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*Beyond Academic Development:
Reconceptualising and Institutionalising Academic
Monitoring and Support*

AMS Research Colloquium 2014 Report

Date: Tuesday, 26 November 2014

Venue: GSB, Westville Campus UKZN



Hosted by:
UTLO & College of Law and Management Studies
Teaching and Learning Unit

INSPIRING GREATNESS

The 2nd Academic Monitoring and Support Colloquium was held on the 26th of November 2014. A total of 122 delegates attended, reflecting an increase of approximately 40% from the inaugural colloquium, which was hosted by the College of Health Sciences. The purpose of this colloquium was to deliberate and refine the resolutions that came out of the 1st research colloquium in 2013. Accordingly, this colloquium was



organised around reconceptualising and institutionalising AMS at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. All Colleges were represented at the Colloquium, indicating a growing interest in AMS in the University. The College of Law and Management Studies, which hosted the event, had 31 delegates. The conference agenda was formulated by the organising committee nominated by the College Deans of Teaching and Learning and supported by the University Teaching and Learning Office. The programme consisted of a keynote address, three plenary sessions and three parallel sessions, with 18 presentations in total. Figure 1 shows the number of delegates per college/organisation.

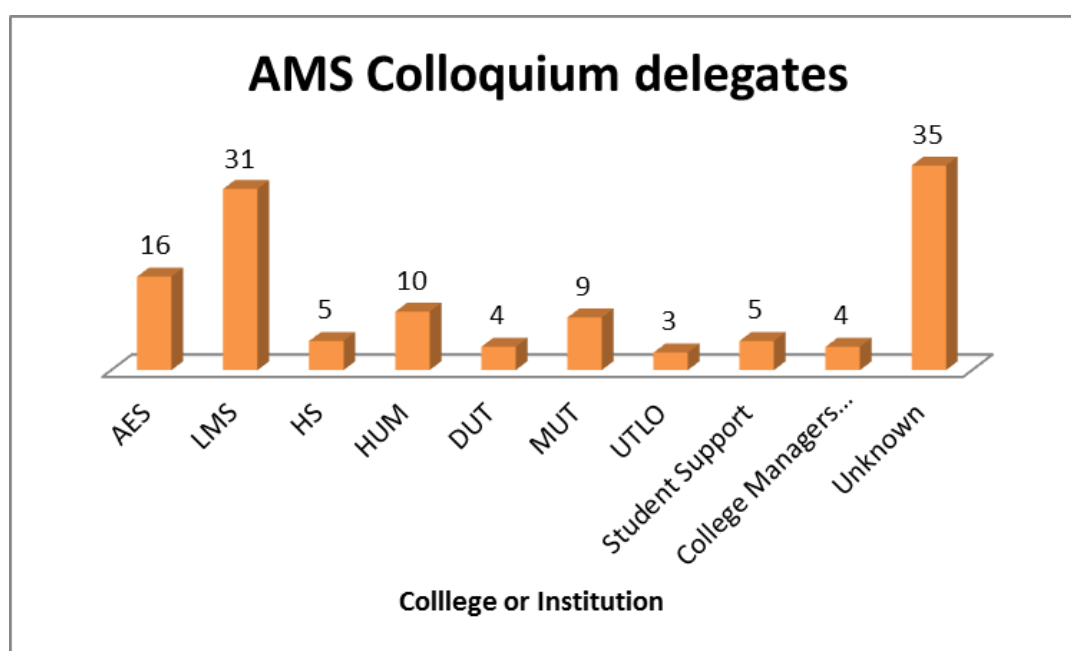


Figure 1. AMS Colloquium Delegates

The day's proceedings were introduced by Professor Kriben Pillay, the College of Law and Management Studies' Dean of Teaching and Learning. The welcome address was made by Professor John Mubangizi, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Law and Management Studies. His address outlined the importance of AMS in the University and the significant efforts made by the College of Law and Management Studies in implementing the Academic Monitoring and Support policy.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

KEYNOTE ADDRESS (08h45-09h45) – AMS AS A VALUE: A REFLECTIVE JOURNEY

Dr Shaun Ruggunan - School of Management, Information Technology and Governance, College of Law and Management Studies

The tone of the day's programme was set by the keynote address which was delivered by Dr Shaun Ruggunan, a senior lecturer in the School of Management, IT and Governance. In his presentation entitled: 'Academic Development, Monitoring and Support as a Value: A reflective Journey', Dr Ruggunan reflected on his journey as a lecturer in the discipline of Human Resources Management. He focused on how, through a process of critical reflexivity, he started questioning his own practice. In particular, he questioned his role as an 'expert' and his identity as a researcher and a teacher of Human Resources Management. It was through the process of making himself vulnerable that creativity was born. He noted that if academics do not question their roles as 'experts' then they do not move to the critical side of vulnerability which is creativity.

Dr Ruggunan teaches what he refers to as critical management studies, in which the classroom is seen as a community, and students are engaged and given the opportunity to tell their stories. Themes are picked up from these stories and used to cover the curriculum. The outcomes of this critical reflexivity was that both the students and the lecturer were more engaged, leading students to perform better than in previous years.

Q & A from the Keynote Address

Q: From your discussions with colleagues, what was your impression in terms of their motivation and approach to motivating students.

Prof Kriben Pillay

A. They have been supportive and it's opened up discussions. We have implemented peer evaluation of colleagues. In one of the interviews it was stated that it was the first time that anyone was asked what it means to be a teacher.

Dr Shaun Ruggunan

Comments from the Audience

Congratulations for making yourself vulnerable, much of the problem we have as academics is to acknowledge our vulnerability and we thus fail to bring about our creativity

Dr Rubby Dhunpath

Refreshing! There is a need for us to have a more public discourse; how do we as individual academics allow the support and engage with management?

Dr Gopal

PLENARY SESSIONS

PLENARY SESSION 1 (09h45-10h45) - ACADEMIC MONITORING AND SUPPORT: A STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE AT UKZN

Plenary Panel Discussion Facilitated by: Dr Angela James (HUM)

Panelists: Angeline Stephens (HUM), Prim Naidoo (LMS), Roshanthi Subrayen (HUM) and Urisha Naidoo (CHS)

Student: Mr Sabelo Mavundla: School of Education

The first plenary session of the day was chaired by Dr Angela James from the School of Education. In this session, a final year BEd student chronicled his experiences of university life; his challenges with transitioning and the support he did or did not receive from the institution. In his presentation, Mr Sabelo Mavundla called for programmes which integrated the academic, social and economic aspects of student life. He also argued that orientation was key in helping students adjust to university life and that academics must be actively involved in the development of students; they must encourage students to attend tutorial sessions, encourage things like group work, and discourage things like racial division in the classroom. The following key questions were addressed by a panel consisting of AMS practitioners, student counsellors and staff from the disability unit:

1. What mechanisms need to be put in place to support students from orientation to completion of degree?
2. How do we monitor the progress of the student?
3. What mechanisms do we have in place for the academic and social transitioning of students from rural schools to University?

The following emerged from the discussion:

- It is important to recognise the transition challenges that students face.
- It is also important to understand student diversity, where they are coming from and to be sensitive to the issue of disabilities in order to make it easier for such students to progress.
- Academic and psycho-social support should not be limited to first year students, but should also extend to the second and third year.
- Educational, social as well as psychological adjustments are all needed, and mechanisms need to be put in place to provide assistance.
- All the departments at the university need to be developed and supported and well equipped to assist the students.
- Community and parental involvement is needed to assist students with transition challenges.
- Academics and AMS staff needs to be positive and also tell students that they can do it.

Comments from the Audience

Is it a question of underprepared students or underprepared institutions? Food for thought!!

Nokwanda Mazibuko

This is an alienating experience for some of the students; most of our teaching is decontextualized, we must ask ourselves how do we humanise and democratise our institution?

Prof A Sheik

AMS should perhaps be more proactive - the robot system has a negative effect because it already makes the students feel like they are underperformers, like something is wrong with them. Let us learn from students.

Ms S. Mngomezulu

Major Conclusions from the Session

The university needs to:

- Provide social skills empowerment
- Create appropriate learning environments
- Listen to students
- Engage all stakeholders; develop tangible ways of assisting students

PAPER PRESENTATIONS (11h00 -12h40)

The paper presentations were organised around the following themes:

- Beyond Academic Development
- Tutorials, assessment and performance,
- Psycho-social and environmental factors
- Linguistic and literary factors
- AMS praxis

A total of 19 papers were presented. Eight of the presentations were from academics in the College of Humanities. The College of Law and management Studies had seven presentations, while the Colleges of Health Sciences and Agriculture, Engineering and Science had two and one presentations, respectively. One presentation was from an academic from the Durban University of Technology.

PLENARY SESSION 2 (12h40-13h20) - CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON TUTORIAL PROVISIONING

Plenary Panel Discussion Facilitated by: Dr Rubby Dhunpath

Panelists: Professor Kriben Pillay, College Dean T&L (LMS), Kishore Gobardan; Director Professional Services (HUM), Professor Phil Stegen; Academic Coordinator (LMS), Kelvin Thomas; School Operations Manager (HUM)



Plenary Session Panelists - Tutorial Provisioning

The second plenary session focused on tutorial provisioning in the university. The discussion was centred on three main questions:

1. What is your understanding of the function of tutorials in undergraduate programmes?
2. How are tutorials designed and operationalized in your context?
3. What are the strengths and challenges regarding the offerings of tutorials in your context?

1. What is your understanding of the functions of tutorials? What are your challenges of the tutorials?

The panel's response was that tutorials are meant to build on a body of knowledge and for students to ask questions about problematic content areas. Students come from diverse backgrounds and academic skills do not necessarily come naturally. Tutorials allow them to think in-depth and those students who are afraid to ask questions in larger classes, are under less pressure in smaller groups. However, the class sizes in some of the disciplines, which are often too large, diminish the value of the tutorial. This was also linked to the issue of funding. It was also raised that there is perhaps a need to look at use of technology to deal with both large class sizes and issues of funding.

2. How are tutorials designed and operationalized in your context?

There is extensive use of tutorials in the discipline of Accounting. In 2014, there were 170 tutorial groups with 50 tutors. Each tutorial group had approximately 40 students. The lecturers are actively involved in the tutorials and they meet once a week with the tutors. The tutors are mainly 3rd and 4th year students and rarely past students. The tutorials are organised around the lectures, and the problems given during the tutorials are marked and students are provided with solutions. Based on general observations of students during the tutorial sessions, it was acknowledged that students do benefit from applying knowledge during the tutorials. Extensive analysis of the tutorial data in terms of pass rates and student satisfaction/engagement needs to be done to ascertain the efficacy of this programme. There are also plans to make two types of tutorials compulsory in the discipline; one to engage with content and another focusing on developing pervasive/professional skills.

3. Challenges in tutorial provisioning

A concern was raised that the teaching and development grant was being used in some colleges to fund tutorials. Professor Kriben Pillay indicated that this should be funded from mainstream funds. It was also raised that the grant is not certain from the end of 2016, raising a major concern for the future of tutorials in these colleges where TDG is currently being used. Professor Pillay also indicated that tutorials used to be compulsory in the university and that in some disciplines tutorials are being offered without any pedagogical efficacy. In these disciplines, tutorials groups are as large as between 60-100 students. Other challenges raised included the following:

- Setting up tutorials (admin intensive)
- Method of choosing tutors – good students do not necessarily equal good tutors
- Lack of training for tutors – this was identified as essential and that a model of training tutors should be developed and rolled out to the University
- Reporting lines for tutors and ADOs should be made clearer
- Make tutorials compulsory to increase throughput

GROUP DISCUSSIONS (14h00-15h00)

TOPIC: INSTITUTIONALISING ACADEMIC MONITORING AND SUPPORT

Chairs: Prof Kriben Pillay (LMS); Prof Bala Pillay, (AES); Prof Nobuhle Hlongwa (HUM) and Dr Frasia Oosthuizen (HS)

For this session, the delegates were organised into four small groups based on the Colleges they belonged to. The College Dean of Teaching and Learning for each college chaired each small group discussion. The aim of the discussions was to answer the following critical questions:

1. How is AMS practised in your College currently?
2. To what extent are the AMS practises successful/ unsuccessful?
3. How do we move to institutionalize AMS in your College?

The resolutions from each small group discussion were reported back in the Feedback Plenary Panel Discussion.



Professor Mubangizi during a Question and Answer Session

FEEDBACK FROM THE FOUR GROUPS (15h00-16h00):

Towards a Policy Framework for Harmonizing Key Roles and Responsibilities for AMS Personnel at UKZN

Chair: Dr Rubby Dhunpath

College of Humanities

The Office of the Dean of Teaching and Learning is responsible for Academic Monitoring and Support. However, there are also other units within the College, such as Student Support Services, Student Academic Affairs, etc. There are AMS Coordinators on all three campuses (PMB, Edgewood and Howard College).

- Coordinators target students who have already been identified as AT RISK, ON PROBATION, etc.
- Mentors are introduced to students during orientation and thereafter assigned to mentors.
- Each academic staff member has a responsibility to monitor students taking their particular module.
- The robot system is in place but it is reactive instead of proactive.
- A reporting template is used, which is specific to the College, consisting of 18 criteria.
- This reporting template is used to rate the College's performance.
- Once a module obtains a pass rate of less than 80%, lecturers need to write a report explaining why there has been a low pass rate in that particular module.
- There is also provision of Saturday classes or tutorials to further assist underperforming and struggling students within the College.

Student Support Services

- Provides one-on-one counselling. A learning enhancement checklist can also be utilized on request.
- Provides group-based activities
- Exam preparation sessions
- Support of the AMS personnel

Challenges

- There is lack of communication between mainstream academics and AMS personnel.
- Academic staff should receive a list of students on the AMS program so that they too can provide adequate support to these students.
- Academic Development Officers and other individuals involved in the Academic Monitoring and Support Program are not permanent but are on contract, which proves to be a challenge.
- There is a lack of proper collaboration within the College for students to benefit from the AMS program. Hence, for AMS to be successful and beneficial for students, collaboration is a necessity.

Recommendations:

- Mentors should continue assisting students throughout the entire year, rather than concluding their duties after orientation.
- Academic Development Officers should be centralized, rather than having them in different schools. This will make the monitoring process much simpler.
- Everyone needs to be clear about their roles within the Schools/Colleges.

- For AMS to be efficient and effective it needs to be multi-dimensional. Therefore, there is a need for all stakeholders to understand their roles within the College/School.
- There is also a need for a rationale as to why we do what we do, rather than doing things just for the sake of getting them done.
- There is also a need for Colleges to come and work together collaboratively towards one common goal.
- For students with disabilities, involving them means pushing the boundaries for networking to provide these students with relevant support.
- Academic Development Officers need to be proactive instead of reactive.

College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science – Academic Monitoring and Support

Supplemental Instruction is offered in the College. The SI program is working quite well and the pass rates have increased. In terms of attendance, there are too many students that attend SI sessions than can be accommodated. SI sessions are offered in 1st, 2nd and 3rd year level courses and there are additional programs put in place for post graduate students.

- Other approaches used in the College are curriculum advice, research, one-on-one counselling, etc.
- Roles and responsibilities of AMS practitioners and Student Support services are clearly identified, so there is no duplication of roles and responsibilities in the College.
- The learning enhancement checklist is used to identify barriers to academic success. It identifies 9 areas, e.g. problems in lectures such as lecture settings, sound, etc. to facilitate appropriate engagement within the class environment/setting, etc. The LEC is compulsory for all students 'At Risk'.
- There is a huge uptake for student support services to the extent that the student counsellors cannot cope with the demand. A lot of work is being done in the residences through life skills programmes. Students get to know us and the services we offer.

Challenges

- Low uptake of academic counselling and workshop sessions by 'At Risk' students.

College of Health Sciences

The College of Health Sciences uses an integrated holistic program which is proactive and structured. A multidimensional profiling model is used to identify potential risk factors that could impact on academic success. This is done online and the online participation rate is 91%. This online profile immediately identifies risk factors rather than the traditional method that waits for poor student performance. Other programmes include;

- Peer-wellness mentoring in the residences.
- Academic mentoring is offered in the College two evenings per week.
- A living and learning program is offered on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. This program is extended into difficult modules.
- Interventions for special groups are also available
- Clinical Medicine Students also have the opportunity of participating in programs that have now been extended to 4th and 5th year students.

Challenges

- There is an assumption that the teaching and learning portfolio is responsible for success.
- There is a need for consistency and equity of support.
- There is also a need for reflection on best practices.
- The importance of encouraging academics to be more creative should not be ignored.

College of Law and Management Studies

Academic Support is offered through the ADO/ADC initiative. The Academic Development Officers are senior (postgraduate) students and staff appointed to provide support within particular disciplines. They are concerned with identifying underperforming (Risk, Probation) students early and offering them mentoring support, content support and study skills academic counselling. In addition, their mentorship and academic services are extended to the first year cohort (Green students) to encourage a proactive approach that seeks to prevent underperformance and academic failure.

Recommendations

- First year students should come in two weeks before the semester begins to attend workshops on time management skills, computer literacy and referencing.
- Proactivity is key rather than the use of a remedial way/method.
- Time management skills, referencing, how to access e-mails, computer literacy, etc. are some of the skills our first year students have to be taught.
- Academic Monitoring and Support interventions need to be timetabled.
- Teaching and learning utilizes a three-pronged learning approach.

CONCLUDING REMARKS FROM THE PANEL DISCUSSION ON INSTITUTIONALISING ACADEMIC MONITORING AND SUPPORT

- Integration of support services is essential. Academic Monitoring and Support needs to be integrated into the broader teaching and learning core curriculum.
- De-stigmatization of Academic Monitoring and Support is fundamental (a possible research topic).
- The South African Assessment of Student Engagement (SAASE) is to be implemented next year (2015). In particular, focus will be given to 1st year student engagement.
- There should be a shift of focus from 'AT RISK' students to 'AT RISK' modules.
- Removal of stigmatization will allow anyone having difficulty with these challenging modules to make use of AMS services.

Questions/Suggestions:

- Should residences be allocated according to Colleges or Schools so that the AMS programmes can be run efficiently and easily?

Additional Recommendations:

- A one-size fits all is not the solution, hence, there is a need for stability in all Colleges. This means that Academic Support should not be a separate entity.
- Early student profiling, which is currently being done in the College of Health Sciences may be a viable/feasible solution.
- There is a possibility of cascading the Colleges' Academic Monitoring and Support Programmes to University residences.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS OF THE DAY'S PROCEEDINGS AND A WAY FORWARD

A critical reflection of the day's proceedings was provided by Professor Mershen Pillay from the College of Health Sciences.

College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science

1. The work of an ADO needs to be clarified, what works and what does not work and how to improve.
2. The supplemental instruction programme seems to be working, but the students who really need the assistance are reluctant to make use of the provision and some only go towards examinations.
3. Student counselling is done by ADOs and other AMS staff. They do collaborate so that they do not duplicate the work that is done.

Areas of Improvement

1. There is need to profile students when they come into the university so they can get assistance before they become "at risk".
2. Interventions should be proactive.
3. Marketing of AMS programmes needs to improve -- this should be done at the beginning of the year.
4. Profiling of students before or after their first tests and start offering assistance to the ones that need it at the time

College of Health Sciences

1. The College has a proactive online system that profiles students at the beginning of the year.
2. This profiling system covers student issues such as success and social issues and focuses on the individual learner's strength and weaknesses
3. There is a 91% participation rate on the online profiling system
4. The system has red flags that identify a number of issues such as stress, low self-esteem etc.
5. There is also academic mentoring that takes place after hours in the students' residences.
6. There is a living and learning programme that takes place after hours weekly at the residences.
7. Academic mentoring is provided throughout all levels of study, even for the senior students.

Areas of Improvement

1. Integration of all the AMS programmes
2. Academics need to be involved and assist to promote AMS

College of Humanities

1. AMS needs to start when students come; they need to meet their mentors at the beginning of the year before they even go to their first lecturers.
2. ADOs identify the students who are likely to be at risk they are identified if they miss test or a submission there is a red flag that identifies them
3. ADOs and coordinators are contract staff-
4. More collaboration is needed between the different AMS practitioners.

College of Law and Management Studies

1. AMS interventions should be more proactive rather than relying on the robot system
2. Interventions should be time tabled so that students will know well in advance what is happening and when
3. Collaborative approaches that involve teaching and learning, the students as well as the Academics would work much better.
4. There is need to remove the stigma that AMS is a problem based programme.

In concluding his critical reflections, Professor Mershen Pillay noted that it was clear that the University had good policies on AMS. However, there was a need to ensure that these are enforced. He also alluded to the need to look into the modules that are considered “difficult” and have high failure rates rather than the students who are ‘at risk’.

KEY RESOLUTIONS

1. There is a lack of coherence in the various AMS activities, even within the same College. There is need for clarity in role definition and responsibilities of AMS practitioners.
2. Tutorials should be made compulsory and these should be funded from the mainstream budget.
3. There is need for stability; AMS should not be marginal to mainstream teaching, and all stakeholders need to be involved.
4. Student profiling at the beginning of the year works better than the robot system. This should be cascaded into other Colleges.
5. UTLO will be offering a data analytics course in 2015 where 20 academics and support staff will be trained. These academics will look into the top 10 gateway courses in the University, exploring the factors contributing to success or failure in these courses.