

## Chapter 2

# Concept of Adjustment for First-Year Students at South African Universities

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The first year of university is a crucial time for most students. They experience various challenges that require them to learn and develop the skills needed to negotiate their new environment and discover a major that fits their talents and needs. This chapter focuses on the adjustment concept for first-year students. Their adjustment depends on various factors such as student support services in collaboration with academic staff, pre-entry work for the practical orientation to their studies, skills developments, institutional strategies, and assessment. It further develops a historical background of South African Higher Education. It demonstrates how peer group pressure influences the FYs' experiences at South African universities. It establishes a conceptual framework for factors influencing peer groups and their formation among FYs transitioning from high school to university. It discusses FYs' experiences associated with the types of groups and peer pressure. It examines the advantages and disadvantages and factors influencing peer groups, peer pressure, and their formation.*

### **ADJUSTING FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN THE WORLD**

The first year of university is a crucial time for most students. They experience challenges that hinder them from learning and developing the skills needed to negotiate their new environment and discover major subjects that fit their talents and needs (Soiferman, 2017). Adjusting FYs' experiences to social and academic life could engender challenges, affecting their academic performance and achievement.

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### **Concept of Adjustment for First-Year Students at South African Universities**

Initially, Boston College could be considered the first to offer a Freshman Orientation class in 1888. Reed College, based in Portland, Oregon, was the first institution to provide a course for credit when, in 1911, they offered a course that was divided into men-only and women-only sections that met for 2 hours per week for the year (Association of College Research Libraries, 2007). The Freshman Year Experience has developed at the University of Carolina during the 1960's. The University of South Carolina in the United States has a course called University 101, which was for first-year seminars in the 1970's. It aimed to increase access for first-year students. The implementation of the University 101 showed that first-year students adjusted better to the social and academic life of the university environment by using the university's resources and services and participating more in extracurricular activities (University of South Carolina, 2015). Many engaged scholarships and conferences have been developed worldwide on adjusting FYSSs at the university (Krause *et al.*, 2005). For example, Teesside University has been a cohort for the National Resource Center's International Conferences on the FYSSs' Experiences and in developing first-year initiatives beyond the USA. In 1995, Queensland University of Technology hosted the first Pacific Rim Conference on the First Year in Higher Education. In 2005, the European First Year Experience launched the conference to establish how FYSSs want the institution to enhance its challenges. The inaugural Southern African Conference on the First Year Experience, held in September 2008, could significantly contribute to the success of first-year students. These meetings highlighted the growing number of initiatives developed to support FYSSs in higher education. These could influence institutions worldwide to recognize the value of focusing on FYSSs and other students in transition and explore ways to support their FYSSs better.

Similarly, Upcraft *et al.* (2005) reiterate that FYSSs could and will do better when placed in intentional intellectual and social campus environments that could challenge them and support their efforts to succeed. It is important to note that components of an FYSSs' experience programme depend on the structure of the university and its unique needs and areas of emphasis, including orientation, curriculum, academic advising, student support services, and administrative policies and practices about FYSSs. Upcraft *et al.* (2005) suggest that FYSSs' success could be influenced by their experiences encountered at the university.

### **ADJUSTMENT OF FYSS' EXPERIENCES AT SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES**

There was a need for investigating first-year experiences, and urgent attention to this matter has long been noted at South African universities. It is relevant to consider that the FYSSs' experiences programme was initiated in 2011 to develop a national discussion group by forming a First Year Success Special Interest Group under the auspices of the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) (DeHaan, Hirai, & Ryan, 2016). This group usually met yearly, following up with a First Year Experience conference hosted at South African Universities. These groups collaborated with the South African National Department of Higher Education and Training to create an opportunity to submit collaborative teaching innovation grants and a grant application to involve several South African institutions. Subsequently, the South African National Resource Centre (SANRC) grant application was successful, and as a result, the SANRC was created during the last quarter of 2014.

Similarly, Stellenbosch University initiated the First-year Academy in 2006 and launched it in 2007. This First-year Academy (FYA) was a comprehensive University initiative that focused on promoting the success of FYSSs by improving their quality of learning. The FYA aimed to improve FYSSs' academic success with various research activities, programmes, and projects. For example, in the first six weeks

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