as the STAR (STudents At Risk) Programme.

played by the Academic Monitoring and Support Coordinator. They pointed out that the programme helped with more than academic problems, and that the consultations encompassed social, financial and even family matters.

When asked for suggestions on improvements, they suggested that the Academic Monitoring and Support Programme should be compulsory for all students in the Faculty of Education.

3.2 Faculty of Engineering

According to the Faculty Report, the Academic Support and Advancement Programme (ASAP) is the faculty level structure that coordinates AMS in this Faculty. ASAP evolved with input from the student representatives on the Faculty Board, the Student Engineering Council executive, the Heads of School and academic staff. It is managed and coordinated on a part-time basis by the current Head of School of Chemical Engineering: this is made possible by funding from the DoHET. The Panel was informed that there are regular meetings with the staff as well as report-back to the HoS and the Dean and Deputy Dean.

The Panel interviewed the Deputy Dean responsible for undergraduate studies, the ASAP coordinator, four ADOs and several students, and was impressed by the efficient organisation and coordination of the ASAP.

The Panel was informed that the structure of Academic Monitoring and Support was constituted as follows:

- There are five ADOs, funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET), one for each school. Their main function is to assist students "at risk" with academic writing and general study skills.

- A Supplemental Instruction (SI) programme is run by postgraduate and senior students who have been awarded a Certificate of Merit, for the benefit of undergraduate students at first, second and in some cases third year levels.

- There is an active and effective peer mentoring system.

Each Head of School is responsible for the academic monitoring of "at risk" and probation students. Unfortunately the system was not as effective as was hoped, because students did not always respond positively to approaches from the HoS. Although there has apparently been a reasonable uptake for the SI programme, by students whose progress is on the whole satisfactory, it is regrettable that the weakest students do not attend. The students indicated that they were comfortable with the low numbers, as this means that they receive more attention than would be the case if the groups were larger. Groups are currently restricted to a maximum of 20 students. The Panel realised that this signals a problem: if the SI sessions were fully utilised, they would probably be less beneficial.

The Panel heard that the exclusion rate had been reduced and the throughput rate improved over the past few years. To what extent this is attributable to the monitoring and support systems is unclear, because, at the time of the merger, the faculty inherited a "bulge" of comparatively weak students, who boosted the exclusion rate over the next two or three years.

In response to a question from the Panel as to how the system can be improved, the Engineering representative stated that they were investigating the possibility of a five-year programme. In this regard concern was expressed about the lack of sufficient flat venues suitable for tutorials; these would be needed if the programme was to be expanded. It appeared that the faculty had spent a considerable amount of funding on upgrading existing venues and creating suitable new venues. The representative also felt that the monitoring process needed to be more immediate and direct; the phrase used was "closer – more like a high school". The need for this was reinforced by the comments of one of the students interviewed: he indicated that he had not been given a timely warning, and that monitoring had only come into effect after he was moved to "red" on the "robot system" and was thus on probation. Thereafter, however, he attended the SI tutorials and found the support to be most helpful. He was pleased to report that he now achieved excellent results.

Other students related positive experiences, with one stating that the Chemistry SI was "interactive and useful", and another commenting positively on the SI in mathematics; the same student described the mainstream mathematics tutorials as "not really helpful", as the information provided was "inadequate".

Students felt that there was definitely a need for additional support; one expressed the view that "we have to catch up – some modules are (delivered) too fast". SI was generally viewed as a valuable intervention.

A recurring theme from students was also their great appreciation for the academic and other support and advice given by the Academic Development Officers (ADOs).

When the Academic Development Officers were interviewed, they confirmed that, from their perspective, the SI programme was indeed successful. The SI leaders were monitored on a weekly basis, and "on the whole, they do a good job". Students, both those "at risk" and those who were academically stronger, were now attending the programme on their own. Concern was however expressed that most of the support was being utilised by the latter group, who were thus achieving even better results, rather than those "at risk". The ADOs expressed the view that academic support was currently being underutilised. When asked if the support system could be transformed into a developmental activity, the ADOs indicated that some students have started their own study groups, and that developmental components were incorporated into their support systems.

The faculty is reluctant to have SI sessions for all modules. It is currently offered in modules that are identified as being particularly difficult, and that generally have high failure rates.

3.3 Faculty of Health Sciences

The Faculty Report [13] indicates that the Dean's Assistant (Academic Development and Student Support):

- co-ordinates the work of Academic Development Officers (ADO's), the mentors and the Retention Project run by the Westville Student Counselling Centre; and

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[13] *op. cit.,* Appendix H.

- is responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the interventions.

The Dean's Assistant and the appointed Academic Development Officers (ADO's) in each discipline/school are responsible for regularly updating academic records and for producing reports on AMS at School and Faculty level.

The Faculty also manages and runs a number of internal Faculty orientation initiatives over and above that offered by the University and Disciplines. All first year students are obliged to attend a compulsory introduction to Academic Development during orientation week.

The Panel interviewed the AMS coordinator and the ADOs, and heard that monitoring and academic support within the disciplines works very well. There were some challenges:

- Lack of time is a major problem;

- Students experience difficulty accessing the LAN;

- Students tend to be interested only in their marks;

- The same students come over and over; and

- ADOs have to be psychologically prepared for the types of problems brought to them.

Interviews with the Health Sciences students once again indicated the high esteem in which students tend to hold the ADOs. A Sports Science Honours student stated, "The ADO is my best friend in the department"; and this sentiment was echoed by a dental student, who had also benefited greatly from assistance provided by the Student Counselling Centre.

When questioned about the support gained from mainstream lectures and tutorials, several students attested to the high quality of these activities, as well as to the accessibility of staff.

3.4   Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences

The Panel was made aware that this was one of the largest faculties, and that students excluded from other faculties are frequently directed towards continuing their studies in this faculty. It was accordingly seen to be a faculty that needed a very large and active Academic Monitoring and Support Programme.

According to the Faculty Report,[14] this faculty has appointed five Dean's Assistants to oversee Academic Development and Student Support. These staff members have been assigned the responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all AMS interventions. Administrative support is provided from the existing undergraduate and postgraduate offices on the respective campuses.

In addition to the involvement of the Dean's Assistants, the support interventions include:

- a mentorship programme, using senior students as mentors;

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[14] *op. cit.,* Appendix I.

- content and knowledge-based support from academics, to students who seek such support;

- the Writing Place, which assists students with essay writing and general academic writing skills, and helps them to read effectively;

- curriculum intervention, which is aimed at adapting curricula to assist in developing a student's general academic and cognitive skills, language proficiency and capacity for self-directed learning; and

- referral to the Student Counselling Centre (SCC) which uses various tools including the Learning Enhancement Checklist (LEC).

The faculty has developed a system for identifying and tracking "at risk" students, and for ensuring that their progress in terms of participation in the various interventions is monitored, from registration to the completion of their examinations.

However, the Faculty Report acknowledges that non-compliance is a major challenge: "only those students who take the initiative are supported. Anecdotal evidence within the faculty demonstrates that this represents a small minority of students." [15] As the faculty representative put it during the interview, "Some (at risk) students don't bother to come". Student mentors also referred to the problem of non-attendance, indicating that, in some instances at least, the students' time-tables may be too crowded, while in many cases students proffer excuses that were clearly invalid.

One of the Pietermaritzburg HDSS representatives pointed out that another challenge was communication with the students once they were identified as being "at risk". In many instances, the telephone numbers provided by the students were incorrect, or did not reach the students; and letters were often sent to inappropriate addresses, such as rural homes. Although it should be possible to make use of e-mail messages, in many cases the students did not respond. The faculty thus resorted to advertising on the campus.

While the faculty considers the system to be compulsory for identified "at risk" students at different levels, it faces the obvious problem of enforcing attendance. At this time the faculty can go no further than identifying and encouraging all first year students to participate in the mentorship programme.

A further problem that was reported by the faculty representative was that academic coordinators do not always cooperate fully, and that marks are not always captured promptly, rendering the monitoring process much less effective. Moreover, the ADOs pointed out that they are unduly stressed because their employment contracts limit them to four hours per day.

When the Panel asked the Howard College HDSS representative how successful and effective all the interventions were proving, she said that research, in collaboration with SCC, was ongoing. There were no clear answers as yet, although there was anecdotal evidence that those who attended the programmes do improve their academic performance. She

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[15] p. 1. HDSS Academic Monitoring Report

indicated that the faculty was concerned about the high proportion of dropouts, but that there were relatively few academic exclusions.

The Panel learned that, in Pietermaritzburg, a pilot programme had started in the second semester of 2011, with invitations being sent out to 440 students; only 178 eventually remained in the programme. Participants were required to choose one of two modules: (i) Exploring Literacy in Humanities (an accredited module); or (ii) Academic Communication Studies. There were no tangible results from the pilot programme yet, but the coordinators felt that the programme was proceeding well for those who had joined.

The interviews with students indicated that there was a fair degree of satisfaction with the various AMS interventions listed above. For example, one student stated, "My mentor has made a difference. Now I feel I belong". Others indicated that mentors not only motivated them very strongly but became their friends. Some mentors apparently motivate students to form study groups. In particular, students expressed appreciation for the Saturday mentoring sessions. Mention was also made of the helpfulness of the subject librarians.

However, the Panel also heard that mentees were frequently not aware of the role of mentors and therefore tended to forget about the mentors, who were thus underutilised.

When asked what improvements they suggested, the following ideas were forthcoming:

- Earlier identification of "at risk" students was necessary;

- Each mentor should identify her or his strength to assist the mentees in making an appropriate choice;

- Mentors should be reimbursed for the air time when they used their own cell phones to contact their mentees; and

- Mentors should be paid in accordance with the promises made at the time of their appointments.

3.5   Faculty of Law

According to the Faculty Report[16] drafted in February 2010, most of the support for students in this faculty was offered in three ways:

- The identification and counselling of "at risk" students, involving the Deputy Deans, the Deans' Assistants and the Year Coordinators;

- Small-group teaching in the first year modules;

- The SUKAR-funded Academic Support Programme, focussed mainly on second year students, with some informal support at the first year level.

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[16] *Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011,* Appendix G

Reference is then made in the Report to Academic Development Coordinators, with whom probation students are required to meet. There is no formal peer mentoring system, nor, as far as the Panel was able to ascertain, any system of Supplemental Instruction or extra tutorials.

Both the Faculty Report and the interviews with the ADCs indicated that the faculty is making serious efforts to embed as much of the academic support as possible within the core modules of the LLB. The Report states that there are no longer separate Academic Skills tutorials, since learning styles, time management, note taking, academic reading strategies and test techniques are dealt with in a series of lectures included in a mainstream module.

The Pietermaritzburg ADC[17] referred to attempts to bring in skill-based learning, and to bring writing and time-management skills into the curriculum; the interviewee told the Panel that "they have had a fair amount of success in modifying modules rather than introducing add-ons". The part-time ADC at Howard College declared that, in her view, the most important improvement to the system would be to "teach students how to apply the law".

An important feature of academic monitoring in the Faculty of Law that has been introduced subsequent to the writing of the Faculty Report is the use of the Learning Enhancement Checklist acquired by the Student Counselling Centre from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2009. Described by a member of the SCC as "a powerful intervention for their probation students",[18] the LEC requires these students to complete a questionnaire that is then analysed to provide either an individual report, or to contribute to a group report for the ADC. In the words of one of the Law ADCs in Pietermaritzburg, "Broadly, the LEC will show us where the students are struggling so that we can intervene in a more informed way."[19] This is proving to be a very effective tool, and it can assist both in the early identification of "at risk" students, and in providing structured guidance to them. According to one Pietermaritzburg student, use of the LEC has been very helpful because it has enhanced the quality of his meetings with an ADC and the SCC, and he has been guided to attend the workshops that are most useful to him.

The LEC appears to work better in Pietermaritzburg than at Howard College. The results are analyzed very quickly and the students get prompt feedback. At Howard College, students are expected to complete the questionnaire and come back on another day for the results, and the Panel heard that very few students did return. The SCC reported that a lack of capacity, particularly on the HC campus, affected their ability to hand results back promptly.

The impression gained from the interviews with the ADCs and the students was that the monitoring and support system at present was somewhat more effective in Pietermaritzburg than at the HC centre. There was currently no Deputy Dean with the responsibility for academic monitoring and support programmes; although a Dean's Assistant helps with some aspects, there is no single overall coordinator. A student told the Panel that he only found

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[17] This incumbent had recently been employed on a part-time basis. The previous ADC had resigned, and it took a while to replace her.

[18] See e-mail message from Margot Freedman, with subject, "Law Probation Students PMB Campus – Academic Monitoring and Support Systems Evaluation Feedback", dated 9 September 2011.

[19] Erica Wille, *UKZN Law Faculty – Pietermaritzburg Campus, Probation Report June 2011.*

out that he was on probation after he had entered the "red" zone on the "robot system". He was then sent a letter and required to meet someone (presumably an ADC) with other students for group discussions. He told the Panel, "There was not much one-on-one support, and no-one followed up".

The Panel asked the ADCs what they would suggest in the way of improvements to the system, and the Pietermaritzburg ADC replied, "The more AMS the better". This, he felt, had to include more small group work.

The students at Howard College and in Pietermaritzburg were critical about the effectiveness of the mainstream lecturing and tutorials programme, some even complaining about the difficulty of accessing lecturers, some of whom did not advertise their consultation times. One student stated, "Lecturers whom I cannot understand I cannot easily approach." A few students reported that there was minimal feedback from tutorial assignments, with no comments, but "just ticks and marks".

When asked about evaluation of the modules, a student stated that there are evaluation sessions at the end of each semester, but that, as far as the students could tell, these are not taken seriously and nothing is done to rectify deficiencies.

Concern was expressed about the lack of a peer mentorship system. A student also suggested that it would be very helpful if the Faculty of Law could establish a facility similar to the Writing Place that was available to the Humanities students.

3.6   Faculty of Management Studies

According to the Faculty Report,[20] the Academic Mentoring and Monitoring Coordinator is currently appointed in a temporary capacity, although there are plans for making this post permanent. Administrative support is provided by the Education Unit, which is also responsible for coordinating the ADOs.

In addition to extensive counselling by the Academic Mentoring and Monitoring Coordinator[21] the support interventions include:

- mandatory consultations for "at risk" students with Academic Development Officers and mentors;

- ongoing communication with students via cell phone SMSs, e-mails, telephone calls and face-to-face interactions;

- the maintenance of quarterly reports, interview reports and attendance logs in the students' files at the Faculty Office;

- a faculty-based writing centre to provide support for students with their written assignments; and

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[20] *Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011,* Appendix F.

[21] The Report indicates that this takes up 80% of the Coordinator's time.

- referral to, and interviews with, the Faculty Education Unit, the Student Counselling Centre, or the Career Counselling and Student Employment Centre, as appropriate.

With regard to the first bullet above, the Faculty Report indicates that attendance at ADO sessions varies from 20% to 70% across the disciplines. This is despite the considerable effort expended in implementing the communications methods mentioned in the second bullet above. The lack of participation by those students who badly needed support was confirmed by the interview with the AMS coordinator and a group of ADOs, who remarked that the students only attended reasonably well immediately before tests and examinations. The Pietermaritzburg ADOs reported to the Panel that the reason given by many students for non-participation was, "I didn't think I needed help."

This group of ADOs saw themselves as bridging the gap between students and lecturers; they dealt essentially with issues affecting academic performance. They recognised a possible downside: students might incorrectly see consultation with ADOs as a substitute for lecture attendance, rather than as a supplementary support system.

The appointment of the Academic Mentoring and Monitoring Coordinator made it possible to identify and track "at risk" students more effectively.[22] However, the Report stresses that many of the interventions are available to, and indeed used by, mainstream students as well.

According to the Pietermaritzburg ADOs, the system tended to be reactive rather than proactive. This necessitated careful monitoring of continuous assessment throughout the semester, to avoid identifying "at risk" students too late in the year. They also perceived as a problem the that fact that "101" modules were not repeated in the second semester.

An important avenue for the initial announcement of the system of ADOs and the existence of the writing centre is the faculty's participation in the campus orientation programme. According to the Faculty Report, this endeavour was largely ineffective in 2009, as the student attendance at the Faculty orientation was only 20%. Plans were set in motion to remedy this during 2009, and the attendance at orientation at the beginning of 2010 increased to 60%.

Several of the students who were interviewed by the Panel were positive about the role of the ADOs and mentors. It was confirmed that ADOs were available for all students, not only those who were "at risk"; and that they were helpful in respect of the resolution of academic and other problems. When asked if they received adequate support in the mainstream academic programme, some Westville students were forthright about the fact that lecturers were not always clear, that tutorials were often too large, and that the tutors were often unable to explain issues well. It was suggested that more care should be taken in selecting and training tutors. When the AMS coordinator and a group of ADOs were interviewed, they responded to this point by indicating that the tutors were not appointed by the AMS structures.

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[22] After the 2009 examinations, about 2500 students were identified as "at risk".

Problems such as those mentioned above were not evident at the Pietermaritzburg centre, where the view was expressed that lecturers are readily accessible and helpful.

Students' responses to the question, "Can you suggest improvements to the system?" included holding tutorials at different times, perhaps such as early in the morning when they were still fresh and not tired out by their busy daily schedules; appointing more ADOs, who were generally regarded as being extremely helpful; and (in Pietermaritzburg) appointing mentors for all the students.

As is the case in HDSS, students complained about mentors being promised payment but not receiving remuneration.

3.7   Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine

According to the Faculty Report[23], a senior academic has been given the responsibility for the coordination of the Academic Development Programme (ADP), and she has adequate administrative support.

Poorly performing students receive academic counselling from the ADP and the year coordinators. They are also referred to the SCC "to ensure that there is no underlying personal or social issue that may be contributing to the poor performance". The ADP coordinator and the SCC at the Medical School together ensure that information is gleaned from "at risk" students with regard to personal and career adjustment problems.

Academic support is provided to first, second and third year medical students, in the form of specially trained student tutors, who cover particular areas of difficulty. Where possible and when the timetable permits, academics are encouraged to run question and answer sessions, or to deliver extra tutorials in areas of difficulty. There is an active mentoring programme, with second year students, "selected on the strength of their interpersonal, leadership and academic skills", acting as mentors to first year students. An informal residence tutoring programme is designed to assist junior students in residence. In 2010 a clinical mentoring programme was implemented, but this was for the benefit of the third and fourth year students in the hospital wards.

As far as resources are concerned, the faculty has provided adequate funding for running the mentorship and extra tutorial programmes. Some academic positions have been created and filled in order to bolster the ADP. However, space continues to be a problem at medical school.

The ADOs who were interviewed expressed the view that the monitoring and support systems were working very well. Students respond well, and there is active engagement, with those participating discussing their specific problems. As the programmes have been developed, they have been heavily subscribed, to the extent that those responsible have felt overwhelmed.

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[23] *Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011,* Appendix D, p. 1.

As an example, a representative from the Medical School told the Panel in some detail about the academic literacy course, which was introduced as a result of the problem incoming students have with language and with technical terms.[24] A further problem encountered by students is their lack of computer skills. Staff in turn find that there is too little time to deal with the material that needs to be covered.

Students are initially embarrassed about attending this module. After about 6 weeks there is a distinct change in attitude, and they become enthusiastic. The Panel heard from the medical school representative that they grow in confidence, and that their results have shown a definite improvement.

When the Panel interviewed the students from medical school, the feedback was generally positive. The panel was informed that SI, available to all on a voluntary basis, and the mentorship programme were both perceived as very helpful, both for academic and other problems. The impression was gained that the programmes had improved since last year – in one case, from the first to the second semester this year - and that monitoring was more efficient. For example, the Panel was told that, at first year level, all the students who had been awarded marks of less than 50% were assigned tutors; and "at risk" students were contacted telephonically.

One student expressed the view that students themselves should be more responsible, and should ensure that they availed themselves of the support that was offered by the school.

The students suggested the following improvements to the AMS system:

- Monitoring of "at risk" students should take place sooner than at present;
- Feedback from assessments should be more prompt;
- The study skills manual could be expanded and made more elaborate and explicit;
- Mentors should plan more carefully for the SI sessions, rather than asking students what they were getting out of the lectures, and how they were coping.

3.8 Faculty of Science and Agriculture

The Panel was informed that the Faculty of Science and Agriculture on each campus relied on two Deputy Dean and two Dean's assistants to analyse student results in terms of the "robot system". A dedicated coordinator for support programmes and interventions was appointed in December 2009, and is assisted by an administrator in the Faculty. According to the Faculty Report,[25] monitoring initially takes the form of "commitment letters" to students "at risk" and on probation;[26] these students meet the coordinator and sign the letters at registration. The coordinator is available at least once a week for academic counselling and

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[24] The representative bemoaned the fact that "students do not read anything at all".

[25] *op. cit.,* Appendix K, p. 1.

[26] There are just fewer than 900 in these categories in 2011.

other forms of support. The Faculty works with the Student Counselling Centre to profile these students using the Learning Enhancement Checklist.[27]

In addition to one-on-one counselling with the coordinator or a member of the SCC, students may avail themselves on a voluntary basis of a mentoring system, study groups, SI sessions, extra tutorials, a "hot seat" (one-on-one) tutor, extra reading materials and academic support workshops, which all take place at school level. The Panel was informed that those who engage with the programmes generally tend to do well, while those who choose not to do so invariably continue to perform very badly.

When asked what it would take to improve the system, the Deputy Dean replied that there had to be far more involvement at school level. He pointed out that this was consistent with the impending structural changes, since faculties would not exist after the end of 2011, and schools would have to take greater responsibility for students. In this context, he referred to the tension that exists between teaching and research, suggesting that the demands of research made it difficult to become heavily involved in academic support for "at risk" students.

He also pointed out that the current number of dedicated AMS personnel was far too small, considering that there were about 4500 students in the faculty. This problem was reinforced by the Pietermaritzburg Science and Agriculture representative, who said that this shortage of dedicated AMS staff was the main reason why the faculty could only follow up on students already in the "red", rather than including those who were "at risk", and in the "orange" zone. The Faculty Coordinator, in her Report, pleaded for additional administrative assistance to speed up the entering and collection of the monitoring and evaluation data, so that there could be timeous and preventative support. The Pietermaritzburg representative told the Panel that the "Robot" system was working well on the whole, and that students in the "Red" zone were being counselled in regard to the problems they encounter, and also, where appropriate, in regard to their future readmission possibilities.

The Panel noted that, in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, key modules which generally hold students back are repeated in the second semester of the year in question and the first semester of the following year.

When the students were interviewed by the Panel, they made the following points *inter alia:*

- Several found the SI sessions, one-on-one tutorials and the mentorship system very helpful.

- Some did not find it easy to approach the Head of School or even the lecturer directly, so they opted for study groups with their peers. It was recognised that some lecturers were easier to approach than others.

- In terms of forms of support they prefer, the "hot seat" system and SI were highly ranked while counselling seemed to be the least favourite.

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[27] See section 3.5 above.

- Related to this point, some students referred to lecturers in specific disciplines who they felt were particularly poor at explaining concepts.

- Related to this point, some students felt that the tutors need to be selected on the basis of their communication ability and not only on their academic excellence only. The panel heard that some tutors are not able to communicate in a manner that enables students to grasp the content. This point was seen as a contributing factor to students' non-attendance of tutorial sessions.

- Some students felt that the ADOs need to be given the opportunity to speak for them during the exclusion committee meetings. The ADOs did indicate that their involvement in this panel ended with the report that they submitted, and they stated that it would be a good idea to be invited to attend since a report does not sufficiently capture the essence of their motivation for students that are earmarked to be excluded.

In some schools, students claimed that there were no support structures, and they had no formal opportunity to consult with their peers, for example through a mentorship system. Their only method of seeking assistance was to approach lecturers directly. However, the panel also found that some schools such as Mathematics and Physics are poorly resourced with respect to academic staff numbers, which could impact on the support provided to students.

When asked if the students' representatives were a helpful resource for support, the view was expressed that these are elected on the basis of popularity rather than skills.

4.   Issues of Concern

Section 5 of the *Academic Monitoring and Support Draft Report 2009 – 2010*[28]*,* entitled "Challenges in Academic Monitoring and Support", lists a few issues that also concerned the Panel in the course of its deliberations.

1. Academic Development units tend to be staffed by temporary personnel, so the support initiatives "are often hampered by a lack of stability and continuity in staffing." Moreover, such arrangements can have a negative impact on the commitment of such valuable personnel, especially because such a context does not allow for career development.

2. Linked to this concern is the obvious difficulty of securing adequate funding to enable Academic Monitoring and Support system to be strengthened and expanded.

3. A similar concern relates to the human resources situation throughout the academic sector of the university. If all "at risk" students attended programmes for support then the staff would be overwhelmed at school level, at faculty level and within the SCCs on each campus. The latter are particularly poorly resourced.

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[28] *Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011,* Appendix B, pp. 11,12.

4. Some faculties have insufficient office accommodation for their support staff. This might pose an even greater problem when the structures are altered and monitoring and support activities are devolved downwards to schools.

5. While some "at risk" students interviewed considered attendance at SI sessions or extra tutorials, or consultations and meetings with ADOs and mentors compulsory, many did not. Staff confirmed that, even when the faculties considered these activities to be compulsory, attendance was on the whole rather poor. Sadly, it was often those students most in need of assistance who did not comply.

6. The Draft Report pointed out that "Faculties also identified the need for closer cooperation between academics in disciplines who refer students for academic support and the academic support coordinators, to ensure proper tracking of all referred students."[29] While the Panel did not discuss this particular point, members did express the view that early identification of risk cases is necessary. In this respect, the Panel considers it a matter of great concern that assignments are not always processed promptly, nor are the marks and comments fed back swiftly.

7. The Panel was concerned to find out that monitoring and support systems sometimes differed across campuses within the same faculty; this was more pronounced in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences; and the Faculty of Law.

8. There were reported instances of mentors who had not been remunerated for their services, and some mentors were aggrieved that they had to use their own cell phones without compensation.

9. There were a few reported instances of students not being able to consult academic staff because the latter did not observe their own consultation times.

10. While accepting that there was a widespread appreciation of the support given by ADOs, the Panel felt slightly uneasy about the possibility that, in some instances, "at risk" students were too heavily reliant on these staff members, and wished to remain so for too long – in some cases even into their third and subsequent years of study. For example, in the Law Faculty at Howard College, the students expressed regret that mentoring is only available during the first year, and that they cannot continue with the support from the second year onwards.

11. There is also concern with regard to the changing role of the ADOs on the ground. Students expected them also to offer some counselling and support on non-academic issues. The ADOs' willingness to go the extra mile is greatly appreciated but there is concern about whether they can do this effectively without the proper training.

12. The Panel noted that the University was not yet in a position to operate a proper semester system across the board, in the sense of offering "101" modules in the second semester for those who failed that module in the first semester.[30] This prolonged the study period for such students who had to wait to repeat the module in the next year, and could ultimately have serious motivational and financial problems for them.

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[29] *Academic Monitoring and Support Draft Report 2009 – 2010,* p. 14.

[30] The exception is some modules in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture. See Section 3.8 above.

13. On page 16 of the Draft Report referred to above, the question is posed as to "whether the investment in access and first year support is delivering the expected outcomes, and whether the investment would yield better returns if extended to supporting 2nd and subsequent years. In this regard, a cost-benefit analysis of existing support would be instructive." It is a matter of concern that none of the data so far analysed and set forth in reports produced to date have established either (a) the extent to which financial or psycho-social factors affect the drop-out and exclusion rates or (b) the net effect on these rates of the Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes currently in place.

5. Commendations

1. The Panel was impressed by the positive attitude, dedication and commitment of all the staff involved in the Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes; by their overall availability to students who sought assistance; by the efficient coordination of services; and by the effective communication of services to students in general, and, in particular, to those "at risk". External members of the Panel all commented that no AMS programmes similar to those at UKZN existed at their four institutions.

2. The Panel was also impressed by the development and use of the Learning Enhancement Checklist (LEC). This was enthusiastically expounded on by the Pietermaritzburg Student Counselling Centre, which had used the tool on the 30 Law Faculty probation students in August 2011, as well as in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, and HDSS in Howard College. The LEC acted as a virtual springboard for information on these students, highlighting their difficulties and enabling staff to get to know their students better. The exercise was well-received, and the feedback from both staff and students was generally positive.

3. The role of the Academic Development Officers was widely applauded across all faculties, and it is clear that they are a much-appreciated source of guidance and assistance. In many cases their assistance transcends strictly academic matters and they provide much needed advice on a wide range of psycho-social problems.

4. Every faculty has some form of mentorship system, with student mentors being used in all but the Howard College section of the Faculty of Law, where mentors are academic staff members. The Panel realised that there was again universal appreciation of the mentors, who provide "at risk" students with ready support, encouragement and advice. These mentors are very often peers of the student mentees, and are thus perceived as being rather more approachable – and perhaps less daunting – than professors and other senior academic staff members.

5. Notwithstanding the previous comment, the Panel was impressed by the fact that, in the vast majority of cases, senior academic staff at both school and faculty level were accessible and extremely willing to help.

6. The Panel acknowledged the positive value of the Writing Place, currently located within the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences.

7. The Panel commends the deans of all the faculties for ensuring that their offices are strongly committed to tracking and contacting students "at risk" and to providing academic and other support.

8. The Panel interviewed one or more representatives of the Student Counselling Centres from the Howard College, Pietermaritzburg and Westville campuses. It was clear that the work done by these centres, in the face of declining resources, is an important component of the vital support provided to students who are "at risk". Of particular note was the use of the LEC, mentioned in point 2 above.

6. Recommendations

1. Academic Development Officers

   a. The use of Academic Development Officers and mentors must continue, and their appointments must be renewed wherever possible. Indeed the Panel recommends that more ADOs should be appointed if at all possible. Given that the appointment of ADOs had been made possible in the first instance by funding from the Department of Higher Education and Training,[31] it was realised that this would now have financial implications for the university, but the Panel believed that the success of the system thus far warranted further expenditure, at least in the immediate future. The Panel recommends that every possible additional avenue of funding should be explored to strengthen the support system, and to aid in sustaining the programme with a more stable and permanent support structure. This should include comprehensive capacity building as ADOs and mentors often have to deal with issues that are beyond those for which they were trained.

   b. Allied to this is the need to provide suitable office accommodation for the monitoring and support personnel, especially when the faculties cease to exist, and the activities are taken over by the schools.

2. Mentors and SI tutors

   a. In regard to the mentorship system, the Panel recommends that mentors, mentees and SI tutors should be identified as soon as possible after registration, and that the process should not be delayed until the end of the first semester, but should be streamlined as well as open and transparent. Mentors' roles should be clarified and all mentees should be made aware of these roles at the outset.

   b. The Panel heard that, in some instances, promises made to mentors in respect of payment for services were not honoured, and that these mentors often had to call students on their own cell phones without reimbursement for air time used. The

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[31] Funding for the Academic Monitoring and Support system as a whole was multi-pronged; an earlier report states, "In addition to their own funding, the DVC: Teaching and Learning made available funding from the DOHET Teaching Development Grant and the (university's) own main fund budget to faculties to this end". (*Evaluation of Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes offered by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 12 – 15 September 2011,* Appendix B, *Academic Monitoring and Support Draft Report 2009 – 2010*, p. 4.)

panel recommends that all faculties should pay urgent attention to correcting this unacceptable situation.

c. The Panel recommends that processes should be harmonised across campuses. As an example, it was noted that there were Faculty of Law mentors at Howard College, while the SCC provided the mentoring system in the Pietermaritzburg section of that Faculty.

d. The panel encourages Faculties to emulate the examples of the Faculties of HDSS and Science and Agriculture by making use of Saturdays for mentoring sessions if at all possible.[32]

3. The Panel recommends that Academic Support Coordinators, ADOs and mentors should investigate ways of working with students so that they are encouraged to become independent, and are weaned from the support programmes as soon as possible. Every effort must be made to prepare students to succeed in higher education, to be able to identify and solve their learning problems, and to manage their learning.

4. Further to this point, the Panel urges faculties and schools to release assignment and test marks regularly and timeously, to assist with continuous monitoring and to enable timeous decisions to be made.

5. The Panel recommends that the Writing Place, or a similar facility, should be made accessible to all students, and not just to those registered in the College of Humanities and currently also assisting students from the faculties of Management and Engineering. However, the Panel cautioned against this resource becoming a clinic, where students took their written work for comment and correction prior to submission. It was felt that it would be far more beneficial if the Writing Place became a development centre, with the express purpose of training students in skills such as academic writing, correct referencing, the use of footnotes, access to academic discourse, etc.

6. The Panel noted that the Faculty of Law had decided in 2009 to embed as much of the academic support as possible within the core modules of the LLB degree. The Panel was of the view that, in the long run, this would be an effective approach for all the Colleges, and the Panel members accordingly recommend that, where possible, such support should be integrated into the mainstream courses.

7. The Panel encourages the Student Counselling Centre to work more with other faculties than Law, HDSS and Science and Engineering, to extend the use of the LEC as soon as possible. To this end, the Panel recommends that serious attention should be paid to increasing the resources available to the SCC.

8. Notwithstanding Commendation 5 above, there were a few reported instances of academic staff who did not observe their own advertised consultation times. The Panel recommends that faculties take steps to ensure the consistent availability of staff at the stated consultation times.

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[32] The Panel was informed that, in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, attendance at Saturday mentoring sessions increased markedly immediately before tests and examinations.

APPENDIX 1

PROGRAMME: EXTERNAL REVIEW OF ECADEMIC MONITORING AND SUPPORT

EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC MONITORING AND SUPPORT

PROGRAMMES OFFERED BY UKZN

13 – 15 September 2011

FINAL PROGRAMME
Tuesday, 13 September 2011
HOWARD COLLEGE CAMPUS
VENUE: QPA BOARDROOM

TIME	INTERVIEW/ACTIVITY	DESIGNATION/FACULTIES
8:30–8:45	Discussion of Day's ac	Panel
8:45–9:20	Deans/Deputy Deans (Responsible for undergraduates)	Law, HDSS, Medical School & Engineering
9:25–09:55	Faculty AMS co-ordinators (Bev, Erica – Law), Gopal, Clare, (HDSS), (Veena - NRMSM), (Jon and Mogasuri - Engineering)	Law, HDSS, Medical School & Engineering
10:00–10:30	Students	Students (Health Sciences - Nursing and Med School)
10:30–10:45	**Tea**	**Panel**
10:45- 11:15	Academic Development Officers	Health Sciences - Nursing and Medical School
11:20- 11:50	Students	Students (HDSS)
11:55–12:25	Students	Students (Law)
12:30–13:30	**Lunch**	**Panel**
13:35–14:10	Students	Faculty of Engineering
14:15–14:40	Academic Development Officers	Faculty of Engineering
14:45–15:30	Libby Collins	Student Counselling Services
15:35–15:55		Academic coordinators/programme directors
16: 00–16:15	**Tea**	
16:15 -	Wrap up and planning for Wednesday	Panel

Wednesday, 14 September 2011
EDGEWOOD CAMPUS
VENUE: Main Faculty Boardroom A101
8:00 – 10:30

TIME	INTERVIEW/ACTIVITY	DESIGNATION/FACULTIES
8:00–8:45	Dean or Deputy Dean for UG	Education
8:45–9:15	Students	
9:15 –09:40	Student mentors	
9:45 – 10:05	Kalenga	Academic coordinator
10:10 –10:30	Mngomezulu	AMS Coordinator
10:30	Travelling to Westville campus	

Wednesday, 14 September 2011
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
VENUE: GSB-STUDY ROOM 10

TIME	INTERVIEW/ACTIVITY	DESIGNATION/FACULTIES
11:05 – 11:15	**Tea/Coffee**	**Panel**
11:15 –11:40	Deans or Deputy Deans for UG	Health Sciences, Science & Agriculture
11:40 –11:55	Students	Science & Agriculture
12:00 –12:25	Academic Monitoring & Support Co-ordinators (Dr Kindness)	Science & Agriculture
12:30– 13h00	Students	Faculty of Management Studies
13:00 –13:30	**Lunch**	**Panel**
13:30 –14:00	Students	Health sciences
14:00 –14:25	Academic Monitoring & Support Co-ordinators (Prim Naidoo & ADOs)	Faculty of Management Studies
14:30 –15:00	Academic Monitoring & Support Co-ordinators (Penny Flack & ADOs)	Health Sciences
15:05 –15:30	Saloshni Pillay	Student Counselling services
15:35 –15:55		Students representatives
16:00 –16:45	Tea/Coffee Wrap up and plan for Day 3	Panel

Thursday, 15 September 2011
PIETERMARITZBURG CAMPUS
VENUE: PRINCIPAL'S DINING ROOM
8:30 – 14:30

TIME	INTERVIEW/ACTIVITY	DESIGNATION/FACULTIES
8:15	Panel arrives in PMB	
8:30–9:00	Dean/Deputy Deans	HDSS, Science &Agriculture, Education, Law
9:00–9:30	Students	HDSS
9:35-9:50	Faculty Coordinators – Mr Kometsi/ Mr Nene	HDSS
9:55-10:30	Students	Management Studies
10:30 – 10:45	**Tea**	**Panel**
10.50 – 11.05	Faculty Coordinators (Rob Gutteridge & ADOs)	Management Studies
11:10 –11.40	Students	Science & Agriculture
11:45 –12:00	Faculty Coordinators –Prof Kirkman	Science & Agriculture
12:05 –12:35	Students	Faculty of Law
12:40 –12:55	Faculty Coordinators	Law
13.00 – 13.30	**Lunch**	**Panel**
13:35 –13:50	Zama Khanyile/ Nyembesi Khanyisile/Margo	Student Counselling Services
13:55 –14.20	SRC members	Academic Affairs
14:25–14:40	Discuss report format	Panel
14.45	**Panel departs**	