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REPORT ON STUDENT DROPOUT IN 2007 AT TUT

Report prepared by

Dr J F van Koller

Strategic Management Support

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**1. Introduction**

For the last few years TUT has been pestered by a number of staff strikes at the beginning of each year. Most of those strikes coincided with the student registration periods at TUT.

It also became noticeable that TUT annually suffers huge numbers of student dropout. Although the issue of student dropout is not something unique to TUT, since it happens at all higher education institutions, the question arose whether the continued annual staff strikes did not also contribute to the number of students dropping outs each year. It was within this context that a research project was launched with one of its aims to ascertain to what extent staff strikes had any impact on annual student dropout numbers. The research project also aimed at determining all other reasons for student dropouts.

This document contains the report which was prepared after completion of a research project which was aimed at determining to what extent the staff strike of 2007 played a role in the student dropout of the same year. The report includes a number of conclusions and recommendations aimed at countering the dropout numbers at TUT.

**1.1 Problem statement**

The main problem which the research project attempted to resolve was the question of: Was the 2007 staff strike at TUT a major contributing factor towards the dropout of students from TUT during that year?

**1.2 Aims of research**

The main aim of this research project was to determine whether the staff strike at the beginning of 2007 had any significant impact on the number of students who have dropped out of TUT during the same year. The second aim was to establish what the main reasons were for the dropout, if not the staff strike.

**1.3 Research methodology**

The research methodology was mainly quantitative of nature. A questionnaire consisting of a total of 11 questions was sent out to all students who reportedly dropped out of TUT in 2007. Most of the questions had subsections. The list of questions is attached to this report. Of the 3 338 questionnaires which were delivered, only 224 were returned and eventually only 217 or 6.5% could be analysed.

Total sent out: 3 500

Total delivered: 3 338

Total not delivered: 162

Total returned (completed): 224

Percentage returned (completed): 224 = 6.7% of 3338

Total spoiled: 7

Total analysed: 217

Percentage analysed: 217 = 6.5% of 3338

The returned questionnaires were analysed per question. Since the main part of the questionnaire was quantitative of nature, the responses were quantified.

**2. Findings**

The researcher is aware of some of the shortcomings of questionnaires as a source for data gathering. Such shortcomings among others include aspects such as: possible ambiguity of questions; wrong interpretations due to limited language proficiency of respondents; questions not allowing space for respondents to explain the reasons or context for their responses; the language and level of the language used in the questionnaire, and so forth. For that reason the researcher is mindful that there is an element of error that should be taken into account and a particular effort was made to highlight questions which could have been misinterpreted because of some ambiguity in the way they were formulated.

The researcher also realizes that the low percentage of completed questionnaires could negatively affect the generalizability of the findings and conclusions reached in the report. For that reason, the researcher recommends that further, follow-up research be done on student dropout at TUT to verify the accuracy of these findings and conclusions.

It should also be noted that no comparison was drawn between undergraduate and postgraduate respondents since it became clear that the differences were very insignificant due to the low number of postgraduates who responded. In any case, the questionnaire was primarily intended for first-year newcomers to TUT, and it was not anticipated that there would be many postgraduates still busy with first year courses or who would have dropped out.

**2.1 Question 1: Why did you cancel/dropout?**

With regards to question 1, the following results were obtained: 63% (8 = 3.7% postgraduate) of the respondents indicated that they have dropped out from their studies due to financial reasons. The remaining 37% cited reasons such as health problems; wrong subject choice; failure of subjects; the fact that they only had one subject to pass; exclusion due to failure; the fact that lecturers did not explain the work sufficiently; lecturer incompetence and inconsistency; lecturer absence; wrong information and poor service/assistance from TUT; joining another institution; relocation to another province; staying in Polokwane but course not offered at TUT Polokwane campus; staff strikes; accommodation and transport problems.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Reasons for dropout** | **Total %** |
|  |
| Financial reasons | 63 |
| Health problems | 2.3 |
| Wrong subject choice | 3.7 |
| Failure of subjects | 5.2 |
| Only had one subject to pass | 0.5 |
| Exclusion due to failure | 4.2 |
| Lecturers did not explain the work sufficiently | 2.8 |
| Lecturer incompetence and inconsistency | 3.3 |
| Lecturer absence | 2.3 |
| Wrong information and poor service/assistance from TUT | 2.8 |
| Joining another institution | 0.9 |
| Relocation to/staying in another province | 0.9 |
| Accommodation problems | 3.7 |
| Transport problems | 2.3 |
| Staff strike | 2.3 |

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

Based on the above results, it becomes evident that the single main reason for student dropout in 2007 at TUT, was financial difficulties (63%). However, it is noteworthy that financial problems was not the only reason for student dropout, although be it the main reason. The other reasons given do not form substantial grounds which could be regarded as statistically significant. It is also significant to note that one of the smallest percentages (2.3%) indicated the staff strike of 2007 as a main reason for their dropout and only 0.9% of respondents indicated that they have left TUT to join another institution.

**2.2 Question 2: When in 2007 did you drop out of your studies? (Mark with an X)**

With regards to question 2, the following results were obtained: 59% of the respondents indicated that they have dropped out during the first term of 2007; 9.2% during the second term; 2.3% during the third term and 15.7% during the fourth term. 13.8% of the respondents did not indicate which term they have dropped out.

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

Based on the above findings, it seems as if the majority of respondents dropped out during the first term. The second and third terms showed a sharp decline in dropout, while the fourth terms showed a steep increase. The latter trend could be as a result of failure of examinations.

It is significant to note that the majority of respondents dropped out during the first term of 2007. It is during the first term that student registrations take place and also when staff strikes normally occur. However, based on the fact that only a small percentage of respondents indicated staff strikes as a reason for their dropout, there is no statistically significant correlation between staff strikes and the period of highest student dropout.

**2.3 Question 3: To what extent did the following factors contribute to your dropping out?**

**NB: For purposes of analysis of this question, responses such as “to quite some extent” and “to a great extent” have been grouped together to represent an affirmative answer while responses such as “not applicable”, “hardly at all” and “to a lesser extent” have been grouped together to represent a non-affirmation of the point.**

With regards to question 3, the following results were obtained:

* 1. Poor marks: 32.2% indicated that poor marks were a major factor which contributed to their dropout while 50.7% indicated that it did not contribute to their dropout. 17.1% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  2. Lack of motivation: 27.2% of respondents indicated that a lack of motivation was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 53.4% indicated that it did not contribute to their dropout. 19.4% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  3. Unfriendly campus atmosphere: 10.6% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 69.1% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 20.3% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  4. Incompetent lecturing staff: 12% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 67.7% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 20.3% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  5. Not able to fit in: 9.2% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 68.7 indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 22.1% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  6. Not enough money: 63.2% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 29.9% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 6.9% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  7. Accommodation problems: 32.7% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 51.2% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 16.1% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  8. Parental sickness/death: 13.8% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 66.8 indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 19.4% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  9. Socializing too much: 11.1% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 67.7 indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 21.2 of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  10. Wrong choice of course: 26.7% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 54.9% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 18.4% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  11. Change in circumstances: 25.8% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 53% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 21.2% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  12. Your ill health: 7.3% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 69.7% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 23% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  13. Transport problems: 22.1% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 60.4% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 17.5% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  14. Moved to different environment: 10.6% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 68.7% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 20.7 of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  15. Did not understand work: 15.3%of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 63.5% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 21.2% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  16. Course was too difficult: 18% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 61.7% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 20.3% of the respondents did not respond to this option.
  17. Others (specify): 4.1% of respondents indicated that this was a major factor which contributed to their dropout, while 1.9% indicated that it was not a major factor which contributed to their dropout. 94% of the respondents did not respond to this option. Of the 4.1% who indicated that it was a major contributing factor, provide quite diverse reasons. There were no particular themes detectable. These include responses such as:

“Not allowing repetition of course”

“Not allowed to continue”

“Campus facilities”

“Complications”

“Financial aid needed”

“NSFAS problems

“Residence orientation too long and physically straining”

“Classes never happened or when it happened it must have moved rooms without me knowing”

“Forced to do a course which I did not want to do and not being allowed to change the course”

“Too much strike”

“Lecturer missing classes”

“No money to change course”

“Too much theory”

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

From the 17 factors listed in the questionnaire, only the aspect of “not enough money” attained a clear majority of respondents (63%). This outcome also corresponds with the open-ended question 1, where the same percentage of respondents indicated that they have dropped out because of financial reasons. The second strongest contributing factor was “accommodation problems” (32.7%) and the third strongest contributing factor was “poor marks” (32.2%). The only other factors which achieved more than 20% support were the following: “lack of motivation” (27.2%); “wrong choice of course” (26.7); “change in circumstances” (25.8%) and “transport problems” (22.1%). It is thus fair to conclude, that although “not enough money” was the biggest contributing factor to student dropout in 2007, there were also a number of other relatively major factors which contributed to the dropout.

What is also noteworthy is that factors such as “unfriendly campus atmosphere” and “incompetent lecturing staff” scored among the lowest factors (10.6% and 12% respectively). This could be interpreted as an indication that the majority of respondents did not find the campus atmosphere to be unfriendly or that lecturing staff were incompetent.

**2.4 Question 4: Before you dropped out, did you ever seek assistance?**

With regards to question four (which only required a yes or no answer) the following results were obtained:

* Yes: 52.5%
* No: 46.6%
* No responses: 0.9%

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

From the results regarding question 4, it becomes evident that quite a large percentage of respondents (46.6%) never sought assistance before they decided to drop out from TUT. Possible reasons for that could be that they were not aware of the available sources of assistance, or that they did not deem those sources to be able to assist them. Could this be interpreted that the student/academic support services for struggling students are not sufficiently marketed to students, or not readily accessible to them?

**2.5 Question 5: If you answered yes to the above question, please indicate the extent to which the following services/persons/training modules helped you:**

**NB: For purposes of analysis of this question, responses such as “helped somewhat” and “helped a lot” were grouped together to represent an affirmative answer, while responses such as “did not use”, “no use” and “helped a bit” were grouped together to represent a non-affirmative response.**

With regards to question 5, the following results were obtained:

* 1. Career counselling: 11% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 36%% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 53 % did not respond.
  2. Study/learning methods: 22.1% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 21.7% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 56.2% did not respond.
  3. Reading/comprehension: 23% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 20.8% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 56.2% did not respond.
  4. Computer usage training: 18.8% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 23.1% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 58.1% did not respond.
  5. Extra classes: 14.8% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 28.1% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 57.1% did not respond.
  6. Language improvement: 23.5% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 20.3% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 56.2% did not respond.
  7. Life skills training: 15.2% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 26.7% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 58.1% did not respond.
  8. Library usage orientation: 28.6% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 16.1% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 55.3% did not respond.
  9. Preparation for tests/exams: 31.3% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 13.4% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 55.3% did not respond.
  10. Consulting with lecturers: 21.2% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 23.5% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 55.3% did not respond.
  11. Note taking skills training: 21.2% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 20.7% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 58.1% did not respond.
  12. Dealing with stress: 13% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 31.2% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 55.8% did not respond.
  13. Time management: 23.1% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 19.8% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 57.1% did not respond.
  14. Summarizing work: 29.5% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 14.7% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 55.8% did not respond.
  15. Planning to study effectively: 29% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 15.7% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 55.3% did not respond.
  16. Information literacy training: 20.3% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 22.1% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 57.6% did not respond.
  17. Writing skills: 25.8% of respondents indicated that this factor did help them with their studies while 16.6% of respondents indicated that this factor did not help them with their studies. 57.6% did not respond.
  18. Other (specify): 2.3% of respondents indicated that there were other factors which helped them with their studies while 5.5% of respondents indicated that there were no other factors which helped them with their studies. 92.2% did not respond. Of the 2.3% who have indicated that there were other factors which helped them with their studies, only three respondents indicated that financial assistance/aid helped them. The remaining responses were also very diverse (similar to the case in question 3) and included the following:

“Teamwork”

“Group discussion”

“Study group”

“Solution from a friend”

“Made an appeal letter to the dean”

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

Based on the results from question 5, it becomes clear that none of the available support services at TUT listed in the questionnaire, played any major supporting role towards the students. Only one source scored above 30% and that is the aspect of “preparation for tests/exams” (31.3%). The second highest scored support service was “summarizing work” (29.5%) and the third highest was “”planning to study effectively” (29%). Support services, which would logically be expected to have helped prospective dropouts a lot, such as “study/learning methods”; reading/comprehension, language improvement; consulting with lecturers; note taking skills, writing skills and information literacy training, scored but in the low 20s. The only other factor which scored in the high 20s was the aspect of “library usage orientation” (28.6%). A support services such as “career counselling”, scored very low (11%).

Based on the fact that only 52% of respondents consulted the available support services and based on the fact that none of the support services even scored close to 50%, it is logical to conclude that these support services did not make any substantial contribution towards assisting these dropout students. Could possible reasons for this non-utilization of support services be that the support services are not sufficiently visible at TUT, or that they are not readily accessible to students? Is for example a unit such as Student Development and Support (SDS) sufficiently visible and accessible?

**2.6 Question 6: What was your experience of TUT?**

**NB: For analysis purposes, responses such as “definitely” and “mostly” were grouped together to represent an affirmative answer, while responses such as “somewhat”, “hardly” and “not applicable” were grouped together to represent non-affirmative responses.**

With regards to question 6, the following results were obtained:

* 1. The teaching was good: 77.9% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 16.1% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 6% did not respond.
  2. I was given enough support by the institution: 44% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 40.5% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 15.2% did not respond.
  3. I got on well with other students: 79.8% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 8.7% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 11.5% did not respond.
  4. The workload was too heavy: 25,4% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 60.8% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 13.8% did not respond.
  5. I had trouble understanding the lecturers: 20.3% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 64.5% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 15.2% did not respond.
  6. I did the right course: 53% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 35.9% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 11.1% did not respond.
  7. The subject matter was difficult to learn: 17.1% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 68.2% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 14.7% did not respond.
  8. Too many students per class, no personal touch: 24% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 63.1% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 12.9% did not respond.
  9. The institution deserves its good name: 71.9% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 15.7% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 12.4% did not respond.
  10. The student advisory service was good: 50.3% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 35.9% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 13.8% did not respond.
  11. If you could start again would you come back to TUT?: 82% of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, while 13.4% of respondents indicated that they disagreed with this statement, and 4.6% did not respond.

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

The aspects which scored very high at this question were the following: “If you could start again, would you come back to TUT?” (82%); “I got on well with other students” (79.8%); “the teaching was good” (77.9%); “the institution deserves its good name” (71.9%). The second category which scored in the fifties included the following: “I did the right course” (53%); “the student advisory service was good” (50.3%). The aspects which scored the lowest were the following: “the subject matter was too difficult to learn” (17.1%); “I had trouble understanding the lecturer” (20.3%).

It is noteworthy that only 17.1% of respondents agreed with the statement of “the subject matter was difficult to learn” while 68.2% disagreed with this statement. Also the fact that only 24% of respondents felt that there were too many students per class, while 63.1% felt that it was not the case. It is thus fair to conclude that TUT course subject matter is not generally regarded as too difficult by students and that the size of classes does not actually contribute to student dropout.

It is also quite significant to note that 82% of dropouts would like to return to TUT. Based on the above results, it seems as if in general the majority of those who have dropped out still regard TUT as an esteemed institution and they would be happy to return to TUT if possible. This trend further confirms the findings from question 1 and 3 which indicates that financial problems were the main reason for dropping out and not any particular shortcomings from TUT as such.

**2.7 Question 7: If you dropped out because of the institution, tell us how the problem may be solved.**

With regards to question 7, the following results were obtained:

113 or 52% respondents completed this question. Only 11 of them (5%) (3 postgraduate and 8 undergraduate) indicated that they have dropped out because of the institution. Among the 113 respondents were 105 (48.3%) undergraduate and 8 (3.6%) postgraduate.

The bigger majority did not drop out because of the institution (102 or 47%), but made suggestions on how matters to prevent dropouts, could be improved. Most of the suggestions were individual and statistically insignificant. The only major suggestions which have drawn wide support were the following:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Recommendation** | **Total** |
| Students who have failed (including foundation courses) should be allowed back (given a second chance). | 17.1% |
| More bursaries and/or loans through NSFAS and more effective allocation of bursaries | 14.7% |

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

Based on the results it is very clear that a very small percentage of students (5%) dropped out of TUT because of the institution per se. Instead, it seems to be due to a number of factors which were not necessarily due to shortcomings of the institution.

The fact that a strong recommendation for improvement of TUT seems to be to allow students back who have failed, seems to suggest that either TUT’s re-admission policy is too harsh, or students are asking for repeated re-admission and no limits on the number of re-admissions. Also the recommendation for more bursaries and loans from NSFAS corresponds with what can be regarded as the main reason for dropouts, namely financial problems.

**2.8 Question 8: How much time did you spend in a typical week doing the following whilst at TUT?**

**NB: For analysis purposes, responses such as “quite a bit” and “a lot of time” were grouped together to represent an affirmative response while responses such as “not applicable”, “hardly any time” and “a little time” were grouped together to represent a non-affirmative response.**

With regards to question 8, the following results were obtained:

* 1. Preparing for class (study, reading, lab work, projects): 75.1% of respondents indicated that they did spent time on this activity while at TUT, while 16.6% indicated that they did not spend time on this activity while at TUT, and 8.3% did not respond.
  2. Working for pay on campus: 5.6% of respondents indicated that they did spent time on this activity while at TUT, while 76.9% indicated that they did not spend time on this activity while at TUT, and 17.5% did not respond.
  3. Working for pay off campus: 8.7% of respondents indicated that they did spent time on this activity while at TUT, while 71.9% indicated that they did not spend time on this activity while at TUT, and 19.4% did not respond.
  4. Taking part in co-curricular activities (sport, cultural, etc.): 14.4% of respondents indicated that they did spent time on this activity while at TUT, while 70.4% indicated that they did not spend time on this activity while at TUT, and 15.2% did not respond.
  5. Relaxing and socializing: 29.1% of respondents indicated that they did spent time on this activity while at TUT, while 55.7% indicated that they did not spend time on this activity while at TUT, and 15.2% did not respond.
  6. Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse): 20.8% of respondents indicated that they did spent time on this activity while at TUT, while 65.4% indicated that they did not spend time on this activity while at TUT, and 13.8% did not respond.
  7. Commuting to class (driving, bus, walking): 47.9% of respondents indicated that they did spent time on this activity while at TUT, while 36.4% indicated that they did not spend time on this activity while at TUT, and 15.7% did not respond.
  8. Studying for tests: 82.1% of respondents indicated that they did spent time on this activity while at TUT, while 7.8% indicated that they did not spend time on this activity while at TUT, and 10.1% did not respond.

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

The activities which received the highest score for this question include the following:

“studying for tests” (82.1%); preparing for class (75.1%) and Commuting to class (47%). It seems as if very few students worked for a salary on or off campus (5.6% and 8.7% respectively). Also a very small percentage of students seem to participate in co-curricular activities (14.4%). The only activities which scored in the 20s are “relaxing and socializing” (29.1%) and “providing care for dependents living with you” (20.8%).

Based on the above results, it seems fair to state that most respondents seem to have spent most of their time on the expected academic activities while they were still at TUT and not very much time on activities which did not contribute to their studies.

**2.9 Question 9: How have you used your time since you stopped attending classes?**

**For analysis purposes, responses such as “largely” and “some” have been grouped together to represent an affirmative response, while responses such as “a little” and “none” have been grouped together to represent non-affirmative answers.**

With regards to question 9, the following results were obtained:

* 1. Continued studying part-time/distance education: 21.7% of respondents indicated that they participated in this activity since dropping out from TUT, while 61.7% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in this activity since they have dropped out. 16.6% did not respond.
  2. Physically looked after family/friends: 24.9% of respondents indicated that they participated in this activity since dropping out from TUT, while 56.7% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in this activity since they have dropped out. 18.4% did not respond.
  3. Started my own business: 4.5% of respondents indicated that they participated in this activity since dropping out from TUT, while 76.1% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in this activity since they have dropped out. 19.4% did not respond.
  4. Joined another education institution full-time: 17.5% of respondents indicated that they participated in this activity since dropping out from TUT, while 66.8% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in this activity since they have dropped out. 15.7% did not respond.
  5. Lazed around: 13.8% of respondents indicated that they participated in this activity since dropping out from TUT, while 68.2% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in this activity since they have dropped out. 18% did not respond.
  6. Started a full-time job: 10.2% of respondents indicated that they participated in this activity since dropping out from TUT, while 69.5% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in this activity since they have dropped out. 20.3% did not respond.
  7. Worked part-time/contract: 29% of respondents indicated that they participated in this activity since dropping out from TUT, while 55.3% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in this activity since they have dropped out. 15.7% did not respond.
  8. Have been in ill-health: 6.9% of respondents indicated that they participated in this activity since dropping out from TUT, while 73.7% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in this activity since they have dropped out. 19.4% did not respond.
  9. Other (specify): 10.2% of respondents indicated that they participated in other activities from what was listed in the questions since dropping out from TUT, while 9.2% of respondents indicated that they did not participate in any other activities since they have dropped out. 80.6% did not respond. In the responses of the 10.2% who participated in other activities, one clear trend became evident. About 3.6% of them (8) indicated that they were “looking for a job” since they dropped out. The only other activities which received more than one response, was the aspect of “looking for bursaries” (2 = 0.9%), “doing piece jobs” (2 = 0.9%) and going on learner ships . The remainder of the responses were all very diverse and included the following responses:

“Getting a licence”

“Joined another institution part-time”

“Sitting without money to continue studies”

“Volunteering”

“Attending library”

“Applied for loans but with no success”

“Lack of support”

“Joint venture”

“Done a computer course”

“Apply for RAP house and assess the situation”

“I have tried to find an institution with a better NSFAS offer”

“Community skills training”

“Survival”

“Looking after the baby”

“Upgraded my Physical Science marks”

“Been seeking help”

“Marketing for a job or business”

“Stay at home” “Group 5 learner ship”

“Got my drivers licence”

“Preaching”

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

The activities which received the highest score for this question include the following:

Worked part-time/contract (29%); physically looked after family/friends (24.9%) and continue studying part-time/distance (21.7%). Only 17.5% indicated that they have joined another education institution, while 13.8% indicated that they were just lazing around at home. Very few dropouts seems to have managed to obtain jobs (10.2%) or start an own business (4.5%). What is interesting is that of the 10.2% who indicated that they participated in other activities, apart from those listed in the questionnaire, 3.6% of them indicated that they were looking for a job or a “piece job” (temporary one-day job) (0.9%). The rest of the “other” responses were very diverse and seem to represent individual opinions.

Based on the above results, it seems as if a very small percentage of the dropouts became involved in positive and constructive activities (e.g. continued studies or getting a job) which could positively contribute towards their future careers.

**2.10 Question 10: What are your plans for the immediate future?**

**For analysis purposes responses such as “yes now” and “yes later” were grouped together to represent affirmative answers, while responses such as “don’t know” and “no” were grouped together to represent non-affirmative responses.**

With regards to question 10, the following results were obtained:

* 1. Study full-time again: 71.9% of respondents indicated that they are planning to participate in this activity in future, while 18% of respondents indicated that they are not planning to participate in this activity in future. 10.1% did not respond.
  2. Work full-time: 57.5% of respondents indicated that they are planning to participate in this activity in future, while 23.1% of respondents indicated that they are not planning to participate in this activity in future. 19.4% did not respond. (Possible misunderstanding of question? Question a bit ambiguous, e.g. immediate future/later)
  3. Emigrate: 10.6% of respondents indicated that they are planning to participate in this activity in future, while 65.4% of respondents indicated that they are not planning to participate in this activity in future. 24% did not respond.
  4. Start own business: 39.7% of respondents indicated that they are planning to participate in this activity in future, while 37.3% of respondents indicated that they are not planning to participate in this activity in future. 23% did not respond.
  5. Laze around: 0.9% of respondents indicated that they are planning to participate in this activity in future, while 74.7% of respondents indicated that they are not planning to participate in this activity in future. 24.4% did not respond.
  6. Look after family/friends: 36.4% of respondents indicated that they are planning to participate in this activity in future, while 40.1% of respondents indicated that they are not planning to participate in this activity in future. 23.5% did not respond.
  7. Start part-time study/work: 56.7% of respondents indicated that they are planning to participate in this activity in future, while 25.8% of respondents indicated that they are not planning to participate in this activity in future. 17.5% did not respond.
  8. I have no idea: 5.1% of respondents indicated that they are planning to participate in this activity in future, while 62.2% of respondents indicated that they are not planning to participate in this activity in future. 32.7% did not respond. (Also a very ambiguous and vague question).
  9. Other (specify): 4.1% of respondents indicated that they are planning to participate in other activities from those listed in the question in future, while 3.7% of respondents indicated that they are not planning to participate in any other activities in future. 92.2% did not respond. Of the 4.1% who indicated that they are planning to participate in other activities, two clear trends became evident. Firstly, 2.8% (6) of the respondents indicated that they wanted to return to TUT in future, while secondly, 2.3% (5) indicated that they are planning to study part-time while working. One of the respondents (0.5%) was a postgraduate student. The remaining responses were very diverse and included the following:

“Travel the world”

“Apprentice”

“Provided I get money for food”

“Distance learning”

“If I can get money”

“Full-time preaching”

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

The three planned activities for the future which achieved the highest scores were all related to future study and work. They include: study full-time again (71.9%); work full-time (57.5%); start part-time study/work (56.7%). Two other planned activities also scored high. These are: start own business (39.7%) and look after family (36.4%). The three lowest scores were: emigrate (10.6%); I have no idea (5.1%) and laze around (0.9%).

With regard to “other” possible future plans apart from the ones listed in the questionnaire, which scored 4.1%, two clear trends emerged. The first was the fact that 2.8% indicated that they were planning to return to TUT in future and the second was that 2.3% of them indicated that they were planning to continue studying on a part-time basis, while working.

Based on the results it becomes clear that a large majority of dropouts are planning to continue with their studies either on a full-time or part-time basis. It is also interesting to note that many students still expressed loyalty towards TUT since they are planning to return to the institution in future.

**2.11 Question 11: Are you an under or post graduate student?**

With regards to question 11, the following results were obtained:

* Undergraduate: 75.6%
* Postgraduate: 6.9%
* No responses: 17.5%

**Discussion and conclusion(s)**

As to be expected the majority of students were undergraduates (75.6%). However, it is interesting to note the percentage of students who were at postgraduate level who also completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire was mainly intended for first-year newcomers to TUT. However, what probably happened was that some of these postgraduate students were students who only had one first-year subject to complete.

**2.12 Responses indicating strikes as a contributing factor**

Only five respondents (2.3%) indicated staff strikes to be a contributing factor to their dropping out. Of the five respondents, only one was at postgraduate level (0.5%).

The fact that strikes scored so low as a contributing factor to the dropping out of students from TUT, could be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, it could be argued that it was due to the fact that there was no specific question or option clearly mentioning strikes as a possible factor. On the other hand, it could be argued that the omission of strikes as a specific question or option in the questionnaire, helped to provide a very credible response, since it was only those respondents who really felt the effects of the strike negatively, who would have indicated it as a factor. It is however evident that the staff strike of 2007 did not have any real or noticeable impact on the number of student dropouts in 2007.

**3. Summary of conclusions**

Below is a list of the conclusions reached based on the results for each question and as indicated in section 2:

* It became evident that the single main reason for student dropouts in 2007 at TUT, was financial difficulties.
* It does not seem as if the staff strike of 2007 was a major contributing factor towards student dropouts.
* There does not seem to be any statistically significant link between the high percentage dropout in the first term of 2007 and the staff strike in the same year.
* It seems as if the student/academic/support services/mechanisms for struggling students are not sufficiently visible or not readily accessible or does not enjoy the trust of struggling students.
* It seems as if, in general, the majority of those who have dropped out still regard TUT as an esteemed institution and would like to return to TUT if possible.
* It seems as if either TUT’s re-admission policy is too harsh, or students are asking for repeated re-admission and no limits on the number of re-admissions despite failure of subjects/courses.
* It seems as if most respondents have spent most of their time on the expected academic activities while they were still at TUT and not much time on activities which did not contribute to their success.
* It seems as if a very small percentage of the dropouts became involved in positive and constructive activities (e.g. continued studies or getting a job) since dropping out of TUT.
* It seems as if a large majority of dropouts are planning to continue with their studies in future, either on a full-time or part-time basis.

The above conclusions can be summarised as follows:

* It seems as if the main reason for the student dropouts of 2007 at TUT was financial problems. The staff strike of 2007 was not a contributing factor towards the dropout rate.
* Most of the dropouts still have a high esteem of TUT and would like to return to TUT.
* TUT’s re-admissions policy with regard to student failure, needs to be reviewed.
* It seems as most of the dropouts are struggling to find jobs or to resume their studies at TUT or elsewhere.

**4. Recommendations**

In view of the above conclusions, the researcher wishes to make the following recommendations:

1. Student support (assistance) services should be marketed more vigorously and should be made more visible and accessible to students who are struggling. This could be done by means of the following strategies:

* After registration, all students should be taken for orientation to the various student support units and be briefed on all available forms of support.
* Regular communication to students by means of newsletters, E-tutor etc., should be conducted.
* Posters reflecting the range of support opportunities should be placed at places where large student groups regularly congregate (e.g. the cafeteria and residences).
* An awareness campaign by directorates/divisions such as SDS and SARO should be conducted to alert students to the available support. Especially residence management could play a major supporting role to students who are struggling by establishing a support centre.
* Students should be informed about who to contact and the contact details should be clearly reflected.
* Alternative support mechanisms should also be investigated, e.g. student mentoring by senior students.

1. Early problem detection mechanisms should be established so that struggling students could be assisted before they drop out.

* The (to be implemented) student tracking system should be optimally utilized to provide updated and detailed information about every student. Lecturers should start using the system as soon as it is fully implemented.
* The first signs of poor performance among students should be detected by lecturers. This could be done by lecturers carefully watching their students’ performance and identifying students who are not performing satisfactorily.
* Once poor performers have been identified, lecturers should try and establish the reasons for such poor performance. If the nature of the reasons for poor performance falls outside the scope of a lecturer’s work, s/he should send the poor performer to a unit such as SDS for assistance.
* The nature and quality of assistance offered by for example SDS, should be appropriate and adequate. A proper diagnosis should be done before any assistance is rendered in order to identify the exact causes. Once the correct interventions have been identified, the treatment should be continued until the problem is sufficiently resolved. The latter should be confirmed by the poor performer.

1. NSFAS and/or other financial support should be extended to more students. NSFAS funding from government should be increased drastically. Proposals/ requests to that effect should be submitted to the DoHET by TUT Management. Even students whose parents earn a bit more than the stipulated qualifying amounts, should quality for NSFAS loans.

* The stipulations for re-allocation of loans should be revisited. Failure for one year, should not spell the end of NSFAS funding. Students should at least be granted a second chance.
* Financial support should also not only be granted to top-performing students. Due to the shortcomings of the secondary/FET schooling system, many students do not perform so well in those examinations, but yet have the potential to succeed at tertiary level. Due to the lack of skills in many areas, it is essential that more students be empowered to address those skills shortages.

1. TUT should review its re-admission policy with regards to students who have failed.

* The policy should be carefully reviewed and aspects which have a negative implication for student re-admission should be addressed. Students should at least be re-admitted twice even if they have failed twice.
* Investigations should be done to determine the reasons for continued failure. If remedial action is possible, it should be taken.
* Strategies should be put in place to enable dropout students to return to TUT. Especially if dropout was due to financial problems, TUT should assist those students in obtaining loans or bursaries. Students who have dropped out should be contacted by TUT to establish how TUT could assist them in continuing with their studies.
* Recognition should be given for courses/subjects passed. Students should be made aware of this, as it might serve as encouragement for them to return.

1. **The way forward**

The following practical steps should be taken to implement the recommendations of the report.

* This report should serve at the following forums for discussion and recommendations:

The Academic Committee

The IPOC

The Finance Committee

* Thereafter it should be discussed with the following directorates/ divisions to ensure that the above recommendations are addressed:

HEDS/SDS

SARO

The NSFAS Office

**Report prepared by:**

**Dr. JF van Koller**

**Strategic Management Support**

**1 March 2010**

**NB: The full report is available on SMS Documents on the TUT Intranet.**

**Attachment (Questionnaire used for research project)**



**QUESTIONNAIRE TO 2007 FIRST-YEAR TUT STUDENTS WHO**

**DISCONTINUED THEIR STUDIES**

Contact person: Dr M Fowler

Tel: (012) 382-5430

Tshwane University of Technology

Directorate: Strategic Management Support

Private Bag X680

**PRETORIA**

**0001**

1 January 2009

Dear Former Student of TUT

It was observed, with regret, that you did not renew your studies at our institution during 2008. We would like to give you the opportunity to tell us why you decided to discontinue your studies.

This follow-up questionnaire is an attempt at determining the reasons behind students dropping out. Your responses are of crucial importance to enable us to assist future students with similar problems.

Should you experience problems with the questionnaire you are welcome to contact the above-mentioned person for assistance.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Please remit your questionnaire in the addressed prepaid envelope to reach our offices before **the end of April, 2009.**

**REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

* *All 2007 first year students who failed to enroll for 2008 are targeted.*
* *If you consent you will be expected to complete the questionnaire.*
* *Participation is voluntary but we urge you to participate as we need your help.*
* *Please be assured that your right to confidentiality will be respected. Only general trends are important to us. The results from this questionnaire will be used to improve support to students. We rely on your honesty and truthfulness.*

Thank you for your cooperation.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Respondent’s consent signature Date**

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

- Please use a **PEN** to indicate your answers.

- Unless asked differently, indicate one answer only to a question.

- Please read through the whole question before answering it.

- Unless requested otherwise, please complete the questionnaire by making a cross in the space corresponding to the answer of your choice, e.g.: “Were you a first student at TUT in 2007?”

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Yes** | **No** |
| **X** | 2 |

|  |
| --- |
| **For office use only** |

1. **Provide your student number (1 - 9)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** |

|  |
| --- |
|  |
| **10** |

1. **Why did you cancel/drop out?  
   …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………....**

1. **When, in 2008 did you drop out of your studies? (Mark with a X)**

|  |
| --- |
|  |
| **11** |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **During, or at the end of the -** | | | |
| **1st term** | **2nd term** | **3rd term** | **4th term** |

1. **To what extent did the following factors contribute to your dropping out?**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **To a great extent** | **To quite some extent** | **To a lesser extent** | **Hardly at all** | **Not appli-cable** |  |  |
| Poor marks | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **12** |  |
| Lack of motivation | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **13** |  |
| Unfriendly campus atmosphere | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **14** |  |
| Incompetent lecturing staff | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **15** |  |
| Not able to fit in | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **16** |  |
| Not enough money | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **17** |  |
| Accommodation problems | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **18** |  |
| Parental sickness/death | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **19** |  |
| Socializing too much | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **20** |  |
| Wrong choice of course | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **21** |  |
| Change in circumstances | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **22** |  |
| Your ill health | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **23** |  |
| Transport problems | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **24** |  |
| Moved to different environment | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **25** |  |
| Did not understand work | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **26** |  |
| Course was too difficult | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **27** |  |
| Other (Specify) ………………………………………… |  |  |  |  |  | **28** |  |

1. **Before you dropped out, did you ever seek assistance?**

|  |
| --- |
|  |
| **29** |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Yes** | **No** |
|  |  |

1. **If you answered Yes to question 5, please indicate the extent to which the following service/persons/training modules helped you.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Did not use** | **No use** | **Helped a bit** | **Helped some-what** | **Helped a lot** |  |  |
| Career counseling | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **30** |  |
| Study/learning methods | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **31** |  |
| Reading/comprehension | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **32** |  |
| Computer usage training | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **33** |  |
| Extra classes | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **34** |  |
| Language improvement | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **35** |  |
| Life skills training | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **36** |  |
| Library usage orientation | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **37** |  |
| Preparation for tests/exams | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **38** |  |
| Consulting with lecturers | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **39** |  |
| Note taking skills training | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **40** |  |
| Dealing with stress | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **41** |  |
| Time management | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **42** |  |
| Summarizing work | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **43** |  |
| Planning to study effectively | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **44** |  |
| Information literacy training | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **45** |  |
| Writing skills | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **46** |  |
| Other (Specify) ………………………………………… | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **47** |  |

1. **What was your experience of TUT?**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Defi-nitely** | **Mostly** | **Some-what** | **Hardly** | **Nog applic-able** |  |  |
| The teaching was good | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **48** |  |
| I was given enough support by the institution | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **49** |  |
| I got on well with other students | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **50** |  |
| The work load was too heavy | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **51** |  |
| I had trouble understanding the lecturers | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **52** |  |
| I did the right course | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **53** |  |
| The subject matter was difficult to learn | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **54** |  |
| Too many students per class, no personal touch | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **55** |  |
| The institution deserves its good name | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **56** |  |
| The student advisory service was good | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **57** |  |
| If you could start again would you come back to TUT? | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | **58** |  |

1. **If you dropped out because of the institution, tell us how the problem may be solved.**

|  |
| --- |
|  |
| **59** |

**……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………**

1. **How much time did you spend in a typical week doing each of the following whilst at TUT?**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Not appli-cable** | **Hardly any time** | **A little time** | **Quite a bit** | **A lot of time** |  |  |
| Preparing for class (study, reading, lab work, projects) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **60** |  |
| Working for pay on campus | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **61** |  |
| Working for pay off campus | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **62** |  |
| Taking park in co-curricular activities (sport, cultural, etc) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **63** |  |
| Relaxing and socializing | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **64** |  |
| Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **65** |  |
| Commuting to class (driving, bus, walking) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **66** |  |
| Studying for tests | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | **67** |  |

1. **How have you used your time since you stopped attending classes?**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Largely** | **Some** | **A little** | **None** |  |  |
| Continued studying part-time/distance education | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | **68** |  |
| Physically looked after family/friends | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | **69** |  |
| Started my own business | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | **70** |  |
| Joined another education institution full-time | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | **71** |  |
| Lazed around | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | **72** |  |
| Started a full-time job | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | **73** |  |
| Worked part-time/contract | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | **74** |  |
| Have been in ill health | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | **75** |  |
| Other (specify): ………………………………………………… | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | **76** |  |

1. **What are your plans for the immediate future?**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Yes, now** | **Yes, later** | **No** | **Don’t know** |  |  |
| Study full time again | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | **77** |  |
| Work full time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | **78** |  |
| Emigrate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | **79** |  |
| Start own business | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | **80** |  |
| Laze around | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | **81** |  |
| Look after family/friends | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | **82** |  |
| Start part time study/work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | **83** |  |
| I have no idea | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | **84** |  |
| Other (specify): …………………………………………………. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | **85** |  |

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION**