

Creating a Student Centred Higher Education System in South Africa

Dr WP Wahl



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*Inspiring excellence.
Transforming lives.*

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UNIVERSITIES
SOUTH AFRICA



Reshaping Universities

to create a Student-
Centred Higher Education
System in South Africa

A research study
by the Transformation
Strategy Group of
Universities South Africa

Report submitted
by Dr WP Wahl

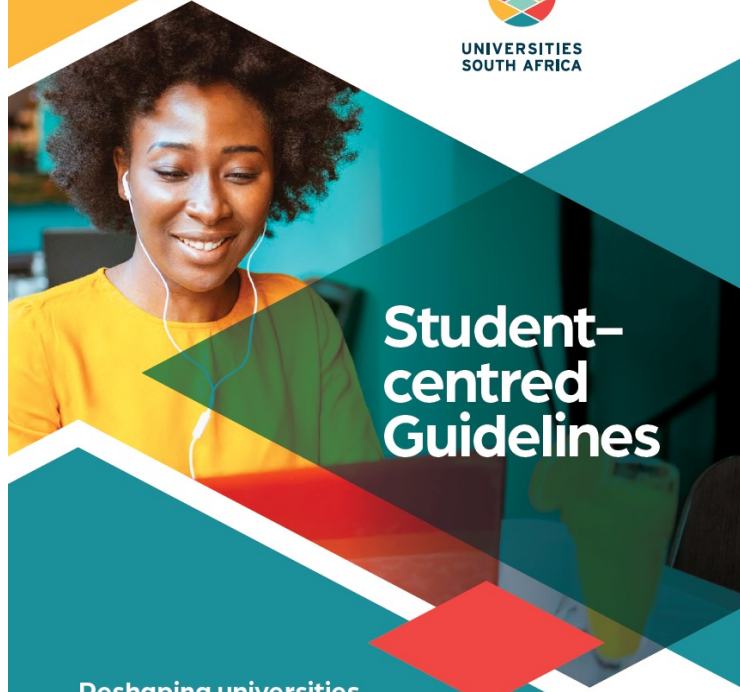
Date: September 2022



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UNIVERSITIES
SOUTH AFRICA



Student- centred Guidelines

Reshaping universities
to create a student-
centred higher education
system in South Africa

Universities South Africa:
Transformation Strategy Group



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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1st Semester
2020

- TSG background discussion
- SAASSAP and UFS process



2nd Semester
2020

- Research Proposal
- Advisory Board established



1st Semester
2021

- Conceptual Underpinnings
- Expert Panel determined



2nd Semester
2021

- Expert Panel: invitations and responses
- Ethical Approval
- Interviews



1st Semester
2022

- Interviews (continued)
- Data analysis
- Report 1: workshop
- Identify most essential values



2nd Semester
2022

- Prioritise values
- Submit final report

Advisory Board

Dr WP Wahl
(University of the
Free State)

Prof Ahmed Bawa
(Universities South
Africa)

Dr Lina Meyer
(Universities South
Africa)

Felicity Kokose
(Universities South
Africa)

Prof Melanie
Walker (University
of the Free State)

Dr Kingsley Nwosu
(University of the
Free State)

Prof Andre Keet
(Nelson Mandela
University)

Bernadette
Johnson
(University of the
Witwatersrand)

Pieter Kloppers
(Stellenbosch
University)

Dr Sibusiso
Chalufu (North
West University)

Dr Birgit Schreiber
(University of
Freiburg,
Germany)

Melissa Lucas
(Assistant
Researcher as
appointed by USAf)

Research Question

How can institutional cultures be reshaped to create a student-centred higher education system in South Africa?

Conceptual framework

- Background discussion document on designing student-centred universities and a student-centred system (TSG) – Addendum A
- Conceptual framework document created by Advisory Board (Prof Bawa, Prof Keet, Prof Walker) – Addendum B

Theoretical frameworks

Social
justice

Human
capabilities

CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS: SEVEN FOCUS AREAS

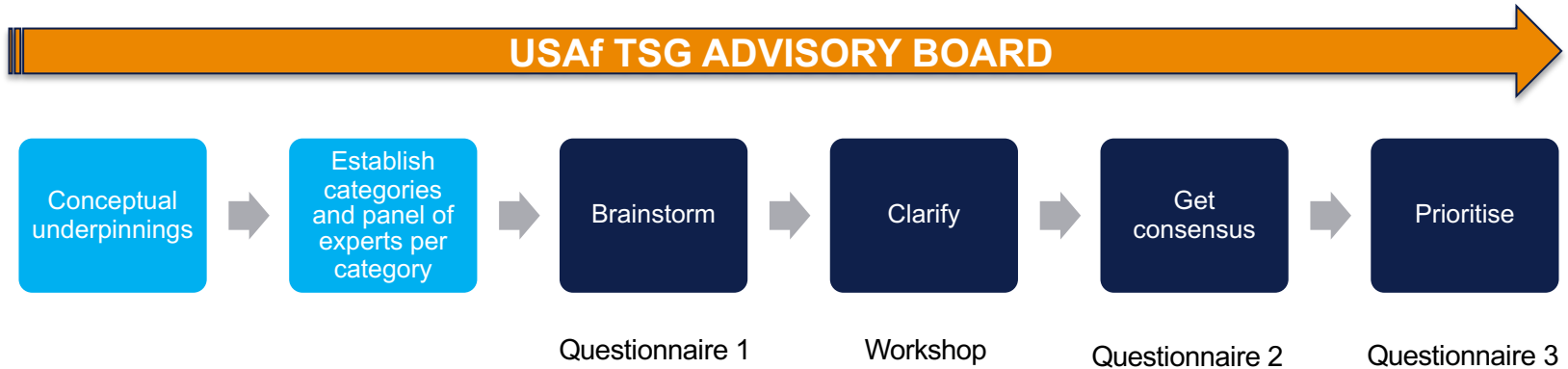
- 1) Understanding students
- 2) Understanding faculty members and staff
- 3) Institutional cultures
- 4) Interweaving between institutions and communities
- 5) Global awareness and citizenship
- 6) Technological impact, digital learning and digital pedagogies
- 7) Human development and human capabilities framework

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Design

- Delphi study with strong phenomenological approach
- Purposive sampling
 - Seven focus areas as *lenses*
 - Experts and leaders in the field (senior academics and senior leadership)
- 22 semi-structured interviews
- Thematic data analysis

AIM OF DELPHI METHOD:
ESTABLISHING CONSENSUS AMONGST A PANEL OF EXPERTS



Isolated events and observances



3
Patterns of behaviour and speech (external)
Patterns of thinking and feeling (internal)



2
Arrangement and organisation of systems (multi-dimensional contexts)



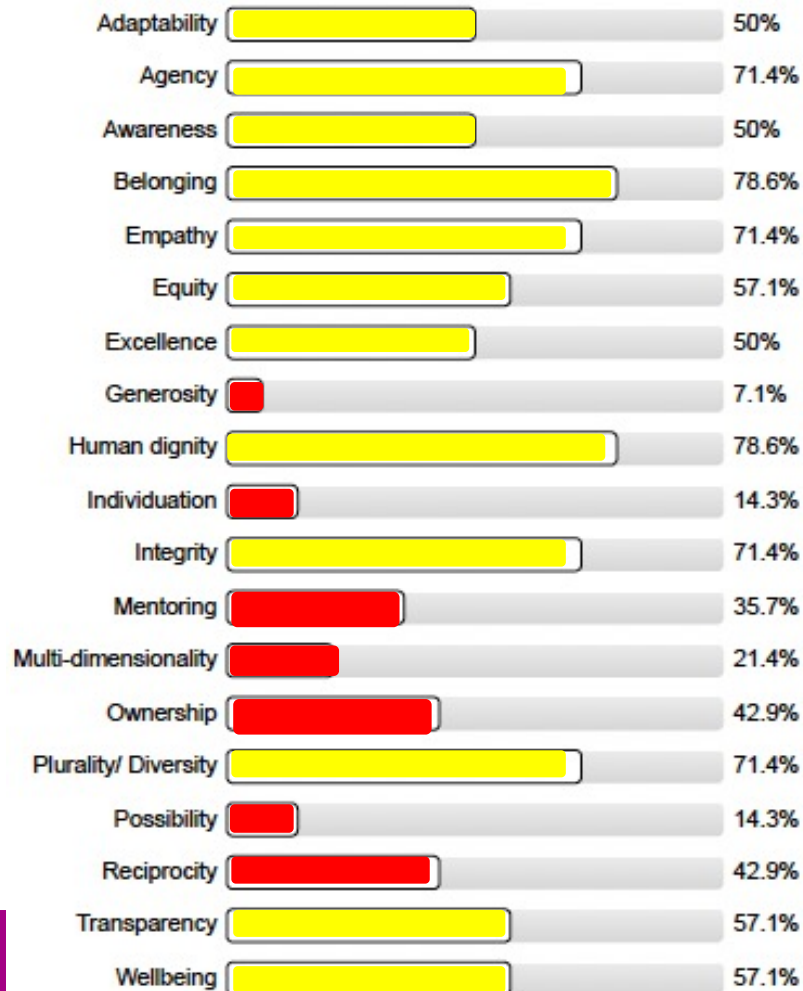
1
Value systems, world views

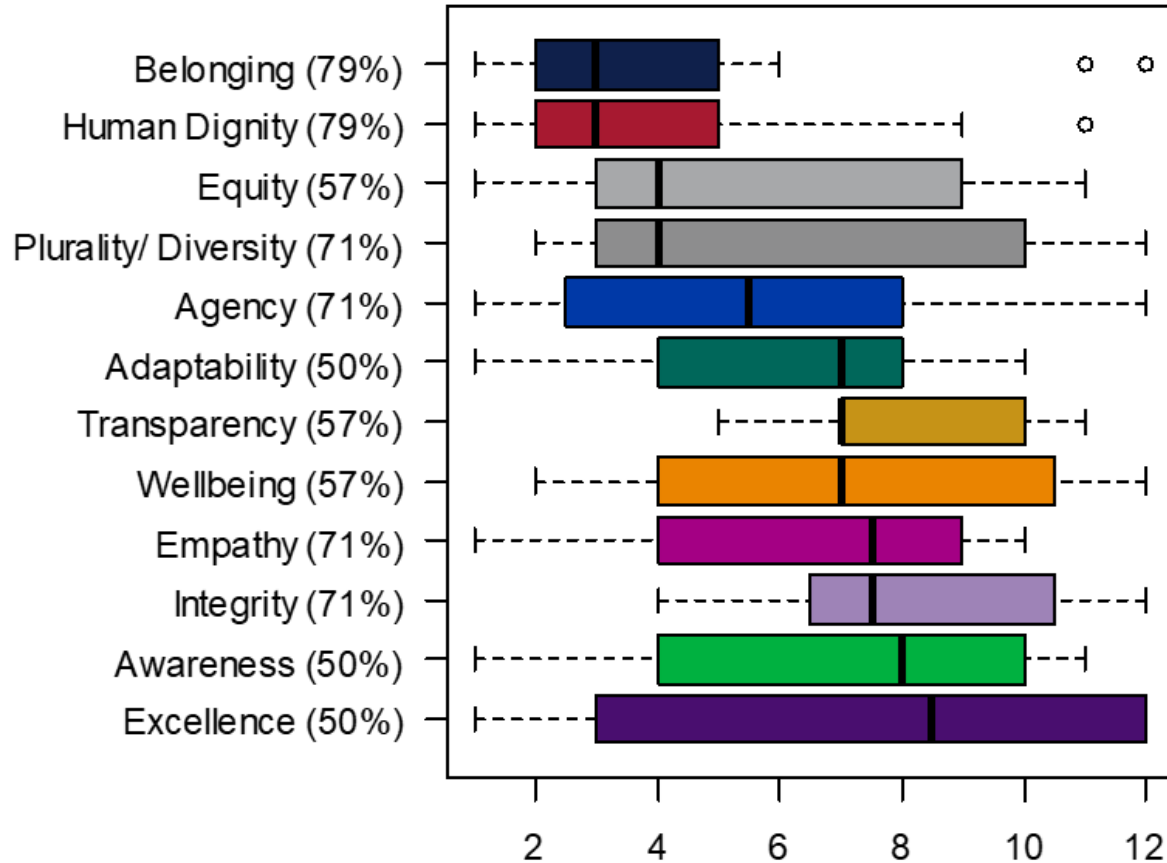
VALUES

20 Values

- Adaptability
- Agency
- Awareness
- Belonging
- Empathy
- Equity
- Excellence
- Generosity
- Human dignity
- Individuation
- Integrity
- Mentoring
- Multi-dimensionality
- Ownership
- Plurality
- Possibility
- Reciprocity
- Formation
- Transparency
- Wellbeing

n=14



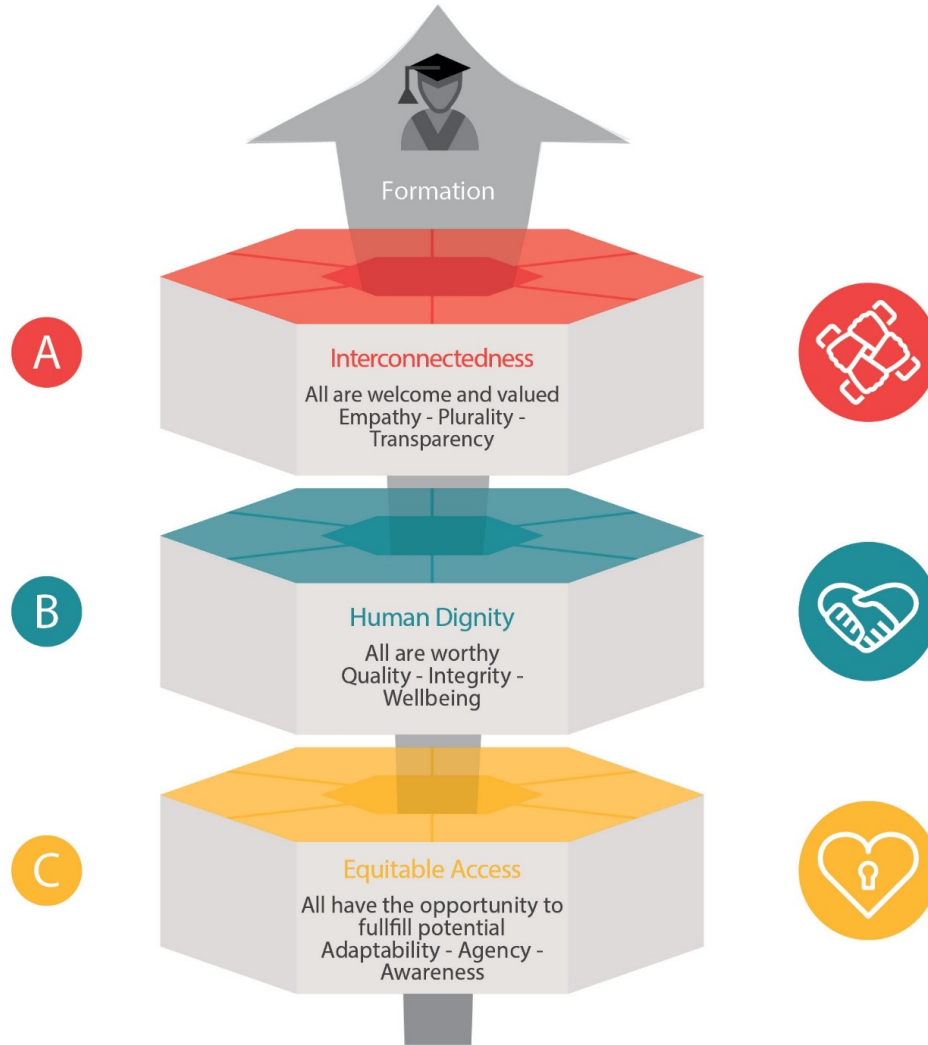


For the value *belonging*, a quarter of respondents put it among the top 2 values, half of the respondents put it among the top 3 values, and three-quarters of respondents put it among the top 5 values.

For the value of *human dignity*, a quarter of respondents put it among the top 2 values, half of the respondents put it among the top 3 values, and three-quarters of respondents put it among the top 5 values.

For the value *equity*, a quarter of respondents put it among the top 3 values, and half of the respondents put it among the top 4 values.

Values



MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CONTEXT(S)

Personal
Personhood
of the individual

Global
International
community



Institutional
Governance
and
management
systems

Sectoral
National
education
system

Societal
Stakeholder
communities

Relational
Inter-personal
connections

Values

A



Inter-connectedness

All are welcome and valued

- Empathy •
- Plurality • Transparency •



B

Human Dignity

All are worthy

- Quality • Integrity •
- Well-being •



C

Equitable Access

All have the opportunity to fulfill potential

- Adaptability • Agency •
- Awareness •



PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOUR

Internal
think and feel



External
say and do

01

Personal
Personhood of
the individual

Relational
Inter-personal
connections

02

Internal
think and feel



External
say and do

Internal
think and feel



External
say and do

03

Institutional
Governance and
management
systems

Sectoral
National
education
system

04

Internal
think and feel



External
say and do

Internal
think and feel



External
say and do

05

Societal
Stakeholder
communities

Global
International
community

06

Internal
think and feel



External
say and do

Inter-connectedness

What individuals think and feel

- Students are listened to and feel heard
- Students feel physically and emotionally safe
- Everyone feels welcome and part of the community

What individuals say and do

- We have an authentic, transparent sharing of information
- We recognise excellence in teaching and learning practices
- We are professional and competent

What the institution thinks and feels

- We are collectively committed to foster a culture of belonging
- We have an empathetic institutional culture
- We use signs, symbols, language, objects and images to transform our culture

What the institution says and does

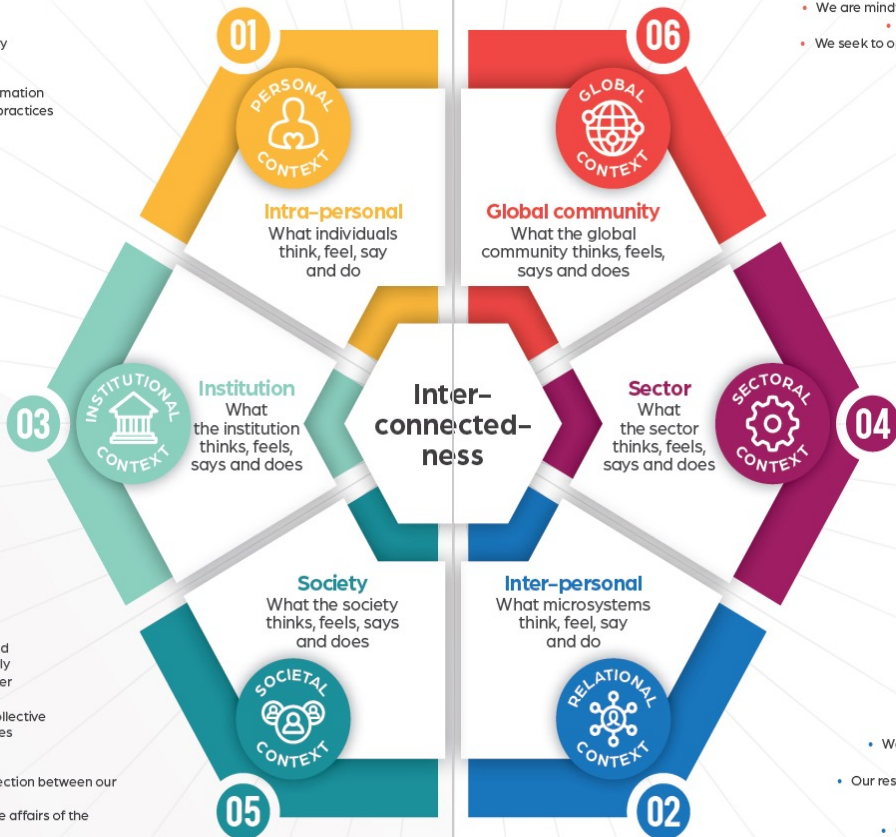
- As a system, we seamlessly integrate the academic and social contexts of the student experience
- We form cross-function partnerships to provide collaborative learning experiences toward graduate attribute development
- Our student structures give a voice to all students in their diversity

What the society thinks and feels

- We are conscious of the requirements of labour and business markets and prepare students accordingly
- Students feel empowered and prepared for life after graduation
- Community stakeholder groups have a sense of collective ownership of the vision and values of our universities

What the society says and does

- As social institutions, we uphold strong inter-connection between our universities and the communities
- As social institutions, universities are involved in the affairs of the community through engaged scholarships
- Our faculties create connections with outside sectors to align curricula content with the demands of the markets



What the global community thinks and feels

- We are mindful of how global issues are entangled with local issues
 - We are committed to engage in global conversations
- We seek to optimally develop students and staff as global citizens

What the global community says and does

- We uniquely influence global conversations appropriately and accurately
 - We are simultaneously internally and externally focused and accountable
- We are a leading voice that initiates and steers conversations around global challenges

What the education sector thinks and feels

- We foster interdependence and togetherness, to learn from each other
 - We seek mutuality, to learn from and transform with one another
- We value a socially just higher education system

What the education sector says and does

- We build a mutually supportive network between universities
- We collaborate and integrate with the primary and secondary education system
- We facilitate broad institutional sharing of resources and knowledge

What microsystems think and feel

- We foster a culture of belonging, inclusivity and diversity
 - We are transparent
- Our residences are integrated, socially cohesive communities

What microsystems say and do

- Our structures actively create the future with students
 - We co-create our curricula with students and industry
- We design intentional learning experiences inside and outside classrooms

Human Dignity

What individuals think and feel

- We recognise and affirm all aspects of students' realities and humanity
- We are responsive to the realities of the home environments of students
- We see students as whole human beings with unique needs

What individuals say and do

- Our engagement with students is meaningful and mutually respectful
- We are sensitive to our use of language as a tool to engage students
- Students are encouraged to freely join student groups based on their personal interests and aspirations

What the institution thinks and feels

- We are aware of the history of our institution
- We have an explicit collective commitment to change our institutional culture
- We promote the well-being and human dignity of all our students and staff

What the institution says and does

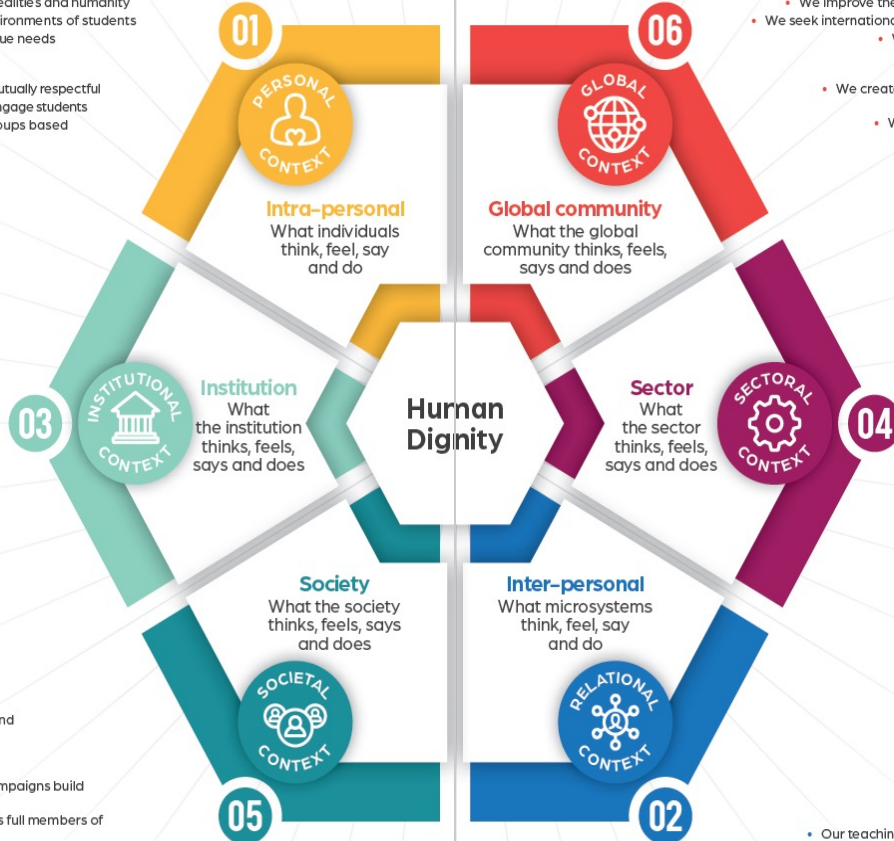
- We offer holistic integrated support in our university
- Our system of support is multi-dimensional and covers a wide range of needs
- Our leadership transforms our institution from the inside

What the society thinks and feels

- Our universities have a firm commitment to make a positive impact on society
- We are conscious that universities function as a microcosm of the broader society
- We cherish local indigenous knowledge systems and incorporate this in our curricula

What the society says and does

- Our preparation programmes and recruitment campaigns build bridges with outside communities
- We build systems to include commuter students as full members of the university community
- As a university, we actively facilitate conversations in communities to advance peacebuilding and nation-building



What the global community thinks and feels

- We improve the well-being of our students and staff as global citizens
- We seek international opportunities for students from developing countries
- We strive to uphold excellence on an international level

What the global community says and does

- We create a wider set of freedoms and opportunities for people in marginal groups
- We address the dehumanisation of the rich-poor divide on an international level
- We enable global social mobility

What the education sector thinks and feels

- We collectively recognise how our histories influence our current university cultures
- There is an awareness in the larger system of the unique characteristics and contribution of each university
- We recognise the uniqueness and dignity of each university

What the education sector says and does

- The national higher education policy regime honours decentralisation
- We commit to developing a differentiated higher education system to enable universities to flourish
- There is a balance between national higher education policy and sufficient autonomy of institutions

What microsystems think and feel

- We value the dignity of each person
- We appreciate diversity
- We promote mutual respect

What microsystems say and do

- Our teaching and learning practices are relational and humanising
- We commit to embracing different perspectives to create learning experiences
- We ensure that all living spaces remain conducive to student well-being

Equitable Access

What individuals think and feel

- We encourage self-directed learning and goal-directed behaviour
- Students feel they have freedom to choose and achieve what they value and desire
- We appreciate that students' needs change as they progress through stages of their journey

What individuals say and do

- We serve the unique set of challenges of each student
- Learning outcomes and assessment criteria are clearly defined and explicit
- We clearly communicate access to support systems and growth opportunities

What the institution thinks and feels

- We respond to the socio-economic, academic and biopsychosocial challenges of students
- We back up our initiatives with data and data analytics
- Our policies intentionally address systemic barriers to provide access and opportunities

What the institution says and does

- We intentionally design differentiated support systems
- We monitor and evaluate the impact of responsive interventions
- Our physical infrastructure on campus is conducive to student learning, development and success

What the society thinks and feels

- Commuter students have equitable access to on-campus support systems, and opportunities to participate in student life programmes and activities
- We seek to integrate classroom activities with real problems in local communities
- We foster collaboration with the social support systems of students' home environments

What the society says and does

- We consciously mitigate the limiting negative influence of broader societal challenges on student success
- We create the kind of community on campus that we envisage for the broader South African society
- Our inter-connections between faculties and industries create opportunities for students in labour and business markets



What the global community thinks and feels

- We seek to integrate teaching and learning with global challenges
 - We prioritise global work-integrated learning
- We seek the fundamental structural redesign of universities as Africanised knowledge-intensive institutions

What the global community says and does

- We provide sufficient mobility for students and staff to engage in an international context
 - We contextualise international metrics for our higher education context
 - We provide future employment and entrepreneurial prospects on an international level

What the education sector thinks and feels

- The higher education system is aware of the historical backgrounds and geographical locations of different institutions
 - We mitigate the advantages and disadvantages associated with the location of university campuses
- We ensure a sustainable, well-administered funding model that enables equitable access

What the education sector says and does

- The higher education system distributes resources equitably to meet the diverse needs of universities
- The higher education system's objectives and resource allocation strategically address historical legacy issues
- We provide sufficient mobility for students and staff who belong to universities in our country

What microsystems think and feel

- We value fair-mindedness and a just system
- We are aware of the diverse backgrounds and levels of preparedness of students
- We take the impact of technological access and digital competence of staff and students seriously

What microsystems say and do

- We promote easy access by removing systemic barriers
 - We structure equitable access to out-of-class developmental experiences
- We use journey mapping to design support systems in response to diverse needs

Inter-connectedness

What individuals think and feel

- Students are listened to and feel heard
- Students feel physically and emotionally safe
- Everyone feels welcome and part of the community

What individuals say and do

- We have an authentic, transparent sharing of information
- We recognise excellence in teaching and learning practices
- We are professional and competent

What the institution thinks and feels

- We are collectively committed to foster a culture of belonging

01



Intra-personal

What individuals think, feel, say and do





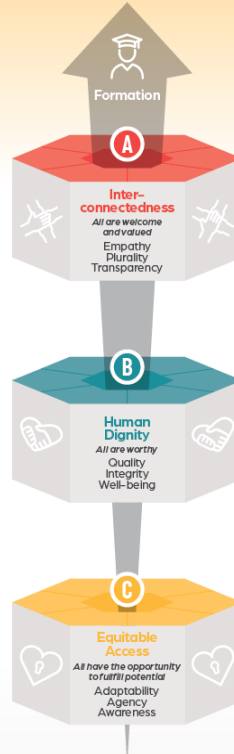
Student-centred guidelines

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- Our engagement with students is meaningful and mutually respectful
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- Students are encouraged to freely join student groups based on their personal interests and aspirations

- We serve the unique set of challenges of each student
- Learning outcomes and assessment criteria are clearly defined and explicit
- We clearly communicate access to support systems and growth opportunities

Explanation of the context

This context relates directly to the personal profile of each student and its meaning in relation to their specific developmental needs. It also refers to the **personal** experiences and conceptualisations of individual students.



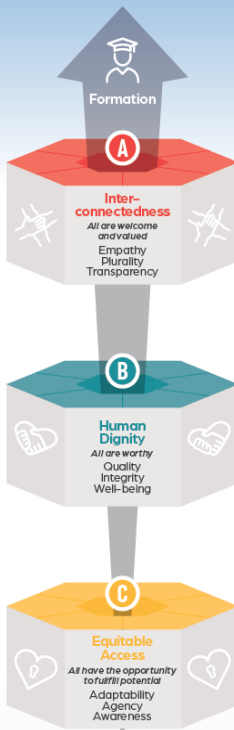
Student-centred guidelines

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What microsystems say and do

- Our structures actively create the future with students
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 - We design intentional learning experiences inside and outside classrooms

- Our teaching and learning practices are relational and humanising
- We commit to embracing different perspectives to create learning experiences
 - We ensure that all living spaces remain conducive to student well-being

- We promote easy access by removing systemic barriers
- We structure equitable access to out-of-class developmental experiences
- We use journey mapping to design support systems in response to diverse needs

Explanation of the context

This context refers to the roles, relationships, and interactions embedded in the micro-environments of the student experience; e.g. academic spaces, student formations, student residences, and social circles.



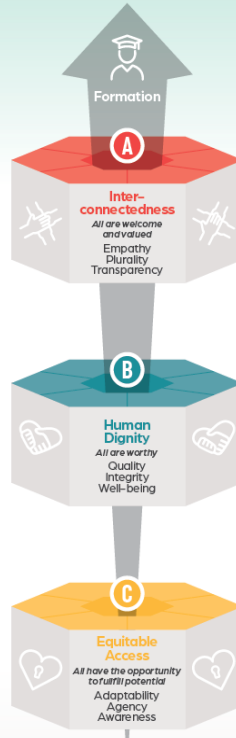
Student-centred guidelines

What the institution thinks and feels

- We are collectively committed to foster a culture of belonging
- We have an empathetic institutional culture
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- We are aware of the history of our institution
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- We promote the well-being and human dignity of all our students and staff

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What the institution says and does

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- We intentionally design differentiated support systems
- We monitor and evaluate the impact of responsive interventions
- Our physical Infrastructure on campus is conducive to student learning, development and success

Explanation of the context

This context refers to the unique characteristics of individual universities; e.g. the institution's history, culture, student-staff profile, governance and management structures, policy frameworks, infrastructure, and geopolitical factors.



Student-centred guidelines

What the education sector thinks and feels

- We foster interdependence and togetherness, to learn from each other
- We seek mutuality, to learn from and transform with one another
- We value a socially just higher education system

- We collectively recognise how our histories influence our current university cultures
- There is an awareness in the larger system of the unique characteristics and contribution of each university
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- The higher education system is aware of the historical backgrounds and geographical locations of different institutions
- We mitigate the advantages and disadvantages associated with the location of university campuses
- We ensure a sustainable, well-administered funding model that enables equitable access



Formation

A

Inter-connectedness

All are welcome and valued
Empathy
Plurality
Transparency

B

Human Dignity

All are worthy
Quality
Integrity
Well-being

C

Equitable Access

All have the opportunity to fulfil potential
Adaptability
Agency
Awareness

What the education sector says and does

- We build a mutually supportive network between universities
- We collaborate and integrate with the primary and secondary education system
- We facilitate broad institutional sharing of resources and knowledge

- The national higher education policy regime honours decentralisation
- We commit to developing a differentiated higher education system to enable universities to flourish
- There is a balance between national higher education policy and sufficient autonomy of institutions

- The higher education system distributes resources equitably to meet the diverse needs of universities
- The higher education system's objectives and resource allocation strategically address historical legacy issues
- We provide sufficient mobility for students and staff who belong to universities in our country

Explanation of the context

The higher education sector serves as a superordinate category that encompasses all higher education institutions in South Africa. It also refers to the national structures that influence the higher education sector as a whole, e.g. the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), Universities South Africa (USAf), the Council for Higher Education (CHE), the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and the National Research Foundation (NRF).



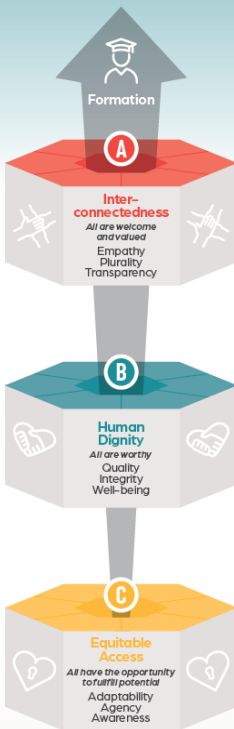
Student-centred guidelines

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Explanation of the context

The societal context refers to the reciprocal relationship between universities and stakeholder communities. It also relates to the labour and business markets embedded in the private and public sectors of society. The interaction between universities and various industries influences the developmental context of students in numerous ways.



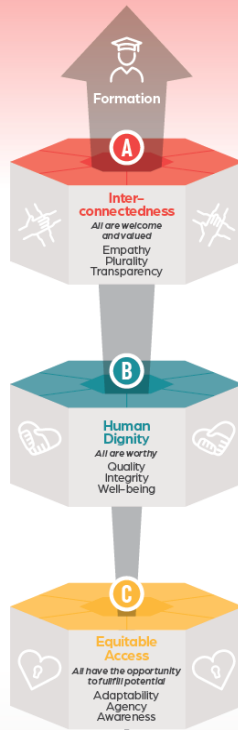
Student-centred guidelines

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- We provide sufficient mobility for students and staff to engage in an international context
 - We contextualise international metrics for our higher education context
 - We provide future employment and entrepreneurial prospects on an international level

Explanation of the context

Global issues find expression in local contexts; the global and the local are intertwined. Universities (and students) should be part of and influence global conversations. Furthermore, the international higher education system continuously influences local higher education systems, e.g. new trends in higher education, international ranking systems, and the educational-technology industry.

Ngiyabonga
Enkosi
Ke a leboha
Ndo livhuwa
Ndza nkhensa
Dankie
Thank you