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**STAY ON TRACK**

**Mind the Gap**

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY

# Introduction

The purpose of this brochure is to give prospective university students who are currently learners at West Rand High School, and their parents, information on some of the most common challenges that cause students in their first year of study to drop out or to underperform. A student who understands what these challenges are, and how they can best be overcome, has a better chance of succeeding at university.

In a recent study by Stellenbosch University (van Broekhuizen, 2016), only 62% of students who had enrolled for degrees at South African universities in 2008, completed their degrees by 2014. 30% had dropped out, and the remaining 8% were still trying to complete their degrees after six years.

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# Choosing the right course

Choosing a degree course is not something that should be undertaken lightly. Aside from the more important fact that it affects the rest of your life, it can also be difficult for a student to meet the demands of a degree course if that student is not really motivated to have a career in the field in question.

## Open days

The first step, therefore, is to get a good sense of the various degree courses available, and the types of careers they make possible. University websites are a good place to start, but open days allow parents and students to consult directly with lecturers involved. The following table contains a schedule of the various open days at local universities in 2018:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **University** | **Campus location** | **Faculties** | **Date** | **Time** |
| UFS | Bloemfontein | All | 12 May 2018 | 9:00-15:00 |
| Qwaqwa | All | 26 May 2018 | 9:00-15:00 |
| UJ | Johannesburg | All | 30 Jul 2018 | 11:00-14:00 |
| UP | Pretoria, Prinshof | Health Sciences | 09 Mar 2018 | 14:00-17:00 |
| Pretoria, Onderstepoort | Veterinary Science | 10 Mar 2018 | 8:00-13:00 |
| Pretoria, Hatfield | Other | 30 Sep 2018 | 7:00-14:00 |
| UW | Braamfontein | All | 28 Jan 2018 | 9:00-15:00 |

Table 1: Open days at selected universities

Parents and students who can either offer transport to other students, or who require transport to any of these open days, are encouraged to fill out the slip included in [Appendix A](#Appendix_A) at the end of the document, and return it to Mrs Crawford in room 4-14.

## Job shadowing

### What it is

Job shadowing entails a student spending a day at work with an older person whose current occupation is in the field of work that the student is considering. The student has the opportunity to discuss the nature of the work in that field, but the student also simply follows the person around as he or she works for the day. In this way, the student gets a very good sense of what an average work day in the given field entails. South African schools do not generally facilitate job shadowing experiences, and nor are South African companies generally familiar with the practice. For that reason, it might be necessary for a student to arrange a day of job shadowing privately.

### Job shadowing pilot programme

West Rand High School is launching a pilot programme to facilitate job shadowing days in 2018. Parents who are willing to be ‘shadowed’ for a day, and students who would like to ‘shadow’, are encouraged to contact the school secretary Mrs Maluleka for further information.

## Intelligence, aptitude, interest

Many parents insist that their children choose a career that seems lucrative, or that is associated with high social status. However, forcing a student into such a career by no means guarantees either success or happiness for the student. A career must match not only a student’s level of intelligence and his or her aptitudes, but the student’s interests.

## Personality traits: the Big Five

Though psychology has long recognised personality traits as a major predictor of student success in a degree programme, these traits are comparatively little known and little used as such a predictor among parents and students.

In predicting whether a student would be successful in any particular career, students’ personalities are commonly analysed by considering how the student relates to the ‘Big Five’ or the ‘OCEAN’ personality traits (Digman,JM, 2018):

***Steven says ... ***

At the end of Matric I had met the requirements for a degree in Accountancy. My uncle is a very wealthy and respected Chartered Accountant, and my parents hoped that I would follow in his footsteps. The problem was that I had never wanted to be an accountant. Since I was a little boy, I had always wanted to become a chef. I wanted my own restaurant, where my friends and I could experiment with flavours and textures and exotic ingredients, and where I could feed an endless stream of happy customers.

I knew that I could make a decent living as a chef – the fact that it would not make me rich did not bother me in the least. I dropped out in my third year of studying Accountancy, because the degree was incredibly demanding, and my heart just wasn’t in it. I now wish I had insisted on following my passion right from the start.

* Openness: how intellectually curious a person is, and how much novelty and variety a person prefers.
* Conscientiousness: how disciplined, organised and achievement-oriented a person is.
* Extraversion: how sociable, assertive and talkative a person is.
* Agreeableness: how helpful, cooperative, and sympathetic a person is.
* Neuroticism: a person’s level of emotional stability, impulse control, and anxiety.

Each of these traits impact a student’s suitability for a range of careers. For example, a person who is highly intelligent might be capable of formulating very convincing courtroom defences, but if such a person is also highly agreeable and neurotic, then he or she might find the constant confrontation in a moot court or a real courtroom far too stressful to ever be happy or successful.

# Time management

The transition to university means an overall larger workload than in high school, but it also involves radical changes in routine and responsibility. There are no ‘demerits’ for not doing your homework of for missing a lecture, and no sanctions imposed for not performing at your best. In short, you are mostly left to your own devices, and it is very much ‘up to you’ whether you will make a success of things or not.***To graduate or not to graduate?*** Jump to the table Enrolments and Graduations for a picture of the harsh reality.



## Failing to plan and planning to fail

School classes typically follow shortly on one another, ending just after midday, with a single break for learners in the middle of the morning. Often there is also one other break at around lunchtime. University lectures, on the other hand, are typically dispersed throughout the day, starting as early as 7:30am and ending after 5:00pm. Free periods are randomly interspersed in between lectures. (Nor are free periods really ‘free’ in the accepted sense of the word – frequently they are taken up with flying visits to the library, catching up with prescribed reading or tutorial work, or swotting for a test in the next session.)

The tables on the next page show the differences between a typical school and university timetable. Note especially the ’disorganised’ structure of the university program, and the longer times: university lecture are usually an hour long, compared to school periods of around 40 minutes. There is also no designated Assembly period for the entire student body.

Table 2: Typical High School Timetable

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Typical High School Timetable** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | **8:00- 8:40** | | **8:40- 9:20** | | **9:20- 10:00** | | **10:00- 10:40** | | **10:40- 11:20** | | **11:20- 12:00** | | **12:00- 12:40** | | **12:40- 13:20** | | **13:20- 14:00** |
| **Mon** | Assembly | History | | CAT | | CAT | | Break | | Math | | Math | | Nat Sc | | History | |
| **Tues** | Nat Sc | LO | | History | | EMS | | EMS | | English | | EMS | | English | |
| **Wed** | English | EMS | | Math | | Math | | Nat Sc | | Nat Sc | | CAT | | History | |
| **Thurs** | EMS | Math | | CAT | | LO | | History | | Nat Sc | | English | | Nat Sc | |
| **Fri** | Assembly | History | | CAT | | CAT | | English | | English | | Math | | EMS | |

Table 3: Typical University Timetable

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Typical University Timetable** | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | **7:30- 8:30** | **8:30- 9:30** | **9:30- 10:30** | **10:30- 11:30** | **11:30- 12:30** | **12:30- 13:30** | **13:30- 14:30** | **14:30- 15:30** | **15:30- 16:30** | **16:30- 17:30** |
| **Mon** | JPO 112 | EBN 111 |  | | CHM 171 |  | WTW 158 | NMC 113 |  | MGC 110 |
| **Tues** | WTW 158 |  | JPO 112 | CHM 171 |  | | | EBN 111 |  | NMC 113 |
| **Wed** | NMC 113 | CHM 171 | MGC 110 | HAS 110 | JPO 112 |  | EBN 111 |  | WTW 158 |  |
| **Thurs** |  | CHM 171 |  | | EBN 111 | NMC 113 |  | | MGC 110 | WTW 158 |
| **Fri** | MGC 110 |  | JPO 112 | WTW 158 | HAS 110 | CHM 171 |  | EBN 111 | NMC 113 |  |

## Getting the balance right

Because the lectures themselves are both longer and more demanding than school classes, and because free periods are unsupervised, it becomes very tempting for students to spend every free period as they would spend breaks at school; in socialising or relaxing. Homework and studying then has to be done at home, late at night. This soon creates a vicious circle of having to work through the night to get homework and studying done, and being tired and therefore inefficient and unwilling to work during free periods on campus.

The problem is compounded by the fact that many students begin living on their own once they start their tertiary education. This in itself entails a far greater number of demands on the students’ time away from campus: shopping for groceries, cooking meals, doing laundry.

## Supervising yourself

University students typically complete a much larger portion of their assignments and preparation for class without any supervision, and this means that, to succeed, students must be capable of managing their own time responsibly and effectively. In school, work is either done in class, under the supervision of a teacher, or it is done at home, under the supervision of a parent. At University, some work might be done in lectures and practical sessions, but most of it has to be done outside lecture hours, either in a laboratory or study centre on campus, in the student’s new home – in a residence or commune. None of these spaces are supervised. First year students are often not disciplined enough to use all this unsupervised time efficiently.

**Positive peer pressure**

When groups of students sharing a residence arrange to study together (or at least study at the same time), this assists in the students’ discipline, as it reminds the student to study regularly, and creates peer pressure to do so.

## Better study methods: Working smarter, not harder

The greater demands on their time might also make it necessary for students to consider study methods that are more time-efficient than the ones they used in high school. In this regard, it might be useful for a student to establish his or her preferred learning style, and a wider range of available study methods. A separate document which contains information on a Study Methods Talk that will be presented at the school by a specialist in the field, has been e-mailed to all families. Please consider registering for this event, as it is bound to be of immense benefit both to prospective students and to their parents.

# Not-so-great expectations

University simultaneously offers less support and supervision, and expects students to deliver work of a radically higher standard than in high school. This means that, when students make the transition from high school to university, both the students and their parents must adjust their expectations regarding the amount of time that the students need to spend studying and completing assignments, and the marks that the students are likely to obtain.

The table below shows the university enrolments versus the actual graduations for the 2008 matric cohort (2009 – 2014), by university.

| **University** | **Undergraduate Enrolments** | **Undergraduate Degree Enrolments** | **Undergraduate Graduations** | **Undergraduate Degree Graduations** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| CPUT | 5589 | 1754 | 2867 | 1140 |
| CUT | 3115 | 1077 | 1352 | 571 |
| DUT | 5783 | 1011 | 2969 | 620 |
| MUT | 2603 | 94 | 1264 | 66 |
| NMMU | 4524 | 2542 | 2298 | 1447 |
| NWU | 5988 | 5575 | 3611 | 3504 |
| RHODES | 1063 | 1063 | 572 | 572 |
| TUT | 11292 | 2068 | 4617 | 989 |
| UCT | 2877 | 2835 | 1865 | 1846 |
| UFH | 1372 | 1361 | 753 | 750 |
| UFS | 4191 | 4111 | 2144 | 2139 |
| UJ | 13242 | 7741 | 6050 | 3783 |
| UKZN | 6869 | 6844 | 4081 | 4068 |
| UL | 3229 | 3218 | 1894 | 1885 |
| UNISA | 24212 | 12867 | 2762 | 1437 |
| UNIVEN | 1320 | 1305 | 733 | 725 |
| UP | 7431 | 7381 | 4295 | 4256 |
| US | 3544 | 3536 | 2430 | 2413 |
| UWC | 3122 | 3091 | 1379 | 1363 |
| UZ | 2623 | 1944 | 1485 | 1102 |
| VUT | 4614 | 643 | 1990 | 444 |
| WITS | 4822 | 4815 | 2202 | 2195 |
| WSU | 3979 | 1215 | 1878 | 679 |
| **Totals** | **127,404** | **78,091** | **55,491** | **37,994** |

Table 4: Enrolments and Graduations

The tables supplies the breakdown for each university, but it is important also to get the ‘big picture’. Have a look at the chart below, which shows the percentage of learners from the matric class of 2008 who actually graduated, as opposed to the enrolments.

## Students’ expectations

The leap to university standards (and the usual drop in marks) can be very demoralising. This in turn might leave a student anxious and demotivated, leading to even lower marks. For this reason, it is important that students and their parents both keep a healthy perspective regarding their marks.

## Parents’ expectations

It is generally recognised that students’ performance can suffer when parents put too much pressure on them to perform. Another common problem is that, when students are the first members of their families to attend university, their parents often do not realise how much support the students require while attending university. Parents who have no experience of university themselves can easily assume that the demands of university are similar to those of high school. They might assume that their children should therefore continue to spend more or less as much time on study and assignments as they did at school, and that they should also continue to receive the same kind of marks. In such cases, it is often helpful to allow parents to peruse the marks (often published anonymously) of the larger student body, or to set up a meeting between parents and lecturers. Introducing them to the parents of fellow students might also help matters.

## Unexpected expenses

Tuition and accommodation fees alone are not a good indication of the full expenses involved in studying. Tuition fees generally do not include textbooks, lab equipment, materials required for projects, stationery, or printing credits. The solution is to get a very careful estimate of the additional costs in advance, and to investigate alternatives before making a big purchase. For example, used text books are often sold privately, at discounted prices.

Likewise, when students begin to live on their own, it is safer to use a conservative estimate of what their cost of living will be. The cheapest meals might not be nutritious enough to fuel their demanding new study programme, and the cheapest transport might not be timeous or reliable enough to get them to class on time.

**Appendix A**

**OPEN DAY TRANSPORT  
For attention: Mrs Crawford, Room 4-14**

Name:

Surname:

Cell phone number:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**TRANSPORT**

Require transport for (no. of learners):

**OR**

Offering transport for (no. of learners):

**INSTITUTION**

Attending the open day of (specify institution)

On (specify date)

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