University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

FIRST-YEAR STUDENT

Experience Survey

2011

Lead Researchers

Nhlanhla Cele (Report Writer)

Report Writing

Nhlanhla Cele, Director of Strategic Planning (Project Supervisor and Report Writer)
Ali Denewade, Project Administrator (Data Collection and Analysis)
Louis Ntsundeni Mapatagane, Administrator of Special Projects (Data Analysis)

Editing of the Report

Rina Minervini, Consulting Editor

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acknowledgement

Executive Summary

In 2012, the Strategic Planning Division (SPD) conducted a First-year Experience Survey at Wits among current first-year students who had been at Wits for at least six months. This report presents the findings of that survey, and contains evidence of the perceptions and experiences of first-year students in their short period at Wits. The target population for the study was all first-year new-to-Wits students, a headcount of 4 877 (5 749 – 15% dropout). A response rate of 20.2% (989) of this total of target participants was achieved in the study. This is a small number, but, while it would have been ideal for all first-year students to participate, the response rate of more than 10% in a survey like this allows us to generalise the research findings.

In the *Wits 2013 Strategy*, the University states:

Wits wants to be vaunted for creating an intellectually vibrant, socially embracing and culturally diverse teaching and learning environment. Student-centredness at the University does not only focus on provision of facilities that are sensitive to student needs but also on the use of pedagogies that respond appropriately to the learning needs of all students. It includes the creation of a conducive environment, inclusive institutional culture, explicit concern and support for student development, and promotion of student responsibility for the quality and effectiveness of their learning. It is a given reality that these values cannot be achieved without co-ordinated and transformative programmes informed by rigorous intellectual debate and critique in a research-intensive metropolitan university like Wits.[1]

This calls for Wits to invest in policy, strategy and the enrichment of experiences of our first-year students in ways that contribute to a positive experience and enhance meaningful teaching and learning. It has to be noted in this report that the study suggests that there are areas in the undergraduate experience that are positioned for positive growth and enrichment. There are also areas that need special attention and strategic investment of resources, and these are:

(a) Developing understood principles of teaching and learning premised on student-centredness
(b) Putting in place mechanisms mitigating against the high first-year drop-out rate
(c) Improving student participation in the Wits First-Year Experience Programme
(d) Providing guaranteed University residence accommodation to all first-year students
(e) Recruiting high achievers for undergraduate studies at Wits
(f) Creating opportunities for more first-year students to own computer devices
(g) Providing a distinct university experience to all undergraduate students to promote a 'word of mouth' recruitment drive
(h) Promote more financial aid opportunities to lessen the burden of fee payment on parents
(i) Help first-year students develop studying skills, given the fact that the majority of first-year students indicated that they need to develop such skills

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[1] *Wits 2013 Strategy. Strategic Planning Division, University of the Witwatersrand.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Hamblin (1989) defines the first-year experience as "the encounters of the first year of study of an undergraduate or postgraduate student in a higher education institution". He further states that the mere process of becoming a first-year student is one that can be filled with anxiety, fear, and uncertainty as the students are venturing into the unknown, especially those for whom it is their first time at tertiary level after high school. These newly admitted students often feel confused, tense, threatened, and even helpless. If they do not have innate coping mechanisms, a combination of these factors can lead to early drop-out or failure, depending on the university environment, the student's level of preparedness for university education, and available support systems for academic and psychological well-being. This study looked at the experiences of first-year undergraduate students at Wits to understand those experiences and establish their levels of satisfaction with basic educational arrangements in their first six months at Wits.

Calendar Instance Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total Registration	4 067	5 049	5 331	6 026	8 366	6 153	5 575
Total Graduates	2 480	2 765	2 503	2625	1 526	10	0
Total Still Registered	49	178	490	986	3 076	3 867	3 937
Total Moved	431	520	579	563	722	575	562
Total Excluded After Passing	525	664	587	775	1 497	788	452
Total Drop-outs After Registration	582	922	1 172	1 077	1 545	913	624
Drop-outs After Registration 1 Year[2]	268	459	796	668	1 076	737	591
% Drop-outs After Registration 1 Year	6.6%	9.1%	14.9%	11.1%	12.9%	12%	10.6%
Drop-outs After Registration 2 Years	144	246	162	213	261	157	33
Drop-outs After Registration 3 Years	88	103	107	118	192	19	0
Drop-outs After Registration 4 Years	51	62	55	75	16	0	0
Drop-outs After Registration 5 Years	17	39	46	3	0	0	0
Drop-outs After Registration 6 Years	8	12	6	0	0	0	0
Drop-outs After Registration 7 Years	6	1	0	0	0	0	0
Drop-outs After Passing 0 Year[3]	288	539	832	766	1 200	772	553
% Drop-outs After Passing 0 Year	7.1%	10.7%	15.6%	12.7%	14.3%	12.5%	9.9%

Table 1: Enrolments and Dropouts for First-year First-Time Entering Undergraduate Students

[2] Dropped out in first year without passing any course
[3] Dropped out in first year after writing and passing some courses

Calendar Instance Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Drop-outs After Passing 1 Year	219	274	237	238	298	125	71
Drop-outs After Passing 2 Years	55	77	71	59	46	16	0
Drop-outs After Passing 3 Years	20	31	32	14	1	0	0
Drop-outs After Passing 4 Years	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Drop-outs After Passing 5 Years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Drop-outs After Passing	582	922	1 172	1 077	1 545	913	624
% Dropout Only	14.3	18.3	21.98	17.87	18.47	14.84	11.19

Table 1: Enrolments and Dropouts for First-year First-Time Entering Undergraduate Students continues...

Like many other universities in South Africa, Wits has experienced a large annual drop-out rate of first-year students. Most students who drop out during the first year of study do so without passing any course, suggesting that they drop out largely before the commencement of the second term in any given year. The data show that very few students drop out during their 2nd, 3rd or 4th years of study. Cohort analysis suggests that a majority of students may be delayed (stay in the system longer than the minimum duration of their qualification), but eventually graduate after surviving the first year.

Various student support mechanisms and systems have been instituted at Wits in an attempt to mitigate the risks that first-year students face. These include student counselling services provided by the Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU), devolved academic development programmes and specific programmes such as the First-year Experience (FYE) offered by the Student Affairs Division, e-Learning Tutorials, and the First-year Student Tutoring programme offered at the student residences. The University has also established a support group for the 'first-generation' students.[4] Other initiatives include the Targeting Talent Project, an initiative started in 2007 with the first cohort being Grade 10 learners, who subsequently became first-year university students. It is against this backdrop that the SPD conducted the study to gain an understanding of the experiences of first-year students. The study was conceptualised to give pointers to strategic initiatives and the development of innovative pedagogies and support mechanisms to help Wits first-year students cope with the challenges they face in the period of transition from high school to university studies.

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[4] These are students who are the first in their families to come to tertiary institutions; these students are termed First in Family.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW:
On The First-Year Experience

Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld (2005) recommend that an important area of investigation for researchers studying student attrition is to establish reasons why students fail to complete their first year of tertiary education. This is particularly important because student experiences in their early days at university serve as a foundation on which the rest of their university experiences may be built (Gardener, 1989). The literature shows that various factors contribute to an unpleasant first-year student experience. Among these factors, stress is most prevalent, although it should be noted that not all students who are experiencing stress will drop out. Furthermore, what one student might perceive as stressful may not necessarily be stressful to another.

First, there are perceptions that living away from home for the first time, having to manage one's own finances, establishing new friends, and generally assuming greater responsibility for oneself can be overwhelming for first-year students. The transition from high school to the first year of university also requires a series of profound academic, social, and emotional adaptations (Wilkie & Kuckuck, 1989). There is an articulated view that first-year students often arrive at university uncertain of the standard of work that will be expected of them. The inability to adapt to this new environment often causes students to withdraw from university during or after their first year or to perform at a lower academic level than they are capable of (Tinto, 1982).

Secondly, there is another articulated view that the first-year performance combined with high-school performance is a reliable predictor of student success. However, Schwartz and Washington (1999) suggest that, although tests have become essential elements in college admissions, they add little to predicting the success of students at university. This simply implies that universities need to be guided by principles of student-centredness and good student socialisation mechanisms when designing orientation and first-year programmes, instead of building on assumptions that good entry scores provide guaranteed prediction of student success.

Thirdly, financial resources may play a pivotal role in the success of the student, as financial hardships could distract students, affect their performance and result in drop-out. This is supported by literature which reveals that the socio-economic status of first-year students is a valuable predictor of timely completion of studies. A study conducted by Letseka and Breier (2008) on student poverty in higher education in South Africa revealed that students from stable socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to complete a bachelor's degree within four years than students who do not come from such backgrounds. Moreover, some students who dropped out were 'forced out' for a short while to earn money and returned when they could afford to pay for their studies (Letseka & Breier, 2008).

Fourthly, 'staying power' is another factor, and is defined as "students having sufficient motivation and morale to see their degrees through and graduate from university" (Moleli, 2005). Wasonga, Christman and Kilmer (2003) observed that first-year students who began their studies with a commitment to completing their degrees are more likely to persist than those with wavering or uncertain commitment. Commitment usually correlates with students' levels of confidence about their ability to learn and succeed.

Lastly, university support mechanisms are essential for providing a sustainable and enduring learning experience for undergraduate students. It is therefore crucial for universities to provide adequate support and assistance to help them adjust to university life (Johnston, Cazaly & Olekalns, 2008), even though students may have high levels of commitment to their studies. It has been found that support from their university helps first-year students to be resilient in order to overcome academic difficulties and to cope with academic life (Wasoga et al, 2003).

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study used a conceptual framework (Figure 1) informed by support and socialisation mechanisms to establish what student support needs first-year students have; how the University has responded to those needs in their view; what perceptions they hold about student-centredness at Wits; and the levels of satisfaction they have in relation to the total learning experience during their first year at Wits. The framework consists of three organising phases: (1) preparing to come to Wits, (2) upon entering Wits, and (3) settling at Wits. The study seeks to establish how the student experiences in these three organising phases shape the total learning experience of Wits first-year students. The study will pose questions in relation to: (1) support services and administration, (2) the quality of and access to facilities, (3) the educational experience, and (4) the Wits culture. These questions will be linked to the three organising phases identified above.

Figure 1: The Wits Model of Student Satisfaction with the First-year Experience

3.1 Preparing to come to Wits

The experience our students have with the University before they officially join as students is important, given the fact that it sets the tone and the expectation for their on-campus educational experience. We argue in this study that the way in which the University handles the application process – which includes

handling enquiries, and sending application forms and all necessary documents to applicants – influences the decisions students make about their university of choice. The research instrument was structured in a way that allowed students to comment on their experiences with the University before they joined as students.

3.2 Upon entering Wits

The "upon entering Wits" phase explores the nature of experiences first-year students encounter from the registration day and throughout the orientation programme. It includes experiences on curriculum advice, payment of student fees, allocation of accommodation, and general orientation on the University facilities. It could be argued that this phase should also explore the experiences students have with the University's First-year Experience Orientation Programme.

3.3 Settling at Wits

A number of variables shape the student experience during this period. The phase covers students' experiences from the first day they attend classes until the end of their first semester. It therefore explicitly includes the experiences of students with the quality of teaching and learning at Wits; and the quality of and access to facilities such as libraries, health and wellness facilities, psychological services, and general student welfare facilities, which could include sport and cultural facilities.

The extent to which students experience these things as either affirming or excluding shapes the way they view the Wits culture. It can be argued that institutional culture can be largely defined as the way people perceive particular behaviours as being the way things are done in a particular institution. It has to be argued again that perceptions that first-year students hold about the institutional culture at Wits inform their sense of belonging to the University. The literature suggests that the best way to initiate people into a particular culture is by improving their sense of belonging. Settling at Wits, therefore, is about giving our first-year students the right emotional and intellectual tools successfully to transcend the barriers between being high-school graduates and university students.

In this study, we also argue that no single aspect of the Wits experience can on its own define the total Wits experience. It is the interplay among these three components – preparing to come, arriving and settling in – firmly anchored on the four pillars of the Wits experience which define the total learning experience of our students. We hope that the analysis of the data will help us unpack issues that have a direct bearing on our students' wellness and their resilience. This data should also help us understand which aspects of University arrangements should be altered to maximise the positive experience for first-year students at Wits.

It is the opinion of the SPD that the University should adopt a combination of multiple models to engage with students instead of focusing on one. These models are: the student feedback approach; the expert model; students as co-constructors; students' rights and responsibilities; and the student participation model. In line with the *student feedback approach*, students are viewed as recipients of services and are surveyed about the quality of these services. While the *expert model* tends largely to focus on levels of knowledge between students and staff – and follows a knowledge-imparting model through transmission teaching, other models, such as the *student rights and responsibilities model*, open up space for student critique and participation in shaping their experience. The *students as co-constructors model* allocates space for students to have a voice in shaping their experience, thus enriching the total learning experience. It is ideal for the University to ensure that first-year students are given enough opportunity to shape their learning experience at Wits, working with the University community to enhance the value of Wits education.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Purpose of the study

The opinions of first-year students about their total learning experience at university are sought by most educational institutions worldwide, generally in the form of a satisfaction feedback questionnaire. Against the backdrop of high drop-out and student failure rates at the undergraduate level in South African universities, such feedback is vital in helping universities to put in place responsive mechanisms that address student needs through the necessary support mechanisms. An interesting aspect of student satisfaction surveys is their link with quality control in that, with the increasing number of students enrolling in South African universities, it is important to maintain quality in teaching and research programmes as this is a strong determinant in accessing more government funding.

This deliberate focus on researching the experiences of first-year students has produced the first such study to be conducted at Wits. As Wits grapples with the implications of defining itself as a student-centred university, and with its need to improve the quality of its student experience, getting feedback on student experiences and perceptions in this regard is essential. It has to be kept in mind that the University intends to continue attracting highly talented students from around the world by affording these students a distinct experience without compromising its commitment to providing, as well, a research-led and student-centred learning experience. The benefits of the first-year experience study are as follows:

- its influence on the expectations and perceptions of other students
- an improved quality of service and total learning experience at Wits
- enhanced responsiveness through strategic planning, prioritisation and provisioning
- an indication of future student satisfaction
- improved student success and throughput
- the nurturing of a long-lasting graduate sense of pride and attachment to the Wits experience
- possible contribution to reduced drop-out rates

The main objective of the study was to establish the nature of the perceptions and experiences of first-year students in relation to Wits educational arrangements and the extent to which students are satisfied with their total learning experience at Wits.

4.2 Critical questions

The **critical questions** posed in this study were derived from the theoretical framework and the objectives presented in the introductory narrative of this report.

The study was based on the following five critical questions:

(a) *What is the nature of the student experience, perception and levels of satisfaction with the Wits experience gained through interacting with the University prior to enrolment as first-year students at Wits?*

(b) *What is the nature of the student experience, perception and levels of satisfaction with the Wits experience gained by students upon entering Wits in 2012?*

(c) *Are students satisfied with nature of administrative and support services that they receive during their first year at Wits?*

(d) *Are students satisfied with the nature of and access to facilities that are made available to support academic activities and student social life on campus?*

(e) *How satisfied are students with the institutional experience they receive during their first year at Wits?*

4.3 Research design

The study adopted a quantitative questionnaire-based methodology using a web-based survey platform. However, in the sections of the questionnaire where there were open-ended questions, a qualitative method was used to get as much discursive input as possible from all participants. A survey tool offered a suitable approach to getting feedback on perceptions, and allowed for maximum participation with sufficient space for open-ended input.

4.4 Online survey

The survey was conducted through a self-administered questionnaire to elicit student responses on their first-year experience and their levels of satisfaction in relation to the Wits experience. A web-based survey was chosen based on its cost effectiveness, efficiency and data security.

4.5 Scope and sample

The target population: undergraduate first-year students (n=5 749 – 15% drop-out rate, given the fact that the study focused on those who survived mid-year exams: n= 4 887). The target response rate: at least 15% (collectively distributed across all faculties and disciplines). In social sciences the acceptable response rate for such a survey is 10%; following the logic of the target population narrated above, the response rate for this study was 20.2%.

4.6 Data collection technique

An e-mail with a link to the survey was sent to potential respondents using the student e-mail facility provided by Central Network Services (CNS). Once the survey had been completed by a respondent, submission would be done by clicking on the 'finish' icon and the data would be stored confidentially. Posters were mounted in various areas on Wits campuses to encourage students to participate in the survey. Several reminders were sent through student e-mail to ensure that as many first-year students as possible participated in the surveys.

The questionnaire was self-administered online. It had both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Questions were divided into three organising phases, namely:

- *Applying to Wits:* capturing application and admission processes
- *Joining Wits:* capturing the first-year experience during registration and orientation

- *Settling in at Wits:* documenting the registration process, accommodation, support services (including psychosocial and financial) provided, and what the students consider to be the institutional culture at the University

Questions posed were related to four areas of student experience, namely the educational experience, support services and administration, quality of and access to facilities, and the Wits culture as provided in the conceptual framework for the study.

Data analysis was ethically guided by the intention to guard the confidentiality of respondents, as promised to respondents during data collection. The questionnaire assured students that their participation was confidential and the findings would not be directly traced back to them. The information on the participation sheet requiring e-mail address or cell number stated that such details would be used only to ensure that students could be contacted if they won a laptop prize for their participation. Students could also voluntarily choose to not to participate in the study if they so desired. Participants were assured that choosing not to participate would not in any way negatively impact on their academic studies. The proposal was submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), and ethical clearance and approval to conduct the study was granted by the Registrar.

5 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The total number of participants in this survey was 1 023. During the analysis, it became clear that some of the participants were not part of the target population (first-years). Two 'filter questions' placed in different parts of the instrument were used to filter data; these were: *Are you a first-year undergraduate student?*; and *If you are an undergraduate student, in which year of study are you – 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th year?* These were used to clean data and eliminate all responses from those who indicated that they were not first-year undergraduate students, or were doing 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th year of undergraduate studies. After extensive cleaning of data, 34 responses were eliminated given the fact that they were not part of the target audience, and only 989 remained as appropriate respondents. In this data analysis, therefore, the 989 represent 100% of the total respondents, being 20.2% of the overall 2012 first-year enrolment (5 749 headcount – 15% dropout = 4 887).

Have you studied at any University before?

No	91.37%
Yes	5.26%
(blank)	3.37%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
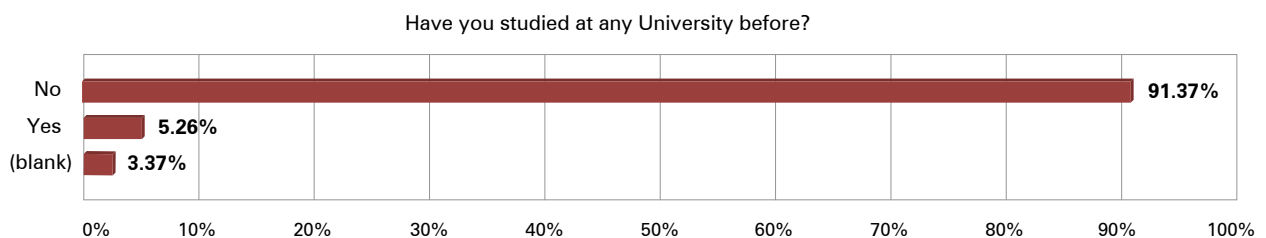
Figure 2: First Time at University

The data illustrated in Figure 2 suggest that a considerable majority of students (91.51% of this sample) enrolled for first-year undergraduate studies at Wits were enrolled for the first time in a higher-education institution. Only 5.26% of the sample came from other universities, while 3.24% did not answer the question. The first-timers are predominantly students straight from high school who need a specific kind of mentoring and guidance to help them cope with higher-education demands and University life in general. Providing support is crucial for these students – as living away from home for the first time, having to manage one's own finances, establishing new friends, and generally assuming greater responsibility for oneself can be overwhelming for first-year students. Such support is also particularly essential given the fact that some of the students represent the first university-going generation in their families. This was the case for the 41.15% of respondents who indicated that no one in their immediate and extended families had studied at a university before, while 58.85% indicated that at least someone in their families had studied at university. It is clear that those respondents who were the first in their families to study at a university had no role models from their family structures to guide them through the intricacies of being a university student.
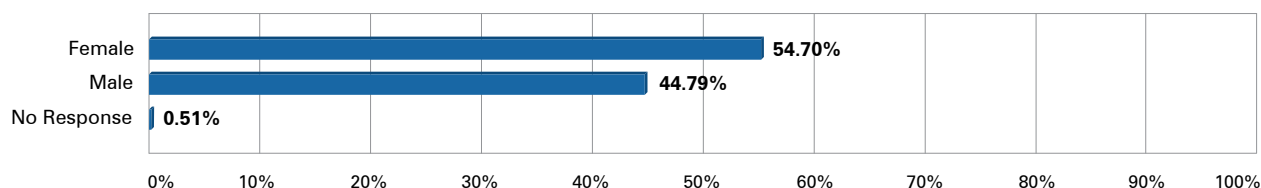
Figure 3: Gender Profile

The proportion of female students enrolled at Wits reached a plateau at 55% in 2009 (SPD, 2012). The participation of 54.7% female respondents is this study (Figure 3) is consonant with the trend of female students registered at the University. It is also encouraging to realise that female students are not only taking more spaces in student enrolment than they did prior to 2009, but are also participating in initiatives giving feedback to the University, such as this study.

The participation of 74.12% African students in the study (Figure 4) is also consonant with the University registration trend (75%) since 2009 (SPD, 2012). Participation in the survey was consonant with the Wits student racial demographics in other ways, too: 14.56% white; 6.67% Indian; and 4.15% coloured. This representative participation ensures that insights gained through the analysis of data represent the views of different races, and that input from these first-year students is informed by the broader cultural perspectives of first-year Wits students.
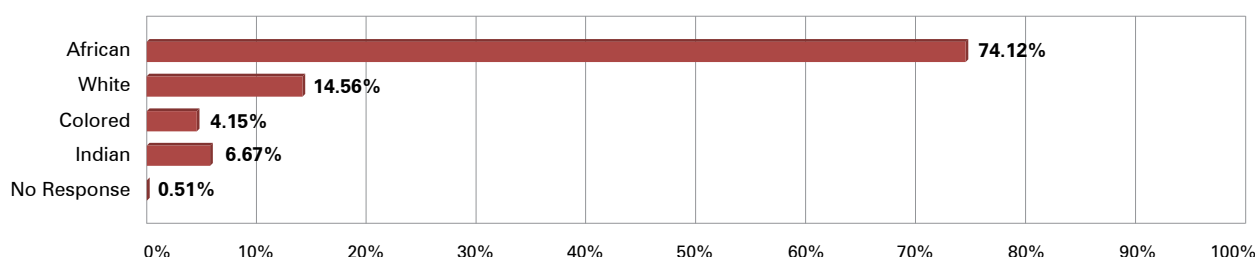
Figure 4: Race Profile

Figure 5 shows that a large proportion of participants (92.32%) were South African nationals, and 7.28% were of international origin. It is also encouraging to realise that the views and perspectives of international students are represented in the overall understanding of the Wits First-year Experience. The proportion of international students at Wits has reached a plateau of 8% over the past four years, and therefore the participation of international students in this study is consonant with the overall enrolment trend in the University.

	n	%
South African	913	92.32%
What is your nationality? (Specify, e.g. Nigerian, Zimbabwean, British etc)	72	7.28%
(blank)	4	0.40%
Grand total	989	100.00%

Figure 5: Nationality of Respondents

On Applying to Study at Wits

Data analysis depicted in Figure 6 shows that the largest percentage of participants (72.19%) in this study came to Wits because of the University's reputation. Information from the University prospectus led to 28.11% of respondents coming to Wits; 14.96% joined the University based on the advice they received from their schools; and a combined 24.57% of participants joined Wits as a result of word-of-mouth reports (being advised by a friend or a personal contact). The data also

shows that the career expo and open days have been very useful instruments to recruit first-year students: 10.61% of sample joined after participating in the career expo, and 11.73% after receiving information during the open day. Very few first-year students joined Wits after receiving information about it from public media: while 10.92% of students joined as a result of the University website, only 2.22% did so after seeing an advertisement in the public media.
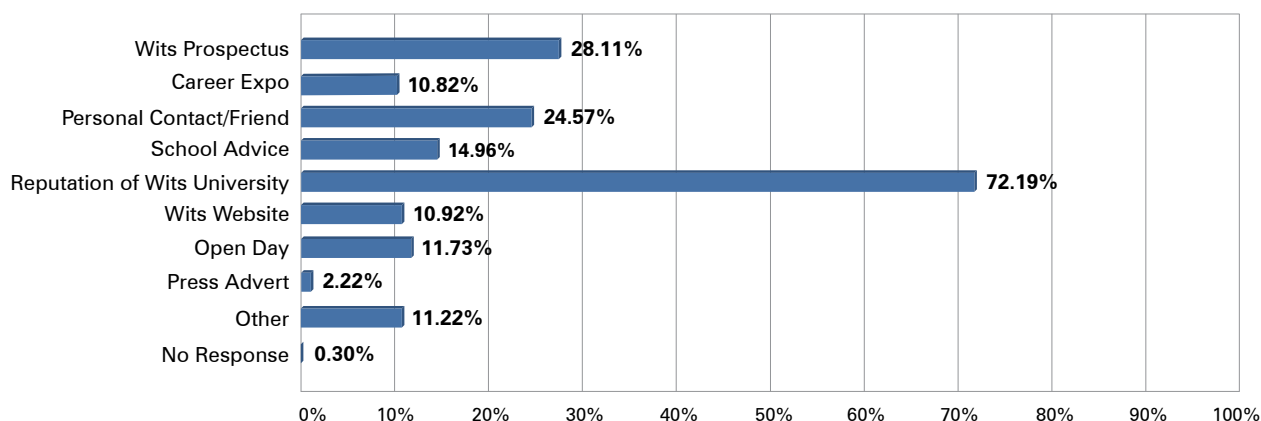
Figure 6: Recruitment Factor and Information

Evidence gleaned through the analysis suggests that the University's reputation (word-of-mouth) is the most powerful means through which the University recruits first-year students. This implies that the experiences of those associated with Wits are very important in ensuring that a good message about the University is sent out to the public in general. This also contributes to making sure that the University has a good reputation in the eyes of the general public – as reflected in Figure 6. If Wits intends to recruit high-level undergraduate students who stand to benefit from our educational and research arrangements, it is very important that we invest in the experiences of those who are already at Wits to preserve its reputation.

Data analysis depicted in Figure 7 shows high levels of satisfaction with the information received from Wits after submitting an application. Those who indicated satisfaction formed 91.91% of the respondents, of whom 46.41% strongly agreed that they were satisfied. Only 7.89% were not satisfied with the information they received after applying to Wits. The instrument did not probe the possible reasons for that dissatisfaction, but it would be ideal to understand what they were. To attract the most academically talented students, universities have to respond promptly with offers, and 86.75% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the efficiency with which the study offer from Wits was made. Only 12.84% were not satisfied with this aspect of their experience.

Clarity of information on registration and concomitant procedures is essential to those applicants who receive offers. The University appears to be providing very clear directives and information on registration procedures: 85.24% of respondents expressed satisfaction with this aspect of their experience. Only 14.56% were not satisfied. Again, in this regard, no probing questions were asked on the reasons for the dissatisfaction.
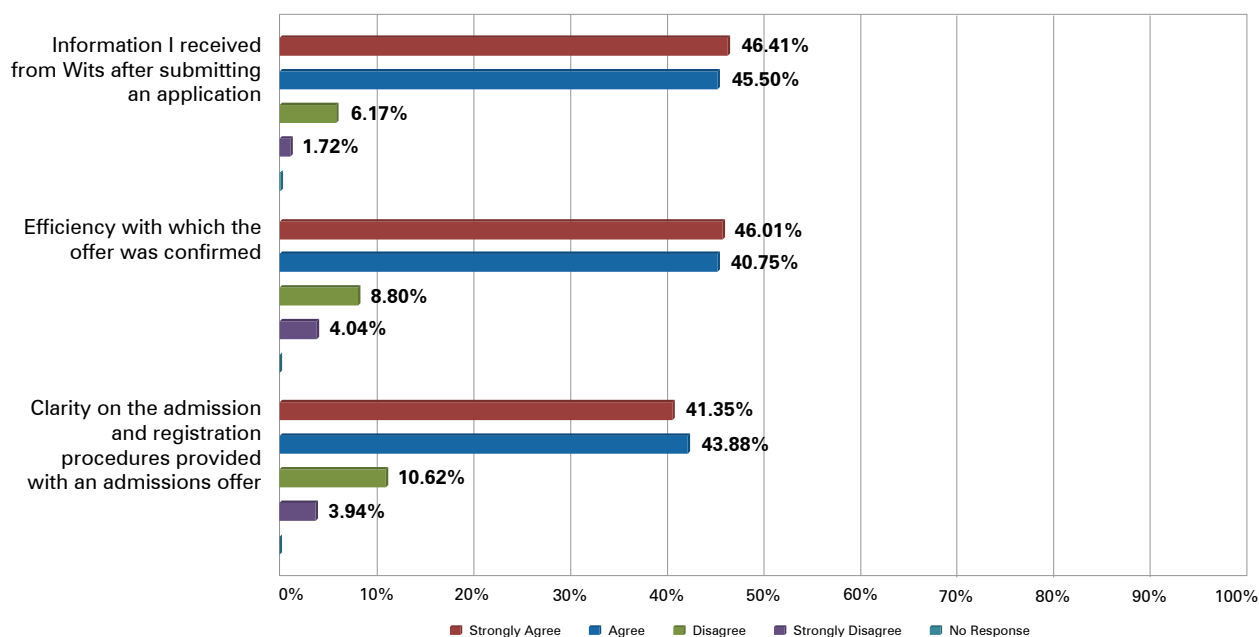
Figure 7: Satisfaction during the Period of Applying to Study at Wits

Upon Joining Wits

Receiving new students in a manner that provides an opportunity to appreciate the University culture often gives impetus to their enhanced sense of belonging. In most cases positive impressions given at the beginning of the studying career in a university help students realise that the university is an environment where they learn more than what is provided in the formal curriculum. Perceptions about institutional culture are often constructed during this period of the student's life in the university and later validated – or contradicted – by similar or counter experiences they gain during the rest of their stay.

The pre-orientation programme is used to provide information on course/academic requirements for new students. As reflected in Figure 8, a large number of respondents (82.2%) agreed that the information given at the pre-orientation programme was a true reflection of the course they were doing. Only 16.69% respondents disagreed with the statement. This percentage could be considered insignificant; however, given that inadequate or inaccurate information could lead to possible drop-out or poor performance, the University needs to ensure that information provided about students' courses is as accurate as possible. The information provided during the pre-orientation programme should also assist first-year students in making better informed course choices. As shown in Figure 8, 76.85% of respondents agreed with the statement that the information provided during the pre-orientation programme helped them make better choices for their studies; 21.44% disagreed. The University needs to consider ensuring that the programme sufficiently supports students and helps them make better choices for their studies.
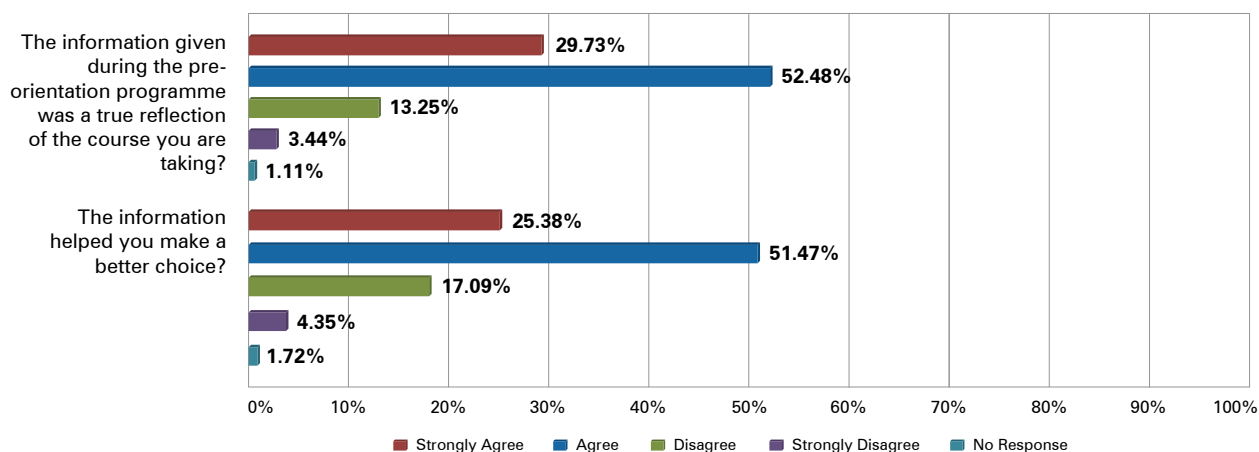
Figure 8: Pre-registration Orientation

The registration process for first-year undergraduate students is often full of confusion as students try their best to understand university rules and procedures while ensuring that they get officially registered as university students. Student needs during this period would range from getting confirmation that they qualify for registration to making sure that they choose the right courses for their studies. Registration procedures have to be articulated clearly and processes have to be user-friendly. The registration process should also encompass the orientation of students into the university systems and environment. An attempt to expose new students to the campus facilities and location of different service departments is essential. The survey looked broadly at the levels of student satisfaction with the registration process and the orientation arrangements that formed an integral part of it.

As depicted in Figure 9, there were relatively high levels of satisfaction with the procedures put in place to support first-year student registration. A total of 79.77% of respondents stated that they were satisfied with the procedures they went through during the registration process at the beginning of the year. However, 19.42% were not satisfied, and reasons for this vary, based on the narrative provided by students on what they would like to see changed about registration procedures and the process.
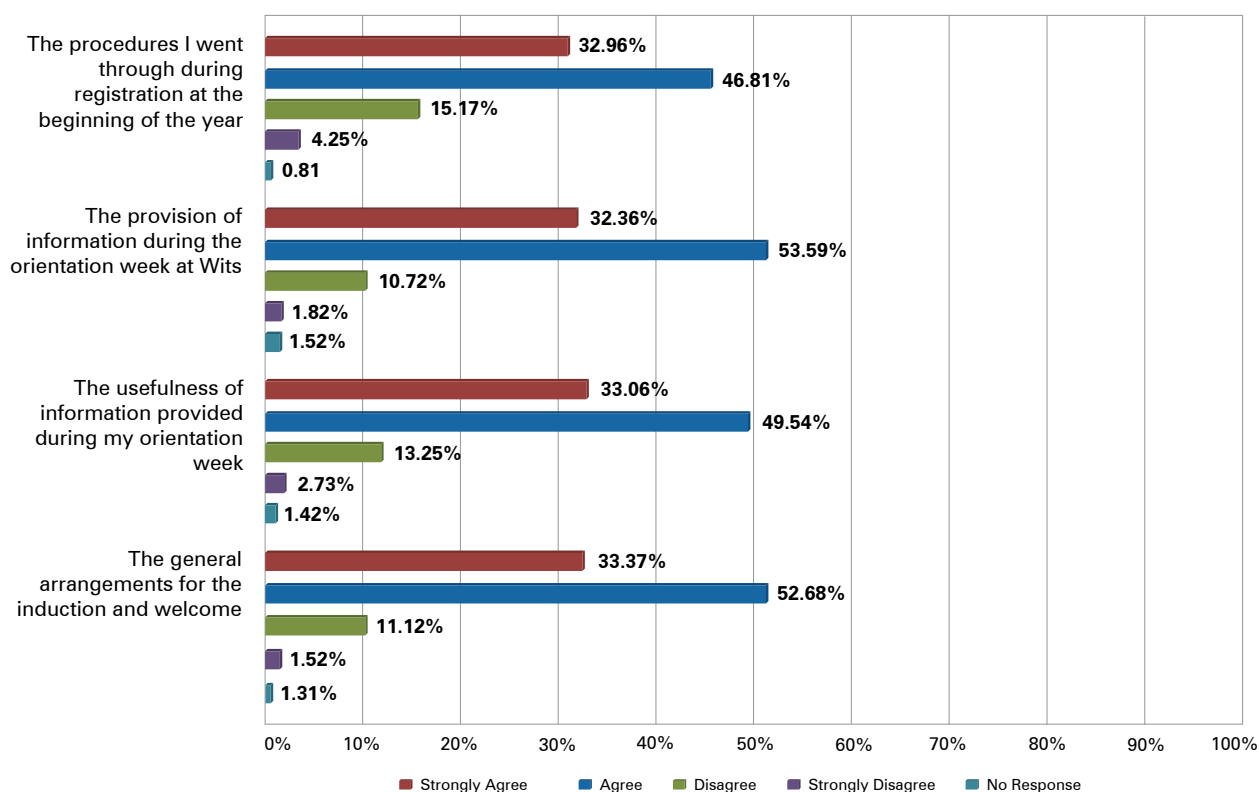
Figure 9: Registration Arrangements

As stated previously, the orientation week (O-Week) should provide sufficient information to help students understand rules, procedures and requirements. The data analysis presented in Figure 9 shows that 85.95% of respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the information provided during the orientation week, of which 32.36% strongly agreed. Only 12.54% expressed dissatisfaction.

Providing information during O-Week does not automatically mean that that information is useful, and respondents were therefore asked to state specifically whether or not they were satisfied with the usefulness of the information provided. The data shows that 82.61% were satisfied, and 15.98% were not. Of the 82.61% who were satisfied, 33.06% strongly agreed with the statement provided. Most respondents – 86.05% – also felt that general arrangements for the induction and welcome programme were satisfactory; only 12.64% of respondents were not satisfied with the arrangements. So some first-year students find the overall induction and welcome programme inadequate, although this result implies that this is a relatively small number.

Participants were further asked to mention additional arrangements that they expected to be part of the registration process, including things that they wanted changed or incorporated into the process.

This was an open-ended question in answer to which respondents freely expressed their views. Figure 10 provides an analysis of themes that emerged from the input of the respondents, including the recurrence of these comments in relation to the total number of respondents. These cover the following opinions and issues:

- Introduce induction and campus tours
- Information about the courses and expectations
- O-week on Health Sciences and Education campuses
- Career guidance/counselling
- Make the registration process shorter, easier and well organised to avoid long queues
- Make the registration process for international students less complex
- Introduce online registration
- Registration staff should be friendly, knowledgeable and welcoming
- Satisfied with the registration programme
- Assist students with finding accommodation
- Reduce registration fees
- Provide information about bursaries and financial aid
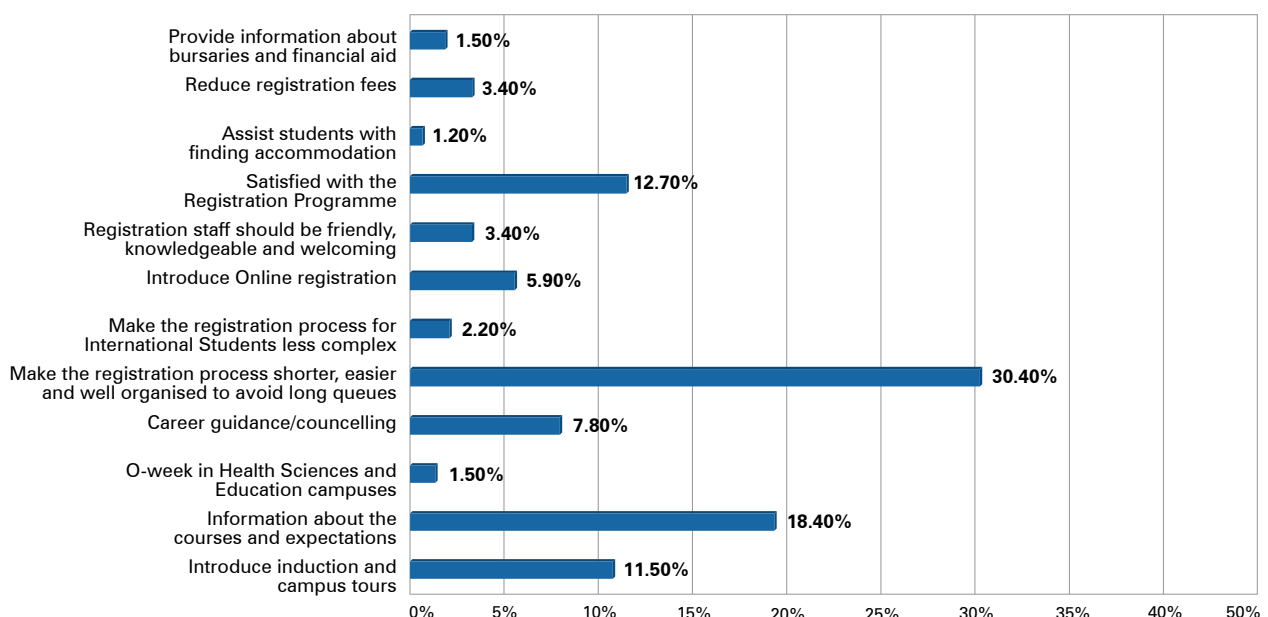
Figure 10: Additional Expectations in Relation to Registration

It is clear from this analysis that most students were unhappy about long queues, perceived inadequate information on courses and expectations, lack of campus tours and perceived insufficient career guidance at registration.

> " **Introduction to the cultural side of Wits e.g. VOW FM, Wits theatre, and much more rigorous exposure to the political side over and above the clubs and societies... I am a law student and did not even know about the LSC.** "

> " **A better explanation about the combinations of classes which one may take in specific courses, like in the Dramatic Arts courses.** "

> " **A lot of the orientation was at main campus and all of my lectures are at education campus... orientation at main was a bit of a waste of time.** "

Additional Student Comments on Registration

- A more structured form of confirmation of acceptance, students should be given proper accounts of which courses and degrees they are able to apply for first before registration week.

- A one-on-one with a person in the same study field but who has most probably completed the programme to help those who are not sure about the course choice.

- Access to higher education must not display a 'first come, first served' image. Students who turn up to apply with their final grade 12 marks should be equally accommodated and advised not to alter their preferred courses on the basis that they have applied late. Late registration is made available at Wits, with a smooth and efficient running queue, therefore by virtue of it being available, so should there be enough reserved space in all courses.

- Add agents to help with registration, also increase the time allocation of registration in conjunction with the number of students admitted.

- Admission requirements should be made better by introducing one or two year(s) plus to the programme, and put the legislation [in place] that you get removed after failure at the end of the year.

- All international students should be given their acceptance letters as soon as possible, so that we can apply for study permits soon enough.

- As a first-year coming to a varsity as big as Wits I think that Wits should provide more guidance to first-years in knowing their surroundings and also providing precise information on the course they have chosen so that they can be 100% sure they are making the right choice and don't have to change the following year [after they] have wasted their whole first year and ... all that money.

- Better explanation of the library processes. Offer courses specific to subjects like referencing and essay writing for law. Computing skills for accounting.

- During the registration programme my advisor advised me to take a module which is not an advantage but rather a disadvantage, regarding what I want to study in the near future. I now might have to change my career path due to this.

- First-year students should be provided with a detailed course outline of the available courses before the day of registration because that was the main problem on registration day ... students were ill-informed about different courses they can take within a specific degree. Particularly with BA students.

- Having the induction on a Sunday was inconvenient. If it were held during the week, it would not feel like an unnecessary commitment as it would simply be a part of the working week. Also, curriculum advice should be provided sooner and in more detail. It is especially useful to hear which courses work well together and also to hear details of what is studied beyond first year (e.g. what can be done at Honours and Master's level). Getting more detailed advice and getting it sooner (i.e. before the formal registration process) allows one to make a more informed decision.

- I think that for the incoming first-years, during registration and orientation, the students should be shown all the places around the campus so as to have that feeling of being home. Apart from that there is nothing more to add because the reception is very good.

- I think Wits should reduce the amount of the registration or upfront fee that we pay to enrol. The orientation programme, but not necessarily the O-week, was quite useful. I also think ... bursary companies [should] come during the orientation programme to sponsor, if it is possible, students who did not get bursaries or NSFAS, because some students were admitted but did not register due to [the] problem of| financial assistance.

- It is quite inconvenient for international students like me, e.g. if [you] want to make a specific course [you] take a plane and come here ... only to find out that you are not eligible .... Fortunately I contacted the course co-ordinator by email and asked him if I was eligible. Then he told me that he is prepared to give [me] a place in the course straight away. So [it is] really inconvenient compared to most universities... across the world where you apply directly for the course you do and they tell you whether or not you got a place via email .... Imagine this. You want to do BSc actuarial science. They accept you for a BSc. Then you take a plane to come here and then HERE they accept or refuse you. It is a really inconvenient system for international students.

- Make every student aware of when they are really expected to attend during the orientation day because you might find that more of residential students are involved in the O-week rather than those outside the campus.

- Multi-funded students must be given an opportunity to decide how their funds must be allocated to their tuition, residence and meals respectively, as provided in their fund confirmation letters during registration.

- Slightly more organised because in orientation week it was very crowded and there weren't enough seats in the introductory talks. Also, some guides/assistants did not know where venues were.

During O-Week, Wits provides students with information on various facilities and functions of the University. This information is meant to allow students to gain a more intimate understanding of the University arrangements that will help them become diligent students in their first year of study. Evidence gleaned from the data shows that the majority of participants agreed that the information provided during O-Week in relation to faculty admission requirements was useful.

Figure 11: Orientation

Faculty admission requirements
- Strongly Agree: 37.82%
- Agree: 50.66%
- Disagree: 8.59%
- Strongly Disagree: 1.31%
- No Response: 1.62%

Accommodation
- Strongly Agree: 18.10%
- Agree: 44.19%
- Disagree: 27.70%
- Strongly Disagree: 7.08%
- No Response: 2.93%

Financial Aid
- Strongly Agree: 22.35%
- Agree: 42.16%
- Disagree: 25.78%
- Strongly Disagree: 6.67%
- No Response: 3.03%

Bursaries
- Strongly Agree: 13.25%
- Agree: 38.62%
- Disagree: 35.29%
- Strongly Disagree: 9.40%
- No Response: 3.44%

Career Education
- Strongly Agree: 23.15%
- Agree: 48.33%
- Disagree: 20.73%
- Strongly Disagree: 4.85%
- No Response: 2.93%

Curriculum Advice
- Strongly Agree: 24.77%
- Agree: 49.54%
- Disagree: 17.80%
- Strongly Disagree: 5.66%
- No Response: 2.22%

Academic timetable arrangements
- Strongly Agree: 35.39%
- Agree: 48.13%
- Disagree: 11.02%
- Strongly Disagree: 3.13%
- No Response: 2.33%

Information in the Orientation Guide given to all first years
- Strongly Agree: 38.83%
- Agree: 49.24%
- Disagree: 8.19%
- Strongly Disagree: 1.82%
- No Response: 1.92%

Orientation Guide
- Strongly Agree: 39.33%
- Agree: 47.22%
- Disagree: 8.80%
- Strongly Disagree: 1.92%
- No Response: 2.73%

Legend: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, No Response
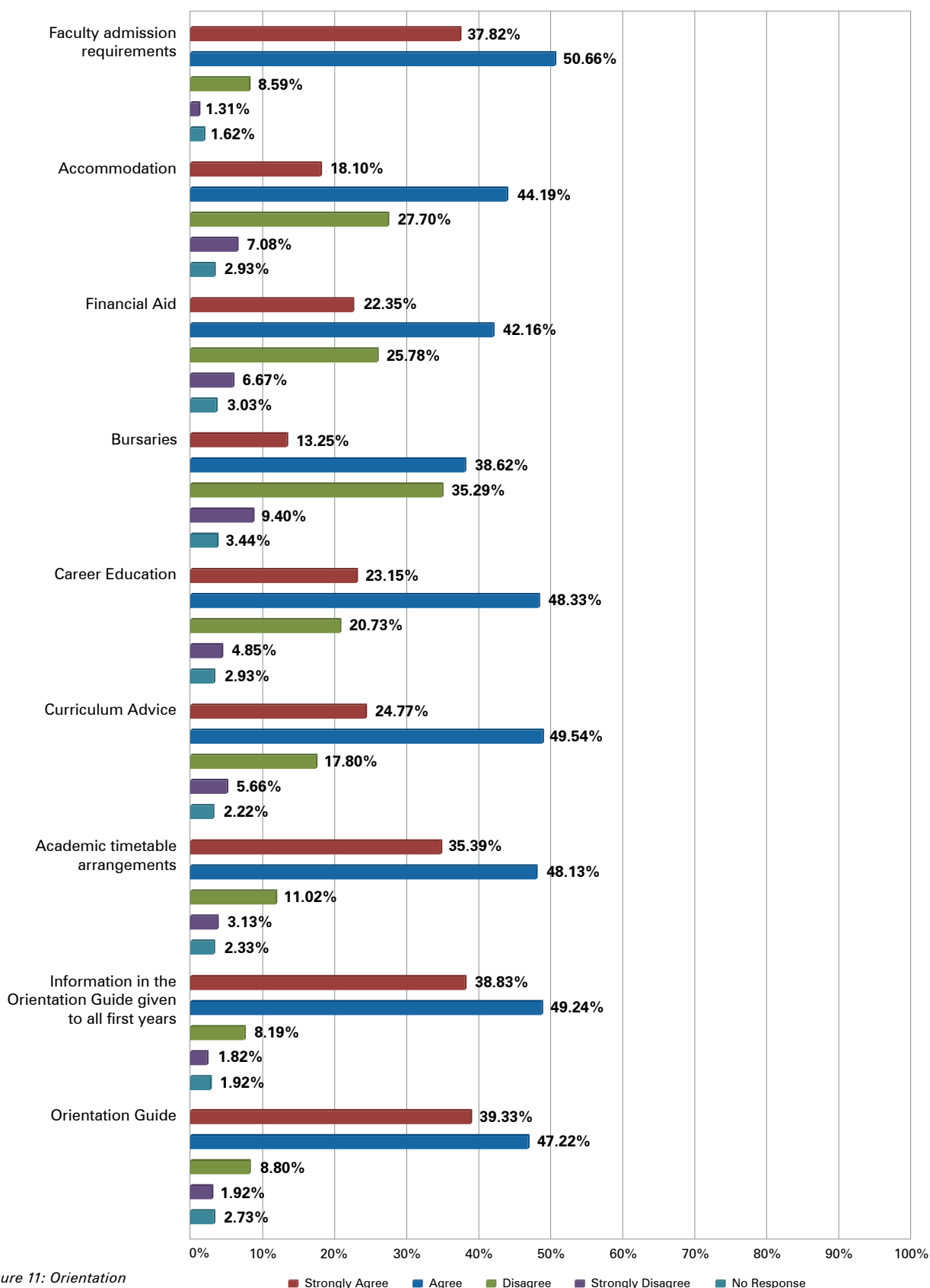
Figure 11 shows that a reasonably large number of respondents (88.47%) agreed that it was, and only 9.91% disagreed. Information provided on student accommodation was found somewhat less useful compared to that provided on faculty admission requirements. Only 62.29% expressed satisfaction on this issue, and 34.78% felt that the information was not useful.

Of all the aspects identified in this section of the questionnaire, the information provided on bursaries was found to be the least useful by a number of respondents. This showed the lowest percentages of satisfied students (51.87%), while a large number of respondents (44.69%) were not satisfied. While the challenge could be made by various financial challenges and mechanisms to address the financial needs of university students, a case can be made for the provision of more useful information for better ways to support financially needy students at a first-year undergraduate level.

As opposed to the information provided on bursaries, a large number of respondents agreed that the information provided on career education was useful. The data show that 71.49% of respondents agreed that this was so, compared to 25.58% who disagreed. A similar majority of respondents, 74.32%, felt that the curriculum advice information was useful, and 23.46% felt it was not. The usefulness of the information on academic timetabling was agreed upon by many participants. The data shows that 83.52% of respondents responded positively, and only 14.16% felt that this information was not useful. In addition to various other information packs provided during O-week, the University gives all first-year students the Orientation Guide. Most study participants agreed that the information in the Orientation Guide was useful, with only 10.01% disagreeing. While there was a widely shared view that the information provided during O-Week was highly useful, the provision of certain types of information could be improved in this respect.

On Settling in at Wits

The study further looked into the satisfaction of first-year students with the various University facilities and services during their settling-in period at Wits. Data presented in Figure 12 show that the majority of participants (81.30%) in the study stay off campus and only 18.30% stay on campus. This suggests that most first-year students in the general population do not stay in University accommodation. Only a small fraction of students have been accommodated in University residences against a growing number of first-year students admitted. Questions regarding their satisfaction with the quality of service and facilities were directed to the 18.3% (181 headcount) who indicated that they stayed on campus. Figure 13 provides the relevant data.
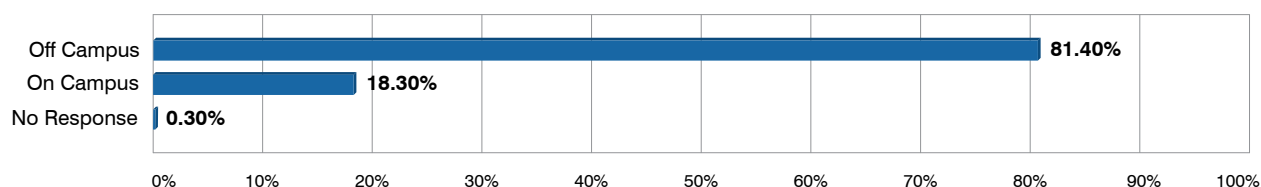
Figure 12: Current Accommodation
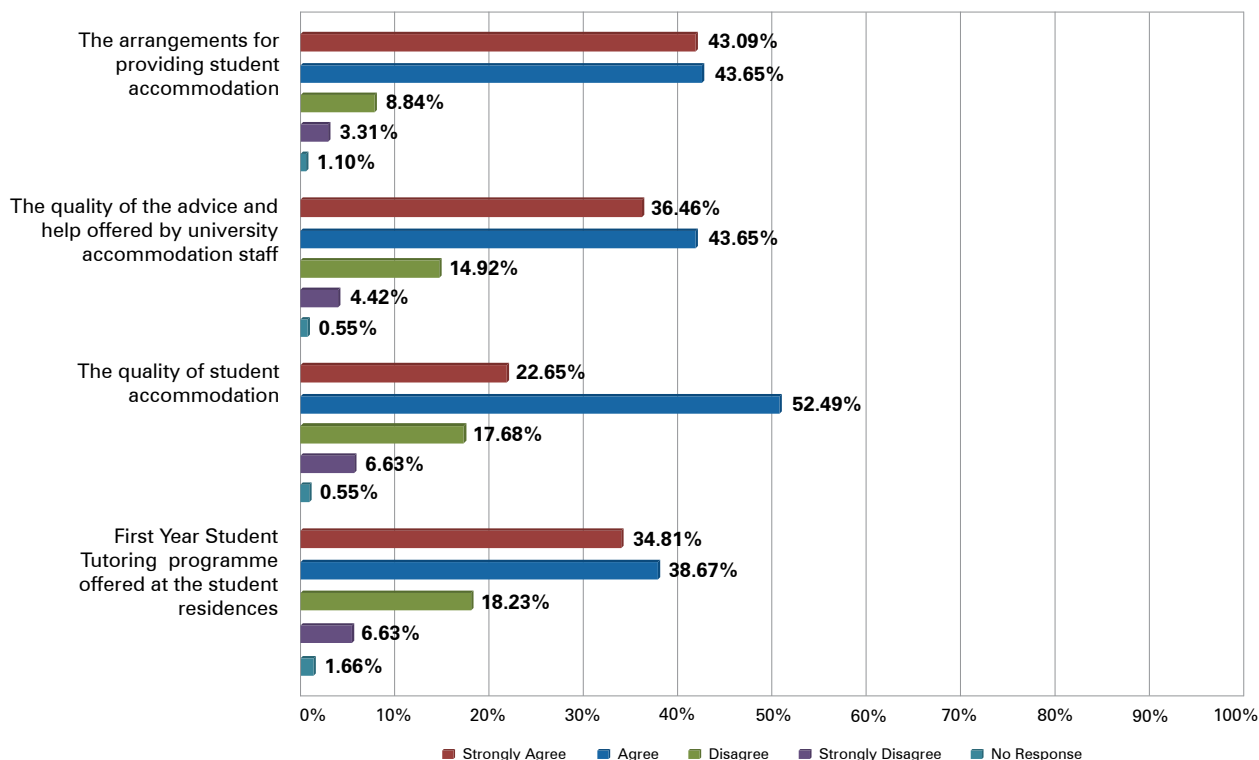
Figure 13: Satisfaction with Campus Accommodation

As shown in Figure 13, the majority of respondents (86.74%) were satisfied with the arrangements for providing student accommodation at Wits, and only 12.34% were not. It would seem that accommodation staff at the Wits residences provide sufficiently satisfactory advice and help to students staying in residences. A large proportion of respondents (80.11%) indicated that they were satisfied in this respect; 19.34% were not. Satisfaction with the quality and condition of student residences also was also shown to be fairly high. When it came to the quality of the accommodation itself, the majority of participants (75.14%) were satisfied and 24.31% were not. The data also shows wide satisfaction with the First-year Tutoring Programme offered at student residences. The majority of respondents (73.48%) registered satisfaction as opposed to 24.86% who indicated that they were not satisfied with this programme.

As shown in Figure 14, the majority of participants (85.54%) indicated that they had heard of the personal counselling services offered by the CCDU and only 13.75% had not heard of them. However, of the 846 who had heard of the personal counselling, only 32.39% had used this CCDU service or participated in their programmes and 67.02% had not. This shows that there is a large number of first-year students who did not use the personal counselling services of CCDU even if they were aware of these services. Of the 274 respondents (32.39%), only 31.56% of the respondents felt that the sessions they attended or services received were useful. However, only 22.93 indicated that they did not. A very large number of participants (45.51%) who had used the service did not respond to this question. The majority of participants (78.87%) had heard of the Campus Health and Wellness Centre (CHWC), and only 20.42% had not. Of the 780 who had heard of the CHWC, only 33.85% had used its services. The data also shows that only 34.23%

	No	Yes	No response
Personal Counselling service provided by CCDU?	13.75%	85.54%	0.71%
If yes, have you attended any of their sessions?	67.02%	32.39%	0.59%
If you attended their sessions or used their services, were these useful?	22.93%	31.56%	45.51%
Campus Health & Wellness Centre?	20.42%	78.87%	0.71%
If yes, have you attended any of their sessions	63.97%	33.85%	2.18%
If you attended their sessions or used their services, were these useful?	20.90%	34.23%	44.87%
Career Counselling service provided by CCDU?	20.93%	77.45%	1.62%
If yes, have you attended any of their sessions?	60.70%	35.12%	4.18%
If you attended their sessions or used their services, were these useful?	21.67%	32.90%	45.43%
Life skills / Psycho-education at the CCDU	57.43%	39.53%	3.03%
If yes, have you attended any of their sessions?	58.57%	37.08%	4.35%
If you attended their sessions or used their services, were these useful?	18.67%	36.57%	44.76%
Wits Volunteer Programme?	61.58%	36.40%	2.02%
If yes, have you attended any of their sessions?	70.00%	25.28%	4.72%
If you attended their sessions or used their services, were these useful?	24.72%	26.39%	48.89%
Leadership and Development unit?	45.90%	51.16%	2.93%
If yes, have you attended any of their sessions?	55.34%	36.36%	8.30%
If you attended their sessions or used their services, were these useful?	21.54%	35.77%	42.69%
e-Learning Tutorials available on Wits e-Learning platform?	25.38%	73.41%	1.21%
If yes, have you attended any of their sessions?	23.14%	73.97%	2.89%
If you attended their sessions or used their services, were these useful?	10.47%	73.69%	15.84%

Figure 14: Knowledge of and Participation in Support Programmes
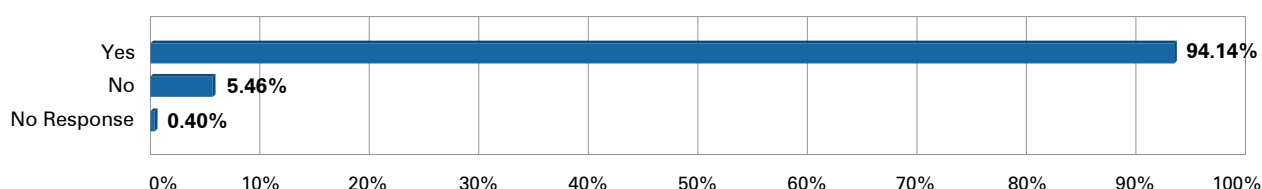
Figure 15: Hearing about the First-year Experience Programme

The bespoke Wits First-year Experience (FYE) Programme appears to have gained wide publicity among first-year students at Wits. As shown in Figure 15, 94.14% of the students in the study were fully aware of the existence of such a programme. Only 5.46% of participants had not heard of it. It is clear from this survey that the programme has been widely marketed to the majority of first-year students at Wits and they are aware of its existence.
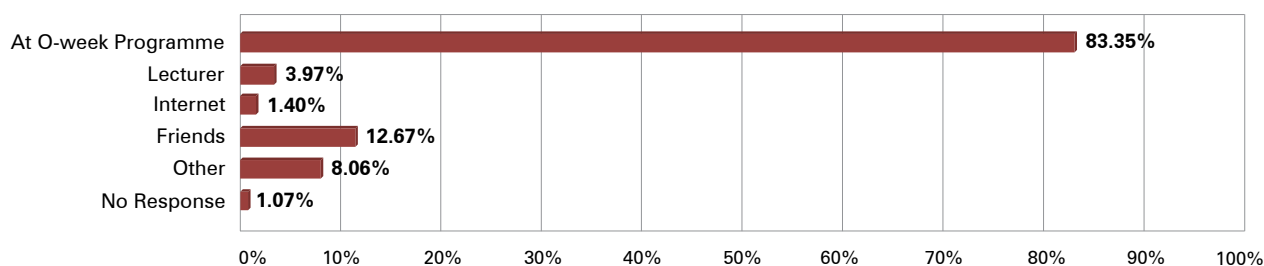
Figure 16: Sources of Information for the First-year Experience Programme

Figure 16 shows that the 83.35% of respondents heard about the FYE programme through the O-Week programme. Some heard about it from a friend (12.67%), and a relatively small number found out from a lecturer (3.97%) or the internet (1.4%).

The data confirms the existence of multiple sources of information regarding FYE programme and together these appear to be effective media for conveying information about it. Out of all those first-year students who participated in the study (989 headcount), evidence shows that 65.32% (646 headcount) registered for the programme and only 30.33% (300 headcount) did not register.
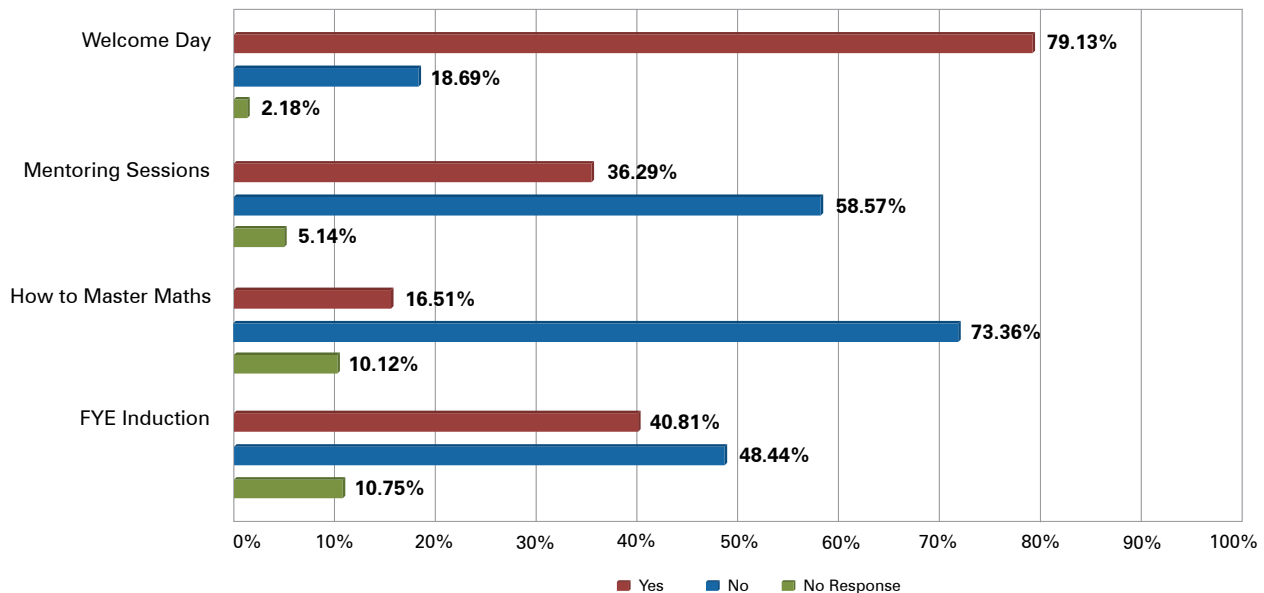
Figure 17 (a): Attendance at FYE Programme Sessions and Courses

The data in Figure 17(a) shows that out of 646 students who registered for the programme, only 40.56% attended the FYE Induction course; 48.61% did not attend. The majority of those students who registered for the FYE Programme did not attend the 'How to Master Maths' course; only 16.41% attended. Programme co-ordinators will have to verify why most students registered for the FYE Programme do not enrol for the 'How to Master Maths' course. The evidence also indicates a minority of takers for mentoring sessions in the FYE Programme. A large number (58.82%) of respondents who registered for the FYE Programme did not attend these sessions. Only 36.07% attended them. The session that was well attended, by the majority (79.26%) of participants, was the Welcome Day. Only 18.58% of participants did not attend the Welcome Day.

Given the fact that many participants in the study either did not register for the FYE programme or attend most modules offered in the programme after registering, it would be instructive to establish if those who attended certain programmes had a positive and rewarding experience from these sessions. Figure 17(b) looks at the ratings of these experiences. The data shows that the majority of participants who attended the FYE Induction course rated it good, 11.45% thought it was average and only 2.67% rated it as poor. Of the small group that attended 'How to Master Maths', 65% rated the course as good and 29.25% rated it as average, while 5.66% rated it as poor. A similar trend was observed in relation to those who attended the Mentoring Sessions: 64.81% of participants rated them as good, 31% rated them as average, and 3% rated them poor. The Welcome Day was rated by 66.60% of those who attended as good, while 31.05% rated it as average and 2.15% rated it as poor.

So there is clear evidence to suggest that the majority of participants who attended these courses and events found them to be of good value. The question that must be asked is how the attendance of these programmes can be increased, first by ensuring that most first-year student register for the FYE Programme, and then that they attend courses and events which have been rated as good by most students who participated in them.
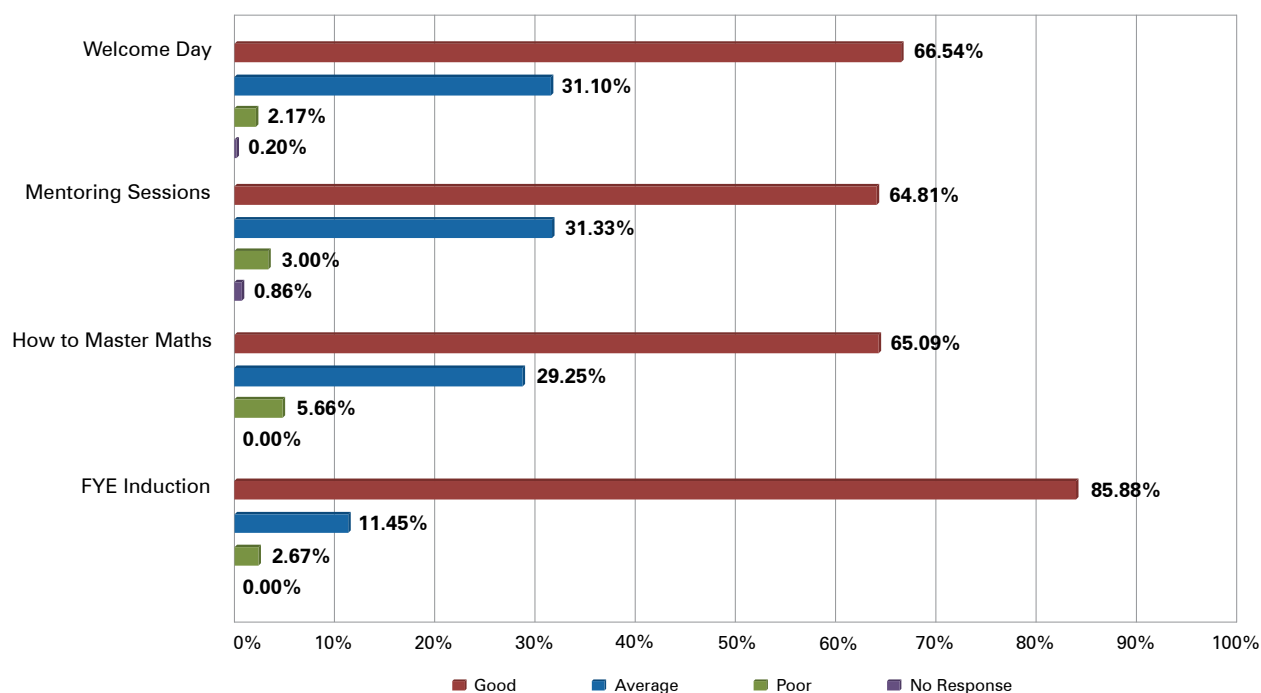
Figure 17(b): Rating of FYE Programme Sessions and Courses

Figure 18 shows a detailed analysis of the participation of students in various sessions of the FYE Programme. It is evident that very few participants attended these sessions. The majority who were registered for the FYE Programme did not attend the majority of modules and sessions that formed part of it. For example, 68% of respondents who registered for the overall programme did not attend Ukufunda Study Skills programmes; only 18% did. For the other programmes, according to the data, 33% attended the 'Time management and balance' and 52% did not; only 16% attended 'How to master Chemistry', and 65% did not; 17% attended 'Personal action plans' and 66% did not; 11% attended the 'Community engagement' module, and 69% did not; a comparatively high 42% attended the 'Computer skills' module, and 41% did not; a low 8% attended the FYE Camp, and 74% did not; 42% attended 'Copyright and Plagiarism', the second relatively high attendance, and 42% did not; 28% attended 'What to do after lectures' and 55% did not; 26% attended 'Career development' and 58% did not; 27% attended 'Stress management' and 57% did not; 38% attended 'Writing skills and note taking' and 46% did not; 23% attended 'Exam preparations' and 60% did not; 23% attended 'Coping with exam anxiety' and 61% did not; and finally, an extremely low 5% attended the Winter Leadership Camp, and 77% did not.
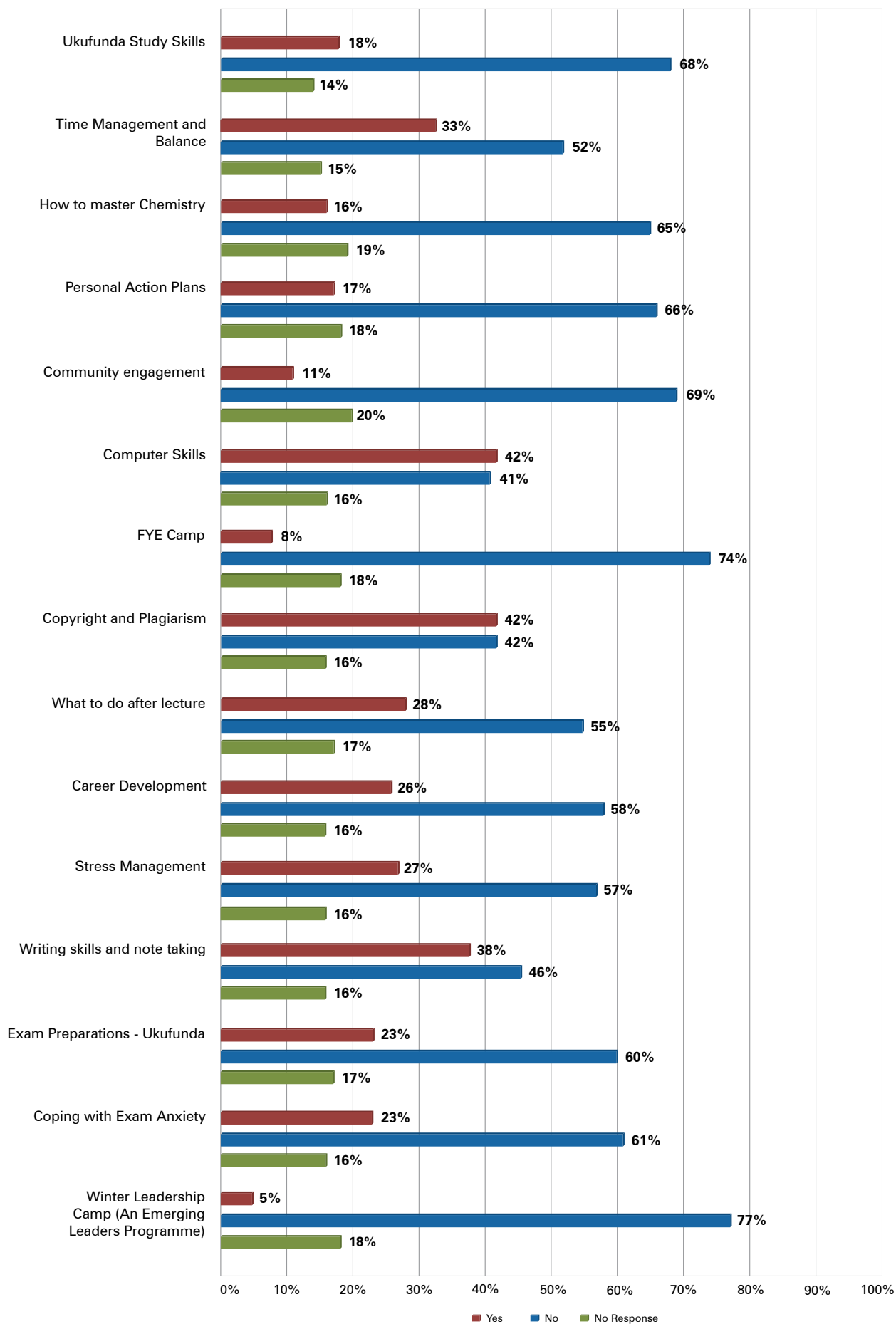
Figure 18: Participation in Various FYE Programme Sessions and Courses

While it is understandable that participants were not expected to attend all these modules in addition to their normal academic load, it is also a cause for concern to realise that particular generic modules which are designed to assist all students, across the board, received very little participation. While few students could be expected to attend a module on how to master Chemistry, one would expect all students to attend courses on stress management, writing skills and note taking, and exam preparations. Low participation of students in such generic modules signals that a different form of marketing and encouragement of students needs to be undertaken in this programme.

Programme Session/Course	Good	Average	Poor	No Response
Ukufunda Study Skills	83.05%	15.25%	0.56%	1.13%
Time Management and Balance	74.92%	22.02%	1.83%	1.22%
How to master Chemistry	71.15%	23.08%	3.21%	2.56%
Personal Action Plans	73.33%	24.24%	1.21%	1.21%
Community engagement	74.55%	21.82%	2.73%	0.91%
Computer Skills	71.60%	22.43%	4.06%	1.91%
FYE Camp	74.39%	19.51%	1.22%	4.88%
Copyright and Plagiarism	75.42%	21.72%	1.19%	1.67%
What to do after lecture	76.90%	22.38%	0.36%	0.36%
Career Development	73.12%	23.72%	2.37%	0.79%
Stress Management	77.57%	20.53%	1.52%	0.38%
Writing skills and note taking	70.51%	25.20%	2.95%	1.34%
Exam Preparations - Ukufunda	76.00%	22.22%	1.33%	0.44%
Coping with Exam Anxiety	72.05%	24.02%	2.18%	1.75%
Winter Leadership Camp (An Emerging Leaders Programme)	77.08%	20.83%	2.08%	0.00%

Figure 19: Rating of Various FYE Programme Sessions and Courses

During the analysis of data in Figure 19, what became important was to bear in mind the low participation rate in these courses as depicted in Figure 18. Figure 19 attempts to provide a rating analysis based on the experiences of those participants who took part in each of the modules. The analysis shows that the experiences of those students who participated in these modules were significantly positive. Very few students rated any of these modules as poor, while the considerable majority in each case rated them as good. For example: 83.05% rated Ukufunda Study Skills as good (the highest rating of all), while only 0.56% rated this module as poor. For the remainder, 74.92%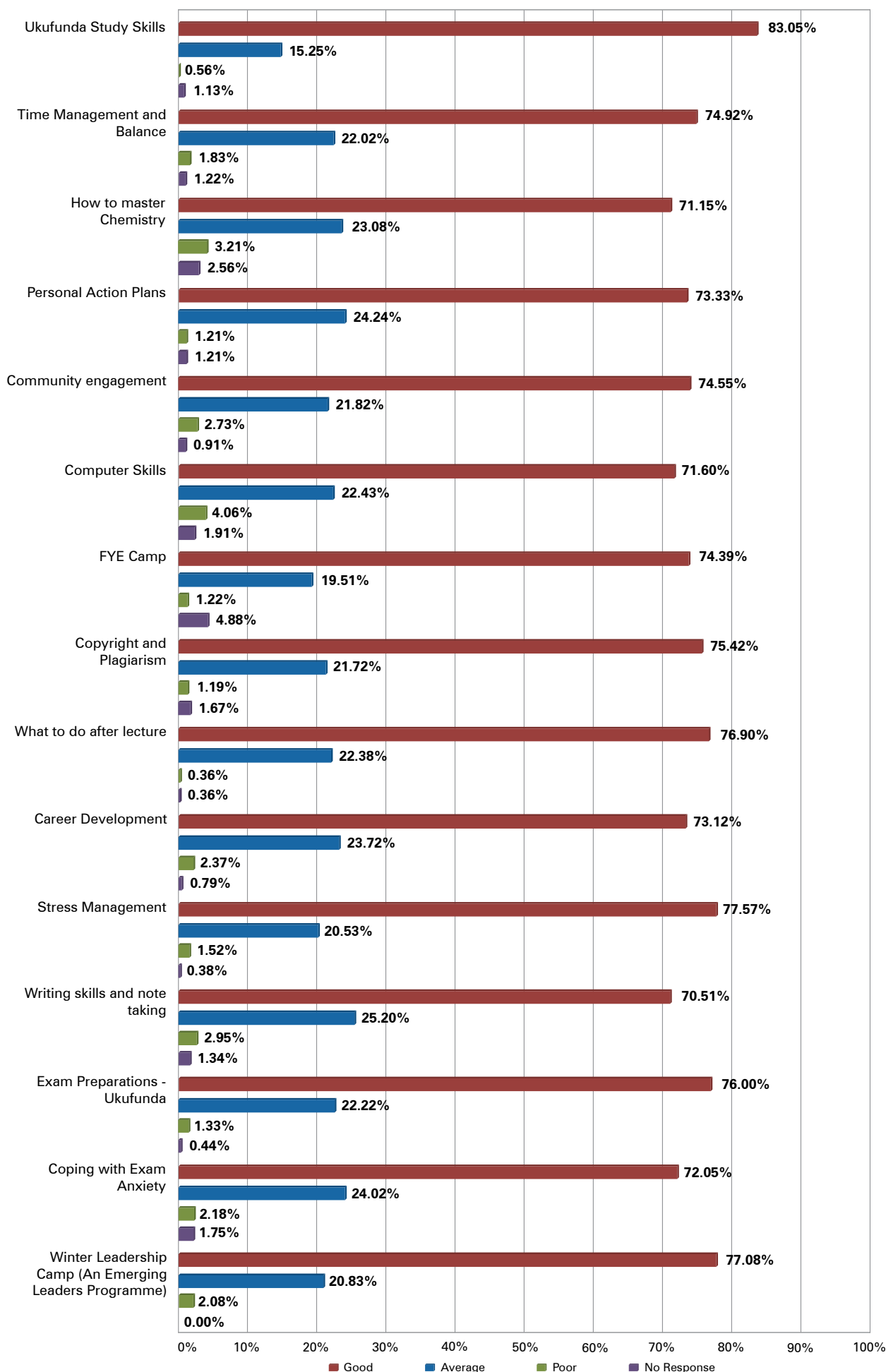 rated 'Time management and balance' as good, while 1.83% rated the module poor; 71.15% rated 'How to master Chemistry' good, and 3.21% rated it poor; 73.33% rated 'Personal action plans' good and 1.21% rated it poor; 74.55% rated the 'Community engagement' module good, and 2.78% rated it poor; 71.60% rated the Computer Skills module good, and 4.06% rated it poor; 74.39% rated the FYE Camp good and 1.22% rated it poor; 75.42% rated 'Copyright and plagiarism' good, and 1.19% rated it poor; 76.90% rated 'What to do after lectures' good, and 0.36% rated it poor; 73.12% rated 'Career Development' good and 2.37% rated it poor; 77.57% rated 'Stress management' good, and 1.52% rated it poor; 70.51% rated 'Writing skills and note taking' good, and 2.95% rated it poor; 76% rated 'Exam preparations' good, and 1.33% rated it poor; 72.05% rated 'Coping with exam anxiety' good, and 2.18% rated it poor; and, finally, 77.08% of students rated the Winter Leadership Camp good, and 2.08% rated it poor. Evidence gleaned through analysing this data clearly shows that student experiences of each and every one of these modules were at very least fairly good, which implies that the modules were useful to the students and helped them understand the University, the expectations Wits has in terms of their studies, and also the development of necessary skills to cope with teaching and learning demands. If there is anything to change in these modules, only very marginal adjustments might be needed based on the feedback given by students who participated in them. The big question is how the University recruits and encourages more students to participate in modules which clearly translate into good experiences for almost all those students who participate in them.
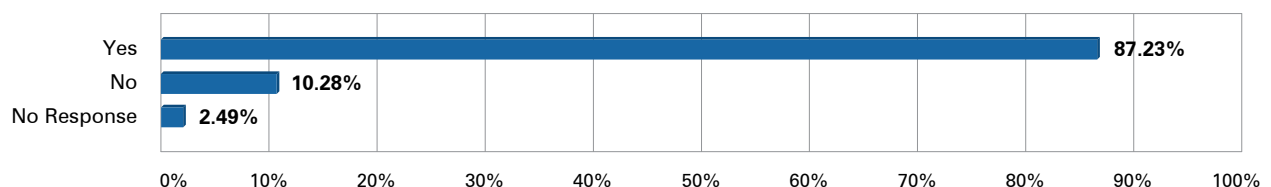
Figure 20: SMS Notification for FYE Programme Sessions and Courses

Having mentioned that there is a need to market the programmes well, we must acknowledge that Figure 20 shows that programme co-ordinators did their best to inform students in advance about forthcoming sessions and courses in the FYE Programme. It shows that 87.23% of participants in the programme received SMS messages notifying them of forthcoming sessions and events, while only 10.28% did not receive such messages. In spite of the declaration by the majority of students that they did receive information advising them about forthcoming sessions, however, we have seen that the majority did not take part in these sessions. This raises the question of whether the problem of low attendance is related to information sharing, or goes deeper than that. It could be that students do not see the value of the programme, or they are preoccupied with other responsibilities to the extent that there is limited time available to participate in voluntary programmes such as FYE. Another anecdotal assertion could be that students' understanding of what each module entails is insufficient for them to be enticed to participate in them. Programme co-ordinators have to find a way to determine why the majority of students choose not to participate in the programme, even though they were given the relevant information well in advance.

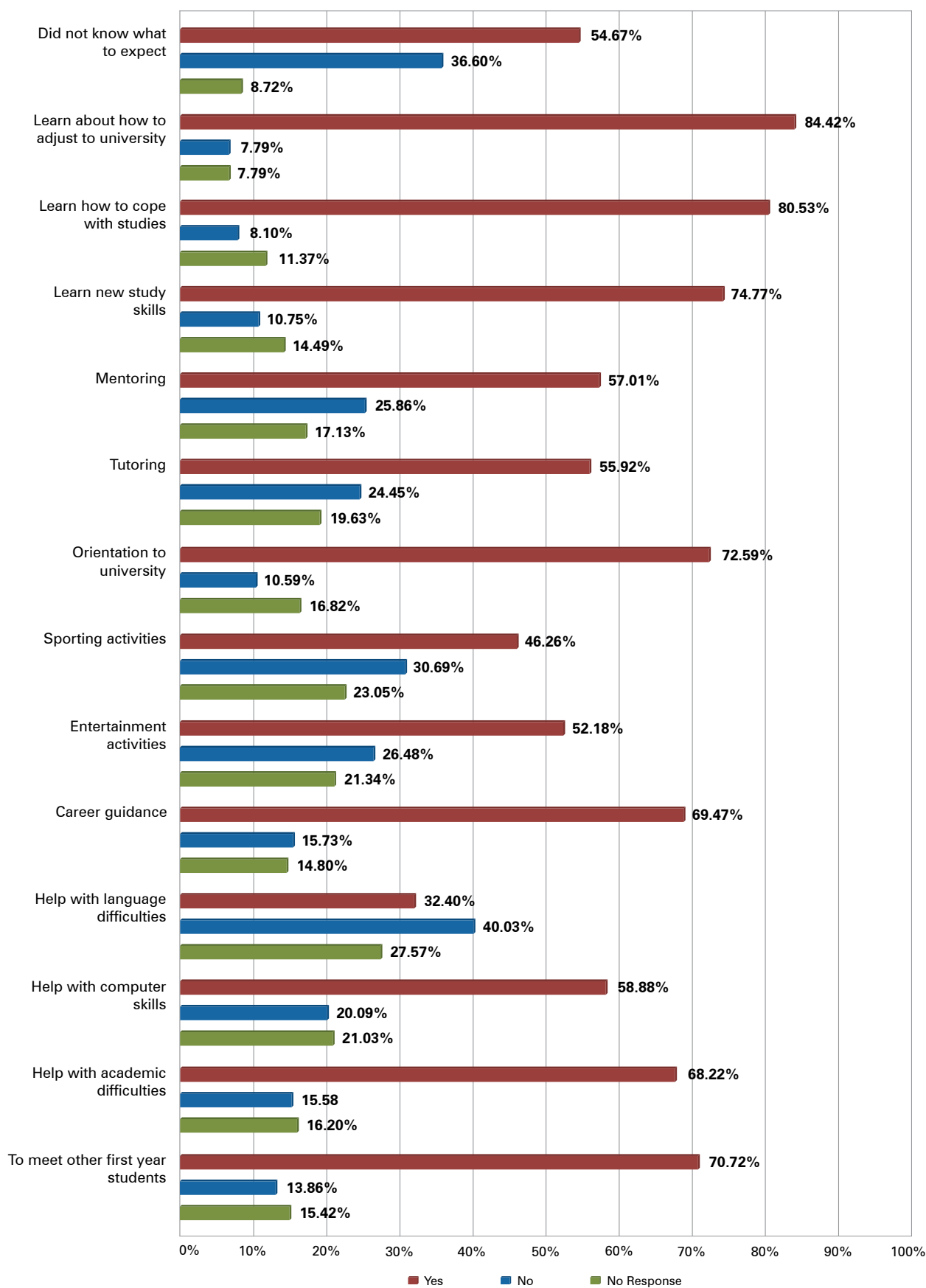| Category	Yes	No	No Response
Did not know what to expect	54.67%	36.60%	8.72%
Learn about how to adjust to university	84.42%	7.79%	7.79%
Learn how to cope with studies	80.53%	8.10%	11.37%
Learn new study skills	74.77%	10.75%	14.49%
Mentoring	57.01%	25.86%	17.13%
Tutoring	55.92%	24.45%	19.63%
Orientation to university	72.59%	10.59%	16.82%
Sporting activities	46.26%	30.69%	23.05%
Entertainment activities	52.18%	26.48%	21.34%
Career guidance	69.47%	15.73%	14.80%
Help with language difficulties	32.40%	40.03%	27.57%
Help with computer skills	58.88%	20.09%	21.03%
Help with academic difficulties	68.22%	15.58	16.20%
To meet other first year students	70.72%	13.86%	15.42%

Legend: Yes, No, No Response

Figure 21: Expectations of those who participated in the FYE Programme

Data analysis in Figure 21 shows that the majority of students who participated in the programme did not know what to expect from it. More than half (54.67%) declared this to be the case, while only 36.6% said that they knew what to expect. While it is clear from the data that students did have particular expectations, these were not explicit and deeply held, but developed along the way as students participated in the programme. Some of the expectations that were broadly shared by students included the following:

- 84.42% of participants expected to learn how to adjust to the University, while 7.79% did not have this expectation
- 80.53% of participants expected to learn how to cope with their studies, while 8.10% did not have this expectation
- 74.77% expected to learn new study skills, while 10.75% did not have this expectation
- 57.01% came with expectations for mentoring, while 25.86% did not have this expectation
- 55.92% came with tutoring expectations, while 24.45% did not have this expectation
- 72.59% of participants expected orientation to the University, while 10.59% did not have this expectation
- 46.26% expected exposure to sporting activities, while 30.69% did not have this expectation
- 52.18% came with expectations for entertainment activities, while 26.48% did not have this expectation
- 69.47% had career guidance expectations, while 15.73% did not have this expectation
- 32.40% came with expectations of being helped with language difficulties, while 40.30% did not have this expectation
- 58.88% came with expectations of receiving help with computer skills, while 20.09% did not have this expectation
- 68.22% came with expectations of being helped with academic difficulties, while 15.58% did not have this expectation
- 70.72% came with expectations of meeting other first-year students, while 13.86% did not have this expectation

Clearly the expectations that students had of the programme were largely positive. They were largely about developing a better understanding of the University, being socialised into the University community as students, being equipped with the necessary skills to learn better in classrooms, and being helped to cope with the challenges they faced as students, which ranged from developing the right computer skills to eradicating language barriers and barriers to learning. An attempt to match students' expectations as depicted in Figure 21 with the real-life experiences depicted in Figure 22 suggests that most of the expectations of the students about the programme were met; the majority of students (80.37%) indicated that their expectations were met, while only 14.17% stated that they were not. It is very unfortunate that not all students who registered for this programme were exposed to the various experiences in individual modules that students who participated in these modules had. The University may want to explore ways of ensuring that students with noble expectations of the programme be encouraged to participate in the necessary sessions in future.
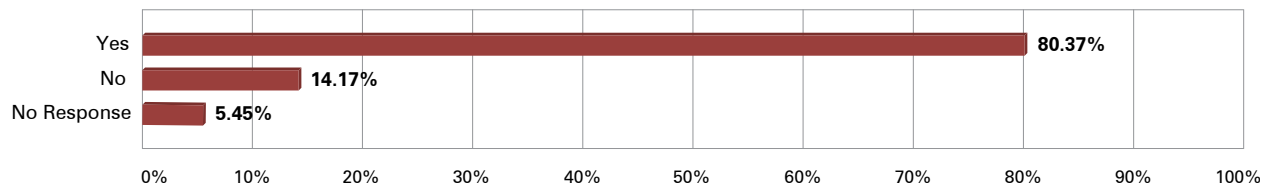
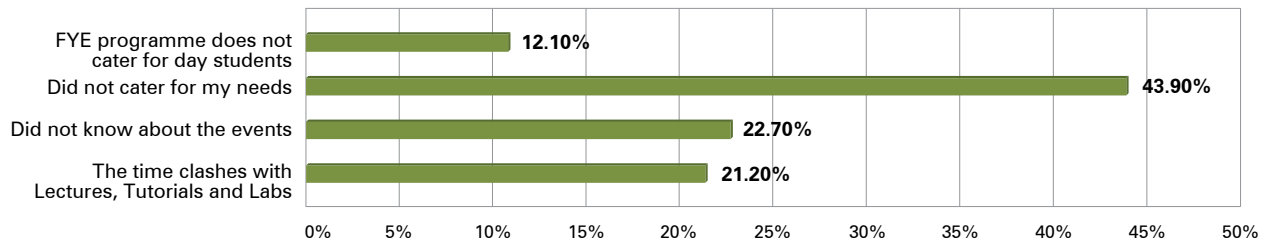*Figure 22: Meeting of Expectations in the FYE Programme*

Figure23: How the FYE Programme Failed to Meet Expectations

Students were also asked to provide reasons why they thought the FYE Programme failed to meet their expectations. Figure 23 provides four key areas identified repeatedly by the majority of respondents who felt that the FYE Programme failed to meet their expectations. A large proportion of respondents (43.90%) who felt that the FYE Programme did not meet their expectations claimed that it did not cater for their needs, and many said that the programme schedule clashed with those of other mainstream academic activities (21,20%). There were respondents who felt that the programme did not cater for day students (12.10%) or they could not attend sessions because they did not know about the FYE Programme activities (22.7%).

Student comments on why FYE did not meet expectations

- All of the activities are at inconvenient times thus I cannot attend.

- Although it is an excellent programme, I just felt that I did not get much out of it. I did not need help with anxiety etc and was hoping more for an orientation of Wits to educate first-years how it runs etc.

- Because most programme are run between 3pm and 5pm and during these times I have lectures and labs so it does not accommodate me

- Because most of their programmes were held very late and I cannot attend them as I travel from home to school every day.

- Could not attend most of the sessions as they occurred during class hours or late.

- Did not attend many of their sessions, due to lots of varsity homework and random weekend tiredness. And during first semester I was tutoring Matric learners but that too I have quit.

- Feel a lot of pressure ... feel motivated at times and not at other times.

- I always had a clash between my timetable and their events so I did not have a chance to attend.

- I did not exactly understand how to participate in it. I am still not sure if I registered for it. I was living off-campus at the beginning of the year so I felt left out and confused about this kind of programme.

- I did not expect the programme to cover such a variety of issues that concerned first-year students and I did not know of how involved it would be in our everyday activities and studies.

- I did not know about most events so I could not choose to attend.

- I did not receive notification of events, nor did I hear of any events/sessions worth attending.

- I did not find any of their events to be of any interest. I was able to meet more new people through joining a sports club.

- I did not really find the First Year Experience programme necessary so did not go to any of the sessions.

- I did not receive any notifications regarding help with studies or tutoring sessions. I did not receive any notifications of entertaining activities or social events with other first-years. I did not receive any notifications regarding volunteering programs or getting involved in the community. I was very disappointed in the amount of things I was interested in attending with the FYE.

- I did not register, but they somehow got hold of my cell phone number and SMS(ed) me everything. This was a huge nuisance as I was not interested in anything to do with FYE.

- I expected to have a mentor as the people at the registration table had promised, but clearly there was no delivery.

- I felt that the FYE programme was not going to help me academically, so it wasn't important to me, thus I did not bother attending.

- I have been asking for a tutor for philosophy and no one got back to me. I had to end up getting external help. So I am very disappointed about that.

- I have never received anything from the FYE. Hence I never attended any of their programmes.

- I have not attended as I am on education campus and all seminars take place on main campus.

- I have not been helped with anything as I tried using SAKAI for some skills.

- It is great that they have incorporated skills and mechanisms on surviving university, and how to cope, and how to master study skills and reach one's potential and so forth, but what I was expecting was that Wits would with this programme address issues such as why, after university, graduates find it difficult to seek for a career or job, even if it is from the best varsities or one has studied a good course.

- The fact that there are still a significant number of people who still sit jobless at home is an area of concern. I would want to know why we do not get immediate channels into the world of work. I was hoping that Wits could explain to us the injustices, the hindering places in society that cause such things.

- I only received information of upcoming events via word of mouth and in most cases after the event had passed.

- I received the response to my application to study at Wits very late, so no one bothered to tell me about FYE and I am cool with that, I orientated myself; no one was helping me with anything. I guess that is the reason why I am not concerned about anyone's concerns, I am just living my life, studying, and that is all.

- I registered for FYE but was never informed of anything that was to happen. I even forgot it exists.

- I thought it would help me with mentoring, for example, as some skills I had already acquired, such as computer skills.

- I was rarely notified on what was happening although I registered and I felt as though they took as [facilitators] people who did not know anything at all.

- In the first semester I did not know how to follow the skills they taught me but it is now starting to work for me in the second semester.

- It is because they do not concentrate on the individual to help them but they just accommodate a group, not taking into consideration that we have different personalities and we are doing different courses. Also they are not specific about their programmes and how we can get help within the school and services rendered.

- The first-year experience 'does not' boldly address the challenges faced by long-distance travelling students like myself. Most, if not all, of the issues targeted by the First-Year Experience programme lean on the side of a financially capable class of students who have immediate opportunities to adopt what the programme encompasses.

- The guy I met at the office when I accompanied my friend to register was very rude to me and that made me lose interest in the whole programme.

- They only sent me SMSs and the places where their sessions take place and I did not know many places around campus. I ended up deleting every SMS they send to me.
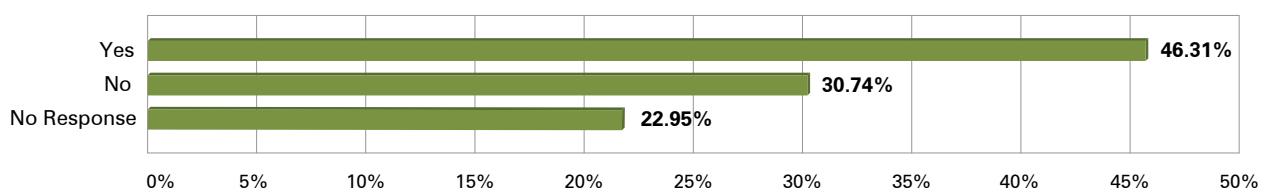
Figure 24: Difficulties in Attending the FYE Programme

The data analysis depicted in Figure 24 suggests that the majority of students in the programme experienced difficulties in attending the FYE Programme sessions and courses. This begins to throw some light on the reasons why the majority of participants did not take part in these modules. Close to half the participants (46.31%) declared that they had difficulties in attending FYE Programme sessions and courses, while only 30.74% indicated that they had no difficulty doing so. The nature of the difficulties experienced is provided in Figure 25 below.

Figure 25 presents various reasons that caused students not to attend the FYE Programme. Students were given an opportunity to choose multiple responses defining these reasons. It is clear from the analysis of data that various students did not attend because of either heavy academic workload or some form of miscommunication. However, it is also equally important to note that 41.46% of the

total population of respondents did not respond to this question by choosing any of the given options. This proportion was then removed, leaving 579 respondents who answered these questions, where n=579 for each option chosen. On this basis, five reasons emerged as key factors that influenced non-attendance. In descending order, these were:

Saturdays are an inconvenient (35%)
Did not get any notification about the events (27.5%)
I stay far from campus (17.5%)
Events time clashes with the academic timetable (15%)
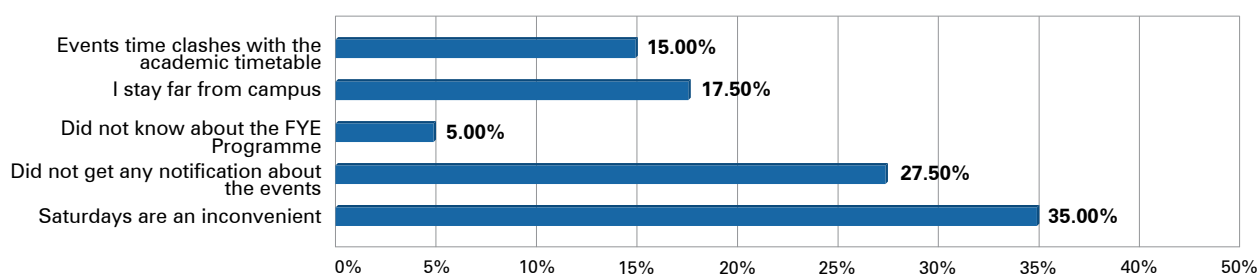Did not know about the FYE Programme   (5%)

Figure 25: Difficulties that Caused Lack of Attendance of the FYE Programme

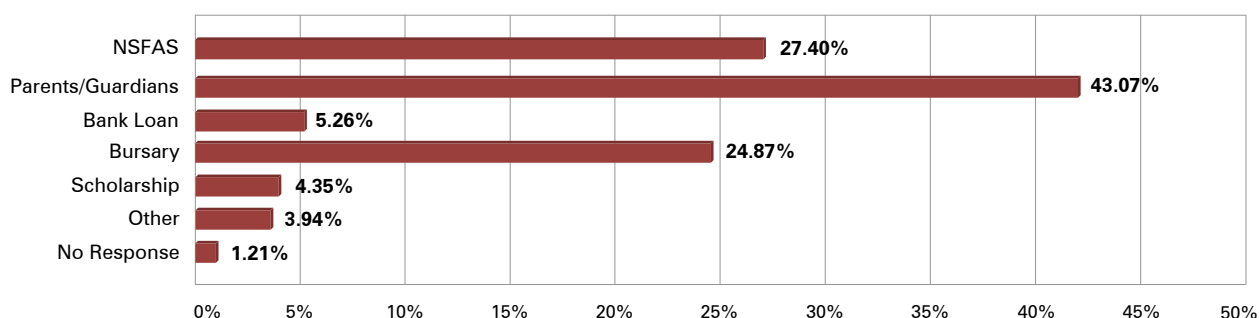## Quality of and Access to Facilities and Services

Figure 26: Financial Support

One of the most important mechanisms to help students cope with their needs in a university environment is the provision of sufficient financial support for fees, accommodation, extramural activities and the extended curriculum. The study attempted to establish the means through which students meet their financial needs in the University. Evidence gleaned through the analysis presented in Figure 26 suggests that the majority of first-year students at Wits receive financial support from their parents and guardians (43.07%). Some students receive financial support from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (27.40%) while 29.22% receive financial support from bursaries and scholarships. It has to be mentioned that a number of students may receive financial support from multiple sources.

While students are free to use different libraries in the University, Figure 27 suggests that the majority of first-year students use the Wartenweiler Library (41.86%), while others use the Commerce Library (16.28%); Law Library (8.49%); Engineering Library (8.29%); Biophy Library (6.67%); Education Library (5.66%), and others. It was important to establish through this study which of the libraries participants mainly used, in order for the University to ensure that the analysis of quality in services and resources provided in each library is linked to this regular use of the facilities.
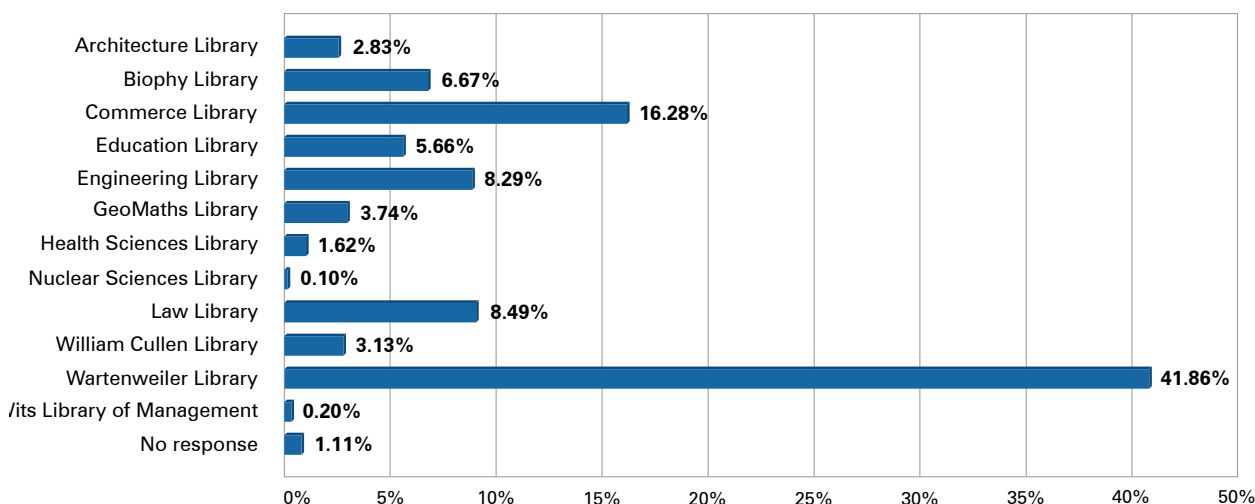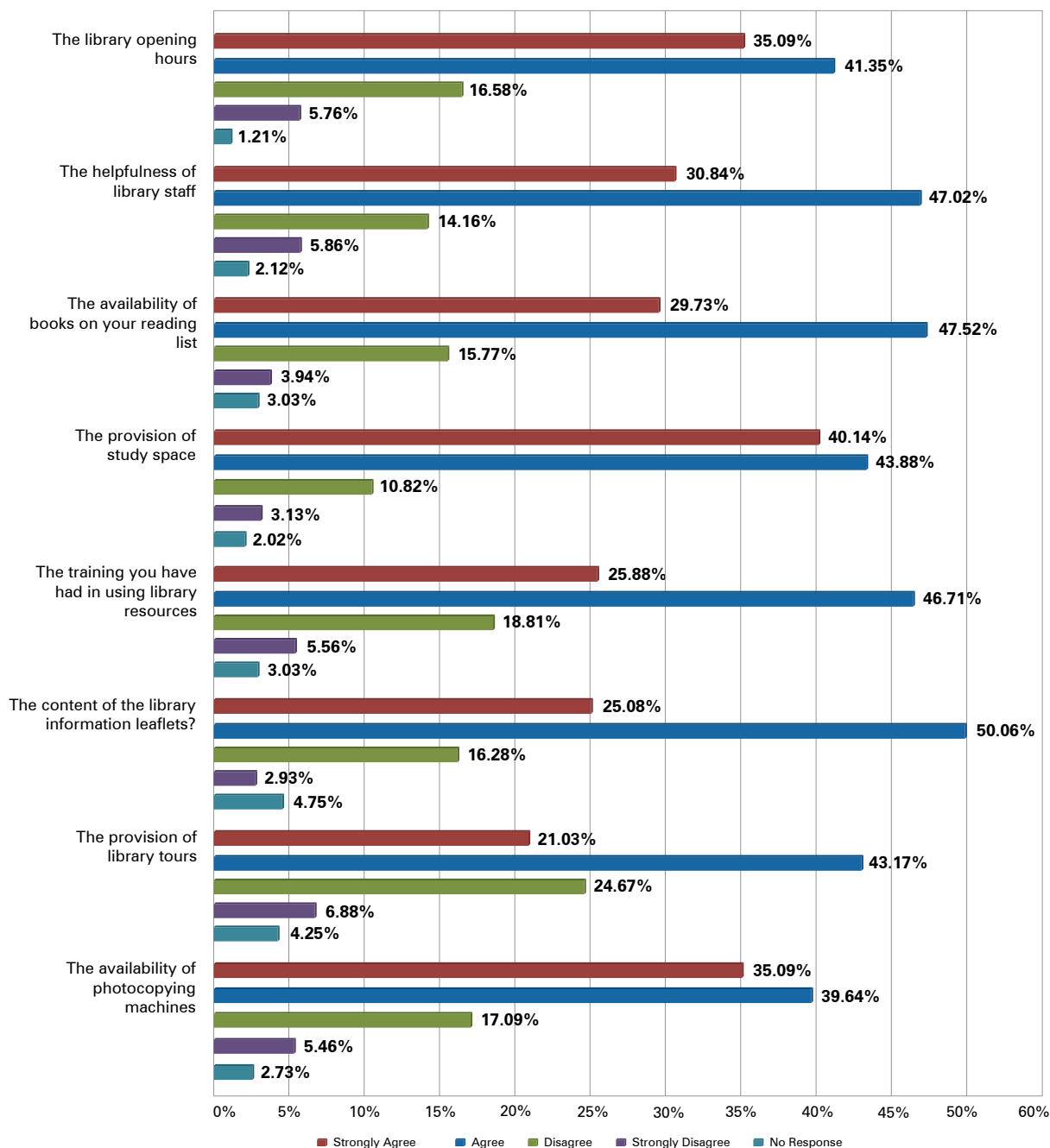
Figure 27: Library Mainly Used

Figure 28: Satisfaction with the Library Mainly

When participants were asked to declare the levels of satisfaction in relation to facilities, services and arrangements in the library that they mainly use (Figure 28), 76.44% indicated that they were satisfied with the library opening hours, while 22.34% were not. Quite clearly, the majority of first-year students are satisfied with the library opening hours, but it is also important to cater for the needs of the dissatisfied 22.34%. The data also show that 77.86% were satisfied with the helpfulness of staff in the library, while 20.02% were not. It is also important to note that in spite of the satisfaction of the majority of students in this regard, the University needs to encourage library staff to provide more helpful services and try their level best to eradicate any form of student dissatisfaction with such services. The majority of students were satisfied with the availability of reading-list books in the library (77.25%), while 19.71% were not satisfied. The University may need to consider widening the availability of books in students' reading lists or improving access to these resources. The study shows that reading space in the library is not a challenge at Wits; 84.02% of students indicated that they were satisfied with the provision of study space in the library, and only 13.95% were not. It is always important to provide the training necessary to help students get the best use out of library facilities. The majority of participants in this study (75.59%) indicated that they were satisfied with this aspect of the service, while 24.37% were not. The University may need to consider ways to ensure that training in the use of library resources meets the needs of all library users.

The library also provides information leaflets, which help students develop a better understanding of the library facilities and accessibility of resources in the library. The majority of participants in the study (76.04%) indicated that they were satisfied with the content of the library information leaflets, while 19.21% of respondents found them unsatisfactory. The provision of library tours is one mechanism that helps library users understand the location of facilities and resources in the library, and how to access these. These tours were found to be satisfactory by majority of participants in the study (64.2%). However, it has to be mentioned that a relatively high number of participants (31.55%) were not satisfied with the provision of library tours. The University may need to look at ways to improve the quality or increase the number of library tours to cater for the needs of first-year students. The availability of photocopying facilities in any library is always a challenge and an area of concern to library users; however, at Wits, the availability of these services has been met to the satisfaction of most first-year students – 74.73% in this study. Only 22.55% were not satisfied in this regard.
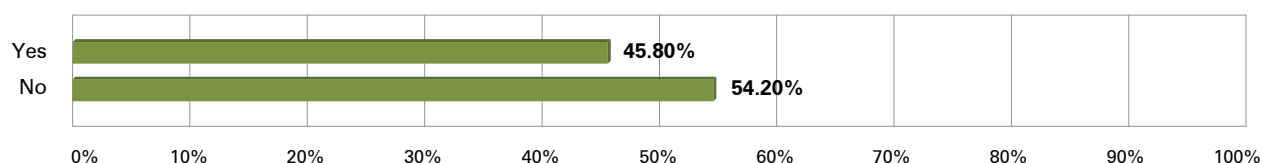
Figure 29: Ownership of Computing Devices

In the Vision 2022 Strategic Framework one of the strategic priorities of Wits is to become an IT-savvy university. As part of IT savvy-ness, the University intends to provide ubiquitous access to teaching and learning information and resources. This can only be achieved if the Wits community, including students, have access to appropriate computing devices and networks to allow free information flow. As a means of establishing the extent to which our first-year students are part of this long-term vision of the University, it was important for this study to establish the degree of ownership of computing devices among first-year students. Figure 29 shows that the majority of first-year students (54.20%) do not own a computing device; only 45.8% do. Reasons for this could be traced back to policy positions taken by the University that only second-year students will be encouraged to own a computing device, by reason of a number of socio-economic challenges envisaged by the University. While Wits may have legitimate reasons to exclude first-year

students from computing-device ownership requirements, this position may have to be revisited in the light of the fact that access to computing devices improves students' teaching and learning experiences in IT-savvy universities anywhere in the world.
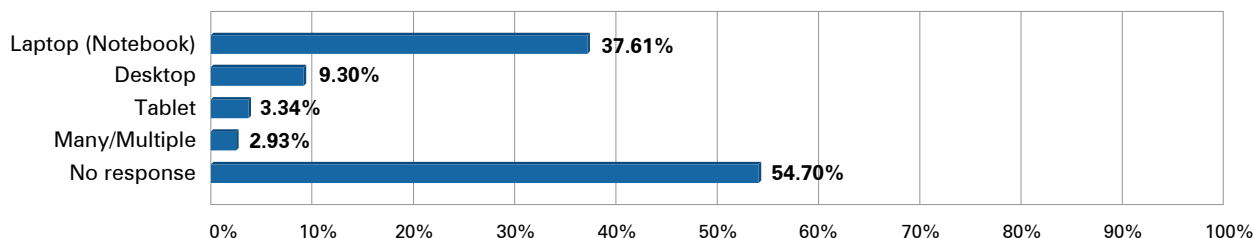
Figure 30: Type of Computing Device Owned

As shown in Figure 30, of the 45.8% who declared that they owned a computing device, 37.61% indicated that they owned a laptop or notebook, 9.3% owned a desktop computer, 3.34% owned a tablet, and 2.95% owned multiple devices. It is intriguing that a large number of students (54.7%) who had indicated ownership of a computing device did not respond to this question. The reason for this could be that the choices provided excluded the ownership of cell phones, some of which could have embedded computing facilities that are useful to students.
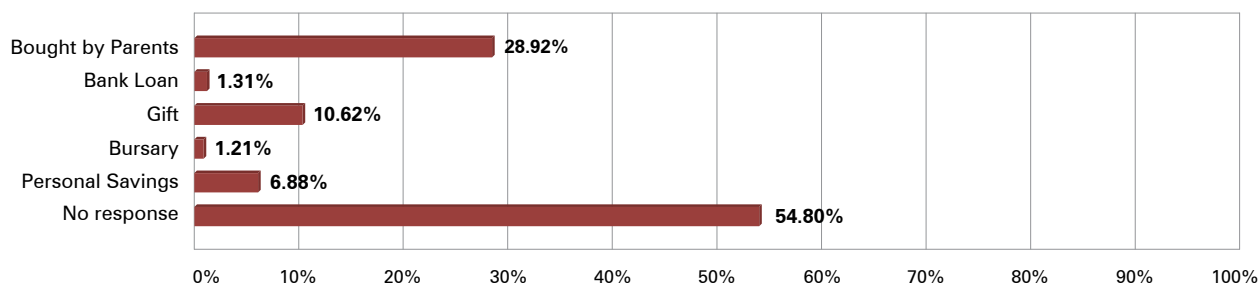
Figure 31: How the Computing Device was Acquired

The data analysis presented in Figure 31 indicates that for the largest percentage of students, a computing device was purchased by their parents or guardians. Only 10.62% received such devices as gifts, while 6.88% purchased the device through personal savings or through bursary funding (1.21%) or a bank loan (1.31%). The data suggest that very limited alternative financial arrangements exist to help students whose parents or guardians do not buy them such devices to acquire them.
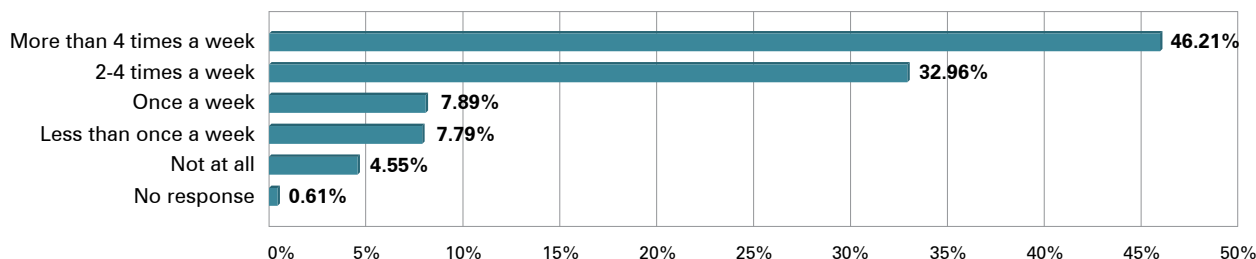
Figure 32: Usefulness of Wits Computing Facilities

All students who participated in this study were asked to provide feedback on their use of the Wits computing facilities, and the frequency with which they used the facilities. It is very clear from the data presented in Figure 32 that the almost half of the participating first-year students (46.21%) used the Wits computing facilities more than 4 times a week, followed by 32.96% using the facilities 2 – 4 times a week. Only 7.89% use them once a week, and 7.79% less than once a week. The data shows, therefore, that there is still a very high reliance on Wits computing facilities among first-year students. This has to be understood against the backdrop

that most students do not own their own computing devices, so the burden of provision of such facilities remains on the University.
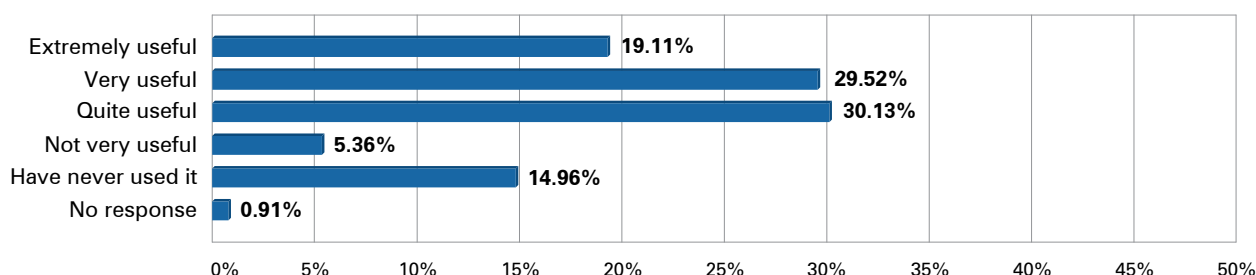
Figure 33: Usefulness of MyWits student e-mail account

As shown in Figure 33, the majority of students indicated that MyWits student e-mail is relatively useful. Looking at the full spread of responses, 19.11% stated that it was extremely useful; 29.52% that it was very useful; 30.13% that it was quite useful; and 5.36% that it was not useful. Only 14.96% of students had never used the **MyWits** e-mail facility. It is important at this stage to indicate that the study did not probe whether students were satisfied with the availability of computing devices, and the speed and functionality of these devices. If the burden of provision for computing devices remains on the shoulders of the University, it will be important for such studies in future to establish whether the provision and functionality of computing devices and networks at Wits meet the expectations and satisfaction of first-year students.

Wits Academic Experience
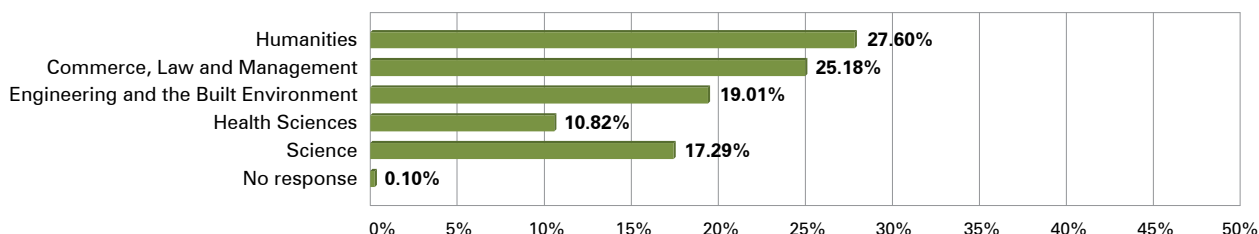
Figure 34: Faculty of Affiliation

Figure 34 gives us a breakdown of the faculty of affiliation of the students who participated in the study. The data show that students from all faculties were represented in this study, with the majority of students coming from the Faculty of Humanities (27.6%) and the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management (25.18%). There were also students from the Engineering and Built Environment Faculty (19.01%) and Science (17.29%), while the Faculty of Health Sciences constituted only 10.82%. It could be stated that, given the high level of representivity across all faculties, it can be assumed that the findings reflect a general view on the University. Figure 35 shows us that the majority of students intend to remain at Wits well beyond their first-degree enrolment. While only 32.25% indicated that they intended to leave the University after completing their Bachelor's degree, 35.69% had intentions to stay up to their Master's degree, while 31.65% intended to study up to PhD level. It was important to establish through the information in Figure 34 the extent to which students intended to commit themselves to Wits. The majority of students clearly intend to have a long-term relationship with the University, which suggests that Wits has to ensure that the expectations that students have about the quality of provisioning and resources in the University are sustained throughout their studies. If the first-year experience and satisfaction with undergraduate studies is one way of crafting long-lasting and meaningful student experiences to ensure that they return for postgraduate education, then the University must invest in these experiences to make them rich and meaningful.
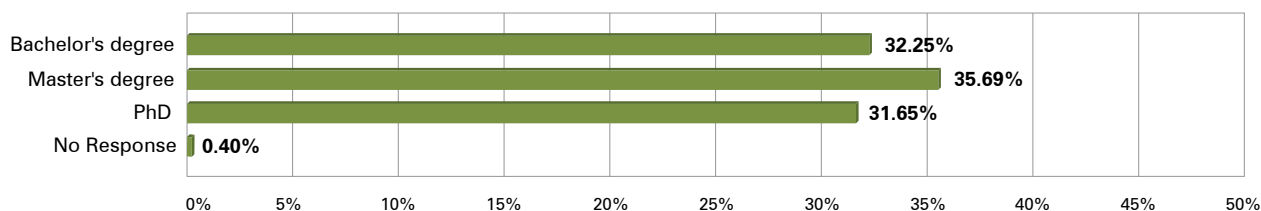
Figure 35: Planned Highest Degree of Study

A university like Wits – which seeks to increase the participation of postgraduate students in our educational and research arrangements – has to realise that undergraduate programmes will continuously become the main feeding mechanism into postgraduate education. Ensuring that the first-year and undergraduate experience remains fruitful for our students will eventually contribute to a high progression rate from undergraduate to postgraduate education, which is consonant with the planned progression depicted in Figure 35.
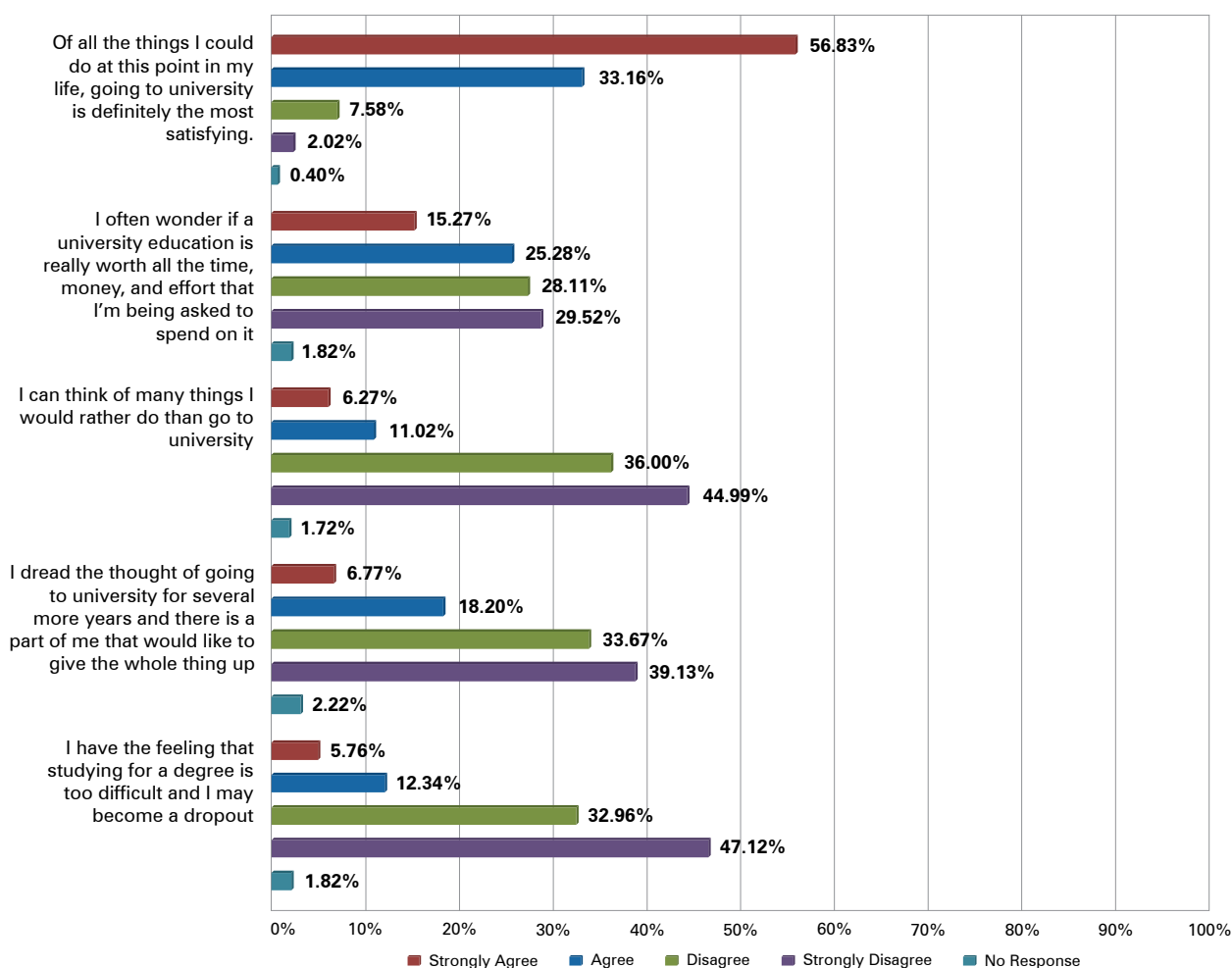
Figure 36: Academic Experience – Motivation

Figure 36 indicates that the majority of participants (89.99%) agreed that going to university is the most satisfying thing they could be doing in their lives at the time of the survey. Only 9.6% were not motivated to pursue university education at the time of the study, and they thought that going to university was not the most satisfying thing they could be doing. This suggests that the majority of first-year students were at least moderately motivated to pursue university education and to face all challenges this presented to them, motivation the University could exploit through the provision of meaningful teaching and learning arrangements. While the majority of students felt that pursuing a university education was a most satisfying activity, 40.55% were not convinced that a university education was really worth all the time, money and effort that they were being asked to spend on it. However, a

relatively high (57.63%) number of participants affirmed that they were convinced of this. These data suggest that most participants were not only satisfied to pursue a university education, but were also motivated by the fact that it was worth their time, money and effort. This position is supported by the fact that 80.99% of participants could not think of anything to do in their lives at that given moment rather than going to university. Only 17.29% of the respondents thought that there were other things they would rather be doing. The study also shows that 72.8% of participants had no inclination to want give up their studies before completing their first degree. A total of 24.97% of participants, however, entertained the possibility of dropping out before completing their studies because they were unhappy about the thought of spending years studying. This data suggests that the majority of first-year students expect to be successful in their studies; they intend to face the challenges with resilience and remain at Wits until graduation. In line with this, only 18.1% felt that studying for a degree was too difficult, and they might drop out for this reason; 80.08 % expressed confidence in their abilities and were not considering dropping out.
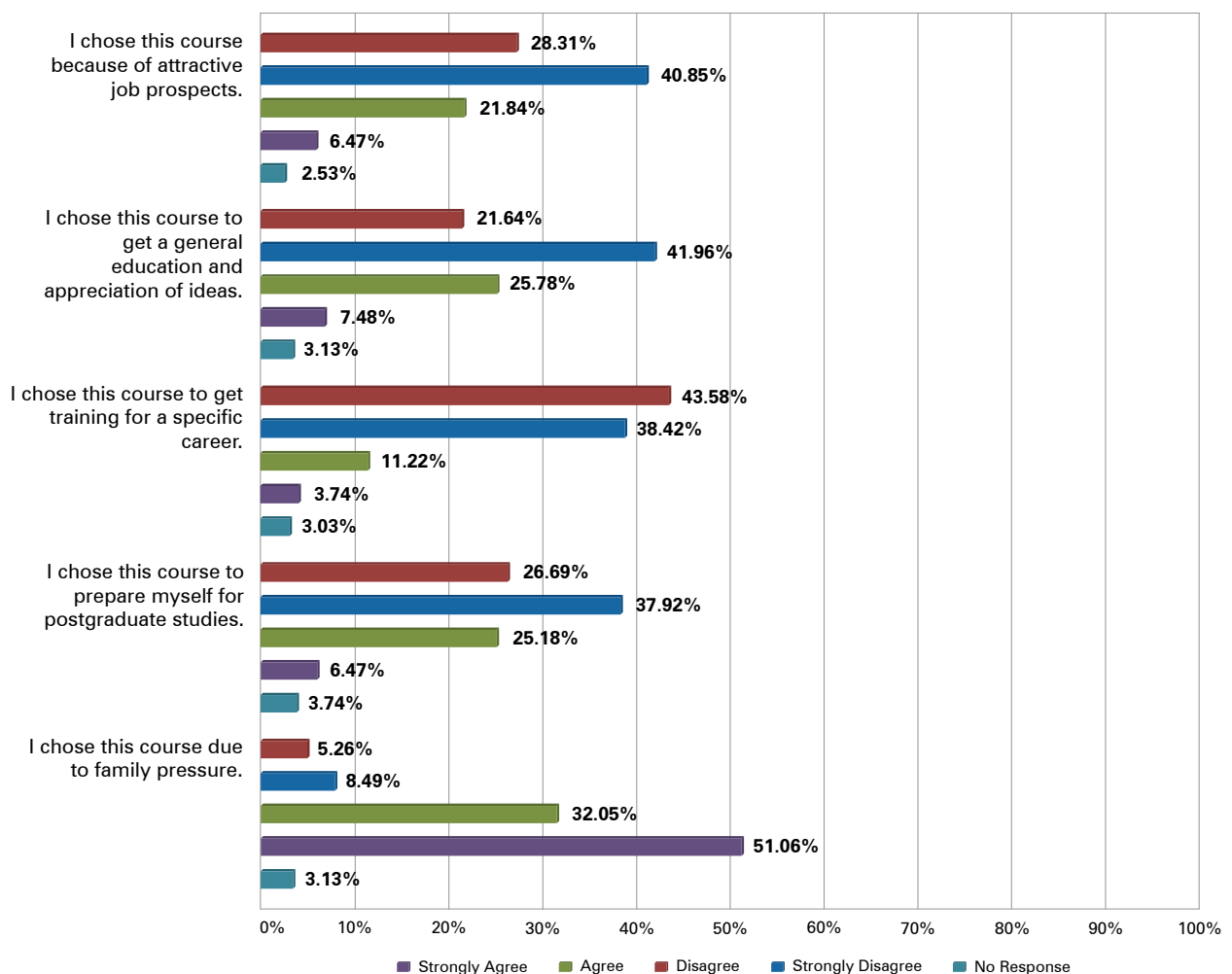
Figure 37: Academic Experience/Course Selection

Figure 37 suggests that a large number of students (69.16%) chose their courses because of attractive job prospects. Only 28.31% disagreed with the statement. The data also shows that a relatively high number of first-year students (63.6%) chose their courses in order to get a general education and appreciation of ideas; with 33.26% indicating that they did not. However, the data suggest that the majority of students (82%) chose their courses to get training for a specific career. Only 14.96% of students disagreed with this statement. The data indicates that the majority of first-year undergraduate students at Wits expect to be trained for specific careers through their undergraduate education and the University needs to fulfil these expectations.

It should also be noted that a relatively high number of students (64.61%) expect the university to prepare them for postgraduate education through their undergraduate studies. Only 31.65% of students did not share this expectation. It is noteworthy and very encouraging to realise that the majority of first-year undergraduate students chose their studies without family pressure: 83.11% of students declared that they were not pressured by their families to pursue a particular course of study, with only 13.75% indicating that this did happen to them. These results collectively suggest that there is a relatively high level of maturity and independence among first-year students at Wits. This is reflected in the extent to which their study choices were not influenced by anyone but themselves, that their expectations were linked to training for specific careers, and that they saw their undergraduate education as preparation for postgraduate studies.
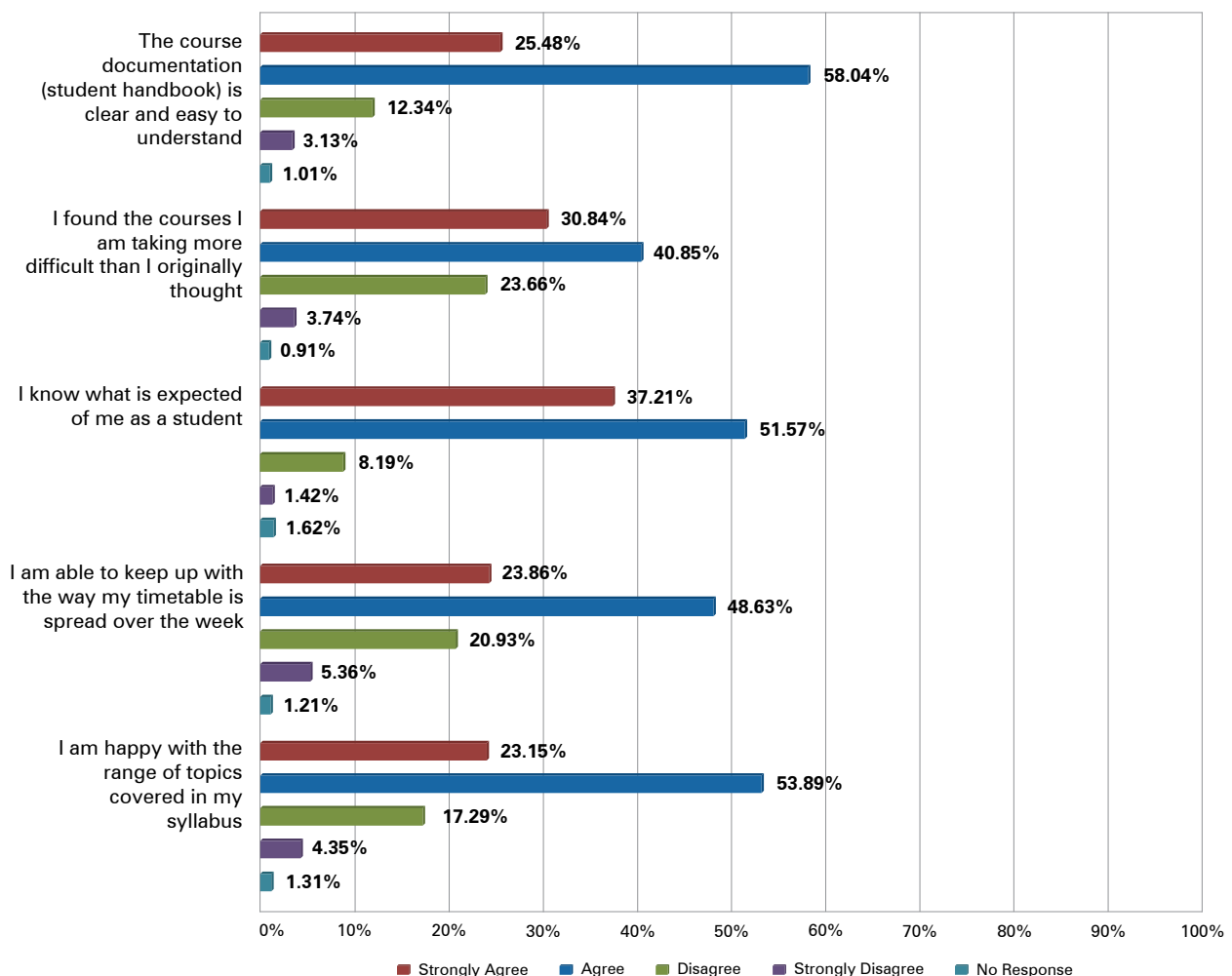
Figure 38: Academic Experience – Course Organisation

The best way to establish the value of academic experience in any given programme is by asking participants to provide feedback on their experiences in their courses. Data presented in Figure 38 suggests that the majority of participants (83.52%) agreed with the statement that the course documentation in various courses was clear and easy to understand. Only 15.47% disagreed. However, a relatively high number of participants (71.69%) indicated that they found their courses to be more difficult than they anticipated. Only 27.4% disagreed with this statement. It is quite clear from the data, therefore, that a large number of first-year students were beginning to express a need for some form of support to help them cope with their studies, which were more difficult than they initially expected. On the other hand, most of the respondents (88.78%) were clear about what was expected of them as students, while only 9.61% declared that they did not know what was expected.

These data suggest that expectations across all courses were clearly articulated to the students, with good understanding. Perhaps it is this clear articulation that made them realise that their courses were more difficult than they initially expected. It follows that there is no need to invest resources in articulating these expectations; the challenge lies rather in supporting students to cope with the difficulties they experience in their studies.

Figure 38 also suggests that timetabling in different courses was not the main problem. The majority of participants (72.49%) indicated that they were able to keep up with the timetable as it was spread over the week; 26.9% of students disagreed. Data analysis also shows that the majority of participants (77.04%) in this study were happy with the range of topics covered in their courses and syllabi, with 21.64% indicating dissatisfaction. It would seem that the majority of first-year students are convinced that the course content and curriculum choices in their programmes are structured in a way that meets the expectations articulated in Figure 36 above. Again, in this case, it is important to state that students do not appear to have problems with the nature of the curriculum, but rather with the means through which they can acquire skills and assimilate the content.

Figure 39 shows that the majority of students (67.95%) were satisfied with timetabling of assignments in their programmes; 31.25% were not. Evidence also shows that a very large number of respondents (82.61%) were satisfied with the availability of information about assessment dates; a small number (16.18%) expressed dissatisfaction. Furthermore, most students were not merely satisfied with information about assessment dates, but also satisfied with the clarity of information about assessment criteria: 75.73% of respondents indicated satisfaction in this respect, while only 21.64% were dissatisfied. The University in general may need to consider taking steps to ensure that clarity on assessment criteria be improved to cater for the latter 21.64% of respondents.
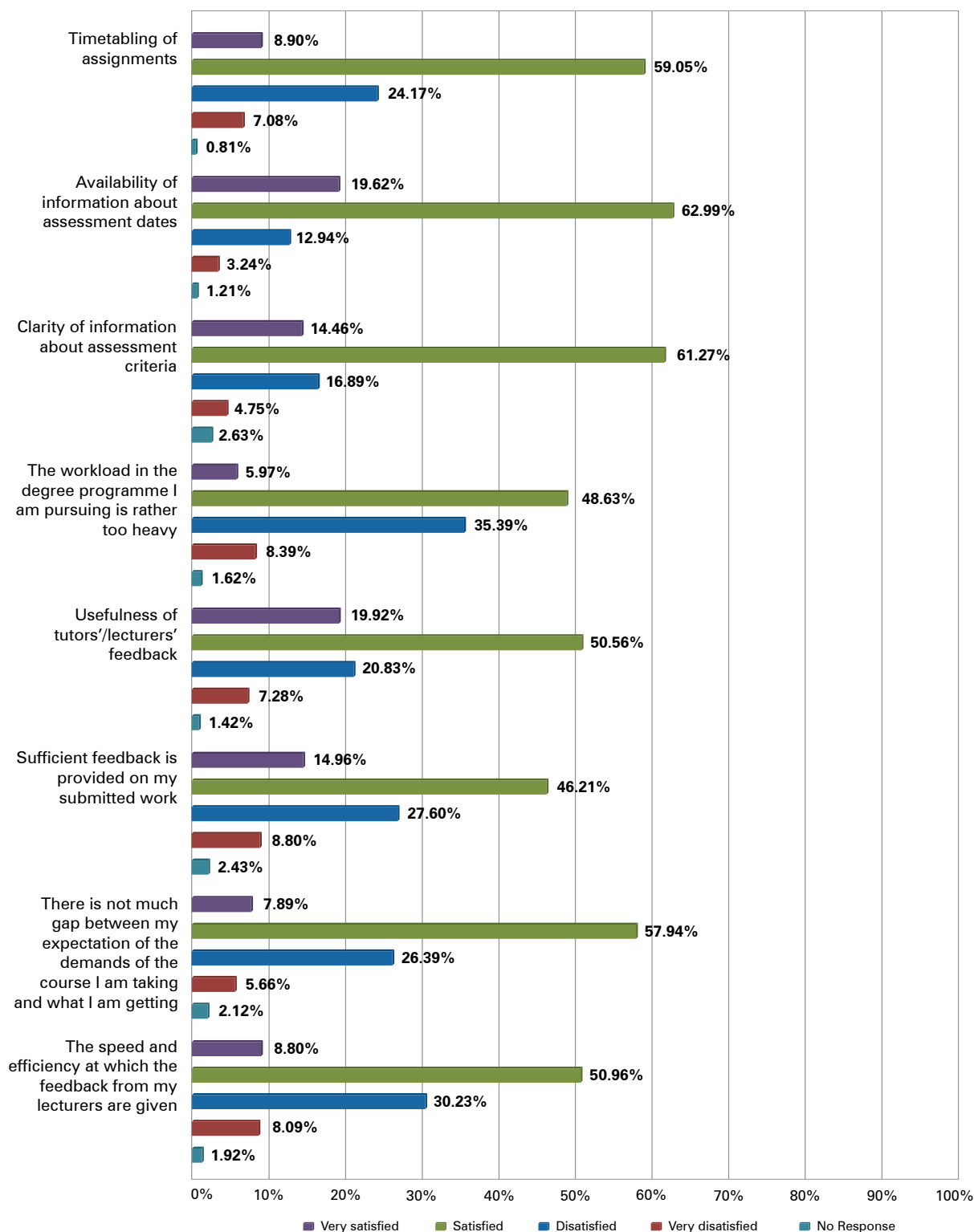
Figure 39: Academic Experience – Workload Assessment

The data support claims made earlier in this report about students feeling that the workload was too heavy for them, as a low 54.6% of respondents were satisfied with the workload in the degree programmes they were pursuing, while 43.78% were dissatisfied. In any teaching and learning environment, the relationship between the student and teacher is often enhanced by the quality of instruction and usefulness of feedback that students receive from the lecturer. Data analysis shows that the majority of students (70.48%) regarded feedback they received from lecturers and tutors as useful to their learning processes. The percentage of participants that were not satisfied was 28.11%. It is important for the University to make sure that the quality of feedback given by lecturers to students is improved to

satisfy students who are not currently finding it useful. It is not only the usefulness of feedback that enriches the learning experience for students; it is also important to ensure that this feedback is sufficient. On this aspect, 61.17% of respondents were satisfied, while 36.4% were not. The University will need to ensure that lecturers are encouraged to provide more detailed and sufficient feedback to work submitted by students, to cater for the needs of students represented by this 36.4% response.

As presented in Figure 39, the data also show that 65.83% of respondents were satisfied with the extent to which their expectations of the demands of the course were on par with the learning experience they were receiving from the course, and 32.05% were dissatisfied with the match. While it can be generalised from this analysis that a large number of students felt that their expectations were fairly matched by their lived experiences, the University may want to consider putting mechanisms in place to cater for the needs of the remainder. It has to be mentioned again that one of the essential factors in improving the relationship between students and lecturers and the quality of learning is the speed and efficiency at which feedback is given by lecturers. Data analysis shows that 59.76% of participants in this study were satisfied with this score. However, a relatively high number of respondents, 38.32%, were dissatisfied with the speed and efficiency of feedback. The University may want to encourage lecturers to ensure that feedback on student work and assessment is given more promptly than the current situation allows. This will ensure that a large number of students who were dissatisfied are catered for.

As shown in Figure 40, the majority of students in this programme (89.28%) agreed that in order to improve their learning, it was important for them to attend most lectures. Only 9.1% of respondents indicated that this was not important. The same positive figure of 89.28% indicated that most students feel that they learn more in classes taught by enthusiastic lecturers, while only 8.59% disagreed. Teaching and learning cannot be reduced to only the lessons and activities provided by lecturers; at university level, it is also important that students should take the initiative to investigate particular topics and get more information on interesting subjects covered in their curriculum. In this study, 78.9% of respondents indicated that they sought out extra information on topics that they found interesting in class, while only 18.2% indicated that they did not. This data suggests that the majority of students who participated in the study are self-motivated to get more information to enhance the quality of their learning. In addition, most undergraduate students who participated in this study (70.58%) felt that working with other students enhanced their learning opportunities, with 26.9% disagreeing. This information suggests that the organisation of curriculum and assessment activities should also give consideration to group work and team work to allow a sufficient degree of peer learning. As part of academic development, the provision of tutors to support student learning outside formal classroom arrangements is always a desirable arrangement. However, it is not only the provision of such tutoring services that enhances the quality of the learning experience; tutors should also be approachable and available to students at the time of need. As this report shows, 64 % of participants agreed that tutors were always available and approachable when needed; while 33.57% of participants disagreed with the statement. The University may need to consider means through which the provision, availability and accessibility of tutors could be improved at first-year level.

It is important for my learning to attend most lectures
- 46.11%
- 43.17%
- 6.17%
- 2.93%
- 1.62%

I learn more in classes taught by enthusiastic lecturers
- 55.21%
- 34.07%
- 5.56%
- 3.03%
- 2.12%

I sought out extra information about the topics I found interesting in class
- 24.37%
- 54.90%
- 14.16%
- 4.04%
- 2.53%

Working with other students in class time is important for my learning
- 21.44%
- 49.14%
- 20.53%
- 6.37%
- 2.53%

Personal tutors are approachable and available
- 19.51%
- 44.49%
- 24.27%
- 9.30%
- 2.43%

The teaching staff treat students as mature individuals
- 28.11%
- 53.99%
- 10.82%
- 4.65%
- 2.43%

The teaching staff are sympathetic & supportive to the needs of students
- 17.69%
- 50.96%
- 21.44%
- 7.85%
- 2.33%

The online teaching resources (e.g. WebCT) are useful
- 33.16%
- 45.90%
- 12.03%
- 4.85%
- 4.04%

Legend: ■ Very satisfied ■ Satisfied ■ Disatisfied ■ Very disatisfied ■ No Response

Figure 40: Academic Experience – Teaching and Learning

The treatment that students receive from teaching staff is also an essential factor in shaping good learning experiences for students at any level of study. The data shows that 82.1% of participants in this study agreed that teaching staff treated them as mature individuals; only 15.47% of respondents disagreed. There was also a fairly widely shared view among participants that teaching staff were sympathetic and supportive of their needs, with 68.65% of respondents agreeing that they were, while 29.2% disagreed with this statement. The majority of students (79.06%) felt that online teaching resources (e-learning) put in place by the University to support their learning were very useful, while only 16.88% disagreed. This suggests that the University may need to put in place policy mechanisms to encourage the use of

e-learning resources and facilities to improve the quality of teaching and learning at undergraduate and, specifically, first-year levels.
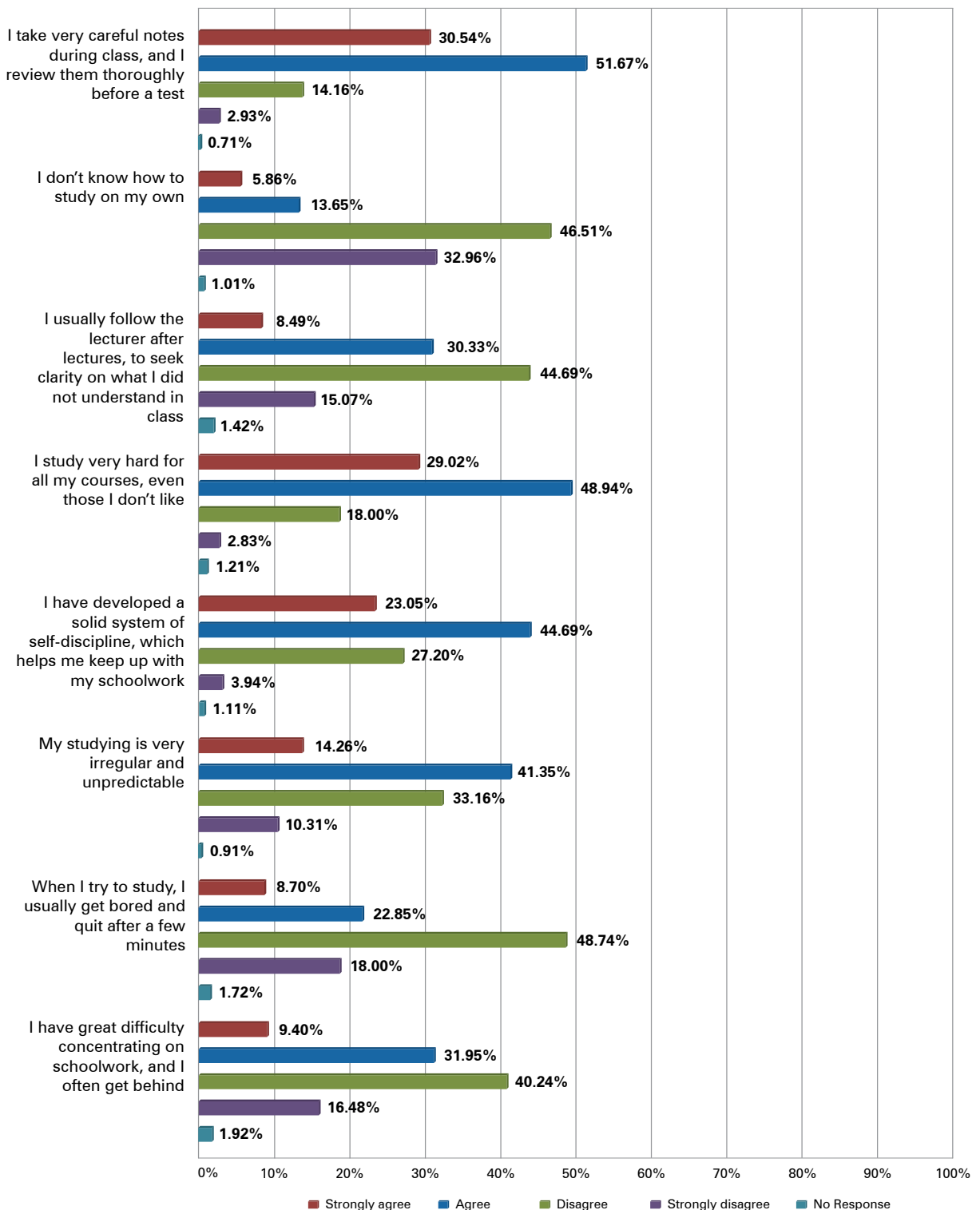
Figure 41: Academic Experience – Study Habits

Students need to develop skills and habits to study in an effective manner that improves the quality of their learning in each and every course of study. Data in Figure 41 show that most students take careful notes during class, and review these notes thoroughly before any given test; 82.21% of respondents agreed that they often use comprehensive and carefully constructed notes to prepare for tests. Only 17.79% of respondents disagreed that they take notes during class which they use to

prepare for tests. The majority of first-year students at Wits seem to have developed sufficient skills to study on their own: while 19.59% of respondents agreed that they did not know how to study on their own, a large number of respondents (79.47%) indicated that they did. A significant number of students (38.82%) also agreed that they usually followed the lecturer after class to seek clarity on what they did not understand in class. However, 59.76% of respondents indicated that they did not.

Being able to strike a balance on time dedicated to study different modules is often a very important quality for successful learning. The majority of respondents, 77.96%, indicated that they studied very hard for all their courses, even those that they did not like, while 20.83% disagreed with that statement. This indicates that even though the majority of students in this study felt that the workload in their studies was relatively high, they worked very hard to meet the demands of the course. In line with this finding, 67.74% of respondents indicated that they had developed mechanisms for self-discipline which helped them keep up with their studies, while 31.14% indicated they had not. A sense of self-discipline and the tools to develop this kind of maturity are essential for developing undergraduate students. This is an area that the FYE Programme should explore to help equip students to develop these required skills.

Such assistance becomes even more important given the fact that a large number of students (43.47% of the sample) indicated that their study habits were irregular and unpredictable. Only 55.61% of respondents indicated that their study habits were regular and predictable. Almost a third of these first-year students confessed that when they tried to study, they usually got bored and decided to quit studying. The data shows that 31.55% of respondents confessed to this, and 66.74% claimed that they did not have this problem. It could be argued that this group is probably composed of those who had developed self-discipline and study skills equipping them to cope with the demands of their university studies.

Being unable to discipline oneself and focus on one's studies often leads to a situation where students are left behind and find it difficult to concentrate and catch up. It must be noted that 41.35% of respondents indicated that they had great difficulty concentrating on their university work and they often lagged behind in their studies. Only 56.72% of respondents disagreed with this statement. The data in this area of analysis suggests that the majority of students at Wits have developed sufficient skills to discipline themselves, study hard, and focus on their university work. However, it cannot be ignored that a relatively high number of students are experiencing difficulties in maintaining that discipline and being able to study in ways that help them to cope with the learning demands. This is worrying, given the fact that evidence provided earlier on in this study suggested that the majority of first-year students did not attend the modules in the FYE Programme designed to help them develop meaningful study skills. The University needs to find ways to make sure that first-year students are encouraged to participate in generic and essential components of the programme that will give them the skills required to cope with the demands of their courses and learning programmes.
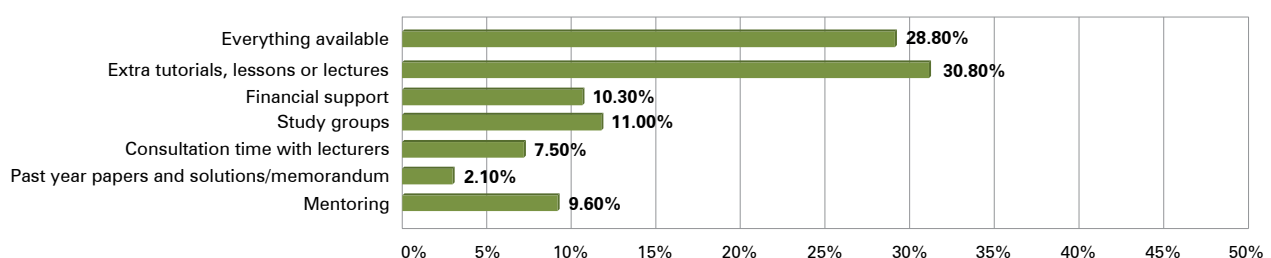

Figure 42: Other Forms of Support Needed by First-Year Students

First-year students indicated that they needed a variety of support mechanisms and programmes. Figure 42 outlines the main kinds of support mentioned in this respect.

Student Comments on Additional Support Needed

- I really think everything has been provided for us, but there is a lack of communication and accessibility between the service and the students, for instance at the beginning of the year. I needed to apply for voluntary work to receive extra money but the support was not offered by the school.

- A better understanding from the lecturers on certain topics discussed in class. Better scheduling of tests, we had to write three tests on one day without even an hour break in between. Better planning.

- Accounting and commercial law extra tutorials where we ask questions [when] we do not understand. Not only the ones programmed for the whole class or slot.

- As a student who lives off campus it would be helpful for me to get a bus that will drop me at the taxi rank, that way I will be able to leave campus late.

- Financial support, sometime we sleep with an empty stomach ... we need money for transport and food.

- For now I would say none, the problem is only with the way ... we should approach questions, that is all.

- I cannot think of anything, during the O-week were told to ask if we are lost or when we need help. I have been using that strategy ever since and everything has been going well.

- I find that the consultation times of the lecturers are very impractical. As I usually have lectures at that time or there is a line of students waiting for consultation.

- I have all the support I need on campus, and it's very satisfactory; I now know where to go if I have a certain difficulty, whether it concerns my studies, my emotions, spirituality etcetera; Wits is a very good place to be as a varsity student.

- I need someone who could be there to help me whenever I get stuck with a problem, and also a personal tutor who would be able to follow my progress.

- I require support from my lecturers if I am trying my best and still having difficulty in the course. One of my language lecturers is very rude and insensitive to students who are not excelling in the course but try their best!

- I wanted a tutor but saw that I would not have been able to fit one in on my schedule. The reason for that is that when I have attended all my classes I need to go home. I travel by train and the earlier I leave, the better, for safety reasons.

- I went to one of my tutors and some second-years with a maths problem but couldn't get any help. So, I realised that here, you just have to figure things out yourself always. Oh, I solved that problem few days or a week later.

- I wish I had a personal accounting tutor ... some questions I fail to phrase in a formal manner and due to that I do not consult with lecturers because they want you to be on point always.

- More efficiency in the financial office. To be honest some [of us] suffered getting no money for books and meals while we had bursaries. Almost failed due to that.

- None so far. This semester is good because I know where to go when I am lost and also [to find] the lectures and need help [from] mentors and fellow students.

- I really think everything has been provided for us, but there is a lack of communication and accessibility between the service and the students. For instance, at the beginning of the year I needed to apply for voluntary work to receive extra money but the support was not offered by the school.

- It is very hard to find tutors, and when I ask for help in the library (law library in particular) the librarians are not helpful. This is hard because I have never used these systems and just need to be shown once.

- I needed clubs or programmes that catered for students who live off campus, but they were not there or I did not hear about them. Therefore I feel I have been robbed of something I should have experienced.

- Personally, I am aware that not all residence accommodations, provided by the school, are full. Therefore students who couldn't attain res due to financial incapabilities or insufficiency, should be granted a number of 'stay-over's' which they can use to enhance their study purpose. For example, if a student has a test/exam/assignment in week 3, the school should grant them a number of nights, prior to week 3, which they can use to stay over at campus in order to access all the facilities and study material which they will need to be able to fully realise their potential of submitting good work. They face [challenges] from long-distance public transport travelling.

- Since I am staying off campus (in the townships), sometimes I have to go home late as I am either studying in the library or doing some work at the computer labs until late, since I don't have a computer at home. After all that I have to walk to Bree Taxi Rank. So students who have to walk to town to get taxis should have a bus ... to and from there in order to ensure their safety, and that their studies do not suffer due lack of resources or being scared to walk to town at night. Some of us do not have cars and we live on a tight budget.

- The university should consider the establishment of day residences for off-campus students. Many obstacles facing them, lack of information available to them. This also promotes a sense of belonging and unity among students, also in the creation of a support system.

- Tours to various law firms so that we keep up with the standards of the legal employment platform and in order to enhance our understanding of the profession besides just studying it.

- [There should be more] allocated tutors because a lot of students need assistance and tutors who are understanding and patient.
- Support from former Wits law first-class degree students on how they did it and how they managed it from first year till final year.

- Help with language difficulties in crossing over from an Afrikaans schooling to doing everything in English.

- Extra lessons that tutors are not so keen to give (generally).

- More restrictive security measures as a lot of incidents have occurred in which security didn't play its role.

Being a Witsie

The notion of Wits as *'a university to call our own'* was explored and embraced in the *Wits 2010 Strategy*. In the *Wits Vision 2022 Strategic Framework*, the University further committed itself to "*providing a vibrant intellectual experience that allows students and staff to analyse, critique and understand the cultural, social, political and economic contexts in which their knowledge generation and acquisition are located*", and further declared: "*Wits seeks to uphold values enshrined in the South African Constitution and the Bill of Rights in teaching, research, service and social engagement, and in campus life*."

This commitment is also reflected in the institutional values that shape the way we do business. In this context, values are defined as principles that shape the behaviour of Wits's internal stakeholders in the absence of written rules and guidelines. These values include the following:[5]

- *Independent enquiry and trust.* Academics and students will demonstrate the capacity to function independently in line with the quality standards, principles and values of the University and in accordance with the mandates and responsibilities that may impact on particular areas of work.
- *International engagement.* Members of the University have roles as public intellectuals, members of the global civil society and intellectual leaders. These roles find expression through curricula and research demonstrating commitment to our local context, but understanding our role as a globally relevant university.
- *Intellectual excellence and integrity.* All those associated with the University are active participants in an intellectual community and the work they do must be characterised by the highest standards of intellectual integrity.
- *Academic freedom and institutional autonomy.* This includes but is not limited to protecting our right to decide who we teach, how we teach, what we teach and what research we undertake. At Wits we will be guided by international standards of intellectual excellence.
- *Collegiality.* The University is a collegial community of scholars, which is more than a constellation of economically driven relationships, within a legally constituted organisational structure.
- *Social engagement and responsiveness.* Members of the University have roles as public intellectuals, members of the society and as intellectual leaders. These roles find expression through curricula and research.
- *Diversity.* A sufficiently diverse range of knowledge areas should be maintained and reflected in teaching and research – including an explicit commitment to cross-cultural accessibility and internationalisation.
- *Accountability.* Wits governance structures are inclusive and broadly representative, which includes the onus of deliberating on all points of view.
- *Debate and critical engagement.* The University's intellectual project is an educational one predicated on intellectual depth and robust engagement.

If the University is serious about these values and inclusive principles for teaching and learning, it is important to ensure that all new students joining the University receive the promised positive cultural experience which is one of the defining factors of a distinct Wits Experience.

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[5] *Extrapolated from the Wits 2013 Strategy.*

I feel welcome and accepted at Wits
- 33.57%
- 52.98%
- 8.39%
- 2.93%
- 2.12%

I am proud to be studying at Wits
- 58.65%
- 34.07%
- 3.94%
- 1.31%
- 2.02%

I am free to express my views and opinions at Wits
- 36.60%
- 48.33%
- 10.31%
- 1.92%
- 2.83%

I think Wits culture is tolerant of Race
- 36.20%
- 43.58%
- 6.17%
- 2.93%
- 11.12%

I think Wits culture is tolerant of Creeds
- 31.75%
- 53.59%
- 6.98%
- 1.62%
- 6.07%

I think Wits culture is tolerant of Religions
- 42.06%
- 48.74%
- 4.25%
- 1.52%
- 3.44%

I think Wits culture is tolerant of Political views
- 39.53%
- 48.23%
- 6.98%
- 2.43%
- 2.83%

I think Wits culture is tolerant of Sexual orientations
- 38.02%
- 48.94%
- 6.67%
- 2.53%
- 3.84%

In everything Wits does, it primarily seeks to benefit its students (student centred)
- 19.82%
- 46.71%
- 24.77%
- 5.66%
- 3.03%

I feel that Wits provides platforms for students to debate and make inform decisions (e.g. student fees increase)
- 17.19%
- 45.60%
- 29.73%
- 4.65%
- 2.83%

Wits fosters interaction between various races, cultures
- 12.13%
- 50.05%
- 31.75%
- 2.73%
- 3.34%

Legend: Strongly agree · Agree · Disagree · Strongly disagree · No Response
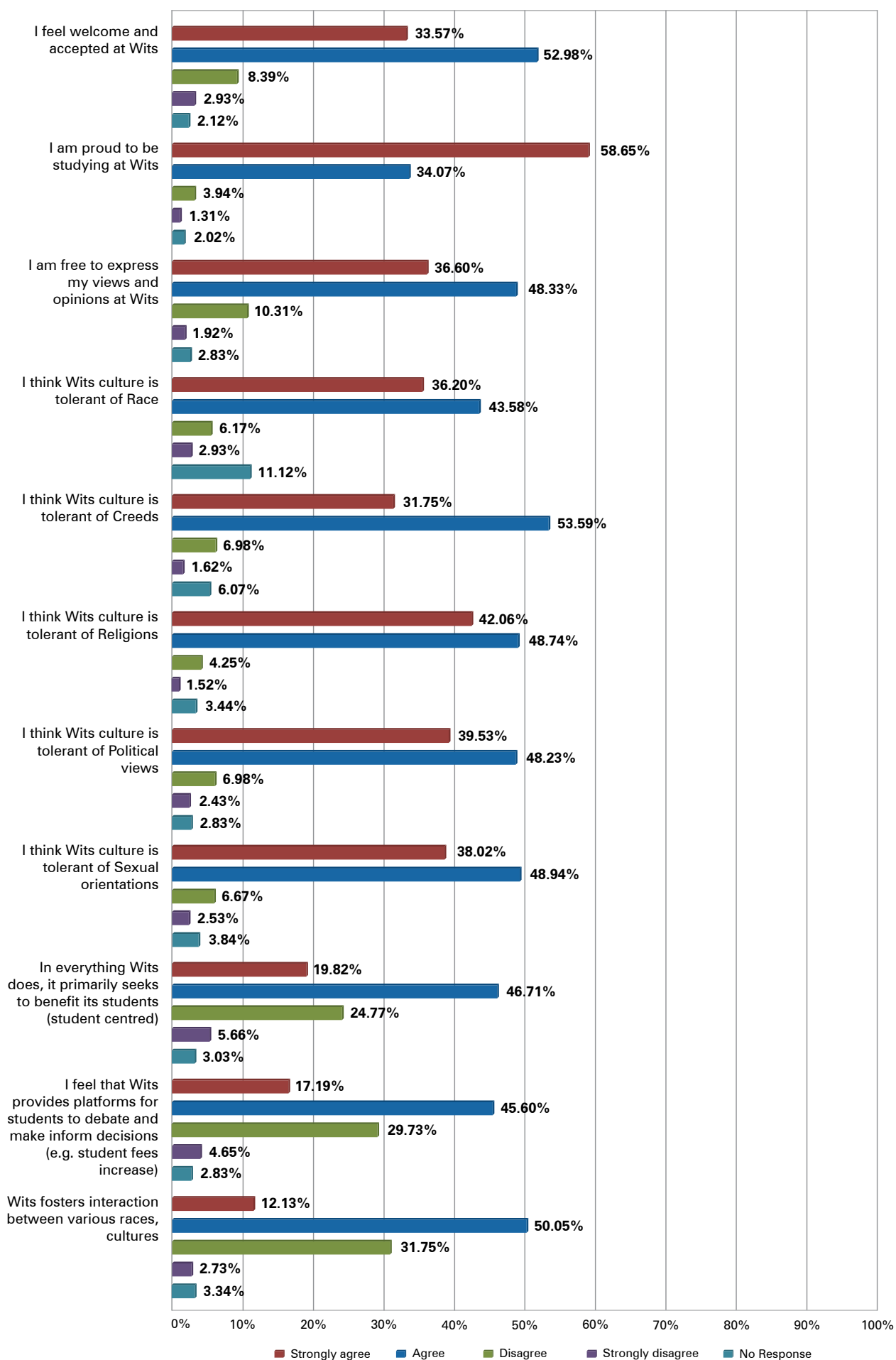
Figure 43: Institutional Culture

A strong sense of belonging has to develop among first-year students at Wits to make them feel part of the University, in a manner that affirms the attitude articulated in the Wits expression: "a university to call our own". This implies that the students should experience the University culture in ways that are inclusive, embracing and recognising diversity among students. If first-year students continue to feel excluded from the mainstream cultural fabric of the University it could translate to high levels of dissatisfaction with the quality of provisioning and educational arrangements at Wits, and the students' general university experience. Figure 43 gives us an understanding of how first-year students at Wits experience various components of the University in terms of the institutional culture. It has to be mentioned upfront that it is very encouraging to note from the data that a large number of students feel welcome and accepted at Wits; the data shows that 86.55% of respondents agreed that they did. Only 11.32% of respondents disagreed with this statement. This suggests that within the first six months that students experience at the University, they are able to identify with the arrangements and culture in the sense of feeling accepted as a part of the University community. A very high proportion of respondents indicated that they were proud to be studying at Wits: 92.65%. Of these, 58.65% strongly agreed with the statement. Only 5.25% of respondents disagreed. Being a proud part of the University community should come with a sense of freedom to engage with the different views expressed and express your own opinions as part of the University community. It is also encouraging to note that a large number of respondents felt that this was the case. The statement elicited a positive response from 84.93% of respondents; only 12.23% of respondents disagreed.

It is vital for the University to uphold the values of our Constitution and embrace diversity in its various forms in its institutional culture arrangements. A very large number of respondents felt that Wits culture was significantly tolerant of racial differences, with 80.18% of respondents expressing this opinion, while only 9.1% of respondents disagreed. The data also shows that 85.34% of respondents felt that Wits was tolerant of creed diversity, and only 7.79% felt that the University was not. This implies that various forms of beliefs, doctrines and faith arrangements are indeed accepted in the University. The great majority of these first-year students (90.8%) were also convinced that the University was tolerant of religious diversity; while only 5.77% disagreed with the statement that this was so. The majority also felt that they were free to express their political views, and that the University embraced this. The statement to that affect received a positive response from 88.27% of respondents, while only 9.41% did not believe that Wits had a politically tolerant culture. It should also be noted that most respondents in the study felt that the University culture of tolerance extended to various sexual orientations. The data shows 86.96% of respondents agreeing with the relevant statement; only 9.2% of respondents disagreed.

In the Vision 2022 Strategic Framework, the University articulates one of its ambitions as being a student-centred university. While being student-centred means that the University is keen and willing to respond to the various needs of students in a manner that enriches the quality of teaching and learning, Wits does not intend to take away the responsibility that students have to ensure that meaningful learning takes place. Based on data analysis it can be argued that the University is beginning to move towards crafting its identity and shaping student perceptions around the fact that it is a student-centred university. The results show 66.53% of students agreeing with the statement that the University, in everything that it did, intended primarily to benefit its students. However, it has to be noted that 30.43% of respondents disagreed with this statement. There is a need to explore reasons why this notable minority felt this way, while acknowledging the satisfaction with this aspect of the University on the part of the majority.

The data also show that the majority of students (62.79%) felt that the University provided platforms for students to debate and make informed decisions. However,

34.38% of respondents disagreed. The University may want to explore more ways through which perceptions about providing platforms for student engagement and the making of informed decisions are improved. Finally, the identity of the University of the Witwatersrand as a cosmopolitan reflection of society has to find expression in the means through which it fosters interaction between various races and cultures. The study indicates a fairly widely shared view among first-year students that Wits does foster this interaction. The data shows that 62.18% of respondents agreed with the statement, while 34.48% disagreed.
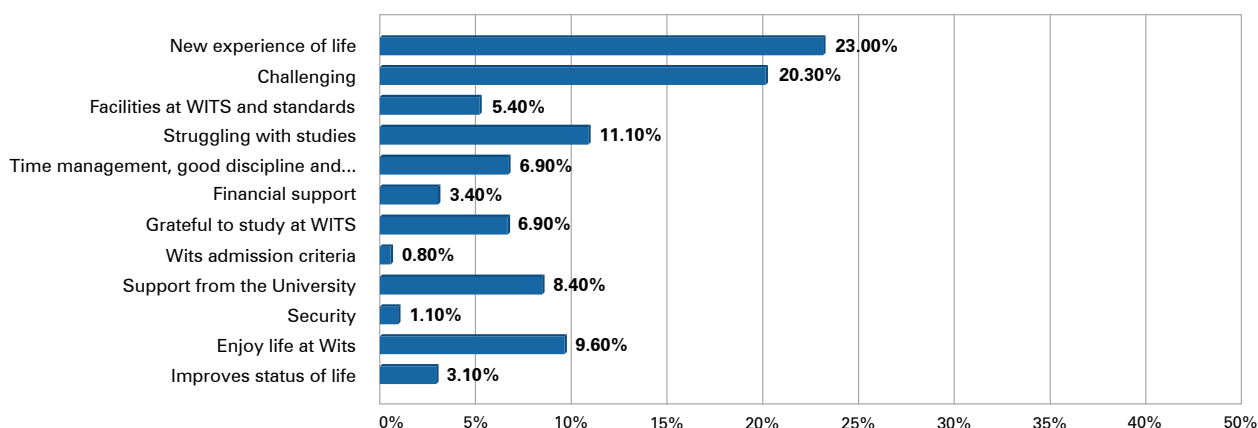

Figure 44: General Comments on the First-Year Experience at Wits

As shown in Figure 44 above, topics and opinions mentioned in general comments about life as a first-year Wits student included:

- New experience of life (23.00%)
- Challenging (20.30%)
- Facilities at Wits and standards (5.40%)
- Struggling with studies (11.10%)
- Time management, good discipline and hard working (6.90%)
- Financial support (3.40%)
- Grateful to study at Wits (6.90%)
- Wits admission criteria (0.80%)
- Support from the University (8.40%)
- Security (1.10%)
- Enjoy life at Wits (9.60%)
- Improves status of life (3.10%)

Open Comments on the Wits First-Year Experience

As shown in Figure 44 above, topics and opinions mentioned in general comments about life as a first-year Wits student included:

- My first year was indeed amazing as I met people from different walks of life with whom I shared mutual interests, but at the same time it was stressful and there has been a lot of pressure from my course and the university life at large. It really has been tough and overwhelming but the overall experience has been very adventurous and the feeling of being a Witsie has been wonderful.

- Although there are more than enough resources to satisfy courses students are studying, I feel that there are too many activities that force first-year students to come to Wits. Example: tutorials and labs should be optional. It should be: hey students, here are all the available resources; this is what you need to know, go learn.

> " At first, I thought that Wits was discriminating because it only accepted white people in the past. I did not think that it was race free. Now I am surprised by how free it is. "

- Although Wits has a lot of diversity, I have had a relatively difficult time fitting in and finding my feet. I am still on that "self discovery" journey. Have not figured out who I am yet, who I want to be and what works and does not work me.

- As I have a gap of 12 years between my high school studying and university (also the limited/poorly resourced Bantu education I was studying in played a huge role in my struggles), I initially struggled with my studies, indeed with Philosophy to such an extent that I still struggle with it. I failed it in first semester and some of its tutors are lazy. Improving in my other courses (law). I believe my second year will be much better if I pass as I am strongly dedicated to my studies and what is happening on the campus. I also strive to succeed.

- At first it was hard to make friends, but later I met most of the people I saw on orientation week, and got along with them. O-week is of great importance and it helps. And can we please have outside water taps almost everywhere at east campus? It is not nice to get water from the restrooms.

- At first I did not like Wits, my first week of school was horrible because I got lost almost every day, but I am now a proud Witsie. I have mastered everything about Wits and I enjoy studying here.

- Besides some of the disappointments that I have experienced, my experience at Wits so far has been truly amazing. I have come across very intelligent lecturers and tutors who put effort in ensuring that their tutorial classes understand and should not be afraid to ask for help. I have created new friendships which I hope will last for many more years to come.

- Coping and adjusting from high school to university standards has been a great challenge. I could say that it actually took me the entire first semester as well as the first month of the second semester to actually adjust and get the hang of how things are done around here ... there was not much support ... maybe attending the FYE programmes would have benefited me but unfortunately I always have class during those sessions.

> " Good to be at Wits and so far satisfied with the services but as a health sciences student, I feel we have more work and more practicals to do than other students. I also feel we are studying subjects that are irrelevant to my degree. "

- First-year experience at Wits was just totally out of this world. The first day was the worst, I even wanted to drop out, but then I learnt that it is varsity, something totally different from high school. I learnt a lot in just two months. I learnt to cope by myself, to put pressure on myself so I work, because lecturers do not follow you around. I even learnt how to stand [up] for myself and be my own person. I do not need to be a follower, and I can be a leader. But overall my first year was fun, a bit of ups and downs here and there. Especially when I wrote my first test, I did not do that well and that motivated me to work harder. I can even balance my social life with my academics, something I battled doing.

- I had a bad university experience at Wits because I chose the wrong course, which I do not like, just because of orientation week. Those lectures brought confusion.

- Having been robbed on campus of my laptop and other valuables really disturbed me. Even further as a first-year student the university could not provide me with a new laptop replacing the one that was stolen. If the university in terms of security were on top of their game I would have not been in the position I found myself in, especially as the event occurred close to the time of exams. I just expected the university to be more supportive of an event that occurred because of their incompetence.

- Honestly, I was quite unsure of the running here at Wits. I had heard from people that it is a good university, if not the best, and all the things that I thought were exaggerations on how awesome the culture here is and how beautifully things are run. I was surprised and I am very happy that Wits could definitely live up to those standards. I take so much pride in my university, I still wonder why students from UP, UWC and US are making a noise about their varsities. This may be seen as a biased point of view but I did do my research about these varsities and my choice to come to Wits has never made me think twice. Then again, I can and would choose to be biased for my varsity. I love Wits, I really do. It has lifted me from the mediocrity class and every now and then I see celebrities – I mean it is highly unlikely that one would meet a celebrity at any other university. I realise why Wits is the second-best university in South Africa and I will try my best to ensure that I too am also part of the students who keep Wits on that ranking – if not move it to the number one position. No, I am not being ambitious – I am a realist and when I see potential believe that whatever it is, it shall succeed.

> " **I always thought that there was racism somehow and I'm quite impressed that everybody is treated equally.** "

- Am disappointed with the initiation into Wits first-years received. Mainly res students were given the opportunity to dive head first into the Wits culture. We did not get a Rag like Tuks does, all social events were late at night and if you do not live on campus it is very hard to travel so far, late at night. I feel this has hampered my enjoyment of the university in the social aspect as I have not made a lot of friends or adjusted as I had hoped.

- I came here to Wits expecting to pass all my courses and not to have difficulties, but now that I'm in the university I have difficulties with some of my courses which cause me to stress and feel like I am useless. The part I am enjoying is meeting new people from different backgrounds, ethnic groups, culture and so forth.

- I am enjoying my first year's experience and it is not as difficult as people usually assume it is. With time management, discipline and an extra work effort everything else works out well! :)

- I am enjoying and loving the experience, and I did not know that varsity is more demanding than high school. I am also enjoying the course that I am doing.

- I came to Wits knowing that after registration I would apply for NSFAS and get rid of financial problems, but I found out that I can only apply to be funded next year. I personally think that the system used to allocate NSFAS is not good.

- I have experienced that through the interaction with others you get to be acknowledged by the people of your same culture and race, and also the places where you come from. I can [also] say that through talking to others, you easily get your academic help. No matter what race that person is, they offer some help, and it is mostly the seniors.

- I feel more guidance needs to be given. Most first-year students are embarrassed that they do not know where to go / what to do. It would also be helpful if the lecturers told us very clearly what is required of us in tests and exams, as this is the first time we are being tested on these courses.

> " **I do not regret the decision I made to study at Wits, and am hopeful that when I finish studying, I will get a better job than my previous jobs.** "

- My first-year experience at Wits has been, to a large extent, catastrophic, [particularly with regard to] the class I derive from and the broader bourgeois-leaning liberal economic system whose implications are evident in the general, yet imbalanced, society we live in. I travel by Metrorail train every day from Benoni to Braamfontein, and my experience is somewhat different from students who live in res. I live with the reality that my means of transport are deteriorating in their performance ... commuters have to accept that we'll not consistently arrive at school/work on time. I am also affected by the fact that academic tools such as computers, printers and the internet are only accessible to me when I'm [on] campus, thus also preventing me from doing some of my assignments, etc, when I'm at home.

- Did not really get to experience Wits culture during O-week, I would have loved to be more informed about Wits culture and activities.

- First-year engineering pass rate is 10%, showing that lots of help is needed to guide students in order to increase the pass rate.

- Great support from lecturers and staff who understand that we are fresh from high school and are willing to help with things that we are not familiar with – directions, using Wits computers, etc.

- I feel the university should adhere to provision of information on all courses no matter how well known or unknown.

" **I feel Wits is a good institute and has lived up to its expectations, promises etc. It's a rather interesting place to be at. One really learns to appreciate diversity and open-mindedness here. Everyday there's something new.** "

- I feel that Wits is not entirely centred on its students but rather operates more as a business that is out to make money even at the very cost of students. I say this because the fees are sky high, meanwhile some of us have parents who earn less than R2 600. If I don't receive an NSFAS bursary then I might as well forget about coming back to Wits next year, because my mum would not afford the school fees or even just the registration fee. Sadly it keeps increasing.

- I have felt welcomed and happy at Wits. I have made many new friends who are all very open and open-minded with their ideals. The lecturers have provided a means to express our ideals without feeling inferior. The system employed by FYE to help first-years is brilliant and helpful. I am very excited about my future years at the university and I do not regret choosing Wits as my university of choice to study at for many years to come [in spite of] administrative problems and miscommunication regarding courses at the beginning of the year due to a lack of information given to me.

- I have learned to interact with different people with different backgrounds. I am able to manage my time effectively now so that I can do all my assignments and submit everything in time.... Most importantly I have really enjoyed my first-year experience because of the FYE Programme! I'm proud to call myself a Witsie.

- I have interacted with individuals of foreign nationalities and have learnt that there is really no difference between us. We all just want to make something of ourselves and make a decent living in the near future.

- I see on a daily basis friends of mine and people I [attend] school with who eat one meal a day and Wits has the audacity to say it is student oriented? That is not right. For these institutions to claim that they are for a better education is just wrong when in actual fact all they do is suck us dry of our money. Why is it that the people who cannot get bursaries and scholarships aren't catered for? Price increases, registration increases? Yes, the fault might be in us the students for not applying for assistance, I agree, but the price hikes? We are segregating the facilities to a select few. I say this because had I not received that bursary I would probably even have been kicked out of Res. But none the less the levels of education provided are adequate.

- Thought I was going to feel lonely when I got into WITS, actually the life here is awesome, people are warm and welcoming. Even the students who were here previously were willing to help us without feeling pompous or better than us as first-years.

- I have met so many different people from different backgrounds, and I learnt a lot from other people's beliefs, languages, culture and religions.

- I learned a lot through diversity and different cultures. I learned to take my school work more seriously and self-discipline so that I could pass at the end of the year.

> ❝❝ **I find that BSc students are not really given as much importance as students doing other degrees such as health science or engineering.** ❞❞

- I have not been able to make a lot of friends because every individual is focused on their own studies and life and they do not make time for other people.

- I learned so much more, e.g. what is required from me as a student, how to live among various people and the good taste of studying at tertiary level.

- I am a bit disappointed at the standard of students at Wits. I have individuals in my class that can barely speak English, yet are doing law. Surely there should be proficiency tests to ensure only the top come to Wits? I find that these students are the cause of Wits falling behind universities such as UCT.

- I was very impressed by the wheel-chair facilities of Wits. They are sensitive to learners with mobility disabilities as well as blind students. It is by far the most diverse university and caters for the aggregated interests of its students.

- In as much as Wits has fostered interaction between various races and cultures, it's individuals themselves who are still resistant to engage and foster comfortable relations with people different to them. That has been my observation in my faculty.

- It has been a really busy year for me, so much hard work, but regardless of the work I have had a fun time exploring every corner of the campus and meeting new people every day. :) I had some of the most supportive lecturers who have been instrumental in helping me get through the 1st semester.

- In my first year at Wits I learnt lot of things; I started using computers here, now I can say I am digitally literate. I think I have also developed my academic writing skills, because here we get to write lot of essays and I read a lot.

- It has been a good experience. Lecturers have been mostly good, although there have been a few who were not so great. Some courses need to be more thought through and given greater direction in what they are aiming to teach.

- It has been a very good experience – difficult to maintain to at first but now I feel that being here as a scholar is the best decision I have ever made my whole life because my future is entirely secured, and I can now help support my family. Freedom reigns here at Wits, I'm more than proud to be a Witsie and I will forever be one.

- It has been good overall. I have made new friends and realised I have much potential and just need to utilise it correctly.

- It has been great and Wits really does put its students first, and ensures that everyone does not only get intellectual growth but personal as well, because it has no set boundaries against certain interactions and allows students to freely express themselves. And the promotions it allows to take place on campus are the best; they initiate some kind of interaction bridge between us first-year students and our fellow senior students. I love Wits, honestly.

> **" It is interesting and hard at the same time, you need to be responsible and know where you come from, which will prevent you from following your friends, like not attending. You need to know how to manage your time properly. "**

- It has been great being a Witsie and I like the support system available (CCDU) to help students and the fact that my school has organised extra Saturday tutorials for struggling students.

- It has been the opposite of what I thought I would become. For the first time in my entire [life] I was convinced that I am an inferior person intellectual-wise. I lost belief in myself. I was basically demotivated.

- It was not that great. Did not live up to expectations for both personal and Wits-related issues. In terms of the BA degree, Wits should try either increasing space (lecture theatres etc) in order to allow more students into certain BA courses, or limiting its intake of students into the degree in order to ensure that all students are afforded equal opportunity to do the courses of their choice.

- It has been very hard and stressful to adapt at times. Too much time is wasted in keeping me at Wits due to long lectures where the point could be made in one session.

- It was good to see how students look past their race [to] be one united Witsie community. I also got to learn more about these other cultures even though I may not necessarily agree with their values and morals.

> **" It is stressing being constantly reminded that you owe something. Why doesn't the e-mail go to parents or [bursary administrators], not the typically unemployed student who is already preoccupied with studies and now finances? "**

- It is actually not easy here. I have to give whatever it takes to pass my course. The Sunday tutorials help me a lot and staying at the school residence helps me a lot. Attending the CCDU programmes also helps me to get over life and to learn more interesting stuff. All in all at first it was not easy.

- It is a bit difficult to keep up but at last you do your best and you pass and you are proud, even if you know you would've done better had you given much more effort.

- It was a bit difficult for me at first as I did not know much about Wits, but people helped.... The Wits experience helped me to really understand what is meant when people say you need to work hard to be where you want to be. I nearly fainted when I got a low mark in some module but that taught me that things

will not always go my way and it helped me to put in much effort. Now I know that since I am a Witsie I need to work hard if I fail, put in much effort and be like one of the leaders who have lifted the name of Wits up.

- It is difficult for me because of my background to adjust yet, I have changed for the better since coming to Wits even though there is fear of what I am capable of. I can imagine my whole life changing and overcoming my fear of being nervous.

- It has been one rough and tough journey to date at Wits. I got to meet new people from different places and backgrounds. I like it so far. I hope I will do my full second year next year since I have been doing badly.

- It has been quite challenging but enjoyable, and has pushed me to persevere and better my understanding of all that I am learning.

- It is the hardest year ever at university, especially for students from a disadvantaged background like me who don't even have sponsorship.

- It was the most rewarding experience following my Matric graduation knowing I am on my way to the way, and half way there. Wits made this into a reality for me which is beyond expression of words.

- It has been a challenging and unusual experience, as a learner who came from an average high school – not used to being on the edge – but Wits changed all that, now am a changed person and also can think critically about things.

> " Wits is more income driven than student centred.10% increase on fees every year? It more of a business institution than a learning centre. "

- My experience here at Wits has taught me a lot, not only from what we learn in class but much more. I have learnt to become a better person, and to be more accepting of other people and their lifestyles. I have also realised that there is much more out there in the world for everyone to do / become a part of.

- Let first-years know that Wits studies are not a walk in the park, they will have to work more than they used to at high school. Help them with study timetables. I was able to adjust to university life, although it was after some time.

- Wits will train you to be a determined student, it will make you prioritise your life, you will learn what's important in your life and that your studies come first, it will develop your thinking and improve your knowledge and skills. Being at Wits I realised that high school education is not enough, I finally saw the reason why we have to go to universities.

- A wonderful and mind-opening experience that has taught me to take my own initiative. It has also taught me that a lot [of people] only care for themselves and you may sometimes be left out in the cold.

- Wits is the first institution that taught me ways of thinking and reasoning. Ever since I came here, I have been flooded with difficulties in terms of my school work, but a part of me tells me that it is by God's grace that I am at Wits, an internationally recognised university, with a good reputation. I still remember that from my

school, a whole bunch of learners wanted to go to Wits, but only two of us made it through. What is left is to work harder and give back to my mom who has been always behind me with her domestic working wages, pushing me to where I am now. My major challenge is to make it through from first year without a bruise or anything to repeat.

> " So far my first six months have been amazing but also very stressful ... It has really matured me and the way I think. It has also made me realise what I really want to study. It would be really great if you could change majors even though you have gone through half the year. "

- It has been really pleasant. Settling in was not difficult because of a broad support base, however the workload is really heavy and tutors make it slightly easier to deal with rather than the lecturers.

- My first-year experience has been rather draining and tiring. I would like to consider myself a bookworm; however, due to my travelling (every day from home – Soweto – to school) studying becomes very overwhelming and tedious.

- Wits enhances the person you were at the beginning and basically provides the platform to grow in being a better person for yourself and for the society as whole, that is, perceptively. You are able to reason profoundly as future leaders of South Africa.

- Wits is a great place to be – the hospitality, and there is no crime. But as a first-year Wits is never easy when it comes academics. I am satisfied with the way we are trained how to be professionals here at Wits.

- Wits has brought together a group of like-minded individuals and I find that there is no one that I have met thus far on campus that I do not get along with. The environment at Wits promotes friendship and comradeship, and encourages individuals from vastly different backgrounds to work together towards shared goals. My experience at Wits has been very pleasant and I would certainly recommend this experience to others.

> " Wits does not only encourage educational programmes but also the importance of socialising and interacting with different students, and also participating in different sports and recreational activities that are offered at the university. "

- Up to this far, it is dynamic! I have access to all useful facilities to accommodate all my non-course-related independent studies such as theology, philosophy, business and accounting.

- University is not as tough as I thought it would be. I am actually enjoying my studies. I do not know if first year is generally easy or maybe I am working hard.

- This has been a very helpful programme for us first-year students, especially when it comes to the computer skills and study skills, but I am not sure if there are still programmes continuing for this semester or not because I never received any SMS for the programme in the third block.

- There is little spirit or pride in Wits students and whatever attempts there are to accumulate this spirit, pride or "Wits Culture"do not seem to work. Students are generally highly indifferent towards the university or they simply do not enjoy studying there.

- This year has been a wake-up call for me. I had to become independent and also I discovered myself, what I love, my strong and weak points, and thus I can proudly say I became a better person.

- There is not much integration amongst the different races on campus. Most clubs and societies are run by black (African) individuals and all the white individuals join different societies such as "Silly buggers".

- I have many friends and a twin brother who are changing courses next year. They all feel that there was too little guidance on careers and on specific courses, e.g. none of us had heard of CAM. They feel they have had to waste a year to understand the university system and what courses they need to / want to take next year. The work load is very big and you end up not knowing where to start. When I came here I wanted to study until masters, but now I feel like I cannot even complete my undergraduate degree. It is really challenging.

- The first-year experience (in all respects) has proven to be a good experience and not many changes need to be made to the way in which first-year students experience life on campus.

- Overall, from my first-year experience I have realised that the will to acquire knowledge, which is essential in my overall vision to contribute towards social transformation, has been the fuel that has kept me going irrespective of the challenges I come across daily.

> **"This might be biased, but I think Wits is the best university in Africa. There are more than enough opportunities and avenues for learning and this is commendable. I would however like to see more being invested into sports. I fully understand that this is an academic university but balancing this with sporting investment would make Wits even greater. I am an athlete (sprinter) and would thus really appreciate this."**

- The Psychology department is very inefficient in getting assignments and tests back to us on time – I think it is because there are over 1 300 students in First Year, and the marking staff aren't equipped to deal with everyone at once, but

that is possibly the department's fault for allowing so many students in – every other department has a strict cut-off point, and in every other department, we get our assignments back in half the time it takes for Psych to mark them. Maybe look at hiring some more markers?

- They should improve their orientation week programme. For me, in the humanities faculty, no one showed me around the school, I had to find everything for myself.

- There is still no racial integration. White students do not get involved in Wits clubs and societies, black students feel entitled and think Wits owes them the world.

- It has been fun in terms of interacting with people of different religions and economic backgrounds but the workload gets overwhelming there is a HUGE gap between high school and university.

- Some people are not very helpful, even though you are a first-year; particularly those 'librarians' in security guard uniforms at one of the libraries (not Engineering) and tutors. Most people are approachable, but I experienced the horrible lot [at first], which got me thinking that I am on my own. I know that it is not true now but have lost time. First-years need to know that everyone is approachable, only a few are not.

- The lecturers have no regard whatsoever for students. Their prime aim is to fail as many students as possible so that the University maintains very few graduates, e.g. in PHYS1014 and Civil Engineering.

- The first few weeks of my First Year were admittedly harried and confusing. The information concerning what would be expected of me as a student provided during O-Week and after my first week of lectures was quite different. I would suggest making O-Week a little less about wild "fun" and more about informing us of the inner workings of the University. Like a "crash course" of sorts on the good, bad, ugly and unknown of Wits.

- Am doing mechanical engineering. I now feel that there is a good reason for all of my courses, but I did not think so at the beginning of the year. Since engineers are not allowed to pick their courses, I feel they should be told at the beginning of the year in an informative way why their faculty has allocated certain subjects for them, e.g. Chem is vital for understanding corrosion and [that you] cannot weld aluminium to carbon fibre cause of aluminium's high oxidation potential etc.

> **My first-year experience so far has been quite amazing and I have actually grown more mature compared to the last eight months. I have learnt to be responsible and decisive. I am truly a proud Witsie.**

- Sometimes lecturers can be unrealistic as they all expect us to do all our tutorials, labs and other homework on time as well as put in an extra hour for each subject every day. I have four subjects and usually get home at 5:30 to 6:30, so if I followed the above recommendations I would (just by revising) finish my revision at 9:30–10:30 and then will have to still complete "for each subject" my labs, tutorials etc ... so I would go to bed ridiculously late and then do it all again the next day.... I would turn into a zombie, not working at the needed 100% to actually keep up.

- There has been great support from res, especially the res co-ordinators, as well as fellow students. The facilities provided have been extremely supportive, such as the labs and libraries.

- Sometimes first-years are fooled into the notion that they are supposed to have fun and enjoy themselves and I do not dispute that. However they need to be shown and realise that they need to grow and mature. Their future is in their hands and like it or not they have to work hard and life does not come easy. Sacrifices have to be made and they must remember that they are not in high school anymore, so what worked back then might not work now and they need to be flexible.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

While the study shows that first-year students at Wits are predominantly satisfied with various institutional arrangements and the general culture of the University, there are also areas that need special attention and strategic investment of resources. These include:

a) Revision of the policy on the ownership of computing devices in a manner that encourages first-year students to purchase their own computing devices
b) Encouragement of first-year students to participate in the FYE Programme, which is designed to help them cope with the demands of studying at Wits
c) Encouragement of all students who enrol in the FYE Programme to attend various modules and sessions designed to help them improve their teaching and learning experiences, and benefit from their studies at Wits
d) Fast-track mechanisms to provide University accommodation for first-year students to help them cope with their work while having access to University facilities as residential students
e) Marketing services provided by student affairs departments, e.g. the CCDU, Campus Health and Wellness Centre, and Student Leadership and Development Unit, which are designed to help students deal with the challenges they face as students
f) Improvement in the quality of library training and provisioning to help students better access the library resources and services
g) Helping students to develop better studying skills to cope with curriculum demands in their individual programmes
h) Improvement in the quality and efficiency of feedback that students get from lecturers after submitting their work
i) Publishing and institutionalising principles of student-centredness to ensure that students experience Wits as a student-centred university.

The Wits notion of graduateness – an ambition to educate global citizens with critical thinking skills and a rich knowledge base – should be premised on good-quality resources, a vibrant culture and an embracing institutional culture. If the University is able to create an educational environment that helps first-year students become successful in their studies, it could be a guarantee of achieving the ideal of becoming an intellectually elite institution, *"[p]roviding a total learning experience that reflects human rights and social values that show appropriate levels of understanding of contextual and cultural diversity (that embraces the notion of a university to call our own"* (Wits Vision 2022). The University needs to continue exploring ways through which the first-year experience could be enriched with the view to creating a solid foundation for academic excellence and building lasting stakeholder loyalty to the University.first-year students become successful in their studies, the achievement of the ideal of becoming an intellectually elite institution can be guaranteed. The University needs to continue exploring ways through which the first-year experience could be enriched with a view to creating a solid foundation for academic excellence and building lasting stakeholder loyalty to the University.

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