

Helping hand to the student to prevent failure- The process, initiative and strategies to help at-risk students in the first year of their academic program in Occupational Therapy

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Introduction: The first year Academy (FYA) is an initiative of Stellenbosch University to improve the success rate of first-year students. The initiative was implemented in 2007 and the assessment of students within the early days of the academic programme was introduced to identify students that might be at risk cases in certain modules. Research has shown that a large component of students who do not achieve success in the first year have often struggling in the first few weeks at university. With the early identification of these students that would most likely need additional support, timely assistance can be provided and their chances of success may improve.

Objective: As lecturer and class coordinator responsible for the administration and well being of the first year students I was tasked to develop strategies to handle the early assessment process and suggest action plans to provide support for the students at risk.

Description: The test results was used from all the modules and the students with a performance of under 50% was identified as at risk students. The following underlying factors to academic performance was explored namely the student, the lecturer and the content of the module. Informal interviewing and questionnaires was used with the at-risk student to identify concerns from the student's perception of factors contributing to their academic performance.

The question papers and answers was used in the discussions with all the lecturers involved . The information of the students and lecturer perceptions of the barriers was used to establish action plans to support the at risk student. Feedback was obtained at the end of the year from the students and lecturers.

Results: The results will be presented of the perception of the barriers to learning from the student and lecturers perspective and the different actions plans implemented.

Conclusion: The performance of the 2008 first year students improved. The students found the whole process valuable and necessary. The students could identify correctly what their barriers to learning were but took no initiative to solve them.

Contribution: From sharing the mistakes and success we had in the implementation of action plans I hope to enable other lecturers with their challenge to help at risk student.