

STUDENT AT-RISK

Follow-Up Survey



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under the Directorate of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation.**

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FOREWORD

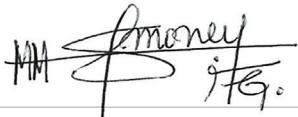
We present the first Student *At-Risk Follow-Up Survey* Report with great appreciation and purpose. This report marks a significant milestone in our ongoing commitment to enhancing student success through data-informed strategies and responsive support systems.

Identifying and supporting at-risk students remains a core focus of our institution's efforts to foster equity, inclusion, and academic achievement. Conducting this follow-up survey has allowed us to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences, challenges, and progress of students previously flagged as at-risk. Their voices, captured through this survey, provide a crucial lens through which we can evaluate the effectiveness of our interventions and refine our support mechanisms.

This inaugural report highlights key findings and underscores the value of ongoing engagement with at-risk students. It sets a foundation for institutional learning and continuous improvement, ensuring no student is left behind.

We are grateful to all the students who participated in the survey and the teams and stakeholders who supported this initiative. Your contributions are instrumental in helping us build a more supportive and responsive academic environment.

Let this report be the beginning of a more robust dialogue and action-oriented approach toward student retention, progression, and success.



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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, enhancing student support services in higher education has gained significant attention. Universities worldwide increasingly recognise the need to address various aspects of student well-being, including academic, financial, mental health, and social dimensions. This approach aims to create a holistic and inclusive learning environment (Smith, 2021; Brown & Jones, 2020). The changing student population demographics, challenges such as financial instability, mental health issues, and the complexities of remote learning, have heightened the demand for innovative and adaptive support mechanisms (Doe, 2019; University Support Report, 2020).

This survey of at-risk students offers a comprehensive overview of their experiences, needs, and satisfaction with existing services. It provides a foundation for identifying gaps and developing targeted interventions (Wilson & Evans, 2022). By systematically evaluating students' perspectives, higher education institutions can respond to changing trends and anticipate future challenges, ensuring their strategies align with global best practices (Johnson et al., 2021).

The insights gained from these surveys are crucial for improving retention rates, enhancing academic outcomes, and promoting a culture of inclusion, equity, and resilience (Taylor, 2018). Ultimately, such initiatives foster the development of supportive and vibrant campus communities where student success is both a priority and a goal (Adams & Lee, 2020).



2. PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

The purpose of this survey is to gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by at-risk students and to evaluate the effectiveness of the current support systems. Additionally, the findings will help identify service gaps and guide the implementation of evidence-based strategies to improve academic performance, mental health, and overall student satisfaction. This approach highlights the institution's commitment to creating a supportive, inclusive, and equitable educational environment, ensuring long-term success for all students.

3. TARGET AUDIENCE

This survey is designed for students identified as at risk due to academic, financial, social, or personal challenges. The survey aims to gather detailed insights into their experiences with the support given to them by focusing on this specific group. This information will help respective faculty to tailor interventions to meet their unique needs effectively.

4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The survey's primary goal is to guide the development of innovative and student-centred support strategies.

Specifically, the survey aims to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing academic, financial, and mental health support services.
- Identify ongoing barriers to accessing institutional resources.
- Collect student recommendations for improving the quality and accessibility of support mechanisms.
- Foster a culture of continuous improvement by integrating student feedback into policy and program design.
- Strengthen institutional commitment to addressing student needs. To inclusion, equity, and resilience.

5. THE IMPORTANCE OF CONDUCTING A STUDENT SUPPORT SURVEY

Conducting a student support survey is crucial in addressing the diverse and evolving needs of students in higher education. These types of surveys provide a structured and reliable method for collecting feedback directly from students about the challenges they face, whether academic, financial, social, or emotional (Smith, 2023). As universities strive to meet international standards, the insights gained from these surveys are essential in enabling evidence-based decision-making and fostering continuous improvement.

Identifying gaps in existing systems, these surveys highlight success stories and innovative practices that can be scaled to benefit a larger student population. For instance, institutions excelling in mental health support or peer mentoring programs can share their findings to promote models adaptable to various contexts (Jones, 2023). Furthermore, by involving students in these evaluative processes, universities foster a culture of collaboration and mutual respect, ensuring students are recognised as active participants in shaping their educational experiences.

Ultimately, these surveys go beyond mere assessment tools; they are proactive strategies for building sustainable, inclusive, and high-performing educational environments where students are empowered to thrive academically and personally.



6. LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education institutions worldwide are increasingly recognising the importance of supporting at-risk students to enhance academic success, mental well-being, and overall student satisfaction (Tinto, 2017). At-risk students, including those from low-income backgrounds, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities, often face unique barriers to academic achievement, such as financial constraints, lack of institutional belonging, and inadequate access to mental health resources (Schreiner, 2020).

Several studies highlight the impact of student support services in mitigating these challenges. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), academic advising, tutoring, and mentorship programs significantly improve student retention and performance. Moreover, research by Kuh et al. (2011) emphasises that engagement in learning communities and student support initiatives fosters a sense of belonging, which directly correlates with academic persistence. According to Mbaleki et al. (2023), effective student support and intervention ensure that students' transition into higher education is smooth and their success is guaranteed.

Mental health plays a crucial role in student success. The American College Health Association (2022) reports that increasing numbers of students experience anxiety and depression, which negatively affect academic performance. Effective institutional interventions, including counselling services, peer support programs, and stress management workshops, have been shown to enhance mental well-being and learning outcomes (Habley et al., 2021).

Despite existing support mechanisms, gaps remain in service accessibility and effectiveness. Studies by Jones and Brown (2019) indicate that many students are unaware of available resources, while others find them insufficient in addressing their specific needs. A comprehensive approach that integrates data-driven decision-making, proactive outreach, and evidence-based interventions is necessary to create an equitable and supportive educational environment (Astin, 2016).

Hence, the purpose of this study was to get feedback from the students on the relevant support that was given to them after being identified as "at-risk". This feedback will guide the institution in improving support initiatives for students as well as in the development of more innovative and student-centred support strategies.



7. METHODS

7.1. Identification of Students Requiring Assistance

The Walter Sisulu University (WSU) has developed an "At Risk Framework" that classifies risk factors into academic and non-academic categories to identify students and modules needing intervention. Critical indicators of high-risk students include academic failure and previous instances of dropping out or stopping out. Likewise, high-risk modules are identified based on historical performance data. This dual classification allows a focused approach to individual student support and module-specific remedial strategies.

Historically, WSU has relied on manual processes to identify at-risk students since 2015. However, with advancements in data analytics and academic software, the university adopted automated methods in 2021. Utilising tools like PowerHeda, WSU has implemented sophisticated data mining techniques to enhance the efficiency and accuracy of identifying at-risk students. These methods allow for the extraction and analysis of large datasets, facilitating the identification of risk patterns that may not be immediately apparent through manual evaluation.

PowerHeda's Student Tracking Module is crucial in this approach because it offers advanced analytics capabilities.

This module enables the university to:

- Identify at-risk students with precision.
- Conduct detailed cohort analyses, including segmentation into cohort clusters based on institutional parameters.
- Generate longitudinal data on each cohort's intake, dropout, stop-out, graduation, and retention trends over time.

This data-driven approach marks a significant shift from previous practices. In earlier years, external parties were often engaged to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate interventions. Now, the responsibility rests with the lecturers overseeing the respective modules. This change empowers lecturers to design and implement tailored remedial and corrective actions for at-risk students within their modules. Such an approach ensures that interventions are contextually relevant and closely monitored by those who have direct insight into the student's academic environment.

Integrating advanced analytics and decentralising the responsibility for interventions, WSU enhances its ability to provide timely and targeted support to at-risk students. This proactive approach addresses academic challenges head-on, contributing to improved retention, performance, and overall student success.

7.2. Research Design

This study utilised a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to comprehensively understand student support interventions for students identified as at risk. The study's core is a quantitative, web-based survey that provides measurable insights into students' perceptions and experiences. To enhance the quantitative data, open-ended questions were included to capture qualitative feedback from participants. This dual-method approach ensures that the study identifies trends and patterns and uncovers deeper contextual narratives that can inform policy and practice.

The choice of a survey-based research design is appropriate for this study. It allows efficient data collection from a broad sample, maximising participation while offering ample opportunity for qualitative feedback. The methodology balances efficiency with depth, enabling robust analysis of students' perceptions, experiences, and recommendations.

7.3. The Online Survey

This study's primary data collection tool was a self-administered, web-based questionnaire. This format was chosen for its cost-effectiveness, ease of distribution, and enhanced data security measures. The online survey allows respondents to complete the questionnaire at their convenience, reducing barriers to participation while ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

The survey includes sections designed to gather quantitative data (such as satisfaction ratings and frequency of resource usage) and qualitative data (including open-ended questions about specific challenges or recommendations). Combining these elements, the survey offers a comprehensive view of the effectiveness and accessibility of student support interventions.

7.4. Scope and Sample

The target population for this research consists of registered Walter Sisulu University (WSU) students from various levels of study for the year 2024 who have been identified as at risk of failing. The sample is designed to reflect the diversity of the student body, encompassing different academic disciplines and levels of study. We aim for a minimum response rate of 5% to ensure a statistically meaningful outcome. In social sciences research, this response rate is acceptable and sufficient for identifying trends and generating actionable insights.

7.5. Data Collection Technique

Data collection was conducted via email through the distribution of the survey link. Potential respondents received an invitation email with the survey link and an information sheet outlining the study's purpose, confidentiality protocols, and ethical considerations following research guidelines. Upon completing the survey, participants had to click a "finish" button to ensure their data was stored securely.

A reminder email was sent two weeks after the initial invitation to maximise participation. This follow-up communication encourages engagement and improves the response rate, thereby enhancing the reliability and representativeness of the collected data.

7.6. Analysis of Data

Quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Power BI and Microsoft Excel, utilising their capabilities for data visualisation, trend identification, and statistical analysis. These tools enable researchers to examine key metrics, including satisfaction levels, usage patterns of support services, and demographic correlations.

Qualitative responses were assessed separately through a thematic analysis approach. This method involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and insights within the narrative data, providing a deeper understanding of students' experiences and specific challenges. The research team conducted the final analysis to ensure the findings aligned with the study's objectives and strategic requirements. The outcomes are presented in a way that emphasises their relevance to institutional policies and the overall rationale for the study.

8. RESULTS

The following section analyses the participant's profile. The total target population was 8,234, with 230 respondents, resulting in a low participation rate of 3.58%. **Table 1** gives a full detail of the analysis of the participants.

Participants' Profile

Table 1: Participants' Profile

Faculty	Target Population	Number of Respondents	Participation Rate (%)
Total	8234	230	3,58%
Engineering, Built Env and IT	2096	56	3,74%
Mngt and Public Admin Sciences	2428	77	3,15%
Economics and Financial Sciences	661	18	3,67%
Law, Humanities and Social Science	215	5	4,3%
Medicine and Health Science	11	0	0%
Natural Science	209	15	1,39%
Education	2604	59	4,41%
First-Year Status			
Yes	2710	98	2,76%
No	5524	132	4,18%
Sex			
Female	4463	132	3,38%
Male	3761	98	3,83%
Campus Affiliation			
Buffalo City Campus	1018	50	2,03%
Butterworth Campus	1036	76	1,36%
Komani Campus	329	17	1,93%
Mthatha Campus	1378	87	1,58%
Funding Status			
Self-Funded / Not Funded	1010	21	4,80%
NSFAS Funded	4716	140	3,36%
Bursary Funded	2398	69	3,47%
Residence Status			
On Campus	1193	188	6,35%
Off Campus	7041	42	16,76%

Table 1 above shows that the low participation rate raises concerns about the representativeness of the survey results, as it limits the generalisability of findings. The highest participation rate was the Faculty of Education, with 4.41%, contributing to 59 respondents. Faculty of Law, Humanities, and Social Science followed with 4.3% participation (5 respondents) despite its small target population. The Faculty of Natural Science had the lowest number of participants, with only 1.39%, and the Faculty of Medicine and Health Science had no respondents, indicating underrepresentation. Amongst the responses, 2.76% of participants (98 respondents) from a population of 2,710 were first-year students. A higher participation rate of 4.18% (132 respondents) among non-first-year students. Gender representation with female students participation rate of 3.38% from a population of 4 463. Male students have a slightly higher participation rate of 3.83% compared to a population of 3,761. Although the difference is slight, male students were slightly more engaged in the survey.

Respondents were asked to answer the question, "Were you identified as one of the students who needed assistance?" **Figure 1** below depicts their responses.

Students Identified

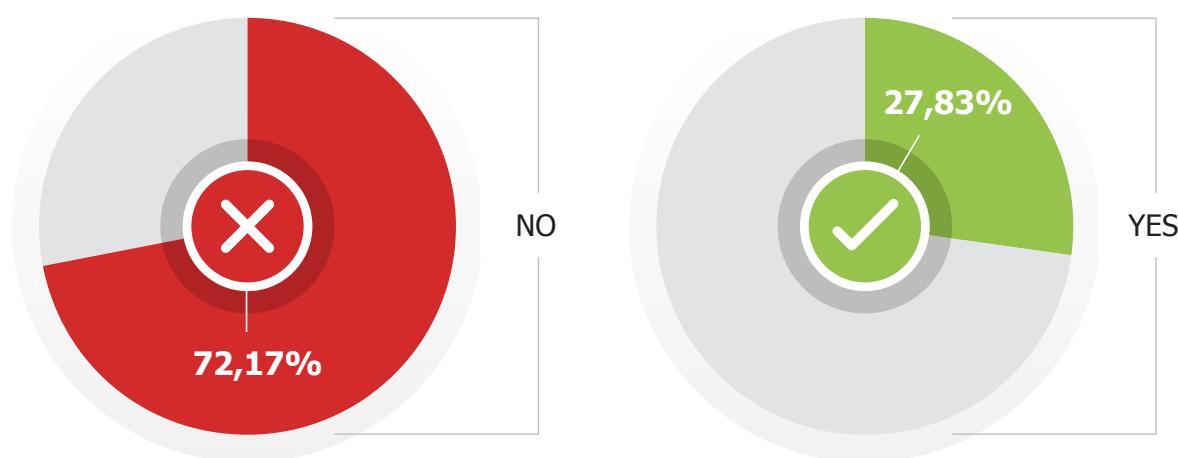


Figure 1: Identification of Students Requiring Assistance

Responses	Number of Students	Percentage
No	168	72,41%
Yes	64	27,59%
Grand Total	232	100,00%

Figure 1 presents information about students identified as needing assistance. It is important to note that while identifying at-risk students is automated, the notification to those students is not yet automated. Responses to the question, "Were you identified as one of the students who needed assistance?" were categorised as "**Yes**" or "**No**." A "Yes" response indicates that the student has been notified and is aware of their situation. According to the data, 72.41% of students reported that they were unaware of being identified as needing assistance, while 27.59% confirmed that they had received notification.

The fact that 72.41% of students were unaware of being identified as needing assistance highlights a significant gap in awareness regarding student support systems (SSS) and a communication breakdown between the faculties and students. This indicates that the methods for informing students about their status or available support may be ineffective or underutilised. If students are unaware of their identified needs, they are less likely to seek the available help, resulting in missed opportunities for intervention and assistance. Consequently, this lack of awareness may lead to students struggling academically or personally without realising that support is accessible.

Based on the insights gathered, there is a pressing need to enhance faculty communication channels regarding notifying at-risk students. The institution should assess its procedures for identifying and informing these students. This assessment may involve implementing multiple communication methods, personalised follow-ups, or real-time alerts to ensure students are aware of their situations and understand the notifications they receive.

Students who are unaware of their circumstances and do not receive timely assistance may encounter more significant challenges, which could adversely affect their academic performance, retention rates, and overall success.

Additionally, it is essential to strengthen proactive identification and support mechanisms. Not only should students in need be identified, but we must also ensure they are actively engaged with the available resources.

8.1. Students Contacted by the Support Team

The students were asked if they had been contacted by the support team and were given the option to respond with either "yes" or "no." The graph in Figure 2 shows the distribution of their responses. According to the data, 59.38% of the students indicated that they had received assistance from the support units, while 40.63% stated that they had not. **Figure 2** illustrates that a larger percentage of students received support compared to those who did not.

Students Contacted

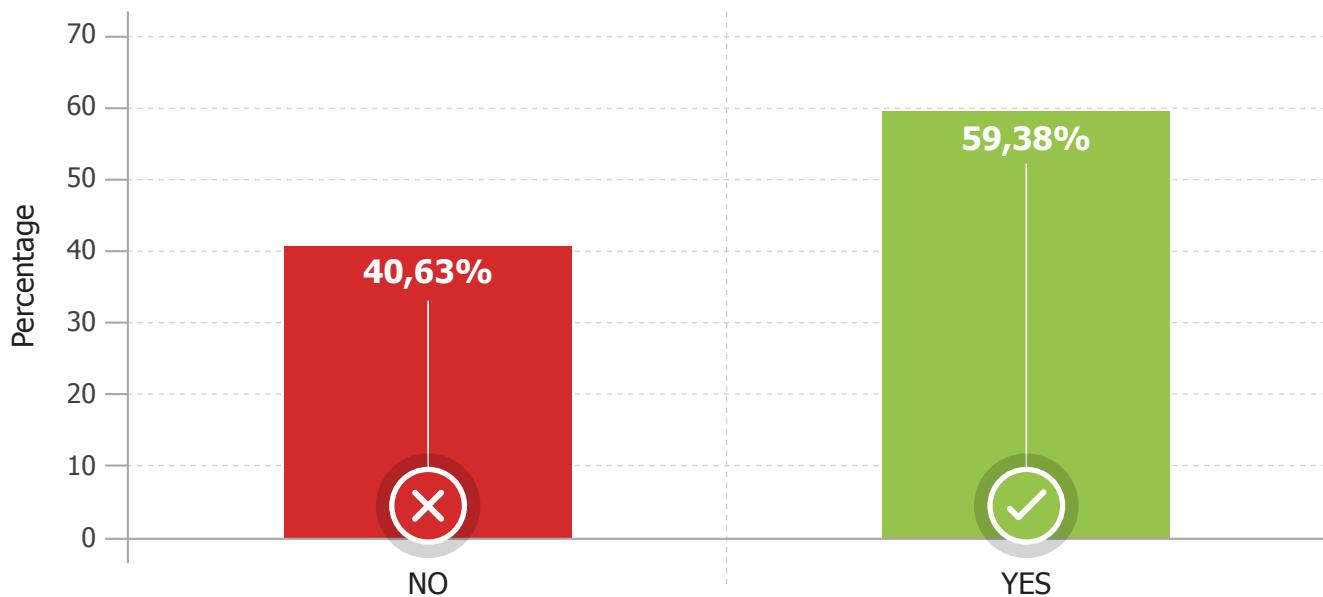


Figure 2: Students Contacted by the Support Team

Responses	Number of Students	Percentage
No	26	40,63%
Yes	38	59,38%
Grand Total	64	100,00%

The current disparity presents an opportunity to enhance outreach initiatives and ensure that all students, particularly those in need, receive adequate support. The support staff play a crucial role in making students aware of and connecting them to the resources available at WSU.

Allocating resources to address the needs of those seeking assistance is vital to ensuring the effective management of their personal and academic challenges. The accompanying graph is useful for identifying potential gaps in knowledge or access to support services.

The data indicates that a significant portion of students who were successfully contacted by the support staff still did not receive assistance. This communication issue may stem from outdated contact information or a lack of resources. The following section will discuss the support provided by the department, as illustrated in **Figure 3**.

Support Received

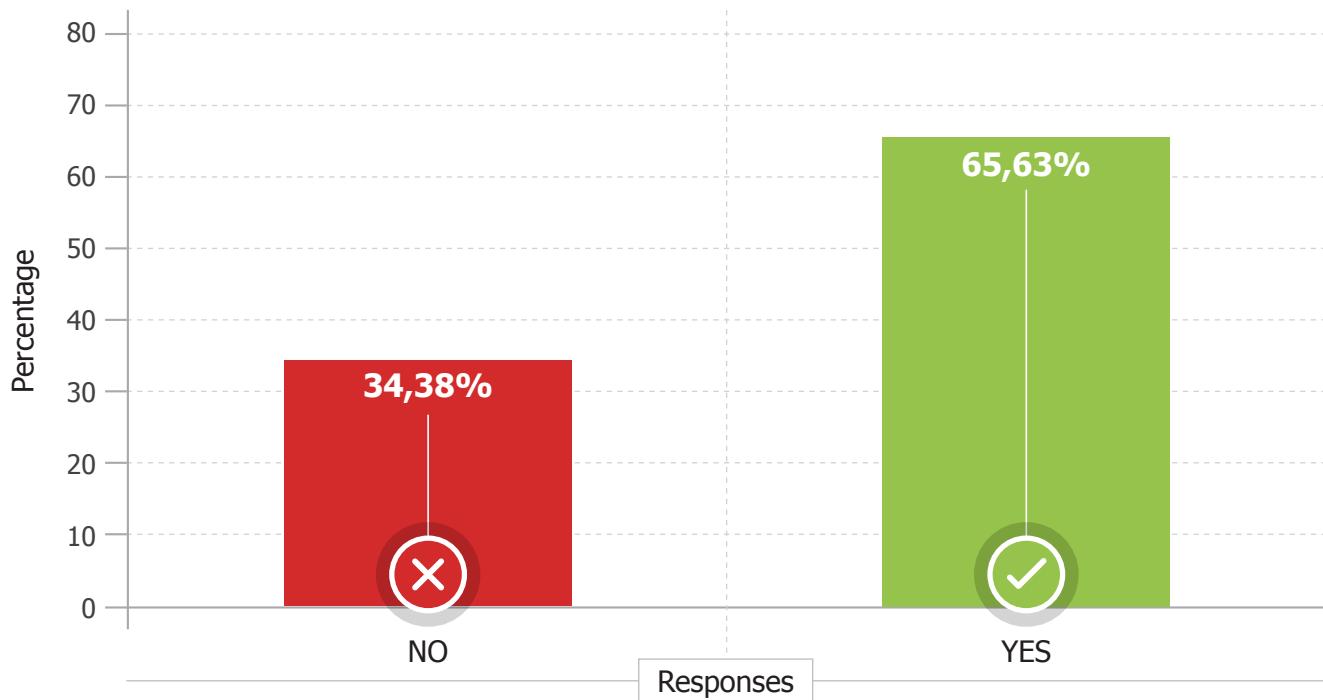


Figure 3: Support Received from the Department

Responses	Number of Students	Percentage
No	22	34,38%
Yes	42	65,63%
Grand Total	64	100,00%

Students were asked whether they had received support from their respective departments. As shown in Figure 3, the majority of respondents, 65.63%, indicated that they had received support, while 34.38% reported that they had not.

The data from this survey suggests that the WSU support mechanisms are effective and accessible for most students in need, as evidenced by the response rate. The finding that 65.63% of students reported receiving support is a positive indicator of WSU efforts. This underscores the importance and functionality of departmental support systems in assisting students. Effective support mechanisms contribute to improved student satisfaction, academic performance, and retention rates, ultimately enhancing the university's reputation.

However, the findings also highlight areas needing improvement. A notable 34.38% of respondents indicated they did not receive support, revealing significant gaps in the system that deserve attention. This raises concerns about equitable access to resources, as some groups may remain underserved. To address this issue, WSU should investigate the reasons behind this disparity, such as potential communication barriers, resource availability, or procedural inefficiencies.

Optimising these areas will help ensure that all students benefit from available support mechanisms, promoting inclusivity and reinforcing WSU's commitment to student success.

8.2. Comprehensive Support Services for Student Success

According to the WSU student tracking framework, students who require assistance can access various support services provided by various units within the institution, each tailored to meet specific academic and personal needs (WSU, 2022. Student Tracking Referral Framework). Amongst these interventions given by various support services, we have:

- **Peer academic leaders (PALS)** play a key role by offering mentorship, helping students develop effective study habits, and guiding them through challenging coursework.
- **The academic advisors** assist students in navigating their academic journey, guiding course selection, degree planning, and career aspirations. These services are designed to ensure students are supported in their academic pursuits and in managing their overall well-being, helping them succeed both in and out of the classroom.
- **The tutoring services** are available to provide after-class personalised academic support, with a senior student specialising in subjects that other students may find challenging.
- **The Writing Centre** offers workshops and one-on-one consultations to improve writing techniques, such as essay structure, referencing, thesis development, research methods and any other writing issue student may have in their academic journey.
- **Teaching and Learning with Technology** aims to support students through technology-related interventions and digital literacy initiatives. These efforts help students become familiar with the technological resources available at the university, empowering them to utilise these tools for their academic success effectively.
- Also, **lecturers** actively engage with students, identifying struggling students and directing them toward appropriate resources for additional help, creating a collaborative learning environment.
- Beyond academic support, students can also access **health services** and academic advising to address their well-being and personal development. Health services offer counselling and mental health support for students experiencing stress, anxiety, or other psychological challenges, which can affect academic performance.

According to the analysis, **Figure 4** illustrates the types of support students receive from different units within WSU.

Frequency of Services

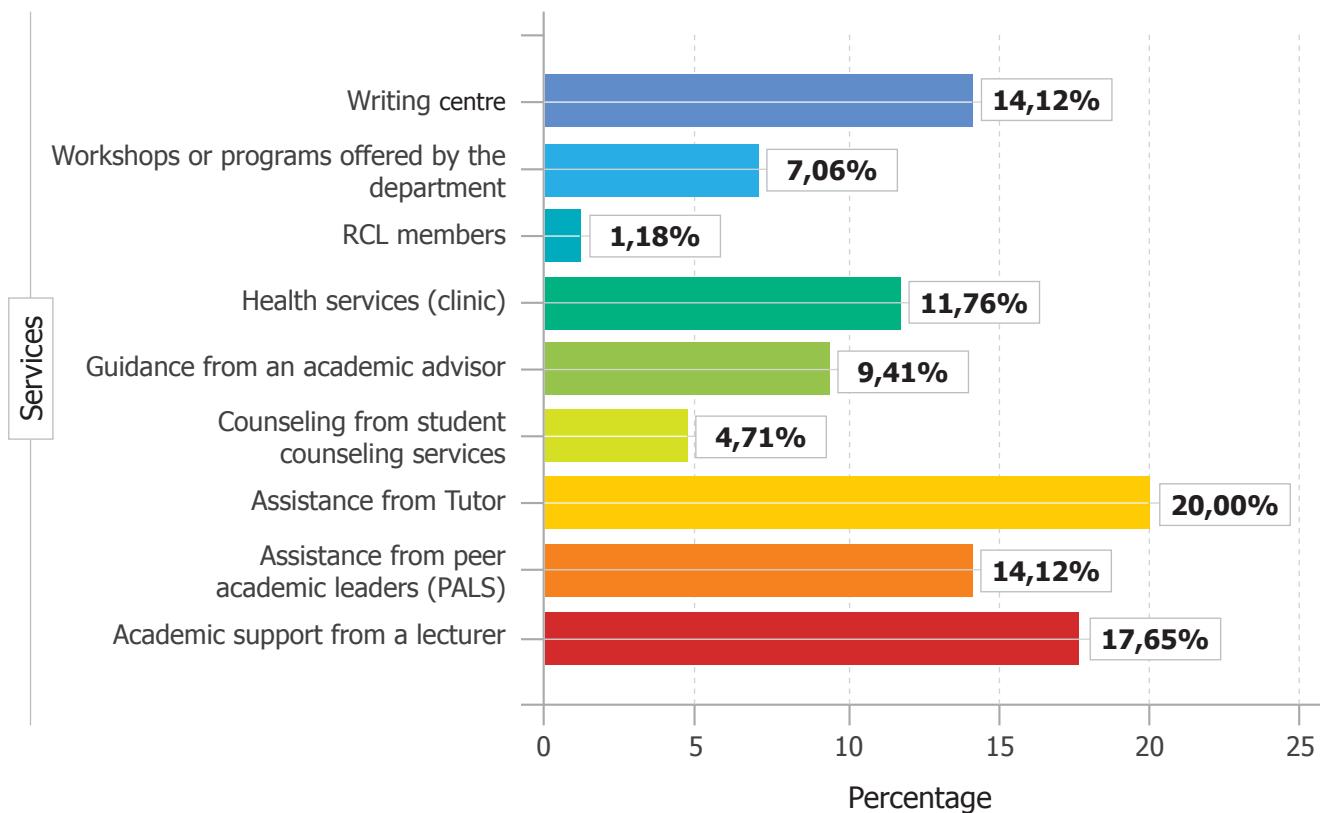


Figure 4: Frequency Graph

Services	Number of Students	Percentage
Writing centre	15	14,12%
Workshop or program offered by the department	6	7,06%
RCL members	1	1,18%
Health services (clinic)	10	11,76%
Guidance from an academic advisor	9	9,41%
Counselling from student counselling services	4	4,71%
Assistance from tutor	22	20,00%
Academic support from lecturer	25	14,12%
Assistance from peer academic leaders (PALS)	13	17,65%
Grand Total	105	100,00%

The information in **Figure 4** provides valuable insights into the level of assistance required by students and the available resources to support them. It highlights areas where additional help or services may be necessary.

According to the student respondents in this study, the primary sources of academic support include lecturers, with 23.8% of students seeking help from them, and tutors, with 20.95% doing the same. This underscores the crucial role that faculty and tutors play in student support. Additionally, Peer Academic Leaders (PALs) greatly contribute, as 12.38% of students seek assistance from them.

Moreover, Supplementary Support Services such as the Writing Centre, which 14.28% of students use, and health services (clinic), utilised by 9.52% of students, are noteworthy resources that address both academic and health-related challenges.

The guidance from academic advisors (8.57%) and counselling services (3.8%) played a lesser yet still significant role in supporting students. According to the data, only 0.95% of students sought help from members of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL), indicating that this group may be underutilised or less relevant for academic personal support. The term RCL is commonly used in high schools to refer to student governance, which may lead to confusion with Student Representative Council (SRC) in higher education institutions. As a result, students might mistakenly refer to SRC without recognising the differences in their roles and terminology.

Based on the insights derived from the data above, the following implications can be drawn:

8.2.1. Focus on Lecturer and Tutor Contributions

The significant reliance on lecturers and tutors highlights their pivotal role in student success. To ensure that these lecturers and tutors are well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of students, WSU should prioritise investing in their continuous training and professional development. This includes equipping them with effective teaching strategies, updated subject knowledge, and skills to support student engagement. Equally important are workload considerations for lecturers and tutors. Managing their responsibilities is essential to prevent burnout and to maintain the quality and consistency of academic support provided to students.

8.2.2. Enhance Peer Support Structures

Peer support plays a crucial role in student learning, as evidenced by the impact of Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) programmes. Expanding these programmes and providing comprehensive training to PAL leaders can further enhance their effectiveness. Well-trained peer mentors can offer valuable academic guidance, foster a supportive learning environment, and contribute positively to student retention and success.

8.2.3. Increase Awareness of Counselling Services

The relatively low utilisation of student counselling services (3.8%) suggests potential barriers such as lack of awareness, stigma surrounding mental health, or accessibility challenges. To address this, WSU should implement targeted promotional campaigns to raise awareness of the benefits of counselling services. Efforts should also be made to reduce stigma and ensure that these services are easily accessible, culturally sensitive, and responsive to students' mental health needs.

8.2.4. Leverage Writing Centres

With 14.28% of students utilising Writing Centre resources, these centres are positioned as valuable assets for academic development. WSU should further promote the services offered by the Writing Centre and enhance its capacity to support a wider range of students. Strengthening this centre through additional resources, expanded service hours, and targeted outreach can significantly improve academic performance and writing proficiency across disciplines.

8.2.5. Address the Gap in Departmental Workshops

Only 5.71% of students reported participating in workshops or programmes offered by their departments, indicating a gap in engagement with these potentially valuable learning opportunities. To better meet student needs, departments should diversify their workshop offerings, ensure they are relevant to current academic and career demands, and actively promote them through various communication channels. Encouraging student feedback on workshop content can also enhance relevance and participation rates.

8.2.6. Health Services Integration

With nearly 10% of students accessing health services, there is an opportunity to adopt a more holistic approach to student well-being by integrating these services with academic support systems. Collaborative initiatives between health services, academic advisors, and student support units can address physical and mental health concerns that impact academic performance. This integrated approach ensures that students receive comprehensive care that supports their well-being and academic success.

8.3. Overall Academic Feedback

Students were invited to provide overall academic feedback on the support offered by the faculty in an open-ended format. The open-ended responses provide insights on the support offered and their experience during this process. Several recurring themes emerged, the key themes emerging from this analysis include Motivational and Academic Support, Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health, Overwhelming Study Load and Academic Pressure, Role of Support Systems in Student Resilience. The feedback highlights the positive aspects and the challenges students face, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of various support services.

One student stated,



"The academic advisor was giving motivational advice and how academics can be so hard sometimes, which leads to anxiety."

while another mentioned,



“Academic lecture helped me by motivation and advice on how to gain confidence and focus. Tutor through their efforts to make every student to understand. They’re passionate and willing to help at all times.”

Some students also expressed their satisfaction with the support received as the best experience in their first year, with one asserting,



“Well my WSU first year experience was one of the best experiences starting from the writing center where they gave us support and guidance on how we are expected to write our assignments which helped us improve our year marks. Support and guidance from my lectures, tutors and PALs was the best. I’m looking forward to better improve my self on my second year.”

Students appreciated various support systems that significantly enhanced their academic and personal experiences. Motivational lectures guided focus and confidence, while tutors were commended for their dedication and patience in ensuring content understanding. The insights from the data point to the dual role of academic interventions: addressing emotional well-being (e.g., anxiety, motivation) and academic skills (e.g., focus, understanding). Lecturers' commitment to helping students play a vital role in creating a supportive learning environment. For best practice, WSU can strengthen student support programs by incorporating motivational sessions and focusing on emotional well-being. As part of staff development, training for academic staff could include strategies to build confidence and foster student focus effectively. Highlighting and encouraging the passion and dedication of educators can enhance student engagement. Overall, the sentiment in both quotes is positive, indicating appreciation for the motivational and supportive role of academic advisors, lecturers, and tutors.

The Writing Centre and academic advisors offered critical assistance with writing and managing workload challenges. Counselling services, including school psychologists, were instrumental in addressing personal issues like stress, anxiety, and depression.

Programmes like Intshayelelo created a supportive environment for first-year students. Overall, the support systems inspired confidence, resilience, and relief, helping students navigate academic and personal challenges effectively. One student stated,



“The struggle of having too much study load was overwhelming but the support I gained helped me a lot because I was scared even about my dp.”

Another shared,



“I was not well at all; I reached out to Student Counselling, and they were of great help. Some issues aren't resolved yet, but it went well.”

Additionally, students reported challenges of stress and overthinking about what will happen in their lives in future, with one stating,



“I was thinking in that time I will be fine but not I'm not sleeping because I think everything. I don't know what happened to me but it's part of growing. The support I have is about how to be a student and don't think too much like me.”

Despite the support systems in place, students faced several challenges. Some struggled with tutor unavailability, delays in support, and unresolved coursework issues. Advanced Diploma students highlighted frustrations with funding difficulties and results processing delays. Concerns about perceived inequalities between diploma and bachelor's students regarding support and resources were also raised. Additionally, many found the study load overwhelming, and some continued to experience issues with sleep, anxiety, and unresolved academic or personal problems, impacting their overall progress. The feedback underscores the positive impact of motivational lectures, supportive tutors, academic advisors, and counselling services in helping students overcome challenges and build resilience. However, the negative aspects, including tutor unavailability, funding delays, and ongoing mental health struggles, highlight areas for improvement to ensure equitable and timely support.

WSU should consider interventions to help students manage study loads, such as time management workshops or peer tutoring. In addition, strengthening counselling services at WSU, even in the residences, can address the ongoing challenges that require a more sustained approach, potentially involving follow-ups, expanded services, or tailored support plans. However, improving awareness by encouraging students to seek help early can reduce the build-up of stress and fear. Overall, the feedback from students reflects a mix of stress from overwhelming academic demands and unresolved challenges, gratitude for the support received, which provided relief and reassurance.

The students' reflections highlight the important role these support systems play in their academic journeys and personal development, noting both successes and areas for improvement within the university environment.



9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The student feedback reveals that the WSU support systems play a critical role in shaping their academic and personal experiences. Positive contributions, such as motivational lectures, dedicated tutors, academic advisors, and counselling services, have significantly enhanced students' confidence, resilience, and ability to manage challenges. Co-curriculum Initiatives have also been particularly impactful for first-year students, fostering a supportive environment during their transition to university life.

However, challenges persist, including tutor unavailability, delays in accessing support, and unequal resource allocation for students. Funding, along with ongoing mental health struggles and overwhelming study loads, continue to affect students' progress. In addition, results processing or mark capturing delays are still the major factors that slow the process of early identification and the putting in place of interventions. These issues highlight the need for targeted improvements to ensure that support systems are accessible, equitable, and effective in addressing students' diverse needs.

Below are the recommendations:

1. Enhance Accessibility to Tutoring Services

Increase the availability of tutors by hiring additional tutors or implementing flexible (online tutoring) scheduling to reduce delays and ensure timely support for all students.

2. Streamline Administrative Processes

Adopt more workflow processes and utilise technology for better tracking and communication with students to address funding and results processing or mark-capturing delays.

3. Promote Mental Health Support

Expand access to counselling services and provide additional resources, such as peer support groups in residence, campuses or more workshops, to address common issues like stress, anxiety, and sleep problems.

4. Ensure Equity in Resource Allocation

Evaluate and address disparities between diploma and bachelor's students to ensure equal access to academic and personal support services.

5. Optimize Study Load Management

Offer time management workshops, workload planning tools, and individualised academic coaching to help students navigate their study requirements more effectively.

6. Monitor and Evaluate Support Programs

Regularly assess the effectiveness of motivational lectures, academic advising, and other support systems using student feedback to identify and implement continuous improvements.

The table below presents the recommendations along with suggested responsible units:

Recommendation Area	Action Point	Responsible Unit/Stakeholders
1 Enhance Accessibility to Tutoring Services	Hire additional tutors and implement flexible/online tutoring schedules to ensure timely academic support.	Teaching & Learning Centre, Academic Departments
2 Streamline Administrative Processes	Utilize workflow systems and technology to improve communication and speed up funding processes, results, and mark capturing.	Registrar's Office, ICT, Finance, Academic Administration
3 Promote Mental Health Support	Expand counselling services; introduce peer support groups and wellness workshops in residences and on campuses.	Student Counselling, Student Affairs, Residence Life
4 Ensure Equity in Resource Allocation	Evaluate differences in support services for diploma vs. bachelor's students to ensure fair access across programmes.	Academic Planning, Faculties, Equity and Inclusion Office
5 Optimise Study Load Management	Offer time management workshops, workload planning tools, and personalised coaching to help students manage academic demands.	Academic Advising, Teaching & Learning Centre
6 Monitor and Evaluate Support Programs	Collect regular student feedback and assess the effectiveness of motivational lectures, academic advising, and other support services for ongoing improvement.	Institutional Research, Student Affairs, Quality Assurance

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