

https://dspace.org/

Rethinking social spaces in higher education: exploring undergraduate student experience in a selected South African university

Ndofirepi, Elizabeth Sipiwe

2015-08-13
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/18217

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

RETHINKING SOCIAL SPACES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN A SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

Elizabeth Sipiwe Ndofirepi

A thesis submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisors: Professors Michael Cross and Felix Maringe

Johannesburg

2015

ABSTRACT

Core debates in Higher Education are largely centred on the issues of formal access vis-à-vis epistemic access. In South Africa, universities have managed the issue of formal access that is, by focusing on merely attaining entry into university without much of epistemic access (Cross 2004; CHE, 2010). Following Morrow (2009), there is currently, a growing interest in Higher Education about epistemological access that entails becoming a member of the academic practice, student achievement and eventual success. This interest seems to have been necessitated in part by the growing diversity of student composition in universities.

As formal access broadens as a result of university transformation, it is not being matched with student success since it is accompanied by difficulties in adaptation especially 'non-traditional students' as they are known in South Africa. Like other institutions in the country, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) is confronted with the dilemma of poor results which the students, particularly the undergraduates, achieve and the difficulties linked to their academic failure or success. Insomuch as the universities and, in particular Wits, have the onus to provide a rich and nurturing academic, social and cultural environment that promotes student achievement through non-discrimination, it is crucial to know how the student makes the best of this.

Most of the current studies on student experiences emphasise formal access and epistemic access without paying particular attention to campus experiences leading to student social and academic development. The studies are about what institutions do and what students should do to achieve epistemic access without taking into consideration the contribution of student campus life. The problem with this is that the campus is changing. It is increasingly becoming an extension of the classroom: a social learning space. This study explored epistemic access vis-à-vis campus experiences. The study used a qualitative case study approach to explore the ways in which undergraduates students experience their lives on campus and what meaning they make of such experiences to position themselves for success in their early years of study. The qualitative approach allows me to elicit answers to address the 'why' question of student experiences which is scant in previous

studies (CHE, 2010). Specifically, the study seeks to obtain comprehensive information about the interactions between the university environment and the student's ways of involvement in the university's campus experience in so far as their achievement is concerned.

While it is extremely difficult to determine the specific forms of interface between campus life and student achievement, the study shows that as the university campus is increasingly turning into a dynamic learning space where the interplay of institutional interventions and peer support influences development, it has become a critical component of the university goals and project. There is a shifting configuration of the campus spaces into an essential social learning space for student academic and social development. Within this pattern, learning communities emerge as a consequence of individual, collective and, in some cases, institutional agency. This requires a new approach particularly at a time when these trends are being precipitated by the extension of classroom practice into campus via Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). What has emerged from this study is of value to the university in understanding the campus complexity and suggesting specific spaces which require institutional mediation to maximise student agency and promote student development. I argue that what is perhaps needed is turning campus social spaces into social learning spaces that are flexible; where activities are delineated with and through students as creators of their spaces. There is need for the university to examine and understand students' actions on campus in order to arrive at suitable institutional mediation.

In this study, I propose a model from the emerging issues. The Achievement-Space Linkage (ASL) Model shows the interconnectedness of spaces that influence student achievement. Though fluid in nature, the model comprises of spaces that shape student campus experiences as experiences develop within them. This model could serve as an analytical tool to understand campus experiences and seek to move institutions forward.

Keywords: student experience; achievement; campus experiences; campus spaces; undergraduate students; campus spaces.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for degree purposes to any other university.

Signature: _____

Elizabeth Sipiwe Ndofirepi

_____day of _____in the year_____

DEDICATION

To my late father, Emmanuel Dzingai Zvidzai Bumhira Marivo, with love.

PUBLICATIONS EMANATING FROM THIS RESEARCH

Ndofirepi, E. S. & Cross, M. (in press). Mediating student agency on campus: student-driven activities and student social and intellectual development. *Higher Education*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The PhD journey being exceptionally long, tedious, lonely and challenging could not have been made possible without other people by my side. My grateful thanks go to a number of people for their help and support in ensuring that this thesis saw its final completion.

First and most, I am profoundly indebted to one of my supervisors Professor Michael Cross aka Michael for walking with and by me in this academic research journey as a source of ideas, critique and motivation. His ingenuity, flexibility, firmness, tolerance and mostly good humour provided for the nourishment I needed on the way. I view Michael's PhD supervision philosophy as one of engaging a team in developing a confident scholar out of each team member and not just producing a doctoral thesis.

A special word of gratitude is due to Professor Felix Maringe who willingly joined us in this journey in an exceptional way. He became my second supervisor and also my mentor in the transition when Michael left University of the Witwatersrand. Professor Maringe partnered with Michael in a unique way as they read my work and gave me feedback. Thank you my professors for taking me this far.

I would like to thank the 47 participants, who trusted me and were prepared to be interviewed, for giving me their time and engaging with me in dialogue through my questions. Their willingness to voice and share their experiences, thoughtful responses and helpful insights provided the data for this study.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to all my colleagues too many to mention by names but a list would certainly have to include; 'The Team' under the supervision of Professor Michael Cross and Professor Felix Maringe's group not only for challenging me to rethink my ideas continuously but in providing me with the encouragement to see this research to an end.

I wish to express my appreciation to the staff members in the Division of Educational Leadership and Policy studies, but especially to Professor Brahm Fleisch and Dr. Francine De Clercq who were instrumental financially through the provision of part time work –

jobs that brought food to the table for my family during my years of study. Professor Brahm, thank you again for trusting me with the position of a Project Manager for one of your mega and unique programme: Professional Certificate in Education Finance, Economics and Planning.

Thank you Professor Jane Castle, Professor Eric Worby and Dr. Moyra Kean for the opportunity to attend the numerous Academic Writing Workshops and Writing Retreats that not only saw this work receive critical and conceptual suggestions but take shape and final completion. I also would like to thank Dr. Maxwell Kadenge for editing this thesis.

This study could not have been possible without an array of the University of the Witwatersrand's funding support structures comprising of Supervisors research project funds (Professors Michael Cross' and Felix Maringe's); the 3 year Post Graduate Merit Award; the Post Graduate Merit Scholarship; the Post Graduate University Council school grant; the Post Graduate Completion grant and, the Fhun J. C. Carstens grant.

Very special thanks to my husband Amasa for enduring the endless anxieties and frustrations emanating from the pressure experienced in the writing of this thesis – *Gonyohori, zvakaonekwa, totenda*. I also owe this thesis to my two sons, Tadiwanashe Philip and Nyasha Mhike and my only daughter Tafadzwa Glory aka Shakaina for encouraging me to soldier on against all odds. You rhetoric question: '*Mhamha mopedza riini?'* gave me the strength to realise my dream. Thank you mother Pauline Marivo, siblings, relatives and friends for the encouragement.

This section of my thesis cannot close without me giving praise and honour to the Almighty God through His son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The scripture in Philippians 4:13 that says, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"*, was the most powerful source of my strength in this endeavour.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT i
DECLARATION iii
PUBLICATIONS EMANATING FROM THIS RESEARCH v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS viii
LIST OF FIGURES xii
LIST OF TABLES xiii
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS xiv
CHAPTER ONE 1
INTRODUCTION: THESIS OVERVIEW, INTENTION AND FRAMEWORK 1
1.1 Introduction and background 1
1.2 The focal point and research questions 8
1.3 Rationale for exploring on-campus experiences of undergraduate students 9
1.4 Thesis statement 12
1.5 Introduction to the content of the thesis: the structure 13
1.6 Chapter Conclusion 17
CHAPTER TWO 18
MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A THEORETICAL REVIEW 18
2.1 Introduction 18
2.2 Elusive terminology: competing concepts 20
2.3 Throughput and retention studies in South African HE 22
2.4 Related international studies on student experiences 24
2.5 Studies on student experiences in South Africa Higher Education 25
2.6 The critical-cultural approach 28
2.7 The nature of students' experience on campus 30
2.8 Campus spaces: previous researches and theory 35
2.9 Student achievement 46
2.9.1 Institutional-driven factors 46
2.9.2 Student-driven factors 48
2.10 Conceptual Framework 51
2.11 Chapter conclusion 57
CHAPTER THREE 58

METHODOLOGY: GIVING VOICE TO UNDERSTANDING UNDERGRADUATE CAMPUS EXPERIENCES 58
3.1 Introduction 58
3.2 Research Philosophy 60
3.3 The epistemology of figures: A case for a qualitative research design 64
3.4 The phenomenological approach 68
3.5 Case study 72
3.5.1 Why case study? 73
3.5.2 Selection of Wits case study 73
3.6 Going about collecting data 75
3.6.1 Participants 75
3.6.2 Choosing the sample 75
3.6.3 Data collection methods 79
3.7 My fieldwork experience 81
3.7.1 Gaining access in the field 82
3.8 Trustworthiness: Credibility, dependability and transferability 86
3.9 Ethical issues 88
3.10 Qualitative data analysis process 91
3.10.1 Data Management: the storage space 91
3.10.2 Data analysis: the tools used 92
3.10.3 Preliminary Data analysis: what I did 95
3.10.4 Main data analysis process: what I did 97
3.11 The reporting of the emerging issues 99
3.12 Chapter conclusion 99
CHAPTER FOUR 101
THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL LIFE ON CAMPUS 101
4.1 Introduction 101
4.2 Framework of campus life prior 1994 103
4.2.1 "Race-based segmentations were historically evident", (Lewins, 2010, p.175) 104
4.2.2 Wits' liberal traditions 105
4.3 Frame of campus life post 1994: a wave of change for a changed make-up 109
4.3.1 Shifts in demographic profile of student population 110
4.3.2 A rainbow within a global village 111
4.3.3 Increased wave of international students 112
4.3.4 Student campus social activities: new twists and turns 114
4.4 Conclusion 117

CHAPTER FIVE 119
'WITS GIVES YOU THE EDGE': WHAT'S IN THE NAME? 119
5.1 Introduction 119
5.2 Conceptual framework 120
5.3 The construction of Wits: images and perceptions 121
5.4 Becoming a 'Witsie': the imagined student identity 126
5.5 Images vis-à-vis institutional life 128
5.6 Gaining access: coming to grips with campus membership 133
5.7 Conclusion 138
CHAPTER SIX 141
MAPPING OUT THE CAMPUS SPACES: NATURE AND EFFECTS 141
6.1 Introduction 141
6.2 The formation of students' constituencies on campus: views from literature 143
6.3 Conceptual framework 144
6.4 The complexity of the social space at Wits Campus 148
6.4.1 Navigation into common campus physical social spaces 148
6.4.2 Virtual spaces: networking "on the go" and across geographical borders 168
6.4.3 The open spaces: motifs and metaphors 169
6.4.4 Campus social spaces and student experience: Overall 172
6.5 Conclusion 173
CHAPTER SEVEN 176
THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS 176
7.1 Introduction 176
7.2 The Conceptual framework 177
7.3 The community of friends 178
7.4 The domain of peers: *"...one should always be afforded the opportunity of being alone with the influence of their peers" [32SC3]* 189
7.5 Students perceptions of staff: The mute space outside the classroom 197
7.6 Conclusion 202
CHAPTER EIGHT 205
CONCLUSIONS: 'OPENING THE BUD TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITY' 205
8.1 Introduction 205
8.2 Back to the basis of the study: Research question and implications 207
8.2.1 Theoretical insights derived from the study 208
8.3 Unanticipated emerging issues 216
8.4 Overall theoretical insights derived from the study 217

8.4.1 Rethinking a university social campus for the 21st century students: meta-theoretical insights 218
8.5 A niche in the space of students experiences discourse: strands for realignment 222
8.5.1 Knowledge implications of the study 222
8.6 Implications for practice and areas for further research 222
8.6.1 Limitations of the study 223
8.6.2 Suggestions for further research 223
8.7 Closing thoughts 224
8.8 I just have to say this... 225
APPENDICES 226
APPENDIX A: APPLICATION FOR ETHICS CLEARANCE 226
APPENDIX B: ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER 227
APPENDIX C1: PARTICIPANT INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEWS 228
APPENDIX C2: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION AS A STUDENT. 229
APPENDIX C3: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT TO BE AUDIO-RECORDED 230
APPENDIX C4: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS 231
APPENDIX D: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 232
APPENDIX E: DATA COLLECTED 235
APPENDIX F: CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE 236
REFERENCES 237

LIST OF FIGURES

2.1: Set 1: Crisscross of social contexts of undergraduate students 56

2.2: Set 2: Crisscross of communities and spaces for undergraduate students 57

3.1: Illustration of Osborne's phenomenological data analysis process frame 94

3.2: An exemplar of data analysis process 98

8.1: Achievement-Space Linkage (ASL) Model 219

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Characteristics of the interview sample 78

Table 4.1: Proportion of black students at Wits 1980 and 1990 106

Table 4.2: Enrolment Trend by Race (2005-2010) 111

Table 4.3: Enrolment Trend by Continent (2005-2010) 112

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CAF.....Christian Action Fellowship

CEPD.....Centre for Education Policy Development

CHE.....Council on Higher Education

DoE.....Department of Education

HE.....Higher Education

HSRC.....Human Science Research Centre

MRCI.....Mobilising Regional Capacity Initiative

OECD.....Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

UKZN..... University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

Wits..... University of the Witwatersrand

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THESIS OVERVIEW, INTENTION AND FRAMEWORK

1.1 Introduction and background

Why student experiences...

At first my research interest was in women in leadership and management. I proclaim myself a born leader. I have always found myself in leadership positions both in social, academic and work circles but what bothered me most was the fact that there were few representations of women in such positions.

I decided to do my PhD on women in management positions. I hit a snag when I sensed that it was hard to secure an appropriate supervisor in this area. In the midst of disappointments, despair and uncertainty, an invitation to me to be part of the group of researchers in a large project came as a salvation. My prospective supervisor embarked on a major project that was part of the Mobilising Regional Capacity Initiative (MRCI) program for revitalizing African Higher Education. The project was about access and success in Higher Education (HE) entitled: *Institutional Initiatives to Enhance Participation, Access, Retention and Success in African Higher Education: A Multi-Country Study on Good Practice to Inform Policy*. This was a project that involved a network of postgraduate student researchers from four universities in three countries: Kenyatta University-Kenya, Nnamdi Azikiwe University-Nigeria, University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits)-South Africa (MRC, 2010). My involvement in this research implied funding, academic growth, networking and community of practice since one of the project's expected outcomes was the creation of a critical mass of African researchers in HE through the orientation and capacity development of graduate students (MRCI, 2010). I was to choose one area of research interest from an array of broad issues which included:

- barriers and subsequent interventions to increase participation and access of students;
- selection and recruitment of students in higher education;
- tools that best predict student retention and success;
- type of pedagogical approach that facilitates student learning, improves performance and ensures success;
- integrating peer academic mentoring and advising as part of academic programmes;
- non-academic student support mechanisms and structures required to translate access into retention and success;
- How students experience and negotiate their integration into the university academic culture and their performance in diverse University environments as well as the resources they draw on in these processes (MRCI, 2010).

My mind raced back to the days when I did my first and Master degrees. There was very little to write home about in terms of issues like these drawing from my experiences at the university then. I did my graduate and post graduate studies through distance learning. Then it clicked in my mind. Why not study that component of university life which I missed; the campus experience. The students experience was my niche within the major project and it seems all other minor themes evolve around this one. The chosen theme sounded interesting and new but, seemingly challenging. My final take of the topic was triggered by a conversation that I held with a young female student on our way to the library. She was from Limpopo and had just registered for first year Bachelor of Education degree. Among other comments she lamented, "this place, this campus, I feel engulfed..." Such bold and ingenuous utterances seemed to be pregnant with meaning. From this, I could sense that there was more going on campus than could meet the eye and this could be just the tip of the ice berg. Considering the increasingly diverse nature of the student body in South African universities (Fraser & Killen, 2003), I found it worthwhile and was motivated to carry out an empirical study in order to unveil this campus experience which if it goes unchecked, could be detrimental to the HE efforts on increased student access, participation and retention (Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2010).

Within a short space of time I found myself oscillating between the library, my desk and the computer trying to engage with the key concepts, debates, perspectives and theories at work in this field. From the onset I had to hesitantly take heed of my supervisor's rhetoric: "*Elizabeth, remember the three 'r'...you have to research, read and write...*" For me the PhD terrain was seemingly steep, rough and unfamiliar. I sensed from then on, *this was going to be a rocky journey so I had to persevere. I was never going to be the same.*

Desire for a knowledgeable destination: the experience

The journey I had embarked on required one to make a new contribution to existing knowledge in the field and that required sound research skills which, I confess, I did not fully possess at the start of this study. I could feel my inadequacy in the approach to research or was it just in my mind but whatever feeling it was, I decided to refute the premature anxiety, trauma and self-doubt that I was experiencing. First as an international student in a new academic environment, I grappled with institutional terminologies and academic conventions which I discovered vary by institution and even country. Then it was the research process itself. I had to wrestle with epistemological vagueness pertaining to research process as evidenced by an array of documentation about how to do a PhD (see Backhouse, 2009).

I became resolute, bold and ready to fight on and take risks in this journey. Through thought-provoking experiences, one develops experiential knowledge and emotional resilience and becomes a creative, resourceful problem-solver who could calmly and innovatively overcome new challenges (Mowbray & Halse, 2010, p. 658). My supervisor was empathetic concerning the vast constraints I faced in my studies but said: *"I am not going to do the PhD for you"* and for sure this was my individual responsibility. I had to acquire skills to steer my actions, to enable me to develop into someone who is assertive, persistent, positive, resolute and resilient in shaping how to progress in research. I needed this practical knowledge. This growth in practical knowledge is what Mowbray and Halse (2010, p. 657) refer to as 'personal resourcefulness'; "the reflex, perpetual, emotional and contextual capacity that students

develop during PhD". Another challenge that I faced was that of dealing with other competing responsibilities of work and life, that of being a parent, worker, friend, wife and colleague (Backhouse, 2009). This required self-discipline, knowing what to do in what time and context. I had to learn, with difficulty, to balance responsibilities, establish priorities, develop a work regime, manage time and situations to make sure targets and goals were met and set limits between the different parts of my life (Mowbray & Halse, 2010, p. 658).

Being an intense experience and process, doing a PhD calls for great support from and a consistent relationship with the supervisor. From literature, there is evidence of students experiencing challenges in managing supervision with incidence of supervisors being too busy to meet or appearing to be absent on conference or research or other leave (Mowbray & Halse, 2010, p. 659). On the contrary, my experience was different. My supervisor accommodated me consistently in his schedule. In the early days a day never passed without him checking on me. To show how intense this was, I ended up sensing him passing by our offices despite the fact that there were two closed doors in between. To say this could have developed from my initial fear of him, I fail to establish that now.

I owe much of my growth as a researcher to my supervisor's indispensable contributions first, through his vast and speciality knowledge of and expertise in this area of student experiences in HE and a wide experience in research in general, and then his exceptional approach to research supervision. Among other facets of his research supervision model, I benefitted more from the team meetings. This is where all his postgraduate students formed a team and met regularly to engage with research writing issues with the supervisor himself facilitating the discussions. Engaging in these discussions not only enhanced my knowledge and understanding of intellectual work, but I also developed critical thinking skills through scrutinising and synthesising ideas. When one engages with colleagues' work, it helps to reflect on one's own work and improve on it while developing into an academic. It was some apprenticeship; the supervisor teaching us how to supervise research projects. When I was appointed the

team coordinator, I gained confidence and enhanced my leadership and interpersonal skills.

Since I was to take responsibility for my own learning (Mowbray & Halse, 2010), I grabbed all the opportunities that came my way. Besides consulting with others and staff who were ahead with their thesis writing to get informed advice and direction, I also benefited from attending brief lunch seminars, workshops and PhD weekend presentations which were held at the Wits School of Education. Participating and networking in such a collegial, convivial and scholarly community was necessary in this environment. My own experiences affected my thinking of the research process so being aware of possible biases enabled me to be cautious as I continue with the research process.

Turning to the study...

Core debates in Higher Education are largely centred on the issues of formal access vis-à-vis epistemic access. In South Africa, universities have managed the issue of formal access by focusing on student entry into university without much concern with epistemic access (Cross 2004; CHE, 2010). Following Morrow (2009), there is currently a growing interest in HE about epistemological access that entails becoming a member of the academic community, student achievement and eventual success. This interest seems to have been necessitated in part by the growing diversity of student composition in universities. As formal access broadens as a result of university transformation, it is not being matched with student achievement since it is accompanied by difficulties in adaptation especially by 'non-traditional students' as commonly known in South Africa. The term 'Non-traditional students, refers to students from disadvantaged milieus or 'historically-disadvantaged' social groups. These are the black students which in the South African context include Black Africans, Indians and Coloureds (Toni & Olivier, 2004). No sooner have large numbers of students enrolled at universities previously not accessible to them, (due to apartheid) then they unexpectedly drop out/ withdraw. Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2010, p. 55) points out that 'low graduation rates, high dropout rates and general academic under-performance are central problems facing South African universities'. This is of particular concern in that

in almost every faculty and in almost every programme white students are doing better than their black counterparts including the percentage who are excluded, percentage who graduate and average years to graduation (Wits, 2003b). What comes through strongly here is that black students are continuing to struggle with their studies at previously privileged tertiary institutions.

Existing literature reveals that persistence with academic studies is largely determined by students' first year experiences (Tinto, 1993). This point is confirmed in a study by the Human Science Research Centre (HSRC, 2008) which revealed that out of the 120 000 first year students in South Africa's institutions of Higher Education in 2000, 36 000 (30%) dropped out in the first year of study and a further 24 000 (20%) in their second year. Thus, although there has been high enrolment, there has also been a high level of withdrawal (50%) by undergraduate students in their first two years of study. Significant to highlight are also the findings of a national cohort study by Department of Education (DoE, 2006) that tracked the academic progression of students who entered South African public higher education institutions in 2000.With reference to Wits, it was reported that 47% of the first time entering cohort of 2000 had graduated by 2004 and 33% had dropped out. These statistics reveal a problem with student success at the institution but they are less useful in providing an answer to the *why* aspect of the problem. This calls for an understanding of the reasons behind this by exploring the relationship between campus experiences and achievement of undergraduate students. This study is aims to do this.

The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) is confronted with the dilemma of poor results which students, particularly undergraduates, achieve and difficulties linked to their academic failure or success. According to Cross and Carpentier (2009), in 2008, Wits had a total of 24,116 students of whom 15,588 were black (i.e. 11,363 Africans, 6,625 Indians and 600 Coloureds) and only 8,520 were whites. The implication here is that the majority of students at Wits are black. Most of these black students come from working class backgrounds and lack the necessary cultural capital, skills, attitudes and knowledge to meet the challenges of a university that is characterized by a middle class, elitist, 'white' culture (Cross & Carpentier, 2009). This change in demographic profile

over the last 20 years of the student body has had adverse effects. Instead of 'non-traditional' students adapting to fit into the traditional and largely dominated 'white' academic culture as expected, they have made their presence on campus known through failure and high dropout and their needs which have been influential in changing campus culture and environment. Thus, when the institution (Wits) posed as an alien, hostile and inhospitable academic environment and led these students to adapt to the past hegemonic tertiary education culture, this proved to be problematic for this group of students (CHE, 2010). Faced with such a scenario, the university embarked on structural changes including new developments in campus services to improve campus life and address needs of the students in an effort to counter this perception of aloofness (Cross & Johnson, 2008).

Despite the efforts of transformation made by Wits University in 2002 (CHE, 2010), studies reviewed in the literature in the following sections still report students' poor performance and negative perceptions of their academic and social experiences and achievement. Insomuch as the universities and, in particular Wits, have the onus to provide a rich and nurturing academic, social and cultural environment that promotes student achievement through non-discrimination, it is crucial to know how the student makes the best of this. The critical question which arises then is: *how do/can these students engage with the university resources, facilities, and educational activities at their disposal and, interact with other students to their educational advantage?* Morrow (2009, p. 78) astutely remarked that the institutional resources and conditions "....can; at best, only facilitate, and never guarantee [the student's] epistemological access". Ultimately, it is the student's involvement that renders him/her an active or passive participant in academic practice. The point here is that the benefits that the student may derive from what the university environment has to offer rest with the student's involvement in campus activities (see Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzine, 2005).

What students do during university, the activities in which they engage and the company they keep can become the margin of difference as to whether they persist and graduate (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hakey, 2006). Against this backdrop, this

study is about how the undergraduate students engage with or involve themselves in the campus environment and activities to understand how they make meaning of these experiences with regards to their achievement.

1.2 The focal point and research questions

My study explores the ways in which undergraduates students experience their lives on campus and what meaning they make of such experiences to position themselves for success in their early years of study. From this main aim, the study seeks to obtain comprehensive information about the interactions between the university environment and the student's involvement in the university experience. The study further aims to establish in what sense campus experiences affect student achievement. This research also aims to make suggestions on how the university can mediate campus experiences to enhance students' educational achievement. In consideration of the above aims, the main research question is:

How do campus experiences of undergraduate students influence their achievement?
This key question will be explored through the following four sub-questions:

1. What characterises undergraduate students' campus life at Wits?
2. What are the social experiences of undergraduate students?
3. In what ways do students interact with social spaces on campus?
4. How, if at all, can campus experiences be improved?

To accomplish this aim, the study explores students' perceptions about their involvement and interactions in various spheres and spaces on campus.

The first question explores the link between the campus environment and student campus life. Campus environments that are characterized by feelings of alienation, social isolation, hostility and aloofness are hypothesised to hinder students' social adjustment and retention as well as achievement (Malcolm, Keane, Hoopla, Kaka &

Evans, 2000; Maunder, Gingham & Rogers, 2010). These feelings are not specific to any racial group but could be found distributed among students of different dispositions.

The second question addresses students' experiences on campus in the social context in which they interact and engage. Students' experiences and perceptions on campus are diverse due to the ways they interact with their environment, peers and university staff and, how they involve themselves in scholarly activities (Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzine, 2005). Thus, students who have a positive campus experience are more likely to be satisfied with the campus than students who have a negative experience. The diversity of students which characterizes universities in South Africa points to a myriad of student campus experiences.

The third question explores how students interact with social spaces on campus. Thus, where and what students do or not do and how they feel about it, influences their perceptions of the campus. There are varying levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction which social spaces exhibit as students intact with them. This satisfaction or dissatisfaction leads to intent to stay or quit which in turn may affect student retention or attrition (Kara & DeShields, 2004). Students who find something or someone to connect to are more likely to engage in educationally purposeful activities and are likely to persist and achieve their educational objectives (Kuh et al., 2006).

The fourth and final question is dependent on the nature of responses provided in the first three questions and relies on the shortcomings that need attention and what students suggest should be done to deal with the shortcomings.

1.3 Rationale for exploring on-campus experiences of undergraduate students

The question of what happens to students when they get into the university is a pertinent one since it determines their decisions to stay, pursue their studies and succeed (Maunder et al., 2010). Today, what matters is not to enter the university but how to remain there. The academic and social experience of students is an important topic of

what students become. Undergraduate students in their diverse nature and their diverse backgrounds come to universities with different expectations so they need to make some adjustments early in their early stay at university. A large number of early withdrawals occur during this period (Maunder et al., 2010); hence our attention to the undergraduate student's experience becomes imperative.

The seriousness of the problem of unacceptably high number of non-completion was echoed recently at the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation held in April 2010 when their Commission saw it mandatory to tackle and respond to challenges that HE students face in 1st year until their final year. The Commission is tasked with the mandate to ensure that institutions respond holistically to the needs of the students thereby guaranteeing their success within their stay Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD Information Booklet, 2010).

To end, I view my study as having a methodological and theoretical justification and, foresee a possible contribution to policy issues. Most of the current studies focus mainly on experiences of students as a whole rather than through specific institutional context and individuals. These studies tended to ignore that universities are unique social organizations hence they may idiosyncratically influence the students. The Wits Report of the Working Group on Retention and Throughput: Executive Summary (Wits, 2003b) pointed out that Wits is confronted with real pressure to demonstrate meaningful engagement in issues of equity, redress and transformation at the level of higher education especially within the undergraduate student population. In the same vein, CHE (2005) contends that currently there is little understanding of why huge numbers of students are failing or dropping out of higher education institutions and points out that the current quantitative approaches to understanding throughput in terms of systemic inefficiencies hardly address questions about the various ways the academic experience affects student retention and achievement.

This study used a qualitative case study approach since it is evident that the voices of the students themselves are scant in previous studies (CHE, 2010) hence the question

'why' has not been addressed. It is envisaged that the study may add new knowledge to the existing literature.

A large proportion of HE research is about entrance into the system, financing and dropouts. However, there is a dearth of studies on students' experiences once inside the university system (Kuh et al., 2006; CHE, 2010). Given that the nature of students' early years' experience is an important factor for success in terms of persistence, it is hoped that this study may assist in the understanding of this phenomenon and make a contribution to the present intellectual discourse on student experiences. The research may also contribute to information regarding student experiences for use by other HE stakeholders. Keup (2006) points out that the most effective means of enhancing the outcomes of universities that are at the disposal of Higher Education researchers, practitioners and policymakers are through the experiences students have in academic settings.

This study forms the 'student experience' component of the larger research project that I alluded to earlier and may provide knowledge to inform policy about this phenomenon. From this study, evidence-based information about the campus experiences is provided through the voices of the students and this may go a long way to informing the university about campus challenges faced by undergraduate students. It is argued that lack of information prevents targeting of institutional retention strategies (Kuh et al., 2006; Tinto, 1993) so:

> …understanding how the transition process is experienced by students and identifying areas of difficulty or challenge can therefore enable systems to be put in place to try and prevent those problems from occurring (Maunder et al., 2010, p50)

It is hoped that the results of this study may contribute to informing university policy and strategy around the development of a campus environment that is supportive of student agency in order to enhance student achievement.

1.4 Thesis statement

It is clear in this study that there is a relationship between students' life on campus and their individual growth, academic development and achievement. However, the dilemma is the nature of that relationship. I argue that the campus is not just a space where students live but a social learning space where a great deal of learning and development takes place. To understand the relationship requires reconceptualising the campus from a mere physical space to a social learning space; to rethink how campus could be shaped in a way that would make students see the need to remain on campus. What emerges in this study is that campus spaces are oriented by the students' activities. There is an increasing recognition of the value of student–initiated activities and academic associations arranged through affinity groups aimed at providing collective support to students as they confront the complex challenges posed by the university social and academic demands.

The undergraduate students' life on campus consists of community or association related activities. There is a shift from the traditional predominance of student affiliation to political associations to a preference for social, cultural, academic and religious associations. Most of the student communities or associations' activities are of both social and academic nature. From these activities, one sees a lot of interesting initiatives being undertaken by the students in developing individual members' growth and development. The potential of those initiatives in developing the students is visible but they are somewhat loose. From the activities that the students are involved in on campus, it is possible to recognise and establish designated spaces of contestation which enable or constrain student achievement. What comes out from this study is that there is an increasing appreciation of the nurturing role of student associations with regards to academic development and personal growth. Of concern here are two issues. Firstly, there is the seemingly loose nature of such initiatives and lack of effective institutional mediation to enhance their impact. This calls for more proactive institutional mediation. The institution has to play a more aggressive role to direct the students' innate energy in a positive manner, to intervene in a much more effective way to make the students' initiatives productive as well as turning campus spaces into social learning spaces.

Secondly, there is need for the university to examine students' actions in order to understand it and its credence so as to arrive at suitable mediation.

1.5 Introduction to the content of the thesis: the structure

This thesis is divided into two major sections with each section comprising of four chapters. Chapters one to four make up the first section and constitute signal or lead-in chapters that provide the need-to-know issues. The reader would not understand the argument I am putting across without first understanding the discussions in these four chapters. When addressing issues about students experiences from an interpretive view point which by nature is subjective, the argument is clearer when the researcher's intentions are known and when the context of the research is explicit. This is what the four first chapters serve to do. The second section of the thesis contains chapters five to eight which are the lead-out chapters. These are the data informed chapters where the argument and its sub-arguments are developed and supported by evidence from the data. Leibowitz, Van der Merwe & Van Schalkwyk (2012, p. 6) assert that "research that elicits the student's voice is appropriate" and so in this study the purity of the participants' words are used to explicate the emerging issues and themes. I decide to name my chapters to break away from the conventional temporal flow of Introduction – Literature review- Methodology- Findings - Conclusion. My contention here is that this is not an experiment design study but a qualitative interpretive study whose strength and bases lie in themes and issues emerging from the data and the literature. Consequently my chapters are structured along these issues. I found it justified to label them in this manner.

This introductory chapter: ***'Introduction: Thesis overview, intention and framework'***, provides a synopsis of the study. I started with the motivation surrounding my choice of the topic and my PhD journey. This is followed by section 1.2 the introduction and background of the study, 1.3 the aim and research questions, 1.4 the rationale for undertaking research and 1.4 thesis statement. Finally, in section 1.5 I explain how the thesis is structured and the focus of each of the subsequent chapters as I unveil the phenomenon of undergraduate campus experiences. I argue here that a coherent study

requires a framework that clearly shows how the main argument develops right from the start.

Chapter two entitled: **'*Mapping the terrain of student experiences in higher education: a theoretical review*'**, is a critical re-examination of various related studies in order to position my study of campus experiences of undergraduate students. The student experience discourse has of late drawn the attention of many researchers owing to the change and effects of a new wave of student body in HE that has been necessitated by social, political, economic and cultural turnarounds nationally and globally. There is evidence of lack of empirical studies about campus experiences especially on how campus social spaces affect student achievement. Furthermore, most of the issues addressed in the studies (see chapter 2) are based on the perceptions of the staff and the students but, they are very minimal and the student's voice is missing. Thus, what seems to be missing in the review is the debate on students' experiences on campus from the students' own perspectives. I argue here that through the students' voice about their experiences on campus, one could come to the realisation of the campus as a domain where students' learning and development take place outside the formal classroom. Current literature (see chapter 2) about campus spaces, barely address the topic of social learning spaces. I therefore further argue for rethinking and re-conceptualisation of the campus as a critical social learning space. This study fills in the gap in the campus social experiences literature where generally the student's voice is not heard. To situate the study, this chapter gives an overview and critique of the major debates and themes on student experiences under three core themes: student experiences; campus spaces and, student achievement. The conceptual framework that underpins data analysis in this thesis is drawn from the literature that addresses these issues.

In chapter three: *'**Methodology: giving voice to understanding undergraduate campus experiences**'*, this chapter provides the reader with methodological considerations. Here I address how the study was done in terms of the research design, data collection and data analysis. I begin by looking at my epistemological stance which informs my research approach and design and, justify why I decided to go for a case design with

some elements of a phenomenological approach. Here I argue for an epistemological break in researching issues in HE. Specifically, I propose that undergraduate students' experience of campus life is best understood through the students' voices, their narrations within a qualitative paradigm. I give a detailed account of my experiences in the field, the challenges and constraints that I faced and how I overcame them. In this chapter I also argue that data collection and analysis is not a mere exercise of following what is written in the proposal but a complex process especially where the student's voice is involved. It calls for a combination of theoretical processes and practical experiences, and a good narrative, thus dismissing a proposal as a blue print. I used original words from the participants to explicate the emerging themes with the intention to account for interactions that the participants themselves provide.

Chapter four: '***The context of social life on campus'***, addresses the context of students' social life on campus. Campus life is never static but, is a moving target. It changes with student cohort and era bringing about diverse cultures and different ways of doing things thereby creating another campus with varying experiences, effects and outcomes. For the reader to comprehend these issues around campus experiences of undergraduate students and the point I am making in the preceding and following chapters, one must first be acquainted with the context. The contention is that we cannot understand the nature of campus life without considering the complexity of the places in the global environment and because it is part of wider society, the campus environment is changing all the time. There are forces within and without that influence the students' campus life and in the process shape their perceptions, awareness, beliefs and experiences of the campus. Of importance here are three ideas: the segregated nature of the campus environment, the effects of the racial and ethnic segregation and the university residences that were restricted to the lodge function. The ethos and values of the changing demographics are explored under the following themes: Framework of campus life prior 1994 (predominantly white); framework of campus life post 1994 (tinted); layers of new students in terms of South African legacies (a rainbow) and the increased wave of international students (a global village).

Chapter five is entitled: ***'Wits gives you the edge': what's in the name?*** Here I discuss the perceptions and experiences of the students about the institution at their point of

entry of the university life. The question I tackle here is: How did the students come to be in this institution and what informs their positions in it? I argue that students assume what the institution holds at the point of their entry and either commit themselves to belong and uphold its values and achieve or give up and leave. The perceptions and images that students have about themselves and the institution at the point of their entry are resources which they draw on to inform their preliminary choices of the campus spaces they are likely to occupy or avoid. The students negotiate the images in which case they either transform or refine them or strengthen them or even discard. The main issues that are raised include: construction of university images and perceptions; becoming a student: the imagined identity; images and institutional life; gaining access: coming to grips with campus membership.

Chapter six: ***'Mapping out the campus spaces: nature and effects'***, explores and defines the different social spaces which the students occupy. My argument in this chapter is that there are different social spaces where students' activities on campus occur and the choice of space depends on the kind of students and the different forms of identities their carry but while these spaces serve different purposes, some are more productive than others and hence the form of identity they shape in students differs and the students perceive the spaces differently. The questions being addressed here are [1] what goes on on campus and why? [2] In what space does social life on campus take place? [3] What are the effects of the experiences these spaces provide to students? These questions are answered by addressing the following themes: kinds of social spaces on campus; patterned navigation on campus; social spaces: activities and their effects.

Chapter seven: ***'The power of relationships'***, looks at how the students relate to others on campus. The question is: What is the nature of the relationships that students have with other people on campus and how are such relationships connected to students' achievement? Here I argue that the nature of the relationships that the students have with various subgroups on campus promote or hinder their achievements. The main issues that emerged here are: the role of a community of friends; the domain of peers; the students' perceptions about staff.

Chapter eight: ***'Conclusions: Opening the bud to understand the complexity'***. Here the key issue of the study of how the campus experiences of undergraduate students influence their achievement is addressed in to the whole write up of the thesis. In this chapter, all strings are drawn together to shape the main argument proffered in this thesis that what happens on campus contributes to student growth and development or overall achievement.

The chapter also serves as the finale where the complexity of the campus' social space is eased through integration of insights arrived at in order to contribute to current knowledge about campus experiences of undergraduate students and their development. I also discuss unexpected issues emanating from the data and areas that may require further exploration and then give the recommendations. The overall message in this study proposes a possibility of enhancing campus experience through institutional mediation where it concentrates on reshaping the student's social spaces on campus into social learning spaces. I also challenge other researchers with a proposed model that could be used as an analytical tool in interrogating campus spaces.

1.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter laid the basis for this study by providing a problem statement, a research aim and questions and then the rationale and also how the thesis is structured including the thesis statement. The next chapter maps the terrain for the student experience phenomenon through a theoretical review in order to situate this study within existing debates on higher education.

CHAPTER TWO

MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF STUDENTS EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The student experience discourse has of late drawn the attention of many researchers owing to the change and effects of a new wave of student body in HE that has been necessitated by social, political, economic and cultural turnarounds nationally and globally. From reviewing the literature, there is evidence of an array of national and international quantitative and qualitative empirical studies about different other facets of students' experiences save for issues of campus experiences per se. There is lack of empirical data in the study of campus experiences, especially on how campus social spaces affect student achievement. Furthermore, most of the issues addressed in the studies are based on the perceptions of the staff and are very minimal and not explicit with views from the students alone; the student's voice is missing. Thus, what seems to be missing in the existing literature is the debate on students' experiences on campus from the students' own perspectives. I argue here that through the students' voice, one could come to the realisation of the campus as a main domain where students' learning and development take place outside the formal classroom.

Current literature about campus spaces barely addresses the topic of social learning spaces. I therefore argue for rethinking and re-conceptualisation of the campus as a critical social learning space. This study fills in the gap in the campus social experiences literature where generally the student's voice is absent. So, looking at the aim of the study which seeks to explore the ways in which undergraduate students experience their lives on campus and what meaning they make of such experiences to position themselves for success in their early years of study, I review literature which helps me not only to understand students' campus experiences, but also to know what spaces they occupy and with what effects to better understand the campus as a social space. This

chapter tries to answer a specific question on how to position this current study within the current debates on students' campus experiences. To attempt to answer this, three core themes explained in the next section are considered in the review of literature. Before this explanation, the current chapter is organised as follows.

I start with section 2.2 which addresses elusive terminology. This is followed by a section 2.3 about throughput and retention studies in South African HE. Section 2.4 is dedicated to related international studies on student experiences. This is followed by section 2.5 where I look at studies on student experiences in South Africa HE. Section 2.6 covers issues about the cultural approach to understanding student experiences in HE. Section 2.7 is focused on literature that looks at the nature of students' experience on campus. Then section 2.8 is where I review literature on the debates around spaces on campus. In section 2.9 I look at literature covering student achievement. Finally, in section 2.10, I discuss and provide the conceptual framework; the lens I use to interrogate the phenomenon of campus experiences of undergraduate students.

Theoretical review

To situate this study within the student experiences discourse, this chapter gives an overview and a critique of the major debates and themes on student experiences. It engages with, pulls together and synthesizes various related studies. Attempting to arrive at this, my theoretical review is grouped into three core themes:

1. Student experiences;
2. Campus spaces and;
3. Student achievement in order to position my study of campus experiences of undergraduate students.

***Student experiences*:** the idea of student experiences considers the international and local related literature that explored student experiences, throughput and retention issues; the relevance of the critical-cultural approach to understanding the student experience phenomenon and, the nature of student experiences on campus.

Campus spaces: Here I looked at the literature that explores issues of space in terms of space design, form and purpose. Specifically, I considered literature which is related to an understanding of the spaces which students occupy on campus, how students constitute themselves in those spaces, and the discourses surrounding spaces on campus.

Student achievement*:* Literature that critiques what student achievement entails and what it says about the role of the institution and of the student in this.

By reviewing literature from these three core themes, it can be argued that a gap regarding knowledge about how the student experiences the campus could be identified and a conceptual framework can be developed. That framework may assist in understanding the phenomenon and other issues like the student's decision about where to go after lectures and what to do there and the effects of these activities to student's achievement.

2.2 Elusive terminology: competing concepts

The intent of this section is twofold. First, is to provide an understanding of theoretical concepts as they are used in this study and in literature on HE in South Africa and which may not be the universally understood. Second, is to provide some working definitions of terms that are technically complex and for which there are usually no agreed definitions. For that reason, it suffices to proclaim that the definitions given here are the ones adopted for this study. The concepts to be considered are 'access', 'retention', 'throughput', 'achievement', 'success', 'campus' and 'campus spaces'.

In Higher Education, *'access'* refers to 'mere formal access' and to 'epistemological access' (Morrow, 2009). To register as a student at a university is what is termed 'mere formal access'. It implies the physical entry into the university system and 'gaining' access is a process that can be necessitated by policy or some other agency other than the 'self' taking into consideration issues of entitlement, equity and equality of opportunity. 'Epistemological access', a term coined by Morrow (2009, p.78), refers to "learning how to become a successful participant in the academic practice" of a tertiary

institution. This implies that students develop an understanding of how the institution operates and 'thinks' and use their own initiative to gain entry to the practice of searching for knowledge. This is a process which may include, but is not limited to efforts in utilizing institutional resources and facilities (CHE, 2010). Contrary to formal access, the 'self' that is, the individual student, is the agent for gaining epistemological access.

Retention is the converse of attrition. Non-completion and retention are deemed to be mutually exclusive, that is, if a student does not complete a course he/she is by definition not retained on it. It is measured by the number of students who return to the same institution year after year. Retention is not synonymous with, but encompassed by academic through-put (CHE, 2010).

The term *'throughput'* refers to what happens to a cohort of first-entry students from the point of entry into the university to the point of completion of their studies (CHE, 2010). It includes attrition rates, graduation rates, retention rates and exclusion rates. However, a detailed review of the way throughput is calculated is beyond the scope of this section but, it is important to note that features of input-output calculation depicted by rates, may assist in monitoring *'institutional success'* or efficiency but fail to indicate the '*why'* of the low rates, which is an issue necessary in advising policy decisions (CHE, 2010).

'Achievement' refers to what one has successfully done through some effort. It is some form of success. Thus, achievements are possible only in relation to activities in which the combination of effort or skill of the individual or group is needed and usually the more the effort or skill needed, the greater the achievement (Morrow, 2009). Assessment of achievement is based on how success in participating in some activity is judged (Morrow, 2009). Thus, what one may take as achievement, another might view as child's play that is, too easy. For undergraduate students, the university experience is the first opportunity they have to face a complex pluralist and diverse environment. The experience that one acquires is essential to one's achievement or success (Keup, 2006) if they manage to maintain interpersonal relationships, interact, negotiate for resources and make meaning of their way and remain on campus. This definition of student

achievement goes beyond grades. For that reason, this is the meaning of achievement that is adopted for this study.

The term *'campus,'* is rather problematic. The generic meaning is that of university grounds; the geological site. In this study, it is used to denote institutional residence and the institutional environment excluding the classrooms. So in this study, students' campus life refers to their social life that cuts across and goes beyond the university environment.

While Montgomery (2008, p. 123) refers to space as that within the four walls, he points out that seeing it as merely such is problematic; because to hold the room as a contained unit is to potentially see only a single framework within it, a finite and discernible set of meanings. Within this definition, it is a confined place, a space of closure. Sikwebu, 2008, p. 114) makes reference to "communities, ethnic groups and bodies" as examples of spaces that students use "as insurance against displacement and to make meaning of their new conditions". In this case, space denotes student organisations and associations giving a wider meaning. Similarly in this study, I consider a much broader meaning; one that tends to explicitly unveil where students are on campus. With this stance, the term *'Campus space'* alludes to situations and sites which students occupy or /and find themselves in. It includes the physical space like libraries, halls of residence and campus lawns, the virtual spaces, students' organisations, communities and associations.

2.3 Throughput and retention studies in South African HE

Studies on HE in South Africa are profuse, as the literature review (CHE, 2010) attest. However, it was only from 2000 that debates on throughput and retention in South African HE emerged. The first trend comprised studies on retention and throughput (Wits, 2006; HSRC, 2008; DoE, 2006; CHE, 2005). The focus here was on measuring student success or failure on the premises of input and output indicators such as throughput rates; dropout rates, graduation rates and cohort analysis and establish systemic efficiencies on the basis of academic performance variables like outputs,

funding, programme profiles and academic performance. A notable inclusion is the national cohort study (DoE, 2006) which surveyed the academic progression of students in South African public HE institutions. A statistical analysis revealed a high percentage of dropouts and low percentage of graduation across all the public universities. These figures serve as indicators of the presence of a problem of student success across universities but, they fall short assisting "in explaining why this problem exists" (CHE, 2010, p.36). Therefore, this study intends to gain insight into the campus experiences of the undergraduate students through a qualitative approach in an effort to contribute to the 'why' of the phenomenon from the student's perspective.

The second trend was marked by studies on institutional climate, preparedness and student performance (Cross & Carpentier, 2009; CEPD, 2010; Cross, 2004). CHE (2010) makes reference to an array of studies ranging from funded projects to individual studies. These focus on student and staff experiences of campus 'cultures', 'climate' and learning experiences. The issue of on-campus experience will be the thrust of this study.

Cited as the third trend by CHE (2010) are studies on student experiences and academic performance. Most of these are institutional studies which address issues concerning methods of teaching and assessing campus climate, attitudes of academic staff, poor service delivery by support staff, legacy of discrimination and alienating student experiences (Wits, 2003b; Cross & Johnson, 2008; Fraser & Killen, 2003). Of interest is the (Wits) Report of the Working Group on Retention and Throughput: Executive Summary (Wits, 2003b) which called upon the university to match access with success and devise ways to improve both. The report stressed the need to collect data and build up a university culture where issues of throughput and retention can be debated academically in a transparent manner. In response to this suggestion, literature points to a proliferation of studies, mostly in form of case studies adopting the critical cultural approach (Malcolm, Keane, Hoopla, Kaka & Evans, 2000; Toni & Olivier, 2004). Some of these case studies are discussed in the sections that follow since this research study intends to adopt a similar approach.

2.4 Related international studies on student experiences

There are numerous research studies mostly in USA, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand focusing on experiences of undergraduate students. Most of them cover issues of social and academic integration (Tinto, 1993), attrition, student performance, student's learning, persistence and non-completion (Kuh et al., 2006). Some of the studies are discussed here to cast light on the global facet of this student experience phenomenon.

Using a sample of 20 000 thousand first year students, Keup (2006) carried out a quantitative research study in USA on how students' experiences and campus programmes affect major academic outcomes of the first year. He found out that, generally, students were satisfied with their first year academic experiences, faculties and services but there were some indicators of academic disengagement like underutilization of academic resources.

Harrison (2006) made a survey of 151 undergraduate students who withdrew in the first year of study. The study focused on the students' negative experiences while at the university as well as the final reason for withdrawing from their studies. This seems to concur with the proposition by Maunder et al. (2010 p. 50) that "losing students suggests that something about their experience is not working for them". In a study by Kuo, Hagie and Miller (2004) to examine how current undergraduate students' view their study skills, what challenges they face and how they respond to these challenges, results indicated that academic success, paying fees and balancing academic and personal life were the main challenges. Contrary to the aforementioned research studies, this study is a qualitative case study using a small sample of undergraduate students to investigate what students do outside the classroom on campus thus, "taking cognisance of all the entire system within which students function...this means that every aspect of the students' experience of university life influences their chance of achieving success" (Leibowitz et al., p. 7, 2012).

2.5 Studies on student experiences in South Africa Higher Education

Coming closer to home, previous studies show evidence of a dearth of literature on student experiences and success in HE in South Africa. Only a few studies have focused specifically on the experiences of undergraduate students. (Toni & Olivier, 2004; Wits, 2002b; Cross & Johnson, 2008; Fraser & Killen, 2003; Cross, Shalem, Backhouse & Adam, 2009) One study done at the University of Witwatersrand was an institutional cultural survey directed at members of staff and included reports about student experiences (Wits, 2002a).

A qualitative interpretive research project carried out by Malcolm, Keane, Hoopla, Kaka and Ovens (2000) explored the experiences and backgrounds of first year science students at Wits. Their study aimed to establish more about the students' perspectives of both academic and personal factors that are crucial "to effective epistemological access and success" (p. 4). One of Malcolm's et al. (2000) findings was that the multilingualism of the university was observed as a striking feature for all students and English language was perceived as both a threat and an excitement to most students especially from townships ad rural schools. Some of their findings included students' feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, insecurity, isolation and being overwhelmed by new environment; as well as financial and accommodation worries. Malcolm's et al. (2000) emerging findings led them to reflect on whether the institutional culture was sufficiently aware of, and responsive to the challenges facing new students. Their study persuaded me to investigate further about what undergraduate students actually do on campus when not in the classroom.

Fraser and Killen (2003) carried out a quantitative study to identify the post–enrolment factors that lecturers and students perceived as having important influence on students' success in their studies at the University of Pretoria. Another quantitative study by Wawrzynski, Heck and Remley (2012) aimed at filling a void in student engagement literature explored how the co-curricular experiences influence student outcomes. Wawrzynski's et al. (2012) findings, among other emerging issues, were that students who stayed on campus were more likely to report positive student outcomes and be

engaged in co-curricular activities than non-residence students. There are also studies on institutional culture and climate (Wits, 2006).

Cross et al. (2009) conducted a qualitative study to investigate how undergraduate students negotiate their academic performance within a diverse university environment. Cross and associates (2009) identified three social conditions that have an impact on student success at one South African university. The social conditions were: student background which comprises socioeconomic, language, culture and class; the learning environment created by the university; and individual student ability to negotiate existing university systems. Cross el al. (2009) established that students who were unable to negotiate the challenges created by these social conditions were less likely to succeed.

Ochse (2005, p. 334) conducted a quantitative study to explore theory and findings of previous research to gain an understanding of race differences in academic perceptions and expectations of ability in relation to actual achievement. The findings were that black students did not expect lower marks or had lower scores on self-perceptions of ability compared to their white counterparts. Toni and Olivier (2004) conducted research at the University of Port Elizabeth which sought to establish how black first year females perceived themselves as students at a previously white university. Toni and Olivier's findings showed that long-term career goals and positive self-concept informed the students' defining their academic identities. Both, Ochse (2005) and Toni and Olivier's (2004) studies, point to the effects of the apartheid's racial segregation on black students in South Africa's Universities.

Cross and Johnson (2008) studied responses of postgraduate students to institutional challenges to accommodate increasingly diverse students into a coherent community. They explored student perceptions of current campus practices, social interaction, their interpretations of these and the way they relate to their experiences. A recent qualitative study by Firfirey and Carolissen (2010, p. 987) explored "the experiences and construction of poverty among university students" and the findings are that poor students use a variety of strategies to avoid "the psychological distress associated with

poverty and to disguise their poverty". Firfirey and Carolissen (2010, p. 1000) suggest that if researchers are "serious about transforming higher education institutions into more hospitable places particularly for marginalised students, [they] need to embrace this challenge to also do context specific qualitative research" like theirs. The current qualitative study attempts to address this gap in knowledge by examining campus experiences of undergraduate students at Wits.

There are also recent single case studies about student experiences reported in CHE (2010). These used the critical cultural approach. One such study is by Ravjee et al. (see CHE, 2010), which explored the relationship between students' everyday experiences on the one hand and everyday institutional practices, rules, processes, ideas and meanings on the other hand. The results obtained from that case of third year undergraduates were that diversity of origin, campus experiences and educational ambition shaped student experiences. The internal campus dynamics posed a number of challenges for many students and there appeared to be wide distance between students and the staff and that adversely affects the learning and teaching process.

Another case is by Cross, Shalem, Backhouse, Adams and Baloyi (see CHE, 2010) which sought to investigate a variety of campus experiences, perceptions of, and attitudes to campus processes and practices and the social context where third year undergraduate students learn, and staff, faculty and administrators work. Their study, drawing analytical insights from Morrow's (1993) distinction between formal and epistemological access, focused on the institutional culture of the university to identify those practices, norms and values that hinder and/or promote successful participation for the large, diverse student body. The study established three categories of student experiences. The first category comprises students whose social and academic orientations tally with what the university expects of them and these students have adjusted to the university environment and engage positively with their studies. The second group consists of students who do not share the social and learning experiences needed at the university environment but instead, rely on their own effort to find the resources they need and may benefit from the personal care and support provided by individual lecturers. The third group involves students who do not share the required

social and learning orientation and lack the resources to negotiate their needs. It is argued that such students, "need sustainable and continuous care and guidance to socialize them into sound academic practice" (CHE, 2010, p. 93) lest they withdraw. These findings corroborate the Wits (2003b) report which indicates that across faculties, 33% of undergraduate students are dropping out of Wits without a qualification within five years of enrolment.

From the review of this literature, there are few studies that focused on undergraduate student experiences in HE in South Africa and very little of that work has exclusively focused on campus experiences, spaces and student achievement. The literature seems to suggest that there is a strong correlation between a sense of continuous disgruntlement among the students and also a gap between students and staff. From the case studies, there appears to be a need for more studies to investigate campus experiences of undergraduate students in the South African context. This study seeks to delve more deeply into this. The critical-cultural perspective (Kuh et al., 2006; Ramjee et al., in CHE, 2010; Cross et al., in CHE, 2010) discussed below is adopted for this study.

2.6 The critical-cultural approach

The critical-cultural approach provides a holistic understanding of students' experiences at universities due to its interdisciplinary nature. Kuh et al. (2006) posit that this approach draws on a multiplicity of disciplines that include psychology, sociology, anthropology and organizational theory, thus, drawing together many ways of viewing cultural phenomena. According to Susan van Zyl (Communication: Workshop notes 21 August, 2011), terms such as 'experiences', 'perceptions' and 'attitudes' suggest a psychological inquiry, while 'representations', 'images', 'identities' could suggest anything from art, history and politics to cultural studies. The implication is that most of these terms inform each other when considering the object of my study. The argument put forward here is that there is no single theoretical perspective comprehensive enough to provide an understanding of the intricate relationship between student experiences and achievement. Put together, the various theoretical perspectives on student departure and success provide a holistic accounting of the major factors that come into play to

shape what students are prepared to do when they get to university (Kuh et al., 2006) and influence the meanings they make of their experiences.

Therefore, critical cultural perspectives "seek to assist with the understanding of students' experiences in terms of cross cutting issues of class, race, gender, language, physical disability and so on, within a frame that does not separate out the cultural from the material contexts of higher education" (CHE, 2010). The meanings students give to their experiences are shaped by the culture of the institution. Kuh and Whitt (1988, p. iii) contend cultural perspectives promote "coherent interpretations of what seem, when considered in isolation, to be atomistic events". The implication is that the totality of minute incidents of, in this case, student experiences, may point to a bigger issue.

According to Kuh and Whitt (1988), institutional culture is:

> ...the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups…and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus (Kuh and Whitt, 1988, pp. 12-13)

This implies that people are the product of their institutions. Acknowledging Reay's et al. (2001) ideas, Holdsworth (2006) asserts that the values and practices of certain institutions are instrumental in shaping individual experiences in higher education. The author contends that the values expressed by the institution are created over time and reflect those of the dominant cultural or social group within the institution to mutually reinforce the association between specific institutions and specific types of students (Holdsworth, 2006, p. 499). According to Higgins in CHE (2006), institutional culture within the South African context serves among other uses, as a means to identify problems with the overpowering 'whiteness of academic cultures' that is mostly experienced by non-traditional students as alienating and isolating. In the same vein Cross (1992) observes that although culture can be conceived as a uniting force binding social groups together, it is also a disruptive factor reflecting the complexity of social formation usually constituted by different subgroups and subcultures in a struggle with the dominant culture. Similarly, Gonzalez (2002, p. 193) asserts that often, institutional

culture is explained as a socially constructed circumstance. In simple terms, the culture of an institution is the effects of everyday practices (Thaver, 2006). This study adopts the definition of institutional culture propounded by Thaver (2006).

2.7 The nature of students' experience on campus

This section focuses on two threads of literature. First is the literature students' experiences of campus; their life on campus. This is especially about their feel of the institutional climate/ culture and sense of community with its related discourses of 'gaining membership', 'belonging' and 'affiliation'. In view of the fact that the majority of the students in this study are non-traditional yet in a formerly predominantly white institution, it is necessary to share what other researchers who have studied students with similar experiences have found. Second, I consider related literature pertaining to student campus membership activities within associations or organizations in terms of the nature and role of such groupings.

Existing literature points to an array of studies and debates about campus climate, 'gaining membership' 'belonging' and 'affiliation' to student communities or sharing the inter-subjective features that define the larger university community (see for example, Cheng, 2004; Cooper, 2009; Cross & Johnson, 2008; Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Matthews, Andrews & Adams, 2011; Maunder et al., 2010; Meeuwisse, Severiens & Born 2010; Patton, Bridges & Flowers, 2011; Sikwebu, 2008). Such debates seem to be triggered by the development of complex university environments as a result of an increase in the diverse nature of the student body (Herman, 2011; CHE, 2010; Cooper, 2009). There has been a proliferation of non-traditional or marginalized students in most universities (Mitchel, Wood & Witherspoon, 2010) across the globe.

The university campus social environment life has changed greatly and it now features as a threatening social environment to most students' lives (Malcolm et al., 2000) as they make efforts to negotiate their needs and aspirations. During their early stay at university, most students feel the tensions of entering new territory with new bridges to cross and are often overwhelmed by the social and academic environment (Malcolm et

al., 2000). Growing diversification of the student body in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, culture and nationality, means that students encounter challenges in their adjustment to campus life (Maunder et al., 2010). This demographic change in the student body, if not well managed, can be an institutional liability in that it can trigger resistance to culturally dominant discourse of academia and constrain the feelings of 'belonging' (CHE, 2010). While it is expected that being at university opens opportunities for students for new experiences, personal freedom and identity development (Scott-Sheldon, Carey & Carey, 2008, p. 61), it is argued that students with diverse backgrounds may have different versions of the university experience (Cooper, 2009, p. 1). For instance, some students may feel alienated, intimidated and bewildered by the unfamiliar academic culture and campus environment/ climate particularly students who come from backgrounds where there is little or no history of participation in higher education (Cushman, 2007; Cross & Carpentier, 2009; Agar, 1990; CHE, 2010). Abroad as students enter into college, they experience uneasiness about their abilities, what their roles are and should be on campus (Schlossberg, 1989) and end up perceiving a hostile and cold campus climate.

The issue of belonging is crucial in this study because as Hurtado and Carter (1997, p. 324) posit, "understanding students' sense of belonging allows the researchers to assess which forms of social interaction (academic and social) further enhance students' affiliation and identity with their colleges [and], maybe key to understand how certain forms of social experiences affect the students". The students feel central, and important that they belong (Schlossberg, 1989). He further argues that when students sense that they matter to others, their feeling of marginality lessens and they succeed in numerous ways knowing that they are appreciated by others (Schlossberg, 1989) and receive positive confirmation from the campus community. In this regard, a campus community is also defined as the binding together of people towards a common cause or experience (Cheng, 2004).

This implies that when students identify with the institution and with others, they find a common ground for establishing group or campus membership. When students feel uncertain due to feelings of unpreparedness or difficulty in adjustment or with the courses, they are keen to reduce the resulting uncertainty (Maunder et al., 2010). Some

students from minority groups face challenges while attending predominantly white institutions. They usually feel isolated, marginalized, and excluded in the midst of adapting to the academic and social culture on such campuses (Patton et al., 2011, p. 114). In the same vein, Cheng (2004, p. 216) found out that "students' sense of community is closely associated with their feelings of being cared about, treated in a caring way, valued as an individual and accepted as a part of community and the quality social life" and, making positive connections on campus. This suggests that connections with others allow students to believe in their own personal worth. Formal social networks, for example, are an essential aspect of creating a sense of belonging amongst students (Matthews et al., 2011, p. 113). Networks are vital because "student experience seems to involve entering into and maintaining bonds with social groups" (Maunder et al., 2010, p. 53). This is also related to Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) concept of bonding; connecting to people one identifies with (see details in the section on conceptual framework). Furthermore, according to Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) *Theory of social capital and its concepts of bonding, linking and bridging,* in an organization, an individual member pays allegiance to group members of his/her type. Seemingly indicating that one may feel a strong desire and obligation to fit into a group, find meaning and identify with similar others and not to be 'different'. This could be applicable to educational settings.

However, this scenario does not happen automatically as it is linked to the students' sense of belonging (Cooper, 2009; Cheng, 2004) which involves gaining a sense of membership; an affiliation with some community or organization or association (Hurtado and Carter, 1997, p. 324). The concept of membership also is crucial in this study.

Tinto (1993, p. 106) argues that the concept of membership is "more useful than 'integration' because it implies greater diversity [of modes] of participation". For instance, Hurtado and Carter (1997, p. 335) point out that membership in racial-ethnic student organization may also mediate the effects of adverse campus climate. In addition, they note that the concept of membership is intended to capture the multiple communities on campus and students' multiple affiliations without adopting a single or

predominant set of norms" (Hurtado and Carter, 1997, p. 327). Thus, in their study, they developed the idea that the concept of membership does not just reflect behaviour (participation and non-participation) but goes beyond to cover students' particular activities and groups that can both meet students' immediate needs and link them to the whole campus community life (Hurtado and Carter, 1997, p. 328). In the same vein, Coulon, in Cross and Johnson (2008), defines campus membership and affiliation in terms of one being of a geographically and socially distinct group or organization occupying a common shared space consistent with a particular culture, rules and norms. As Padgett, Goodman, Saichaie, Umbache and Pascarella (2010, p. 100) put it, an individual learns appropriate social norms according to how group members react. Thus, membership in a racial-ethnic student organization is said to be motivated by the need to share common interests and common problems related to students' feelings of marginality in the campus community. It encompasses what students frequently do in their organization to make sense of their environment (Hurtado and Carter, 1997, p. 335).

Therefore, in order to survive students mostly depend on social resources or organizations on campus whose membership they negotiate differently (CHE, 2010). While campus communities are broad, students may form their own small niche communities on campus. Gerrard and Billington's (2014, p. 253), for example, explored the concept of belonging for a group of nursing students through their participation in self-selected extracurricular groups. The individual's perception or image of communities or organisations play a vital role in informing the choices one makes. Aspects of Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail's (1994, p. 239) Model of Member Identification explains how images of one's work organisation shape the strength of one's identification with the organisation. Dutton et al. (1994) point out that when a person's self-conception contains the same attributes as those in the perceived organisation identity, they define that cognitive connection or link as organisational identity. This refers to the extent to which a member defines himself or herself by the same qualities that he/she believes define the organisation. Thus, on campus, one can identify what Tierney (1993) refers to as *communities of difference*. This entails an array of campus organizations, forums and other social groups through which students find

room for partnerships, mutual engagement, construction and expression of group norms and identity, affirmation differences and development of awareness and learning (CHE, 2010).

The implication is that when students become active participants in campus life, they are accorded varied opportunities such as leadership development and reaching out to others in the university community. Thus, the students' social, political, academic and religious organizations are communities of difference. These are networks of civic engagement. Due to students' cultural backgrounds, these communities of difference represent groupings of conflicting and/or competing student values, interests and social norms. In their survey, Cross and Johnson (2008) discovered an extremely fragmented and diverse student body constituted around different socio-cultural activities, interests, leisure and recreational activities.

An individual member pays allegiance to group members of his/her organization. This leads to an understanding and trust of the 'other' which culminates in sharing of *social capital* which serves to counter the challenges of campus life. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) argue that this is generated from three elements, namely, bonding, bridging and linking. *Bonding* entails building connections to people 'like you' say, members of Hindu Students Society or Arts Students council. Cushman (2007) reported that having felt overwhelmed by the size of the university and its impersonal atmosphere, a student sought out other Native American students on campus and they helped her feel grounded and discover her own leadership skills. To gain a deeper understanding of the use of living learning communities in students' lives, Spanierman, Soble, Mayfield, Neville, Aber, Khuri and De La Rosa (2013), employed a qualitative approach to investigate the meaning that students attribute to living in living learning communities. They found out that students appreciated opportunities to interact with people with similar interests and that the living learning communities are welcoming, supportive, resourceful and expose students to "multicultural experiences" (p. 320). *Bridging* implies building connections to people 'not like you' and *linking* refers to building connections to people 'of influence', those in positions of power, and those who can open avenues to the needed resources.

In their study, Cross and Johnson (2008, p. 318) revealed that on campus, the common pattern is that students cooperate with those who possess something in common; "who share similar biographies or backgrounds; and who share the goals of the organization, its norms, values and principles, and who share its traditions". When students are part of social groups or are affiliated to student organizations, they identify themselves with these affiliations; it is a shared enterprise where all members, despite their differences, know the rules of the game, do what needs to be done and get some benefits of some sort (Wenger, 1999). On campus, some students interact as a group for instance, members of Chess Club or Geography Society, sharing a common interest and doing constructive things collectively. Thus, some student organizations operate as 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1999), particularly those that focus on intellectual and academic engagement (CHE, 2010) which result in collective learning. Participation in the community allows the novice student to acquire an understanding of the ways of doing that characterise the different disciplinary discourses (Leibowitz et al., 2012).

Wenger (1999) identifies a community of practice as some kind of community created over time by sustained quest for a shared enterprise. It is a community that is mutually engaged in a joint venture and relying on a shared repertoire of doing things through ongoing interaction. This seems to suggest that participation in such learning communities may be a factor in explaining the students' achievement and eventual successes. However, students' experience on campus does not happen in a vacuum, it takes place in spaces of various kinds and that tends to affect student's achievement. Temple, (2008, p. 239), asserts that the university, space, and learning are intimately connected". In the following section I discuss the issue of campus space. My intention is to establish what existing literature holds in terms of debates and discourses about this area.

2.8 Campus spaces: previous researches and theory

Most studies on campus spaces were carried out in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia and a review of literature about these spaces indicates that "higher

education spaces can be considered in various ways: in terms of campus design, in terms of how space can support the development of a university community, the needs of specialist spaces, and the impact of technology on space use (Temple, 2008, p 227). Some of the issues researched are mainly about campus learning spaces in relation to teaching and learning (Jessop, Gubby & Smith, 2012; Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), 2006; Temple, 2008; Jamieson, 2003). The main concerns are about the design of such spaces. Reference is also made to the costs of the designs compared to the utility of the facilities, space planning and its effectiveness and efficiency for teaching and learning. Some researches call for re-conceptualisation of the campus as a series of diverse learning spaces that allow for a renewal of institutional landmarks like the central library, student union and student residence (Acker & Miller, 2005). What this seems to point to is that new models are needed to suit the 21st century student-centred approaches to learning, changes in teaching and learning methods to match with students' new learning styles such as the introduction of virtual spaces which led, in some instances, to students preferring not to use library facilities. On this issue, Cross (2007 cited in Thomas, 2010) asserts that current views on learning acknowledge that most learning does not take place in formally designated spaces but rather in informal spaces not necessarily envisaged as learning spaces- liberating learning from some form of imprisonment (Thomas, 2010).

There are researches about designs in terms of physical settings. Some researchers argue for clustering of facilities to provide a variety of options for the students. Suggestions are made for designing and continually renewing physical spaces where students learn (Acker & Miller, 2005, p. 2). There are also studies that give emphasis to campus design of individual buildings as a marketing strategy to advertise and communicate the institution's mandate, presence and power, Temple (2008) reports. Other researchers emphasise the role of "academic developers in assisting universities to engage effectively in the design and development [insofar as] effective teaching and learning facilities" are concerned (Jamieson, 2003, p.119). He further argues that such:

> ...refurbishment of existing classrooms and other formal and informal teaching and learning settings are fundamentally educational concerns impacting directly on the student

> learning experience... [Since in] the campus setting learning takes place both within and beyond the formal classroom location (Jamieson, 2003, pp. 120 - 121)

The idea driven by such researches is that of changing the designs of formal learning spaces in a way that promotes or accommodates students' informal learning. That is, to have flexible formal learning spaces. It is in this sense that Jamieson (2003, p. 130) argues that the challenge facing universities is to provide constructed environments where as much as possible, the lived experience of the student meets the individual's requirements, insofar as "the need and desire to learn both formally and informally in appropriate settings" is concerned. He proposed that universities should provide teaching and learning amenities that cover; *Comfort level* in terms of how the space works for the individual; *Aesthetic impact* in terms of how the individual responds to the intrinsic design elements of the facility; *"Fit-out" of the space* in terms of the type and range of facilities provided; and, *Lay-out of the space* (Jamieson, 2003, p. 130) in terms of the use of the activities students want to do at a particular time.

Jamieson, Fisher, Gilding, Taylor and Trevitt (2000) proposed guiding principles for the development of on-campus teaching and learning facilities. They hold the assertion that:

> These principles, based on emergent ideas of student-centred, flexible learning are intended to result in facilities which are less prescribed and function-specific than is presently the case. Their application is intended to foster a sense of ownership by individual communities created through the use and occupation of specific locations on-campus. We see their use as augmenting rather than replacing in *toto* existing design principles (Jamieson et al., 2000, p. 228)

They proposed the following guiding principles and their justifications:

Principle 1: *Design space for multiple uses simultaneously and consecutively*.

- New learning environments should allow for multi-functionality for teacher-centred and student-centred approaches, as well as formal and informal student use. This counters the current facility design which emphasises single functions within a facility.

- Formal sites increasingly need to accommodate informal necessities when the facilities are accessed by students outside of scheduled classes.

Principle 2: Design to maximise the inherent flexibility within each space.

- The current scenario where areas are divided to cater for specific functions restricts certain activities. For multi-functionality, a site for particular activities should be possible to quickly reorganise.

Principle 3: Design to make use of the vertical dimension in facilities.

- The traditional architectural design has emphasised the function and fit of the floor space. Imaginative use of the vertical dimensions to maximise informality appeal could do. This could come in inform of the provision of display areas to generate a sense of disciplinary community, or provision of whiteboard space for student use and raised floors for collaborative performances and activities.

Principle 4: Design to combine previously discreet campus functions.

- The present on-campus separation of services and functions does not contribute to the merging of social interaction and individual activities for those students who prefer such an environment. The facilities should be designed in a way that caters for ease access to provision of food, communal areas for informal interaction and comfortable furnishings.
- The areas external to the 'built space' should complement the 'built space' by extending the overall learning environment into the 'outdoor' classroom.

Principle 5: Design features and functions to increase teacher and student control.

- Use of technical support in such areas becomes expensive and an intrusive aspect of formal classes in such locations. The idea is to maximise user control of the facility's function.
- Student-led activities require less technical support than teacher-led tasks.

Principle 6: Design to take full advantage of alignment of different curricula activities.

- The myriad of faculties, disciplines, curricula and non-academic activities evident on campus needs a variety of learning settings, both formal and informal. The objective should be to minimise the bigger special-purpose infrastructure which is in most cases under-utilised and a barrier to other activities.

Principle 7: Design to maximise student access to, and use and ownership of the learning environment.

- The general control which most institutions wield over on campus facilities is detrimental increased responsibility of students for their own learning experiences and learning outcomes. Times which are thought of as 'out of hours' are most suited to student centred approaches and so facilities should be made available at such times.
- To encourage critical thinking and development of individuals who tolerate individual differences. The tendency for institutional and standardised architecture should be averted.
- In spaces which students use regularly, especially those that are faulty or other specific, students should have significant opportunity to establish a sense of ownership and responsibility (Jamieson et al., 2000, p. 228-230).

While these principles are limited to design, they have to do with both formal and informal learning. I find the informal aspect particularly attractive for thinking about students' experience of physical space hence the guidelines are a pillar of my conceptual lens as discussed under the section on conceptual framework.

Some studies moved beyond the designs of formal learning spaces to what goes on within such spaces which they view as conditional. For example, by studying the, "who, what and how, of both the seminar space and the movement within it", Montgomery (2008, p. 122) argues that one establishes that the "spatial management and movement can impact directly upon the dynamic of learning". In the same vein, drawing on the idea that spaces exert an influence on the way people interact and relate within them, Jessop et al. (2011, p. 190) focused their study of formal teaching spaces to explore "staff and students' conceptions of existing teaching spaces, and their visions of ideal spaces". This resonates with what Cox (2011, p. 197) draws from reviewing literature of works of scholars like Lefebevre (1991) that:

> ...space in education ceases to be seen as pre-given, as bounded, discreet entity, or a backdrop for action, but rather recognised as itself the outcome of an ongoing, contested, productive process, in which social and material factors and local and global forces operate. A constructed space recursively moulds social practice (Cox, 2011, p. 197)

What comes out from literature is the issue of campus formal learning spaces. There seem to be very few debates on the social spaces and social learning spaces. However, my contention is that equally important is a focus on students' experience of the campus social spaces where informal learning takes place. I maintain that if one is to understand the campus experiences of undergraduate students, how the students constitute themselves in the university environment outside the classroom, it is crucial to account for the spaces which they occupy for it is within such spaces that student activities take place and the same spaces impact positively or negatively on the students' experiences. Informal learning happens inside and outside the formal classroom, in social spaces for example social networking sites (Morosanu, Handley & O'Donovan, 2010) and other spaces. The assumption is that as students interact with and in such spaces, they share ideas and information in a subtle and relaxed atmosphere which opens up more opportunities for interaction. As Acker and Miller (2005, p. 5) point out informal learning spaces support chance encounter, divergent conversations, and reflections and study about content presented in formal setting. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt and

Associates (2005, p. 206) concur by saying much effective learning is a result of interpersonal interactions between students and designs need to provide a variety of spaces for them to work and socialise.

With research on spaces in HE being a fairly new area (JISC, 2006; Temple, 2008; Abu-Ghazzeh, 1999), current literature further points to a dearth of empirical research in the area of informal social learning spaces (Mathews, Andrews & Adams, 2011, p. 105) and also to "a meagre understanding of the creation of spaces and the ways in which [the students] experience them" (Abu-Ghazzeh, 1999, p.771). For example, Mathews et al. (2011, p. 105) used the student engagement framework within a qualitative research design in their study to explore the role of social learning spaces on the student experience. Their findings were that social learning spaces can contribute to improved student engagement by fostering active learning, social interaction and belonging amongst college students. The study also suggests that design is a contributing aspect to students' perceptions of social learning spaces (Mathews et al., 2011, p. 105). This brings us to the studies about the social spaces that the students occupy outside the classroom. For instance, studies about the "transformation of research library space to address the changing environment of scholarship, teaching, and learning [thus] creating new spaces to support changing needs of twenty-first century students and scholars" (Dewey, 2008, p. 85). This is observed as "a trend toward flexible designs and interactive spaces" (Sullivan, 2010, p. 130) in the form of what are popularly called learning commons (see, Holmgren, 2010; Dewey, 2008; Hinchcliffe & Wong, 2010) or in some instances, "Library' Opens" (see Bryant, Mathews & Walton, 2009) or "open-plan informal learning area" (JISC, 2006).

The learning commons signifies a "non-disciplinary, intentional environment for students to explore ideas and connections among them in a collaborative and supportive space rich with information resources, services, and professionals, as well as opportunities for personal expression and creation" (Hinchcliff & Wong, 2010, p. 215). Basically, the learning commons model extends the relevance of libraries' physical and functional spaces "beyond their own agendas to incorporate campus–wide initiatives" (Sullivan, 2010, p. 130) by mainly focusing on the student through the provision of and

support for a range of student activities (Bryant et al., 2009, p. 14) individually or collaboratively (JISC, 2006). For example, Holmgren (2010, p. 178) asserts that "the learning commons houses a range of academic services... [and] includes many types of work spaces..." Literature points out that the idea of transforming libraries to incorporate learning commons gives room for the creation of "spaces for advancing intellectual, social and cultural development..." (Dewey, 2008, p. 93) and also lays the foundation for blended learning environments for student social learning experience that amounts to "cognitive development [and] also other aspects of student growth and development" (Hinchcliff & Wong, 2010, p. 213). This is because learning commons encourage learning through dialogue, problem solving, and information sharing (JISC, 2006, p. 4) and even studying alone in a supportive atmosphere. For example, Dewey (2008, p. 86) found that the commons featured the "circle of service" philosophy incorporating the "one-stop shopping around the clock" imperative... [Thus becoming] "...an ideal spot for undergraduates to gather, work, socialise, and be alone in a crowd". According to Hinchcliffe and Wong (2010, p. 219), they are environmental conducive to "meetings and socializing..." Additionally, JISC (2006, p. 4) reported that it is a space with a purposeful mix of refreshments, social activities and IT and this makes it a relaxing and welcoming place where conversation and social interaction are seen as a crucial part of learning. From the above discussion, it is sufficient to say that in some universities, the traditional library has transformed to provide spaces for the academic and social dimensions of the student's interaction and social informal learning with positive outcomes in a way that caters for the student's varying needs on campus. Thus, according to Hinchcliff and Wong (2010, p. 219), with the philosophy of "the library as a space and place, unique opportunities to contribute to the holistic development of student emerge".

There is also literature about outdoor space. Griffith (1994, p. 648) contends that university open space have got to be taken as "scarce resource" since such a space "adds quality to a campus environment". Griffith (1994) observes that central hubs of most universities have reached densities of urban proportions that support physical and mental stress, so well designed open spaces tend to provide a good reception "contrast to the compact intense academic core" (p. 649). Campus outdoor space such as lawns

and grounds become critical in this regard. Abu-Ghazzeh (1999) used a phenomenological approach to study the use of outdoor spaces at the University of Jordan and aimed to examine how the individuals perceived these spaces and how such spaces support students' outdoor activities, that is, to assess user perceptions and patterns of outdoor space use. Some of the issues emerging from this study are crucial to the current research as they serve as part of my analytical machinery (as explained in section 2.10 on the conceptual framework). Abu- Ghazzeh (1999, p. 764) used a qualitative research approach "to gain insights into aspects of human-environment intersections". He analysed a qualitative data set on decision choices to visit an outdoor campus space. The aim was to establish whether meanings and significance existed or not. All the participants indicated the campus was a social setting and they were positive about the way it was arranged. On further reflection, they pointed out that there "was more to the presence of trees and the surrounding atmosphere [and] realised that [often] they took the attractive and soothing effect of greenery for granted" (p. 785). The findings of the study revealed that outdoor spaces between the university buildings are focal points in student everyday behaviour. From this, Abu-Ghazzeh (1999, p. 771) concluded that the meaning of outdoor spaces varies according to the design and landscape or setting of the spaces and the individual; "dynamics that highlight the complex nature of environmental perceptions". Of importance to the current study is Abu-Ghazzeh's (1999, p. 764) assumption that knowledge of how one perceives the outdoor physical setting in which one spends his or her time might assist with the understanding of things like one's choices about where to go and what to do there. Just like Abu-Ghazzeh (1999, p. 769) "turned to phenomenological analysis of human environment interaction" so as "to redress the prior neglect of qualitative approaches to studying environmental experiences", in this study I used phenomenology as an analytical device adopting the supposition that it is an epistemological break thus, enabling one to gain an understanding of the students' campus experiences.

Discourses about nature of spaces

With the emerging debates regarding campus spaces, authors have come up with new terms developed metaphorically to express the effects or impact of such spaces to the

student or the student's perceptions of them. For example, Shouder, Inglis' and Rossini's (2014, p. 26) study entitled *"Making learning spaces your own"*, which gives highlights of their award-winning film *Your Own*, make reference to their *'breakout space'* – for the group's "instant creative interaction". They assert that students should have the opportunity to *personalise space* by making it flexible through shifting the furniture around and this in turn allows students to customise the space to accommodate the activity at hand as opposed to working in a *dungeon-like space* in some case. *Customised spaces* meet "the needs of a particular moment [and] students should be able to claim a particular space as their own and do with it whatever they need to in order to work productively" (p. 27). Likewise, Turner, Welch and Reynolds (2013, p. 226) point to "the evolutionary nature of [those] spaces in terms of both usage and the language employed to define" [them]. To this end, Jamieson (2003) asserts that:

> Space is neither innocent nor neutral: it is an instrument of the political; it has a performative aspect for whoever inhabits it; it works on its occupants. At the micro level, space prohibits, decides what may occur, lays down the law, implies a certain order, commands and locates bodies (Jamieson, 2003, p. 121)

What this suggests is that space impacts on its occupants in a way that defines them and dictates their activities there. From his study on photographing and spatial definition, Rodriguez's (2002) makes reference to the concept of blurred images and spaces. He proposed that "the edge of a space should not be determined by a physical line, but by the perception of change in the environment, a change one experiences through sight" (2002, p. 9). His assertion is that a blurred space is an assortment of interactions between its parts: the visual space and the fluctuating zone showing one part clear and the other part hazy. In a study to examine how social relations structure the production of spaces on a campus college, Mitchell, Wood and Witherspoon (2010, p. 294), found that institutional interpretations of race have significant material and physic consequences for the way that the student of colour experiences schooling in a majority white context. They point out that some spaces are ill prepared and unreserved for students of colour or marginalised groups. To illustrate, Mitchell et al. (2010, p. 296) point out that "understanding the 'raced' nature of space highlights that spaces are not

race-neutral and thus serve to entrap individuals of colour of certain racialised representations , roles contracts, hierarchies and other hegemonic processes". Lefebvre (cited in Mitchell et al., 2010, p. 296) asserts that critical geography has theorised space both physically and conceptually through social relations and social practices in particular social spaces. For example, use of English as an official language in some institutions of higher learning where the majority of the students' first language is not English indicates a 'raced nature' of such spaces. Thus, space is defined as a product of dominant ideologies. For example, in theorising space Lefebvre (cited in Mitchell et al., 2010, p. 297) highlight three intersecting concepts:

- ***Representations of space*** – standardised ways of doing things are supported through say, hegemonic techno-bureaucratic language.
- ***Representational spaces*** – as tied to symbolic often violent experience of space whereby black students felt they were not being served.
- ***Spatial practices*** – this includes everyday practices like library operation times and rules.

What this seems to suggest is that with the growing body of literature into issues of students experiences on campus, outside the classroom it should suffice that more metaphorical terms are likely to develop from the various discourses. This aspect is important for this particular study as one investigates student experiences on campus considering the context of the study particularly the legacy of the turbulent times of apartheid and, the diverse nature of the student body involved. Images are likely to emerge with the students' perception of what is happening to them and around them as they navigate the various spaces outside the classroom. Considering Temple's (2008) assertion that the campus has never been an ordinary place, this study may add more metaphoric terms to the existing ones.

So far, the literature review has shown that HE spaces can be considered in various ways: in terms of campus design, in terms of how space can support the development of a university community and students' experiences. Mathews et al. (2011, p.116) point out that a substantial body of literature for social learning spaces is non-existent. This

affirms Jamieson's (2003, p. 120-121) argument that the discourse on the built environment of the university campus now needs to address explicitly the relationship between the "places" provided on-campus without necessarily separating the "formal" learning environments from the "informal" social spaces and the "quality of the student learning experience since each space significantly, has the capacity to affect the attitude and performance of any inhabitant". This current study intends to add value to these debates. All these concerns pertain to issues of student success; achievement discussed in the following section.

2.9 Student achievement

The importance of student achievement and eventual success at university is not questionable but, how the achievement is realized is debatable. Existing literature shows that there are many factors that promote or hinder student achievement and their eventual success. Two broad categories of these factors are identified: those that are institution driven and the ones that are student driven.

2.9.1 Institutional-driven factors

From a synthesis of international literature on how institutions might improve student outcomes conducted by Zepke and Leach (2005), the majority of the 146 studies surveyed indicated that institutional practices have an effect on how students integrate both socially and academically. Students' social and academic outcomes are enhanced when students are comfortable with the institutional processes, institutional environment and organizational behaviour (McInnis et al., 2000b). Some studies have concluded that persistence and ultimate success are increased when a student is socially and academically integrated into campus community, strengthening both the institutional fit and the student's commitment to the institution (Tinto, 1993).

Studies also indicate that outcomes improve where universities facilitate external personal contact and indicate commitment to student's full well-being (Astin 1993; Pascarella & Terenzine, 2005). This involves promoting social integration and networking through social programmes like sporting activities and clubs (Cross &

Johnson, 2008). On the contrary, some researchers suggest that academic outcomes can be negatively affected by too many social activities (McInnis et al., 2000b; Thomas, 2002). However, institutional services and facilities like language support, counselling, library support, study skills assistance, student housing, employment services, and cafeteria services were identified as success factors for students who utilize them (McInnis et al., 2000b). The implication here is that for one to achieve, it also requires effort or involvement in engaging with university activities. In this regard, Tam (2010) remarked that a reciprocal and two-way interaction between the institution environment and the student creates a positive relationship which wields direct influence on how much the student gains from the institution and in what specific ways. This idea of student involvement is part and parcel of the conceptual framework for this study.

Meaningful and regular contact with faculty members both inside and outside the classroom is an important factor in student achievement and eventual success (Walker, 2000; Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). In their phenomenological study to obtain first person accounts of experiences of struggling black undergraduate students at a predominantly white university, Thomas et al. (2007) found out that a common theme in students' narratives was the disappointing interactions they had with academic staff, who the students perceived as aloof and uncaring. Faculty members who are student oriented tend to be approachable, interested in their work, fair and unbiased and respect students (McInnis et al., 2000b; Astin, 1993). To this end, CHE (2010) argues that successful students negotiated their needs and aspirations in terms of finding specific ways individual academics and administrators interact with them. However, CHE (2010) argues further that the students' power to negotiate is determined primarily by their social background and the social resources available on campus. Empirical evidence suggests that students' out-of-class contacts with faculty such as working together as a group on other research projects, are linked to the gains in academic and cognitive development (Pascarella and Terenzine, 2005) and personal and intellectual growth (Astin, 1993).

Walker (2000) identified a relationship between student experiences of discrimination and their outcome. Discrimination may be disguised, for instance, as 'social isolation',

'alienation' and 'difficulty making friends', even 'feeling homesick'. His study found out that student outcomes are associated with the climate created within the institution. As student diversity increases, institutions must create environments that welcome, accept, acknowledge, respect, affirm and value diversity, creating an 'accepting culture' or ethos (Padilla et al., 1997 in Zepke & Leach, 2005).This seems to suggest that when the student interacts with the various resources in the institution, he/she realizes an achievement. It then becomes vital to explore how the student interacts with the resources on campus.

2.9.2 Student-driven factors

Existing literature points to major changes in the way in which students view and engage with their university experiences (McInnis et al., 2000b). For instance, there is increased employment among students regardless of them being on a part-time or full-time programme. Such activity by self is likely to inhibit or enhance student achievement. Students now expect institutions to adapt to student lives rather than vice versa. Zepke and Leach (2005) reviewed some studies which indicate that institutions need to change how they manage the undergraduate experience, to enable students to remain connected to their lives in and outside the campus.

Another element of the institution adaptation approach focuses on shaping a relevant institution culture. This refers to the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions which direct the behaviour of individuals and groups and provide a frame of reference used to interpret the meaning of events and actions on or off campus (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Culture can either be envisaged of as a unifying force that binds social groups together, or a decisive factor showing the complexities of social formations mostly made up of diverse subgroups and subcultures in a struggle with the dominant culture (Cross, 1992). The struggle over what culture holds is mostly expressed in support of certain kinds of behaviour in terms of the 'way things are in my culture', and in the anger and even resistance expressed by groups who experience domination (Cross, 1993, Kuh et al., 2006).

Cultural capital is a rather symbolic resource base which includes informal interpersonal skills, manners, habits, linguistics, life preferences, conceptual knowledge, certain speech patterns and culturally specific learning tools (Sanchez, 2000 in Zepke & Leach 2005). University students arrive at campus with particular cultural capital. Where the cultural capital is valued and fits with the existing institutional culture, students are more likely to be "a fish in water" (Thomas, 2002, p.431) and succeed. If the cultural practices are considered inappropriate and not aligning or invalid, they are more likely to experience acculturative stress and to leave. Students who lack the requisite cultural capital may have a tough time because of their frame of reference which is different from the institutional culture and that of the dominant peer group on campus. Bennett and Flett (2001) in Zepke and Leach (2005) found that when Maori students of New Zealand showed a high cultural identity as Maori. This mediated the effect of academic problems and assisted them to improve their educational outcomes. They argue that this strong sense of identity may give students access to a network of social support that can safeguard them against the adverse effects of stress and problems.

Peer interaction activities have been identified as a strong factor in successful student integration (Tinto, 1993) and eventual achievement since research points out that spending time with peers and involvement in student groups and research with faculty members are all types of involvement that are associated with positive student outcomes (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzine, 2005). Peer involvement in and out of the classroom are said to increase cognitive and personal development though interactions may result in less progress towards desired academic outcomes (Kuh et al., 2006). Another study established that collaboration with peers to study had positive gains in critical thinking among the African American students (Pascarella & Terenzine, 2005). It was established that voluntary withdrawal from university is more a reflection of what happens on campus and, the absence of contact with others proves to be the most common cause (Tinto, 1993).

Informal student –faculty academic interaction activities are said to positively correlate with student learning and development (Astin, 1993) especially the development of academic competence among new students in early years of university (Pascarella &

Terenzine, 2005). It is argued that for the majority of the students, the more frequent their interaction with faculty the better. Out-of-class social contacts with faculty members seem to positively and indirectly influence what students obtain from their university experience, their view of campus environment and their satisfaction. Thus, where the interactions are positive, there is a possibility that the students feel affirmed and develop a strong bond with the institution (Astin, 1993) and persist (Tinto, 1993).

In summary, the literature reviewed suggests that factors leading to student achievement and eventual success are institution-driven or student-driven. It also points out that it is either the institution that should adapt to the needs of the student or it is up to the student to negotiate his/her way on campus in order to achieve. These debates on institution driven factors and student driven factors seem to be two sides of the same coin. What comes out is that most of the current studies on student experiences emphasise formal access and epistemic access without paying particular attention to campus experiences in student social and academic development. The studies are about what institutions do and what students should do to achieve epistemic access without taking into consideration the contribution of student campus life. I argue that considering the increasely diverse nature of student body in universities, what seems vital is to study what the students are doing on campus, the way they negotiate and perceive it in so far as their achievement is concerned: epistemic access via-a-vis campus experiences. What institutions could do is make a shift in thinking towards student-centred notions by making provision for more complex learning styles and activities (Cox, 2011) that resonate with the ever increasing diversity of the student body.

Also revealed in the literature is the usefulness of the cultural perspective coupled with the views that were used to explore, at macro and micro level, the interface between students' background and their aspirations, and between their social and academic experiences. Reviewed literature revealed that student engagement in institutional life is understood as being mediated by the communities in which meanings are negotiated in practice and in certain spaces so student organizations and spaces where students are should be taken seriously. Methodological problems are cited too. However, the

literature acknowledges the importance of a qualitative approach which can create arguments based on a close account of social and academic processes and practices that affect academic achievement. However, problems of poor performance and dropout persist. The critical question which arises then is: *how do the students on campus engage with the university resources, facilities, and educational activities at their disposal and, interact with other students and lecturers to their educational advantage?* The literature as yet says relatively little about campus experiences of undergraduate students and how that influences the way they interact with the spaces for their achievement.

Furthermore, the reigning discourses of students experiences discussed in the studies reviewed thus far, insinuate a subtle deficit of a clear conceptual framework which can, with the assistance of the students' voices, show how students' involvements in the campus activities mediate their experiences and in turn their achievement. Literature recognises that a positive student experience is often related to reduced attrition and higher student learning outcomes (Mathews et al., 2010, p. 105). The study reported here sought to narrow this knowledge gap and make small contribution to existing literature by exploring students' involvements on campus in terms of participation in institutional educational activities, their interactions with the campus environment, peers and staff and, how the experiences influence their achievement. The following conceptual framework is instrumental in exploring these spatial interactions and relationships.

2.10 Conceptual Framework

From the review of literature, I identified some concepts that can facilitate the understanding of students' experiences on campus. Put together, they form the conceptual framework which contains two main sets of constructs: (i) the crisscross of social contexts of and spaces for student's interaction with peers, contact with academic staff, activities by self and engagement with academic activities and (ii) the crisscross of student communities and campus spaces through perceptions of students of peers and academic staff, developing awareness, knowledge and skills learnt beyond the classroom and changing values, norms and behaviours across various tertiary

educational domains. The study makes use of an interchange of these two main sets of constructs through the use of Abu-Ghazzeh's (1999) proposition of kinds of knowledge of how one perceives a space, aspects of Dutton's, et al. (1994, p. 239) Model of Member Identification that explains an individual's perception of organisational image, Rodriguez's (2002) concept of burred images and spaces, Wenger's (1999) concept of 'communities of practice', Tierney's (1993) notion of 'community of differences' and the 'social capital theory' (Woolcock and Narayan, 2002), to extract meaning from the undergraduate students' campus experiences. The guiding principles for the development of on-campus teaching and learning facilities by Jamieson et al. (2000) also underpin data analysis in this study.

This study refers to social life on-campus that is, student social life outside the classroom, life that *cuts across* the university campus and beyond. The way students experience campus life is mostly a *crisscross of contexts* and spaces within campus. However, it is acknowledged that students residing on campus have not cut off ties with their friends and families who are off-campus, although the focus is on on-campus activities. Based on Backhouse's (2009) notion of 'intersecting contexts' this study refers to the *crisscross of social and academic contexts* and spaces to mean the undergraduate students' interaction with peers, contact with academic staff, activities by self and engagement with academic activities outside the classroom and the social spaces where these activities take place. Backhouse's model offers a full range of contexts which doctoral students encounter. Her intersecting contexts emphasise the out-of-campus which are significant to doctoral students. Here the study emphasises the on-campus contexts which undergraduate students are involved with.

Students' perception of a space may have far reaching consequences. I find that Abu-Ghazzeh's (1999, p. 764) assumption that there are "distinct sorts of knowledge" of how one perceives the outdoor physical setting in which one spends time on might assist with the understanding of things like one's choices about where to go and what to do there is relevant to this study. Abu-Ghazzeh (1999, p. 764) holds the view that there are at least three different kinds of knowledge that inform or constitute the perception of

place or place meaning. These are: i) knowledge about the place's objective attributes, ii) knowledge about the place's affective qualities and, iii) knowledge about the behaviours that occur in that place. The point being made here is that the way students perceive a place or attach meaning to it is based on their understanding of the purpose of the place, its emotional features and their knowledge of what comes out of such a place in terms of informing their actions, activities and conduct.

The way students perceive an organisation also informs their identity within that organisation. I find Dutton's et al. (1994) assumption that when people identify strongly with the organisation, the attributes they use to define the organisation also defines them quite relevant to this study. Dutton et al. (1994, p. 239) assert that there are two organisational images: one based on what a member believes is distinctive, central, and enduring about his/her organisation and one based on member's belief about what outsiders' perception about the organisation. They note that members assess the attractiveness of these images by how well the image preserves the continuity of their self-concept, provides distinctiveness and enhances self-esteem (1994, p. 239). With reference to images and space, Rodriguez (2002, p. 18) observes that a blurred image defines the area of the subject without clearly the limits of where subject and boundary end. Relating this to the university, at the point of entry, students define the university from their limited understanding about it and in the proceeds portray it different from what it actually is and does. Thus, I also find Rodriguez's (2002) conception of blurred images spaces relevant in informing this study about the students' perceptions about the campus environment especially at the point of entry into the university.

For students who are involved more in a particular context say, academic activities, the activities might have a far more immediate influence on experience than the others they are infrequent contact. Tierney's (1993) theory of *communities of difference* and Wenger's (1999) theory of *communities of practice* are useful in understanding crisscross social and academic contexts. The communities of practice are a developing process of the social interactions in the community and a community continually negotiates meaning through the dual social processes of participation and reification (Wenger, 1999). By participation, Wenger (1999, p. 55) refers to "the social experience

of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises". It is a process that encompasses doing, talking, thinking, feeling and belonging. The term 'reification' refers to "the processes of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness" (Wenger, 1999, p.58). It covers a variety of processes like making, representing, naming, perceiving and interpreting thus, shaping people's experiences in such processes. In a community of practice, the two processes ensure both the continuity of practice and the evolution over time of new elements of practice (Wenger, 1999).

Increased campus diversity has been accompanied by rise in social background tension on campus that is, universities are rapidly becoming ethnically and racially diverse student communities for instance. This is what is meant by 'communities of difference'. The competing and conflicting features of communities of difference can be purposefully utilized by both the universities and the students where universities provide the facilities for students' social interactions and groupings. Zepke and Leach (2005) reviewed 18 studies that suggested that student outcomes improved where the students were engaged in some form of academic learning community, homogeneous groups based on shared ethnic, gender or religious ethos. Through social groupings, students get empowerment and campus satisfaction which are possible conditions conducive to student achievement.

In proposing the guiding principles for the development of on-campus teaching and learning facilities Jamieson et al. (2000) hold the assertion that:

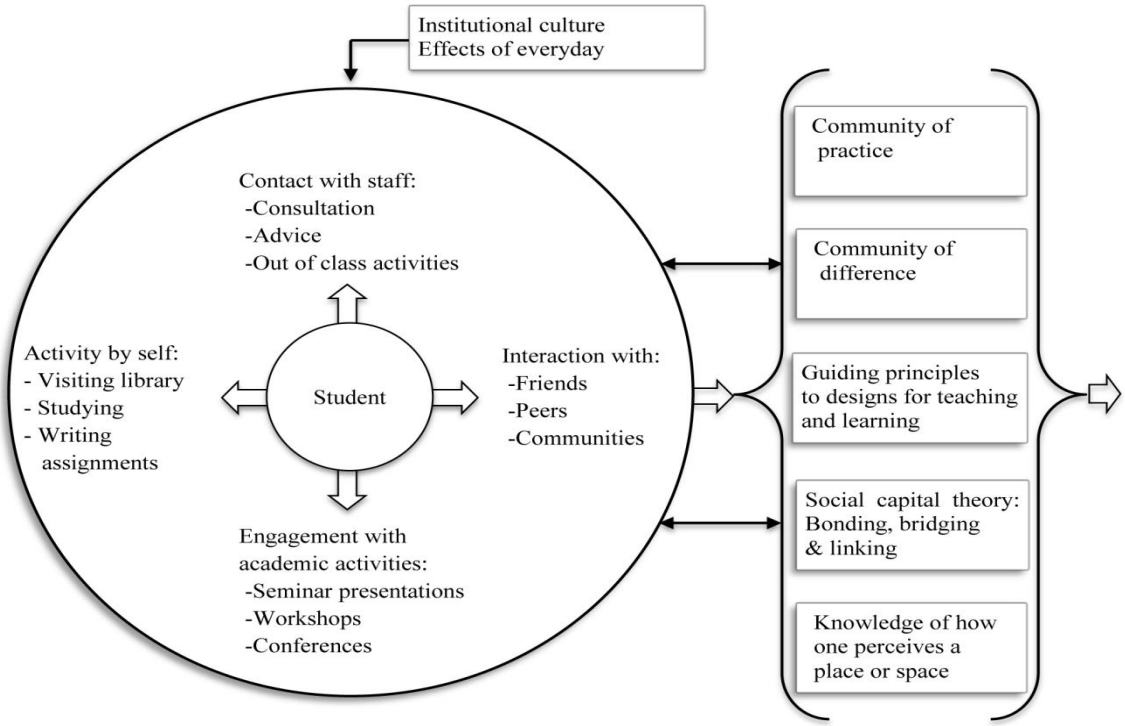
> These principles, based on emergent ideas of student-centred, flexible learning are intended to result in facilities which are less prescribed and function-specific than is presently the case. Their application is intended to foster a sense of ownership by individual communities created through the use and occupation of specific locations on-campus. We see their use as augmenting rather than replacing in *toto* existing design principles (Jamieson et al., 2000, p. 228)

From their guiding principles Jamieson et al. (2000) reject the single use of infrastructure and instead are of the view that spaces be designed for multipurpose especially formal sites accommodating informal necessities. They contend that such sites are easily reorganized and could allow imaginative use as the students see fit at the same time enabling ease access to other areas for informal interaction. They further argue that the idea is to maximise student control of the facility's function with very limited technical support. They are for the alignment of a variety of disciplines, curricula and non-academic activities with a myriad of learning settings for both formal and informal learning in a way that reduces wastage from underutilization of facilities and barrier to other activities.

While these principles have to do with both formal and informal learning, I find the informal aspect particularly attractive for thinking about students' experience of physical space for the following reason. As I explore students' perceptions about campus the issue of space in terms of flexibility in use and sense of ownership seem critical in this study.

There is a potential for constructive dimensions of enrichment and empowerment and the effect across is through mediation. The social capital's concepts of *bonding, bridging and linking* by Woolcock and Narayan (2000), can prove useful in devising mediation strategies. Figure 1 below shows a summary of first set of constructs for the conceptual framework that is the crisscross social and academic contexts.

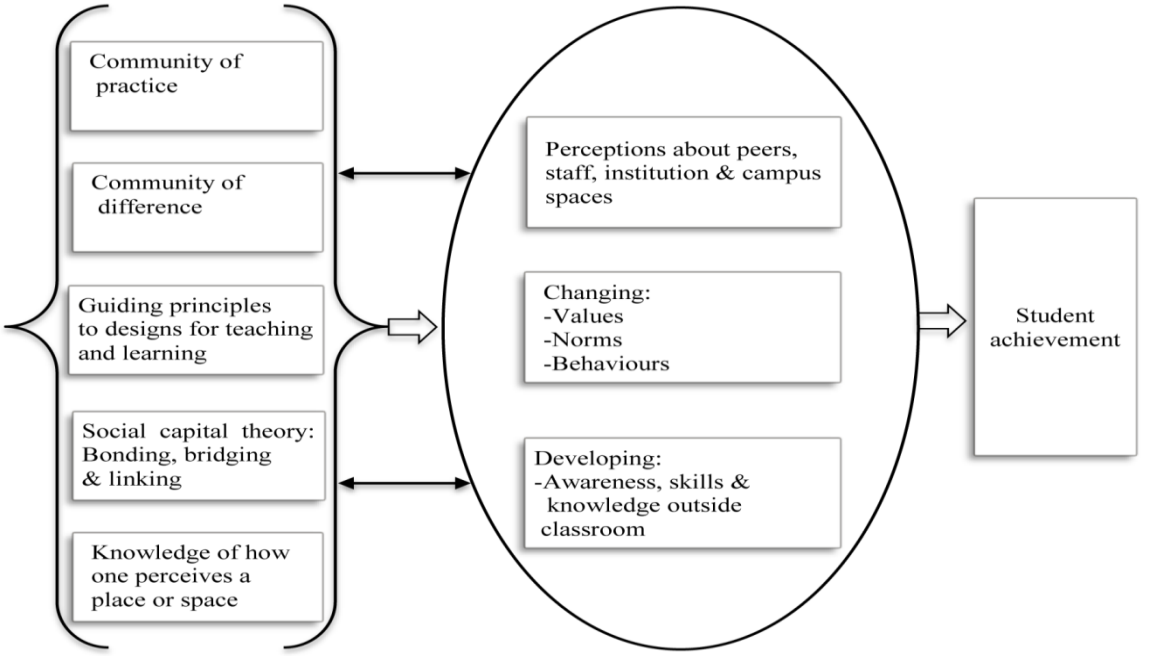
Figure 2.1: Set 1: Crisscross of social contexts of undergraduate students



This study considers the *notion of mediation.* This notion is the basis of the second set of constructs namely *domain of perceptions* of peers, academic staff, institution and campus space; *developing* awareness, knowledge and skills learnt beyond the classroom; and, *changing* values, norms and behaviours. The study makes sense of the activities on campus by drawing on communities of difference and communities of practice and the ideas are carried across through social capital. The *domain of perceptions* refer to the way the students, through their interactions with the crisscross social and academic context and with an interplay with the different communities and social capital, view their peers, academic staff and the institutional environment. Such perceptions could be inhibiting or promoting student achievement. The *development* of awareness, skills and knowledge and *the changing* values, norms and behaviours (CHE, 2010), are a result of the influences of the communities mediating on the crisscross social and academic contexts and the students. The changing values, norms and behaviour are likely to hinder or promote student achievement. A student learns appropriate social norms according to how group members react (Pascarella and

Terenzine, 2005). The communities foster these aspects within the student groupings and may lead to student achievement. Figure 2 below shows the second set of constructs for the conceptual framework to show the notion of mediation.

Figure 2.2: Set 2: Crisscross of communities and spaces for undergraduate students



The constructs for the conceptual framework will be put together from the overriding critical cultural perspective to student success used in previous studies (Kuh et al., 2006; Ravjee et al., & Jansen et al., in CHE, 2010). As pointed out earlier in the review of literature sections, each university has a culture, that is, 'the effects of every day practices' (Thaver, 2006) and it "encompasses all the attitudes and behaviours which, though inherited from history, appear nevertheless resilient to change or almost immutable" (Cross and Carpentier, 2009 p.10). The meanings that students make of their experiences with the campus environment are influenced by the institutional culture.

2.11 Chapter conclusion

This theory chapter mapped the terrain of student experiences in Higher Education. It offered insights into the current debates about student experiences and in the process identifying the gap which this current study sought to fill. The common pattern in

existing literature is that most of the current studies on student experiences emphasise formal access and epistemic access and yet the problem of poor performance persists. The studies are about what institutions do and what students should do to achieve epistemic access without taking into consideration the contribution of student campus life to student achievement. Another key feature of the reviewed literature is its reliance on quantitative research to address issues about student experiences. The previous studies focused on numbers while neglecting the student campus experience notwithstanding a few which unfortunately targeted university staff and students and yet did not capture the student' voice with regards to campus experiences. This qualitative study sought to fill this gap by exploring epistemic access vis-à-vis campus experiences. From the existing theory and literature, I was also able to draw from some theories some constructs that formed the conceptual framework; the lens I used to look into the student campus experience phenomenon. The next chapter explicate how I went about with the investigations for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY: GIVING VOICE TO UNDERSTANDING UNDERGRADUATE CAMPUS EXPERIENCES

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I reviewed relevant literature to clearly understand the issue under investigation: campus experiences of undergraduate students. The process of critically reviewing literature not only enabled me to demonstrate debates and discourses surrounding the student experience including theories, terminology, phenomena, and its methods and history, but, also helped in providing the drive for the research to be undertaken. From the literature reviewed (see theory chapter 2), there is evidence of an array of national and international quantitative and qualitative empirical

studies about different facets of students' experiences. What comes out strongly from this review is the scarcity of qualitative studies addressing undergraduate students' experiences on campus. There is an epistemological break with previous studies that focused on the number game to understand issues of access and retention in higher education neglecting the student experience phenomenon. Such a break requires theoretical positioning as depicted by the conceptual framework illustrated in the preceding chapter, 2. Hence I argue for a qualitative study on how students perceive their experience on campus and how the perceptions relate to their achievement. With this research design, I approach the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (enquirer/ knower relationship - epistemology) that are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

In this chapter I detail the methodology that I selected and the explanation behind my choice. The term methodology refers to the theory or set of ideas regarding the relationship between phenomena; of how researchers gain knowledge in research contexts and why (Scott & Marrison, 2006, p. 153). It addresses the question: how do we know the world or gain knowledge? (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). It is the process of studying a phenomenon (Creswell, 2003, p. 6).

Included in this methodology is a brief explanation of the nature of this research in terms of its philosophical underpinnings and the significance of an understanding of these issues to the chosen research approach and design. I begin by looking at a theoretical view of research and its ways of interpreting social reality before I consider the epistemological stance which informs my research approach. From a methodological perspective, I argue for qualitative research methodology with a case design that contains some elements of a phenomenological approach based on the proposition that undergraduate students' experience of campus life is best understood through the students' voices; their narrations. I go on to detail the qualitative methods I employed in gathering the data. Next is a detailed account of my experiences on the field, the challenges and constraints that I faced and how I overcame them and then data management and its subsequent analysis. This chapter reveals that data collection and analysis is not a mere exercise of following what was written in the proposal but a

complex process especially where the students' voice is involved. It calls for a combination of theoretical and conceptual processes and, practical experiences, and an astute narrative thus, dismissing a proposal as a complete blue print owing this to my initial perception of it as a technical, linear and logical process.

3.2 Research Philosophy

All research approaches and methods have their basis in certain philosophical beliefs. This entails the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge (Creswell, 2012). This is a theoretical view of research. In practice, researchers in the social science, design and conduct research studies that are grounded in different ways of interpreting social reality: the objectivist and the subjectivist views. These two in fact present opposite ways of understanding social reality.

The objectivist worldview is an understanding that "the world exists and is knowable as it really is" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2002, p. 9). This implies that the social world is not influenced by human actions, but that "the meaning of a phenomenon is inherent to the phenomenon and can be experienced by interacting with it" (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p. 110). On the contrary the subjectivist worldview proclaims that "the world exists but people construe it in very different ways" (Cohen et al., 2002, p. 9). This is the philosophical foundation of subjectivism. Subjectivists assume that there is no social reality that is independent of human actors and that the world as known is socially and discursively constructed based on a particular place, time and culture. Subjectivists therefore consider that there is no single compelling reality outside of human actions, but that realities are "local", "specific", and actively "constructed" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Reality is socially constructed because it is dependent on other social and cultural artefacts and as such, humans are always actively involved in creating their own reality. This study takes the position that social reality depends on the actor's frame of reference within the setting (Guba & Lincoln, p. 1994). This position is based on a conceptualisation of student experience as socially organised action occurring in varying communities a notion congruent with the social spaces which orientate this study (see Chapter 2).

Within the two broadly divergent views of objectivism and subjectivism are interrelated elements or premises: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Cohen, et al., 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) which underpins the explicit and implicit assumptions about social reality. The three elements have direct implications for the methodological concerns of researchers. Ontological assumptions inform those of epistemology. Epistemological assumptions inform how human beings are perceived and consequently the methodology. An understanding of some of these elements and their interrelationships guide the decision-making process that undergirds the overall conduct of this study.

Ontology is concerned with human agents' perceptions of reality or what exists. It is "a philosophical belief system about the nature of social reality (or) existence" (Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 4). Thus, philosophically, ontology involves individuals making claims about what is knowledge (Creswell, 2003, p. 6). An objectivist researcher takes the ontological position "that objects have an independent existence and are not dependent for it on the knower" and that this view "treats the social world as if it were a hard, external objective reality" (Cohen, et al., 2002, p.6). Contrary to this stance, a subjectivist researcher takes the ontological position that reality emphasises "the importance of the subjective experience of individuals in the creation of the social world" (Cohen, et al., 2002, p. 7). The researcher holds a subjectivist position as one looks at the subjective nature of undergraduate students as they negotiate and make meaning of the university campus.

Epistemological assumptions relate to the "bases of knowledge its nature and forms, how it can be acquired and how it can be communicated to other human beings" (Cohen et al, 2002, p. 6). A researcher's epistemological stance is expressed in his/her views about what is known about the world and how that knowledge can be acquired. Epistemology is how individuals know knowledge (Creswell, 2003, p. 6) or the nature of knowledge-building (Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011). It involves studying the characteristics of knowledge. My understanding of what constitutes knowing and how

knowledge is created influenced and shaped how I went about conducting this research. The main epistemological perspective that influenced my study is the interpretive social science approach.

A snapshot of my personal biography has a bearing on the assumptions I hold about the social world and the research process. Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 10) assert that, "an inquisitive sensitivity to personal biography" is vital because the researcher values the uniqueness of his/her perspective as a source of understanding the study and there are aspects of the biography that alert readers to the researcher's dispositions and frames of mind the researcher brings to the research. It is argued that the researcher's "personal biography is a lens through which he sees the world" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 10). I am no exception in this instance. I bring twenty years of experience as an educator in this study. In the first part of my career, I operated in the realm of pedagogy where the mandate was 'to impart knowledge' whose creation was not my job. Thus, for a decade I found myself oscillating in constructs like: scarcity and choices; supply and demand; production, distribution and consumption; and, satisfaction of wants. It was all about teaching the learner how society manages scarce resources by making decisions of what, how and for whom to produce through studying the social science of human behaviour – Economics and Commerce. As an economist, my concept of knowledge was that it is created out of experience of, interaction with, and interpretation of human behaviour.

The second part of my career life changed after I attained higher academic qualifications through distance learning. I switched to adult education where for another decade I engaged first in teaching adults how to teach and later, training the qualified in how to interpret policy documents that impacted on them and their work. This interactive nature of my career and the mode of learning I was exposed to for my graduate studies, influenced my methodology for this research study; the quest to interact face to face with the undergraduate students and interpret their perceptions about campus experiences. I concur with Hessy-Biber and Leavy (2011, p.17) on valuing "experience and perspective as important sources of knowledge [and], meaning does not exist independent of human interpretive process". The interpretive stance

sounds most appropriate for this study considering my work, academic experience and nature of phenomenon to be researched hence its adoption for the study.

The interpretive social sciences perspective is rooted in the interpretation of interactions and the social meaning that people give to their interactions (Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Its contention is that social meaning is created during interaction and people's interpretation of interactions and "the only way to understand social reality is from the perspective enmeshed within it" (Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.17). This viewpoint acknowledges human agency and accepts that people are actively occupied in constructing social reality. Due to its subjective nature, this study assumes the interpretive perspective views that reality is nothing other than multiple realities where there is no one real truth and thus, rejecting the notion of objectivity. Thus, the interpretivists acknowledge multiple realities which are constructed socially by individuals (Merriam, 2001). Understanding human experience constitutes knowledge that is to be apprehended from an inductive theory generating mode of investigation rather than a deductive, theory testing means of inquiry (Merriam, 2001). Thus, the interpretive perspective assumes a search for explanations of human actions by understanding the way it is perceived by individuals. This assumption resonates with the aim of this study which sought an account of where students are and what they do or not do when not in the classroom and the interplay with their achievement. The inquirer in interpretivism becomes a member of an interface or communication with the inquiry subject, whereby the findings are the result of that interaction. Reality becomes a social construction. As an interpretivist researcher, I become part of the world that I am studying. This implies that participants can share their views of social reality with me - the researcher and my role in this study is to understand student campus experiences (social world) and interpret it for others.

Within the interpretive practice are variations that include ethno-methodology, constructivism, hermeneutics, qualitative sociology and phenomenology (Merriam, 2001). This study has adopted some elements of the phenomenological methodological variation of the interpretive perspective which are covered in the ensuing sections of this chapter. But at this point I pose to provide an overview of qualitative research

design which characteristically suits my epistemological orientation of the study. The research position that I adopt sets the parameters for my readers and "also provides a window onto social reality that may be unseen" from a different angle or position (Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 36).

3.3 The epistemology of figures: A case for a qualitative research design

As the study assumes that knowledge is socially constructed, I employed a qualitative research design to explore and gain insight into how students experience and negotiate the university campus. In this study, the research questions are not framed by operationalising variables; rather they are formulated to investigate issues in their complexity, in context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 2). I was guided by the view that the manner in which research is conducted may be visualised in terms of the hunt for the solution of a problem - the research question, nature of phenomena-experience, epistemological orientation, approach and the employed research strategy, thus the research instruments utilised. I took these aspects into consideration when I made decisions about the research design. Qualitative research is a generic term (Merriam, 2001) used to explain research that takes a "broad approach to the study of social phenomena" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.2) and the "individual lived experience" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 23, 26). It is a design that "describes things that have occurred and examines relationships between things without any direct manipulation of conditions that are experienced" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 24). I considered it as an appropriate broad approach to the study of social experiences.

The basic premise on which this study is anchored is that reality is constructed by undergraduate students as they interact with the campus, within their social world. As Merriam (1998, p. 6) puts it, qualitative research is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. In addition, this is in line with the view that it is an approach which is quintessentially interactive, naturalistic, and interpretive and as such, the knowledge constructed is interpretive (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This type of

research produces findings which are not arrived at by statistical or quantitative procedures or means (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 2). It is an approach which assumes that "humans use what they see and hear and feel to make meaning of the social phenomenon" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 6). It seeks meaning by focusing on "the social meaning people attribute to their experience circumstances, situations..." (Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 4).

Another justification for using qualitative methodology is because reviewed literature revealed scant elicitation of the voices of the students themselves. It is worth noting that previous research studies used quantitative research approaches especially surveys to study qualitative phenomena such as the student experience. While it is acknowledged that such statistical approaches are vital in identifying the presence of a problem, they fall short in unveiling why the phenomenon happened (Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This is the major weakness of the quantitative approach. As much as quantitative methods are helpful in revealing the magnitude of an issue, they can decontextualise the role of human agents and in so doing variables that can explain a phenomenon are left out of the statistical mode. In contrast, qualitative research often takes the position that an interpretive understanding is only possible by way of uncovering or deconstructing the meanings of a phenomenon (Thorne, 2000, p. 59). In this area of study, current literature has shown that, "quantitative measures of throughput fail to reflect the intricacies of social conditions and learning process" (CHE, 2010, p. 6). From the literature review, it is evident that the voices of the students themselves are scant in previous studies hence the 'why' questions have not been addressed. It is for reasons such as these that the qualitative and not quantitative approach is employed in this study which seeks to explore the campus dimension of the experience of undergraduate students. Thus, it is worth noting that this study presents an epistemological break with the previous quantitative studies about students' experiences.

In this study, I am mainly interested in exploring and gaining an in-depth understanding of this student experience phenomenon. The study relies on students giving an insightful account of their experiences and qualitative research centres on understanding the subjective meanings which such individuals ascribe to their social worlds and privileges

subjective forms of building knowledge (Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This study is an investigation of undergraduate students' campus experiences, which are open to multiple interpretations. Through qualitative research the aim is to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants' viewpoints and not that of the researcher (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2001).

The qualitative approach enables the researcher to elicit this understanding and meaning (Merriam, 2001). This is not achieved through quantitative research. For example, in her study to explore how young people go about fitting in being a 'student' and how predispositions to university life influence these practices, Holdsworth (2006, p. 500) used both quantitative and qualitative research. She points out that while the survey data shows the importance of residential status on students' experiences, the interview data interrogates the patterns revealed by the survey to provide an insight into how students assess their own experiences. Holdsworth (2006, p. 205) further elaborates that quantitative analysis just gives an intriguing snapshot of the phenomenon and on the contrary, the qualitative analysis unpacked nuances as the interview data allows one to explore the 'how' and 'why' of the phenomenon. This distinction is elaborated by Baker and Edwards (n.d, p. 8) who express that both quantitative and qualitative research "approaches are theoretically valuable" but differ in their purposes. They contend that:

> Quantitative researchers capture a shallow band of information from a wide swath of people and seek to objectively use their correlations to understand, predict, or influence *what* people do. Qualitative researchers generally study fewer people, but delve more deeply into those individuals, settings, subcultures, and scenes, hoping to generate a subjective understanding of *how* and *why* people perceive, reflect, role-take, interpret, and interact (Baker & Edwards, n.d., p. 8)

In this current study, speaking in qualitative terms, I am likely to minimise the risks of losing some of the idiosyncrasies which are vital when trying to gain an understanding of the student experience. Qualitative research "involves asking the kinds of questions that focus on the why and how of human interactions" (Agee, 2009, p 432). As qualitative researcher, I take the position that reality is constructed by my participants as they interact with the social environment (Merriam, 2001).

Qualitative research makes provision for a social enquiry that emphasises a flexible, complex, holistic, systematic (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) examination of experiences in social and natural spaces. For this study, a qualitative approach should therefore lay open the undergraduate students' campus experiences and inferred meanings in the natural setting in which they are. Campus spaces are the natural setting, and the interactions the students have with such spaces and other students or people within them are the social realities. This study intends to understand the social reality of the undergraduate students' campus experiences by constructing a rich, holistic picture in words as detailed by the students themselves. This resonates with qualitative research which is characterised by "…rich description of people, places and conversations and not easily handled by statistical procedures" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 2). Qualitative researchers seek answers to their questions in the real world by going to the people for information not extracting people from their environments (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 4 and 9). In summary, the key facets of qualitative research design that are relevant to the current study include:

- Qualitative researchers as key informants to go to the particular natural setting under study as they are concerned with the people's experience in context; historical life of the institution, where, how and under what circumstances they came into being;
- Data collected take the form of words or pictures (assumes that nothing is trivial, everything has the potential of being a clue of unlocking comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon) rather than numbers thus, allowing researchers to study what people take for granted and provide a rich description of the phenomenon;
- Qualitative researchers are more concerned with the process (such as how the expectations are translated into routine activities, procedures and interactions) than merely outcomes or products;
- Data is analysed inductively with particulars put together to build the abstractions and constructing a picture or model and direct quotations from data are used to illustrate and substantiate the presentation, and;

- Qualitative researchers are interested in how people make sense of or attach meaning to their lives/experiences; the process is about capturing the views of people through dialogue to give voice to those views (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 2-10).

Apart from the aforementioned positive features, qualitative research allows flexibility and is considered to be the most appropriate approach to the exploration of the phenomenon of interest since its methods are particularly good for discovering the meaning people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In addition and related to this, the researcher has room to use more than one research method in a single study. Qualitative research has strong roots in phenomenology (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and case study approaches. It is however, necessary to acknowledge that these strong features of the qualitative research design outweigh its negative characteristics of being labour intensive, time consuming, frustrating and challenging (Hessy-Biber &Leavy, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I experienced and battled with these challenges in this study as shown in some of the ensuing sections of this chapter. However, when choosing a research approach consideration rests with its relevance to a particular study in terms of the research aim and research question. For this reason, the nature of the problem for this study can best be investigated and addressed appropriately using some aspects of phenomenology and case study. These two approaches are discussed in the following sections.

3.4 The phenomenological approach

In order to generate knowledge about how students experience campus, I employ aspects of the phenomenological approach. The current study which is aimed at exploring undergraduate students experiences on campus requires a scientific enquiry that offers a way of studying 'lived experiences' within a social environment as interpreted by the people concerned and involved. McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p. 352) assert that ''phenomenological studies investigate what was experienced, how it was experienced, and finally the meanings that the interviewees assign to the

experience". They argue that this approach aims to increase the understanding of lived experiences of students.

Phenomenology is "the study of phenomena as they present themselves in direct experience, is the study of the experiences of the relationship between the individual and the object, is the study of a phenomenon as it presents itself in an individual's direct awareness*"* (O'Leary, 2004, p. 122-123). This approach is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual (see Groenewald, 2004; Lester, 1999). This has been identified as a suitable philosophy and research method (with relevant elements) for capturing lived experiences (Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

I am, however, aware of how some researchers have done some successful phenomenological study to investigate certain aspects of student experiences. Thomas et al. (2007), for example, examined the experiences of academically struggling African-American students in a predominantly white University. Abu-Ghazzeh (1999, p. 770) also used a phenomenological approach in his study to draw attention to subjective meanings and perceptive descriptions of environmental experiences. However, the philosophical position adopted in the current study is that it is not a purely phenomenological one but assumes that certain aspects of this approach are relevant to my enquiry of core issues of student campus experiences. This decision is justified in the existing literature which points out that it is inappropriate to just receive and use a methodology because it worked well elsewhere (Swanson-Kauffman, 1986, p. 61). In the light of the aforementioned limited use, I do not delve into a detailed account of the phenomenological approach's origins, its development and many variations and the theorists involved. So here I just briefly discuss the approach and some of its aspects that I consider relevant to this study.

From literature, there are potentially as many phenomenologies as there are events and experiences so there is no one absolute way of conducting a phenomenological study as it can be conducted in many different ways. However, sometimes authors explain their approaches not by the phenomenological position they have adopted, but by naming the theorist whose specific techniques they are borrowing (Thorne, 2000, p. 69). To this

end, the present study employed aspects of Heideggerian or interpretive phenomenology. For Heidegger, objects/phenomena reveal their meaning in as much as I give them their meaning. This implies that I interpret the participants' experiences from what they say and give it a meaning but also acknowledge that with phenomenology, there are multiple ways of interpreting experiences available to each researcher through interacting with others (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 26). This observation pertains to the issue of rigour in data analysis. The interpretive phenomenological approach allows for the generation of knowledge about the student experience phenomenon. It is a strand of phenomenology compatible with trying to understand undergraduate students' interaction with the campus within their communities.

This study's interest is in the dynamics of encounters undergraduate students have on campus, the way the students make sense of such and "in arguments they construct in explaining them" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 25). Phenomenology seems to provide a close fit in assisting the researcher in gaining an understanding of how undergraduate students make meaning of their campus experience and their perceptions of achievement. Researchers in the phenomenological mode make effort "to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 25) and how people experience a phenomenon. They focus on how people construct meanings from or make sense of their life experiences (Creswell, 2003). For example, Abu-Ghazzeh (1999, p. 769), with the aim to gain insights into aspects of human-environment intersections in terms of whether meanings and significances existed, he carried out a phenomenology study to assess user perception and patterns of outdoor use of spaces. As a researcher, I make efforts to gain entry into the conceptual world of the undergraduate students under study "in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 26) on campus.

Phenomenological studies are highly dependent on the use of constructs, and the individual's descriptions of lived experience (O'Leary, 2004). Thus, in this study, campus experiences are viewed through the lens of undergraduate students. Lester

(1999) commends that phenomenological approaches are good at making previously unheard voices heard and in the process bringing to the surface deep issues.

Furthermore, phenomenology is a science of beginnings in that it calls for a return to the foundations of meanings and experiences in order to describe or understand those foundations accurately (Groenewald, 2004). By using phenomenological approaches as analytical tools to study human environment interaction, Abu-Ghazzeh (1999, p. 769) managed to reveal the participants' sense of attachment spaces and their significance and meaning to them (participants). In light of the foregoing, this study is informed by this approach to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomenon through the way they are perceived by the individuals in a situation. In this study, as the undergraduate students perceive the campus differently as they negotiate it and through their voices, it seems possible to speculate that such perceptions are illuminated.

Phenomenological research puts emphasis on the meaning of experience (O'Leary, 2004) and this is the core issue of the current investigation. However, it is argued that in contrast to positivists, phenomenologists believe that the researchers cannot be detached from their own presuppositions. The researcher has explicit beliefs and should not pretend otherwise (Groenewald, 2004; Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This is the element of bracketing an idea which is usually taken for granted as true. This means that "the researchers act as if they do not know what it means and study it to investigate what is actually taken for granted" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 25). So a researcher, I set out to understand what the participant is saying in its own right with its own meaning and structure not what I expect the participant to say. However, literature points out that this in no way means that the phenomenologist "is standing in some absolute and totally presuppositionless space" (Hycner, 1985 p. 280).

In this study, when it comes to issues and procedure of bracketing, I take my background as an asset (Thomas et al., 2007). Literature points out that a prior understanding of the phenomenon of interest usually happens from the researcher's experience and that might obscure what the data have to say (Osborn, 1990, p. 81). My experience of doing university studies through distance learning puts me in a position where are I am ignorant of what it means to be a student on campus so my background

is different from that of my participants and therefore I have no bias when it comes to issues like these. Methodologically, it is very easy to grasp what the students are saying when one is located and framed as a new comer or an outsider in that space. Seddon (2014, p. 11) asserts that, "as an insider, what you see seems normal, it is what locates you, your history and biography and basic ethnocentrism means it tends to be valued as a personal one best system". By being an outsider in that space, revealed synchronic social-cultural dissonance. I understood the phenomenon by allowing the data to speak for themselves (Osborn, 1990, p. 81).

This study's research questions explore the meaning of students' experiences of campus and ask them to describe their everyday experience outside the classroom (Creswell, 2003), a phenomenon I have no knowledge about. The aim is to see the world as the participants see it; to know how they perceiving the important events and phenomenon of their world (Thomas, et al., 2007) and the meanings they attach to such experiences. The best way to do this is through dialogue; to ask them and this is the path of understanding. Hence I engage with the participants through in-depth interviews; a data gathering tool suitable for phenomenology. This instrument is addressed later in the sections that follow. At this stage I discuss a case study; the most suitable approach to use alongside phenomenology.

3.5 Case study

The foundational methodological tool this research adopts is the case study which Yin (1994) defines as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not very clear; and where multiple sources of evidence are used. According to Merriam (2001), a qualitative case study is a detailed, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit. This study is a case study of three faculties at Wits. For this study, the social unit is the first and third year undergraduate students in the faculties of Engineering and Built Environment, Science, and Humanities. A case study delimits the object of study, to the specific case. Merriam (2001) and Creswell (2012) both present a case as a 'bounded system'. A 'bounded system' is one in which

the unit of analysis is finite. That is the case for instance, is constrained either by a definite number of individuals or by the span of time or both. In keeping with this, this case has clear and demarcated boundaries as there was limited time span that is, from May to November 2011 in which I conducted the research process and limited time that is 45 to 60 minutes in which I drew data from the participants. Merriam (2001) further argues that a case is a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. One can 'fence in' what one is going to study. For this particular study, what are 'fenced in' are campus experiences of first and third year undergraduate students in the aforementioned faculties at Wits.

3.5.1 Why case study?

The case study overarching method has been chosen because of its feasibility and access (Yin, 1994), the opportunity to combine in-depth study and a variety of methods and draw on multiple data source to converge on an issue (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Yin, 1994).

A case study addresses the 'how' and 'why' questions very well (Yin, 1994), thus, allowing the researcher to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It is viewed as an appropriate research tool for this study where one seeks to establish the students' perceptions of their achievement in the light of their campus experiences. In concurrence with Yin, Merriam (2001) contends that the heuristic quality of a case study implies that it can, among other aspects, explain the reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened and why. The case study's descriptive nature enables it to illustrate the complexities of a situation by revealing that many factors contributed to it and that information about campus experiences of different students is tabled in different ways. A case study examines specific instances but elucidates a general problem (Merriam, 2001). Thus, the reader is assisted in a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question through more powerful narrations and explanations from the two groups of undergraduate students.

3.5.2 Selection of Wits case study

The choice of Wits for the case study is not accidental but anchored on two intentions. One, this study is part of a mega-research project involving a network of postgraduate

student researchers from four universities in three countries: Kenyatta University- Kenya, Nnamdi Azikiwe University- Nigeria, University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) and Wits- South Africa. The case of Wits which this study focuses on is one of the university 'cases' informing the 'undergraduate student experience' component of the major project. Within the Wits case, there are also the participants as a case. A set of selection criteria was used to determine who is in the case. These are the conditions or characteristics that establish who are inside and outside the case. The students from particular faculties fit my selection criteria and became participants for this study. *The following paragraph describes these criteria...*

While the question of retention and throughput is a major concern facing all the faculties at Wits, it is reported that three faculties: Engineering and Built Environment, Humanities and Sciences have the lowest throughput rates yet they happen to represent 57% of all undergraduate students at Wits (CHE, 2010; Cross et al., 2009) and 58.90% of all students in 2011 (Wits Annual Report, 2011). These statistics show that more than half of the student population is from these faculties yet in terms of retention and student performance, they are most negatively affected (see CHE, 2010; Wits, 2003b). Participants for this study make reference to the issues of exclusion prevalent in these faculties. One participant for example comments:

> …I want to be here but the thing is, there are many exclusions…the exclusion rate in Engineering and Science is too much…exclusion is the biggest challenge in these faculties. If you fail, you get excluded, that is just the law of the university [15SC1]

This study seeks to contribute to the limited literature with regards to exploring the 'why' aspect of the phenomenon through investigating student campus experiences qualitatively. So a case study suggests an emphasis on the details and the specifics of a particular institution context, setting, set of events and so forth (Susan van Zyl, Communication: Workshop notes 21 August, 2011) and here, Wits is a case study to consider the student experience phenomenon. Accordingly, the case is the complex organisation of experiences and behaviour patterns or situations that constitutes the undergraduate students from the three faculties at Wits as they negotiate the campus

space. In the next part I discuss how the research participants were selected and the research methods that I employed.

3.6 Going about collecting data

To collect meaningful data involves much thinking in terms of the nature of participants the sample, sampling procedures, data collection methods, instruments to be used and the actual data collection exercise in harmony with the qualitative research design and phenomenological approach within a case study. The sections that follow explain these aspects in detail.

3.6.1 Participants

One methodological step I found myself grappling with while going about collecting the data was that of identifying the people and sites that would best assist me understand the central phenomenon being investigated. As stated in chapter 1 and preceding sections of this current chapter, this study is part of a major research project: *Institutional Initiatives to Enhance Participation, Access, Retention and Success in African Higher Education: A Multi-Country Study on Good Practice to Inform Policy* (MRCI, 2010) which targeted campus-based first and third year undergraduate students from each of the faculties of Engineering and Built Environment, Humanities and Sciences at Wits for the 2011 academic year. There were a total of 17086 students registered in the three faculties in 2011. The major project targeted 5% of these so we needed to conduct approximately 854 interviews (*See Appendix B for Ethics Clearance Protocol Number (2010ECE162C*). My study drew its sample from this and also targeting 5% which was supposed to be about 42 interviews but ended up 47. The actual selection of the sample is discussed in the sections that follow.

3.6.2 Choosing the sample

In qualitative research the sampling approach is just one; purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) or "sometimes called purposive sampling, judgment, or judgmental sampling" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 126) and its variations. In this study I 'intentionally select' (Creswell, 2012, p. 206) the undergraduate students and three faculties as the sites to understand the campus experience phenomenon. However,

purposeful sampling has many strategies (see Creswell, 2012) so I decide to use some of these strategies as discussed and justified in the ensuing paragraph.

I interviewed first and third year undergraduate students from the same three faculties. Third year undergraduate students have been targeted since it is likely that having been at the university for two full years have gained considerable campus experiences to inform this study in a significant way. However, I am aware that they may not recall fully their first year experiences. This is why I also included the first year students. These different year groups serve the purposes of methodological triangulation by opening both first and third year student perspectives to the nature of the studied social phenomena. So here I adopted 'homogeneous sampling'; a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 2012, p. 208) of three faculties that have similar characteristics and the three became sites of interest for this study.

Qualitative sampling aims at deeply understanding the phenomenon and this involves looking at "a process of the meanings individuals attribute to their given social situation" (Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011). For this reason, a proper sample size is not one which is representative in terms of figures, but one which leads to deeper and high quality understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. This sounds very easy but I found myself joining Baker and Edwards (n. d. p. 3) in pondering about "the thorny question of 'how many interviews are enough?' in conducting a piece of qualitative research?" They assert that "[T]he answer, as with all things qualitative, is "it depends" (p. 3) on a number of factors. The representativeness is located in the quality of the information to be obtained that answers the research questions as correctly as possible to achieve the research aim.

The sample and procedures are determined by the level of discourse; how data will be collected and analysed and the types of generalisations and representations derived from the data (McMillan & Schumacher 2006, p. 12; Hessy-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Furthermore, in this purposive sampling, "on the basis of the researcher's knowledge of the population, a judgment is made about which subjects should be selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 126). As such, when the issue of 'how many' participants to interview for the

study came to my mind, two deciding factors were already in place. One is the fact that my study is part of a mega research as discussed in the previous sections and the other is my decision to take the phenomenology route. A phenomenological approach is suited with deliberately selected small samples (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Some efforts were made to vary demographical variables (Swanson-Kauffman, 1886) by differentiating the target sample by gender, race, nationality and whether resident on campus or non-resident (See Table 3.1). This resonates with Creswell's (2012, p. 207-208) maximal variation sampling; "a purposeful sampling strategy in which the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristics or trait". In South African context, race refers to African, Coloured, Indian and White and 'black' refers to African, Indian and Coloured combined (CHE, 2010). This constituted the "information – rich key informants" of the target group being studied as McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p. 319) puts it. In this way, the issue of a diverse student body which characterizes the institution under study was taken into consideration.

In qualitative research, this is one way of presenting multiple perspectives of individuals to represent the complexity of the world (Creswell's (2012, p. 207) in this case the university campus environment. To augment this, I also employed what Hessy-Biber & Leavy (2011, p. 46) term opportunistic sampling; where "sequence of events lead to the unintended selection of individuals for interview". For instance, I would interview a group of friends, students on the bus or at the sport field. This voluntary dimension of the participants for ethical considerations, somehow affected the proportionality with respect to gender balance. However, efforts were made to take into account to offset a fair proportionality of male and female participants. In qualitative sampling, researchers agree to be more flexible but try to get the best participants for the study. In consideration of the sampling issues raised this far, all in all, forty seven students were interviewed for this study. The prospective participants completed a brief demographic form (see Appendix C4) before the commencement of the interview. The survey requested students to provide information about gender, race, nationality, nature of residence, and year of study. The table 1 below shows the description of the interview sample.

Table 3.1: Characteristics of the interview sample

Race	Gender		Year of study		Local (L)/ International (I)		Residence		Faculties			Total
	M	F	1	3	L	I	R	NR	E	H	S	
Africans	13	15	12	16	26	2	21	7	10	11	7	28
Whites	3	3	2	4	5	1	1	5	2	2	2	6
Coloureds	3	4	3	4	7	-	3	4	2	1	4	7
Indians	2	4	4	2	6	-	1	5	3	3	-	6
Sub-total	21	26	21	26	44	3	26	21	17	17	13	-
Grand total		**47**		**47**		**47**		**47**			**47**	**47**

Key
Residence: R- Resident, NR- Non-resident
Faculties: E- Engineering and the Built Environment, H- Humanities, S- Science

The table above shows that there were forty seven students altogether interviewed in this study. In South African context, race is categorised as Africans, Whites, Coloureds and Indians. Currently at Wits, 'black' refers to all Indians, Coloureds and Africans registered students (Agar, 1990). Of these, twenty one were first years and twenty six were third years. Furthermore, twenty six of them were staying in university accommodation[1] while twenty one were non-residents[2]. The table also shows that two faculties: Humanities and Engineering and Built Environment had the largest number of the participants. Another observation is that there were more females than males in the interview sample. This resonates with the Wits Annual Report (2011) which indicates that in 2011, there were more female than male students enrolled in the university as a whole and in the three faculties added together. This picture could also be attributed to "opportunistic sampling" (Hessy-Biber & Leavy 2011, p. 46) alluded to earlier on. In fact there were more female than male students in university residence. One could interview more than one participant once at the residence because students would not be in a hurry to go nowhere and as a result chances of inviting more and getting positive affirmation through 'snowballing' (Creswell, 2012) were high.

[1] Commonly known by students as 'in res'
[2] Staying in private accommodation or commuting from home

With regard to the actual selection of the participants, the criteria were based on the individual's willingness to share his/her experiences and willingness to provide a detailed narration of the campus experiences. After formally seeking written permission from Deans of the three faculties through the major project, my actual recruitment commenced with me physically visiting the public spaces where the targeted sample could be located at one point in time such as the lecture and tutorial rooms and halls, sport fields, laboratories, study areas and by the libraries and computer laboratories.

I informed the prospective participants about the purpose of my study and invited them to take part in the interviews. Those willing to participate were booked instantly and I gave them my cell phone number to send a please call message so that I contacted them for booking. During the booking, it was mandatory to accommodate the prospective participants' schedules and preferred sites for conducting the interview as well as seeking their permission to audio- record them. Simple as it may sound, this turned out to be one of the challenging exercises in the data collection process as indicated in the later sections where I detailed my experience on the field as I collected data. In the next section I discuss the methods that I employed in collecting the data.

3.6.3 Data collection methods

While literature refers to many research instruments or tools or approaches and their variations of data collection in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012), the choice of a particular tool in fact rests with, among other factors, the nature of the study, "the theoretical orientation taken by the researcher" (Berg, 1995, p. 239), the research questions and the possibilities and limitations that each instrument portrays. This study used some aspects of the phenomenological approach. As such, a variety of methods can be used but, the most overriding factor is that with this orientation, "dialogue is the path to understanding" (Thomas et al., 2007, p. 4) and the researcher attempt to "capture or unveil the telos (essence) of an account" (Berg, 1995, p. 239). To engage in a research dialogue with the undergraduate students and get their understanding of the meanings and actions about the campus space, I conducted one to one semi structured in-depth interviews.

Interviews

Until quite recently, most existing literature on HE especially on experiences of students, have used questionnaires. I tend to agree with Malcolm et al. (2000, p. 3) when they say:

> This method de-emphasizes the voice of the individual student. It is also culturally consonant as the method of data collection is biased towards a set of predetermined questions and the written responses of students who do not have English as a first language. Interviews to some extend mitigate this (Malcolm et al., 2000, p. 3)

For these reasons and others discussed earlier on, the data for this study was collected through phenomenological interviews using semi-structured questions. Phenomenological interview is "a specific type of in-depth interview used to study the meaning or essence of a lived experience among the selected participants" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p.353). Such interviews allow "the interviewer to delve deeply into social and personal matters" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315) and are valued for their probes and pauses allowing the respondent to elicit more valid data. By using phenomenological interviews, this study sought to understand the student's viewpoint, what goes on within him/her and get him/her to describe the lived experience in a language as free from constructs of the intellectual and society as possible (Groenewald, 2004) and to get an understanding of how and what meaning is constructed around events in one's daily life (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Thus, a phenomenological semi-structured interview offers sufficient flexibility to approach different participants differently while covering the same areas of data collection.

Development of the interview protocol

The interview schedule used to collect my data was meant for the bigger project comprising four individual studies including this one. Each of the four researchers had his/her set of semi structured questions on that one protocol, '*the pool'*. We worked as a team which was one of the objectives of the major project (MRCI, 2010). All protocol in the formulation of interview questions observed, each one of us brought the questions on the table and put them together sequentially into one collated interview protocol.

This was not easy. Several meetings were held to put this in place in a way that resonates with the tradition of developing interview questions. The challenge was to come up with a logical and meaningful interview protocol where questions flow coherently in a way that assists the respondent to enjoy a conversational sort of dialogue. We embarked on crafting the varying questions to meet this. Some questions that overlapped were crafted into one to avoid duplication. For this study, the questions for the interview protocol covered issues about how they came to be in this university and becoming a student, their perceptions and experiences at the point of entry into university; students' social experiences: where they go after lectures, how their spend their leisure time, who they hang out with and interaction with others on campus. The students were also asked to talk about their residence life; experiences that made them happy or frustrated and what the university could do to improve their experiences on campus (*See Appendix D for interview protocol*). In-depth interviews lasting a maximum of 60 minutes with each of the targeted participants were conducted for this study.

I sought participants' consent to interview them and audio-record all interviews in order to secure an accurate account of the conversations and avoid loss of data since it was difficult to capture everything by writing notes during the session (*see consent form and letter Appendices C1&C2).* McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p.355) stress that "tape-recording ensures completeness of the verbal interactions and provides material for reliability checks".

The systematic feature of qualitative research demands that I account for every decision I take in the conduct of the study by "documenting these decisions so that others can review, comment on and critique them" (Rossman & Rallies, 2003, p. 12). In the next section I discuss my experience on the field.

3.7 My fieldwork experience

Reflecting on my experiences in collecting data on the field, one major observation that I have made is that as one embarks on the actual process of data collection, one is

confronted with a myriad of challenges and revelations or new insights which is typical with putting theory into practice. I acknowledge the tradition within qualitative approach of focusing on the context by assuming that a full understanding of human experience is gained by exploring the complexity where " researchers value the messiness of the lived world in the natural settings in which people are found" (Rossman & Rallies, 2003, p. 9). *Here, I recount my journey*…

3.7.1 Gaining access in the field

Apart from the formality of seeking ethical clearance and permission to collect data on campus from students in the three faculties, gaining access involved establishing a safe and conducive environment for getting the interviews to begin in a way that allowed the participants to share their experiences as they actually happened. I made conscientious efforts to get the participants' interest and attention to take part in my study. It was necessary to develop rapport with the participants ((DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316) from the very first encounter with them to gain that access. It started with the invitations to participate in the study.

The final 'invites'

I made crucial initial contacts with the participants by telephone and/or email. Inviting students to participate in an interview is not a one-off activity. I discovered that prior bookings with students for interviews were just the start of the invitation when on the first day, no one turned up. Since qualitative research happens in the field, it calls on the researcher to be among other things, "pragmatic, flexible, politically aware and self-reflexive" (Rossman & Rallies, 2003, p. 13). So in this situation, the invitations were to be followed by reminders through calls done an hour before the time set for the interviews. This challenge did not come as a surprise considering the supposition that with qualitative research, there are no formulaic rules to follow, "only guiding principles gleaned from direct experience, reading literature, studying with others and the actual doing" (Rossman & Rallies, 2003, p. 13).

In most cases I had to reschedule interviews and in other cases students cancelled their bookings. Frustrating as it may sound, this is proper in research since with regards to

research ethics, the prospective participants are told that their participation will be voluntary and they have the right to withdraw any time because "informed consent implies informed refusal" (Cohen & Manion, 1997, p.350). As a strategy to compensate for this loss of prospective participants, I shuttled from campus to campus and embarked on what I coin *'shuttle invitation'*. That is, while in transit from campus to campus to do the booked interviews, I approached students in the bus and at the bus concourse and invited them to be my participants. This proved quite effective because I managed to get a variety of respondents. At times I visited halls of residence and requested interviews in person.

Sites for the interviews

Then next were the sites. Theoretically, the researcher should ensure that the interview settings are as free as possible from background noise and interruptions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Proper as it may sound, some participants insisted on being interviewed in places which were noisy, say, near the canteens or on the campus lawns during lunch hour or in the open on a very chilly day. Such an environment is not very suitable for audio recordings. Sometimes, no matter how I tried to negotiate with them, I would not win. The principle of informed consent comes from the participant's right to freedom and self-determination so consent protects and respects these rights (Cohen & Manion, 1997). The only option then is for one to continue with the interviews but, using a digital recorder that filters the noise so as to reduce threat to the data. At times the participants preferred to be interviewed at their halls of residence either outside or in the common rooms. This is in agreement with the view from literature that semi-structured interviews "are usually scheduled at a designated time and location outside of everyday events" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315).

'Gaining momentum': confidence midway.

At the start of the interviews, rapport with participants was created. A social chat to break the ice was used as a brief mediating activity to institute a relaxed non-threatening mood and get the participant talking. Among other tactics, I shared information about myself and injected humour judiciously as I opened the dialogue and created a comfortable atmosphere for their maximum input. Then simple semi-structured questions ensued. In some instances I had to repeat the questions with some

embellishment, allowing the participant time to hear and think about what was asked. This was followed by prompts that repeat the words that the participant used. This procedure signals the need for further elaboration without leading the participant (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316).

Despite this initial preparation of the atmosphere, it was observed that some participants were still shy and hesitant in their responses. Their voices were shaky and the responses were brief and rather rushed. In a phenomenological study, the establishment of some level of empathy and rapport is vital in order to gain a depth of the information being sourced particularly when investigating issues where the participant has strong personal stake (Lester, 1999; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). As the interview progressed, the affected interviewees became calm and confident. The variety of issues being addressed brought flavour to the conversations thereby making them livelier and the interview process gained momentum. The participants opened up and shared more information as they felt relaxed.

'Pre-empting'

The team members' research work is related to each other in that it is all about students' experiences at different levels and with different discourses. The issues being addressed by each member's questions in the interview protocol are not mutually exclusive. When conducting the interview, one starts with a broad open ended question first for a particular topic and as the interview progresses, the probing question which are more specific, come last to elicit clarification of the response.

At first I rigidly and religiously followed the interview protocol only to be alerted by lack of logical sequence or coherence as some participants pointed out that they had answered a particular question earlier. Expressions like: "…as I mentioned before…"[3] or "but I already said…"[4] or " I stay with my sister as I said earlier on…" surfaced and at times served as an alert to the researcher. As the participants narrated their experiences and perceptions in response to certain questions, in the process they addressed related issues before I even asked those questions. Thus, a response to one

[3] 9SC3
[4] 7E3, 13H1,

member's question covers another or other member(s)' questions yet to be addressed. The response may be incomplete or even richer than what could have been obtained from the actual question. The challenge then is keeping previous responses in mind being aware of what is left unsaid as well as what was said while simultaneously probing for the current question.

On the contrary, pre-empting served as a within *instrument triangulation*. The questions that were pre-empted were rephrased and asked again in order to establish dependability of and contradictions in preceding responses and this attribute to the holistic nature of qualitative research (Cohen & Manion, 1997).

'**The law of diminishing returns'**

The duration of the interviews that I conducted ranged from 35 minutes to 1 hour. Being interviewed involves a process of organising one's experience as one recollects, conceptualises and labels one's thoughts during the interview in accordance with one's perception of being interviewed (Henning et al., 2004). My observation was that by the time one got to the last question, the participant was tired. I could sense the participants' energy levels depleting rapidly. This was detected in the voice which became low pitched, the participant constantly looked at the time, the pace at which he/she responded was faster and the responses were shorter yet, as the researcher, I was interested in hearing the 'voice', getting the rich narratives of the phenomena. Fatigue can impact on the participant's answers. Thus, I noticed '*diminishing returns'* from the interview process. The online American Heritage Dictionary defines this as "a law affirming that to continue after a certain level of performance has been reached, will result in a decline in effectiveness". I have decided to borrow the term '*the law of diminishing returns'* to illustrate my experience in using a collated interview protocol.

In my view, this experience was a result of the lengthy protocol in conjunction with the timing of the interview process. To solve this problem, I took advantage of the one other element of phenomenology that is, reflectivity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In phenomenology interviewing participants is reflective whereas in other qualitative

research it is only dialogical. Reflectivity is higher order than mere observation and dialogue as it encompasses the latter. Being reflective or absorbed in an interview, the researcher observes both what is said, and how it is said in order to engage in a meaningful dialogue. I asked questions which required the interviewee to reflect on his or her experiences. Through probing, I kept up the momentum at the same time ensuring that I "remove as many demand characteristics from the research situation as possible and replace them with empathetic understanding and trust" (Osborn, 1990, p. 82).

I decided as much as possible, to avoid interviewing participants in-between classes/lectures/tutorials/laboratory work. Another strategy was to identify the point at which the participants changed the way they responded and then I tactfully motivated them; showed them that I was more than before interested (Lester, 1999) in what they were saying, stimulating interaction and eliciting details with statements and questions like: "That is interesting…Really? Can you tell me more? Why do you say so?" This also involved making some comments to reassure them that I was listening and to encourage them to keep talking. In some cases, the participant was asked to pause and the researcher digressed a bit in order to continuously built rapport and gain access. This turned out to be effective.

The interview process improved day after day and more participants were interviewed until no new experiences were given. As soon as I finished the first few interviews I started transcription and preliminary analysis to establish issues emerging which in turn informed the interview process. After many interviews, and moving from one interview to the next, it became evident that nothing new was being. "This iterative process of data collection and analysis eventually lead to …the (point of) saturation signalling that data collection is complete" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p., 317).

3.8 Trustworthiness: Credibility, dependability and transferability

As an interviewer, I also felt that my energy level was depleting fast but the variety of questions and the responses provided, reduced the monotony and seemed to fuel me up. I soldiered on. One would hasten to say: What about trustworthiness of interviews done

by the other research assistants, my team mates? In qualitative research, an assessment of trustworthiness is crucial (Creswell, 2012). The extent to which the data, its analysis and conclusions are believable and trustworthy speaks to the concept of trustworthiness. In this vein, the question: "how can an enquirer persuade her audiences that the research findings of a research inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 200) addresses trustworthiness in qualitative research. In this study, the issue of trustworthiness was established through credibility, dependability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility relates to the focus of the study and how well the data and its analysis match the focus of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is the extent to which different researchers would generate the same or similar ideas and derive similar phenomena if the study is repeated in a similar setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is argued that in qualitative research, "the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 2001, p. 14). As the researcher, I ensured the trustworthiness of my study as explained below.

Interviewers have different approaches, styles and impressions they make on the topics. Such variations may cause the participants to differ in their behaviour and eventually impact on their responses to the interview questions. To counter this, we met regularly as a team to share and discuss our experiences and the challenges that we faced in the field as well as sample the completed interviews to check on quality and consistency. Hence, Golafshani (2003) underscores the fact that the integrity of qualitative research rests on the capability and effort of the researcher.

A major weakness of using an interview as a tool for data collection is that of bias. Respondents tend "to overstate or understate the true value of an attribute" (Cohen & Manion, 1997, p. 281). Among other causes of bias are the attitudes and opinions of the researcher such as a tendency for the researcher to seek answers that support his/her preconceived notions, misconceptions of what the respondent is saying and, misunderstanding by the respondent of what is being asked. Biases reduce credibility in qualitative research. Being aware of this, and in line with phenomenology, I had an open mind and bracketed my responses as I listened to the participants talking. I also made efforts to minimize biases by making the interviews as conversational as possible,

using probing questions in the event where the respondents indicate misunderstanding of the questions and seeking clarity from them.

Working as a team in conducting interviews using a collated interview schedule is *researcher triangulation*. Furthermore, the team meetings I held with the research assistants, involved peer checking - another method of triangulation. The different approaches and styles adopted by the interviewers open new insights into the issues being investigated and enhance what Froggatt (2001) refers to as 'digging deeper' when it comes to data analysis. The data from the interviews are descriptions of experience and the phenomenology methodology acknowledges the difficulty of representing human experience through language. The researcher is therefore tasked with interpreting the meaning of the verbal descriptions depending on one's purpose (Osborn, 1990, p. 83).

With regards to truthfulness of emerging issues, in phenomenological studies, I am aware that what counts is the plausibility of the interpretations and the degree to which the issues are illuminating to the reader. Plausibility refers to how believable and persuasive the findings are. In this study, plausibility is shown by the phenomenological nod – where descriptions and interpretations are something which the reader can recognise as experience that they could have had (Thomas et al., 2007) what it is like to experience that (in this situation 'that' is being on campus outside the classroom). According to Thomas et al. (2007), the readers are the final judges of the study's credibility and trustworthiness. From the discussions of the preceding strategies, it is apparent that the quality of qualitative research approach, rests with carefully documented and conducted research process. My narrative of my fieldwork experiences hitherto and how I analysed the data in the ensuing sections attest that the data that I present to my readers in this study is plausible, credible and trustworthy.

3.9 Ethical issues

I applied for ethics clearance to conduct the study from the University of Witwatersrand through the Research Ethics Committee (*see Appendix A*) and consent was granted by the issuing of Ethics Protocol number: 2010ECE187**C** *(See Appendix B***).** With the

phenomenology traditions, the term 'participant' was preferred so as to "emphasise cooperative and the voluntary nature" of the study (Osborn, 1990). The principle of informed consent comes from the participant's right to freedom and self-determination so consent protects and respects these rights (Cohen & Manion, 1997). I did this by explaining the nature of the investigation and then inviting participation without coercion. A specific letter of consent was written in order to obtain informed consent from the participants (*See Appendices C1, C2 & C3).* This form of agreement was explained to the prospective participants before the start of the interview so that they sign it.

The prospective participants were also told from the beginning that their participation would be voluntary and they had the right to stop participation any time because "informed consent implies informed refusal" (Cohen & Manion, 1997, p. 350). The participants were further told about the procedures to maintain confidentiality, that they would not be identified in any reporting in the study and that any quotations from the interviews would bear pseudonyms. This having been emphasised, I witnessed situations where some participants were still hesitant in giving information. As the following fragment of interview shows:

> **Interviewer**: Is there a lecturer who has left a big impression on you? How?
>
> **Participant:** I have two actually. Do I have to state their names?
>
> **Interviewer**: Not necessarily, if you do not want to. However, all that you say in this interview will be treated with confidentiality.
>
> **Participant:** Ok, because I do not want this coming back to me (giving the names).

These responses from the participant show lack of trust and uncertainty in terms of ethical issues. It was after reassurance that the participant went on to provide names of the lecturers.

Besides data collection, other ethical issues also surface when reporting the findings. Researchers are usually accused of dishonesty through misrepresenting, distorting or deleting information which has been provided in good faith by the participants. Lester (1999) suggests that one way to go about it is to arrange the findings according to themes and topics and draw out key issues discussed by the participants. This is the position I adopted in this study.

Furthermore, the findings can be reported strongly by including direct quotes both as 'sound-bites' and more extensive quotes from the participants to illustrate points (Lester, 1999), at the same time representing the voices of as many participants as possible (Thomas et al., 2007). However, precautions were taken to ensure that confidentiality and privacy were not compromised. It should be noted that in order to provide space for student voices, I included some direct quotations from the interviews in concurrence with Billot's (2010, p. 714) suggestion that "...it is the voice of those who hold the positions in question that can illustrate what is perceived, imagined and experienced".

No identification of students was made in the typed transcripts. Pseudonyms could have been used but this was not the case. I feared that such names could coincidentally match with names of other students in the university considering that the population is large. To adhere to the research ethics requirements, I decided to protect the participants' identities by using numbers and letters in place of actual names. After each quotation, a pseudonym description of each participant is given in brackets. For instance, 2E3: '2' is just a number, 'E' stands for Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment and '3' stands for year of study 3. I allocated each participant such an identifying number when analyzing the data.

In the next section, I discuss how I went about storing the data before analyzing it using Osborn's (1990) data analysis procedure.

3.10 Qualitative data analysis process

Qualitative data analysis usually happens concurrently with data collection to assist the researcher in generating an emerging understanding of the research questions in a way that informs both the sampling and the questions being asked (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317). This iterative process of data collection allowed me to check whether the interview was serving its purpose. The process of analysing qualitative data is known for its complexity and iterative process embedded in working inferentially and systematically with the data to produce a final product – the report. This process includes data management an aspect that involves preparing the data so that it is ready to be analysed (Froggatt, 2001).

3.10.1 Data Management: the storage space

After data collection, the next question is: how do I store, process and finally store it? The interesting experiences on the field culminated into loads and loads of data, first it was in the recorder, then the memory stick and then, the volumes and volumes of transcriptions in their reviewed and refined forms. The implication here is that I really had to think hard and strategize how I was going to manage the data in line with research ethics - "How the data will be stored...needs to be addressed with respect to ensuring accessibility, confidentiality of data and safety of the data" (Froggatt, 2001, p. 434). I heard stories of researchers who lost their data unexpectedly in most cases due to misuse of technology. From such stories, I decided to store my data in multiple storage areas; 1) as soft copy in an external hard drive, memory stick, on the desk top computer in documents. 2) As hard copy in print form. I also made duplicates of original data sources in the event that a backup file is needed. In all situations, I made sure that I am committed to maintaining high research ethics of confidentiality. Since the data includes both audio recordings and the transcriptions, I labelled it in a way that allowed traceability to the original source (Froggatt, 2001).It is this extent that I concur with Creswell (2012) that the strength of qualitative research depends centrally with the competence with which the analysis is done.

Miles and Huberman (1994) posit that data analysis methods are too rarely reported in enough detail for readers to follow how the researcher got from the field notes to the

final conclusions. In this study an attempt is made to address this issue in the sections that matter.

3.10.2 Data analysis: the tools used

The process of examining the data set and breaking it down into meaningful parts – analysis (Gonzalez, 2002) - is not easy. As a researcher, I am aware of the proposition that if the analytical processes adopted within the study are not articulated, it is not possible to make judgements about the appropriateness or value of the findings presented (Froggatt, 2001, p. 436). In this section and the next ones, I speak to how I arrived at the answers to the question this research addresses.

After establishing ways and means to store massive data, the next hiccup was processing it. Concerning the tools to use to process the data, I decided to do it manually. I am aware of the many qualitative data analysis computer programs available on the market today but to gain a deeper understanding of the data, I engaged in working with it manually over and over again. After all, computer programmes essentially are simply an aid to sort and organise sets of qualitative data, (Creswell, 2012) but none are capable of the intellectual and conceptualising processes required to transform data into meaningful findings (Thorne, 2000, p. 69). This requires the researcher's capacity to think deeply.

From a phenomenological view point there is no hard and fast rule in analysing data. Data analysis process is largely intuitive (Merriam, 2001) and the learning is in the doing (Crewswell, 2012; Merriam, 2001). The researcher is at liberty to employ an analytical procedure she considers easy to follow (Osborn, 1990). Phenomenological researchers are usually reluctant to focus on prescribed steps and they are justified since that would not do justice to the integrity of the phenomenon (Hycner, 1985). The implication is that the guidelines usually proposed are just a possible way of analysing the data. Thus I am not glued to them but I am flexible. I welcome this stance considering the complexity of my data (it was collected using one collated interview schedule for the main research project). This gives me room to do some preliminary analysis first in the way I see fit.

The complexity of the collated interview schedule has ripple effects, both positive and negative. It spills into the data collection which in turn spills into the data analysis process. This made the process more complicated. Since there is no hard and fast rule to qualitative data analysis, especially within the phenomenological tradition, I decided to engage in what I coin the *two-staged multiple level data analysis process.*

First, I used Susan van Zyl's 'vertical and horizontal' preliminary data analysis processing by (Personal communication: Research Workshop notes 21 August, 2011). According to van Zyl, soon after transcriptions some preliminary data analysis needs to be done. This involves the process of reducing the large volume of data in a way that makes it manageable at the same time not losing the minutiae which includes maintaining the presence of the voice of the participants which is a major strength of qualitative research data. This plummeting of data could be done in two ways and levels: vertical level analysis and horizontal level analysis.

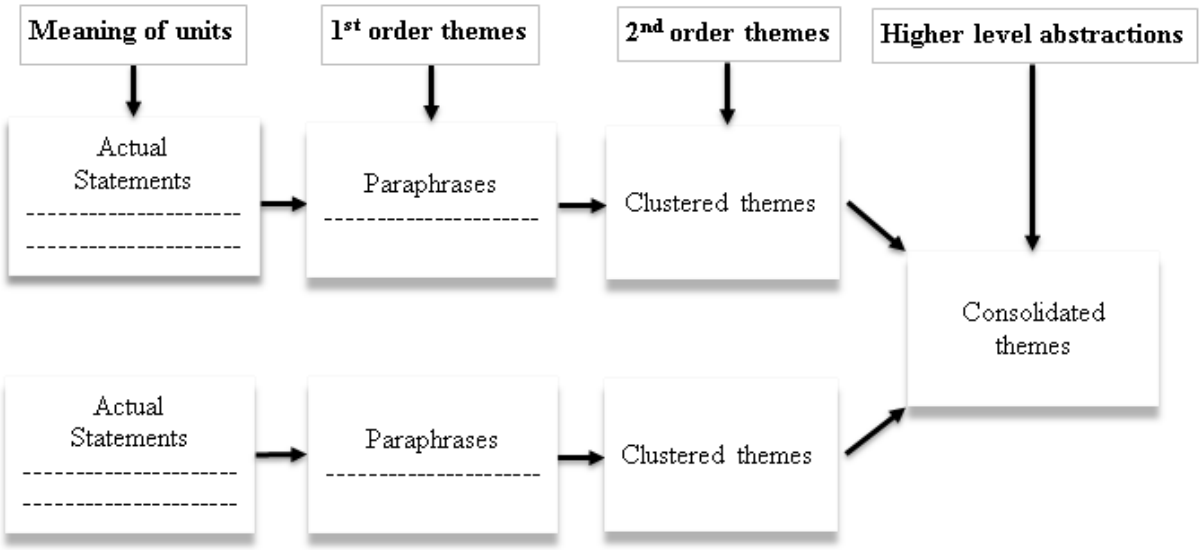
Van Zyl proposes that vertical level analysis entails reducing the volume of data by way of summarising and paraphrasing interview by interview. Furthermore, at this stage one also does preliminary selection of what to keep in and what to leave out. This is informed by what the study set out to achieve: the aim and the nature of the research question[5] since in the final product, the data functions as evidence. To some extent this implies bringing in some level of preliminary interpretation or thematic analysis.

Horizontal level analysis involves making comparisons - relating the data from the different interviews to each other usually by way of vertical analyses. Here the data that was identified from the vertical level for each transcript is compared with each other and this involves for instance, looking for recurring themes, categories, discourses that could then be understood as experiences, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs. Again this is guided by the research question, the topic and methods. In other words, here I consider phenomenology since the two analysis processes or tools should speak to each other.

[5] In this case "the research questions serve as navigational tools that can help a researcher map possible directions" (Gee, 2009, p. 432).

Second, for the main analytical strategy or tool, I employed Osborn's (1990) phenomenological data analysis procedure consisting practically in interactive levels of analysis from the specific to the general and from simple (actual statements) to complex (abstraction) as illustrated in figure 3.1 that follows.

Figure 3.1: An illustration of Osborne's phenomenological data analysis process frame



(Ideas adopted from Wiart, Dorrah, Hollis, Cook & May, 2004, p. 9)

As illustrated in Figure 3.1, Osborn's (1990) data analysis procedure has the following steps:

- The researcher transcribes the data then reads through all the transcriptions extracting or identifying units of meaning relevant to the research questions.
- Once the units of general meaning have been established, they are carefully scrutinised to eliminate the redundant units by checking the literal content for number of times it was mentioned and how it was stated thus, reducing to units relevant to the issue asked.
- The units of meaning are then paraphrased to facilitate the creation of first order themes.

- The first order themes are then clustered into few second order themes.
- Finally, the second order themes are then consolidated into fewer and more general higher level thematic abstractions that form a pattern or structure of the phenomenon.

The procedure culminates into the final thematic synthesis which then could be presented to each participant for validation (goodness of fit). Every aspect of the common experience should fit with every participant's experience (Osborne, 1990).

The thematic high level abstractions are used as a framework to guide the presentation of the results (Osborne, 1990). Finally, the researcher writes a composite summary which captures the participants' campus experiences as experienced by the participants (Lester, 1999). In the discussion part, a contemporary phenomenological approach allows the researcher to interpret and conceptualise the qualitative data and make reference to existing literature (Thomas et al., 2007).

3.10.3 Preliminary Data analysis: what I did

Data analysis commenced on day one of the interviews as soon as the scheduled interviews for the day were over. It was an iterative process. The assumption was that one would be in a position to possibly identify problems with the questioning or interview procedure as seen from the participants' responses. This assisted with the interview procedure itself. I could pick that at times I tended to follow the protocol per book; not allowing the participant to reflect on the question before responding. I corrected this by creating a dialogical conversation involving following and building on what the participant was saying. The other reason for an early preliminary analysis was excitement on the part of the researcher; to see what was being revealed: patterns and emerging issues.

For qualitative data collected through interviews, the analysis starts with the researcher transcribing the raw data. The use of a collated interview protocol complicated this stage. As much as the researcher wanted to do all the transcriptions for all the interviews, this was made impossible by the length of each recording. One transcription

took so much time that to continue could mean not finishing conducting the interviews in 2012. Moreover, I had to do preliminary analysis at the same time. I managed to do only eight. I decided to hire someone to assist with the transcribing process and risked losing some information through errors of omission and audibility. As a way to overcome this, I went through the transcripts at the same time listening to the recordings to check if it was transcribed verbatim; in their original version. There were errors here and there and the person who transcribed the interviews improved after I pointed out the errors. While tedious and challenging, this exercise allowed the researcher to become more acquainted with the data.

After transcribing the data, I embarked on preliminary data analysis (Creswell, 2012) starting with vertical level analysis to reduce the large volumes of data (Susan van Zyl (personal communication: Workshop notes 21 August, 2011). I read each transcript over and over again and used a highlighter marker to indicate what I picked as responses to the interview questions. These were the responses to my questions that happened to have been included in the responses to other questions as I explained earlier on in this chapter.

The next step was to read each transcription again, this time drawing a line in the margin parallel to what I thought was relevant in the text. At the same time I put a label to those segments– coding. I also highlighted certain words and some good quotations (Creswell, 2012) and jotted notes in the margins. The same labels remain uniform on all the transcriptions.

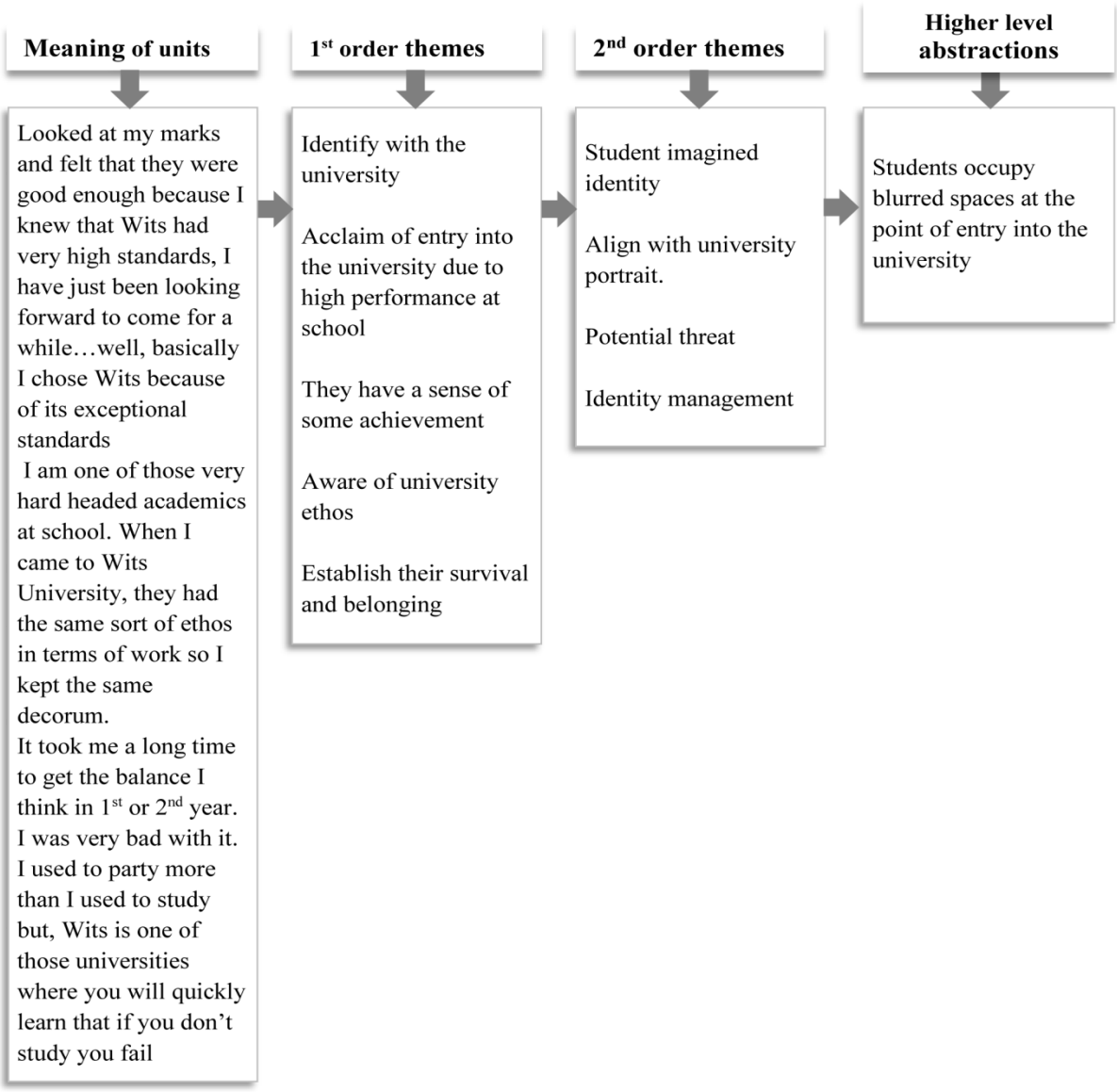
What then followed was the horizontal level analysis where I looked for patterns and recurring or unique issues across all the transcriptions. (Susan van Zyl, personal communication: Workshop notes 21 August, 2011). I used the notes and labels I assigned earlier. At this point, I discovered that I could categorise the data as follows; experiences at the point of entry into the university, where students go after lectures, what they do or decide not to do and with whom. Next was to cut and paste the highlighted statements or paragraphs and categories on separate labelled pages according to colour; green, yellow, blue, red. However, I made sure that I did not lose

the source of these statements by carrying over the initial label on the transcript. I also kept a duplicate transcript intact so that I could always easily go back to the original source for verification or clarification because by cutting and pasting I stood the danger of getting meaningless statements or interpreting an incomplete statement. At this point I then moved to the main data analysis process.

3.10.4 Main data analysis process: what I did

My main data analysis process was based on Osborn's (1990) levels of phenomenological data analysis. I interrogated the pages that had the cut and pasted texts; reading them over and over to categorise and code them further. This exercise involved reading and extracting meaning units. These were excerpts that were a representation of what the participants said about their experiences on campus. Figure 3.2 below is a visual illustration of the process.

Figure 3. 2. An exemplar of data analysis process



The meaning units were summarised to assist in the formation of first order themes. The first order themes were identified from the summaries. These were then clustered into second order themes. The second order themes were finally merged into high level thematic abstractions. The higher order thematic abstractions became the final interpretive themes of the emerging issues. These were the imagined identities that are in blurred spaces, the contested spaces depicted in students' experience of spaces they occupied and the power of relationships illustrated by formation of friendships,

community of peers, student organisations where we find the students occupying mute and relational spaces.

3.11 The reporting of the emerging issues

With a list of key emerging issues from the analysis, the next challenge is to present them in a way that sends a coherent message to the reader. Going through the key issues, I selected the themes that were interrelated as expected of phenomenology (Thomas et al., 2007, p. 6).

The primary structure of presenting and reporting the emerging issues in qualitative research is a narrative discussion. This summary of issues comprises themes and dialogue that support the themes. The narrative presented in this study has in some cases the themes based on the words of the participants (see forthcoming data chapters 5, 6 and 7). I also included direct quotes to cater for and provide the voice of participants (Creswell, 2012, p. 250) as evidence of representation of their thoughts and feelings (Burnard, 1991). Another strategy that I adopted was inserting participants' words in between my own narration to emphasize the ideas or issues (Creswell, 2012).

In reporting the merging issues, efforts were made to interconnect the themes. In the data chapters I decided to connect the themes to display chronological or sequencing of events (Creswell, 2012). Chapter 5 addresses students' experiences at the point of entry into the university. Then chapter 6 is about the spaces they occupy as they negotiate the campus environment and chapter 7 continues with the spaces but concentrating on the building and use of relationships – the relational aspect. Chapter 4 which follows articulates the context in which the study was carried out.

3.12 Chapter conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed description of how the different stages of the research process were done in an effort to understanding undergraduate campus experiences. The research process shows epistemological break with previous studies that focused on quantitative results to understand issues of access and retention in HE neglecting the

student experience phenomenon. The chapter also presents the qualitative methodology adopted in this study. It gives a breakdown of the overall research process including the research design, data collection methods, tools used in collecting the data, and data analysis procedures that I adopted. The research process envisaged in the research proposal did not fit like a template when it came to the actual research process. The research process was not always predictable and bound by the methods encapsulated in the research proposal. My fieldwork experiences attest that a research proposal is not a blue print. On the research's truthfulness, I concur with Gee (2009) that the researcher's credibility rests on the particulars and specifics of a place and the people who inhabit that place at a given moment. That is , the research's worth is characterized by the extent to which the researcher is able to clarify what goes or went on in the places being investigated to reduce puzzle of 'what men are these? The next chapter addresses these concerns.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL LIFE ON CAMPUS

"To understand the present, we need to reflect on the past... the legacies that have informed current ...life. You can see what is new and what has been around for some time," (Dawson, 2010).

4.1 Introduction

Campus life is never static. It changes as the student cohort changes, bringing about different cultures and different ways of doing things thereby creating a different campus with varying experiences, effects and outcomes. For the reader to understand issues around campus experiences of undergraduate students one must first take into account the context. The contention of this study is that we cannot understand the nature of campus life without taking into account the complex nature of places and, because it is part of a wider society, the campus environment is changing all the time. There are forces within and without that influence students' campus life and in the process shape their perceptions, awareness, beliefs and experiences of the campus. Prior to 1994 one could not isolate Wits from the rest of the wider South Africa and to a limited[6] extent the global society.

Within a wider environment and by default, within the Wits campus environment the race issue is dominant. Without ignoring, of course, ethnicity, gender and other issues, but the issue of race dominated. Consequently, one could not discuss any dimension of campus social life without dealing with the issue of race because it shaped not just the entrance nor the patterns of enrolment but it also shaped the choices students make on campus either for entertainment, or for studies, or for linking with other students or whiling away time with other students (Murray, 1990). Race was a dominant feature that accounted for the segregated nature of the campus environment and the effects

[6] There was limited involvement at the time because South Africa was isolated from the rest of the world due to its political unrest- apartheid.

there of. The discussions in this chapter zero around this issue and its subsequent spiral effects that produce patterns that influence students' social life on campus.

In the South African context, the history, specifically the South African legacy, is paramount and has a significant impact on the changes happening and envisaged on university campuses. For one to ignore that legacy and assume a natural, normalcy and equilibrium state when addressing campus issues would be a fallacy. Wolpe (1995) says that the content of the South African debate about the future of HE is shaped by concrete historical conditions which are, in important respects different from those that characterize other Africa countries. The separate/duality HE in the apartheid era accounts for the fact that the issues facing South Africa HE simultaneously converge and deviate from those facing other African universities. In the South African context, race is one of the primary factors to be considered when exploring campus experiences.

I am obliged in this chapter to explore the changing nature of the Wits campus pre 1994 to post 1994 in order to shed light on the context in which this research on campus experiences of undergraduate students is anchored and informed. I am not spared in the experience that in piecing together an image of the present, one is constantly shoved to the past; a narrative of apartheid whose events long past make their presence felt in the present with compelling strength (Sheehan, 2008) but since proven weak on today's campuses.

Pre-1994 students who came to campus were mainly middle-class, white English home-language speaking (Agar, 1990). The cohorts of students were more so white in values and ethos and brought to campus life their 'white' framework. The 'white' character of Wits which the then Chairperson of the university council of 1952, P.M. Anderson feared that may one day be endangered if a quota system was not installed; a fear triggered by a thirty percent increase in the enrollment of first year black students from 70 to 101(Murray, 1990). The white institution resolved to some sort of liberal directions refuting the apartheid regime's call for maintaining the whiteness status quo by enrolling black students from middle class backgrounds (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2008). Thus, the historically predominantly white campus became tinted.

Well after 1994, there was an influx of black students from working class and rural backgrounds into the university (CHE, 2010) creating a much more diverse cohort. Better still, the tranquil South African environment enabled students from other African countries and even overseas to secure places in the university and as a result, campus life took on a rainbow framework which is very complex and fragmented. This is the campus this study is about.

The aim of this chapter is to give a chronology of campus life at Wits in order to illuminate varying layers of students within different frameworks. I argue that different layers of students have different forms of mediation and identities and ways of doing things. The questions are: a) who were/are the students on campus? b) What did/do they do outside the classroom? c) What informs their social life?

I devise this chapter into two main sections giving a chronicle of the Wits campus pre and post 1994. After section 4.1 which is the introduction, section 4.2 opens the discussion on the framework of campus life prior 1994 which was predominantly white. Then in section 4.3 I attend to the tinted framework of campus life post 1994, the layers of new students in terms of South African legacies. Here the frame is a rainbow within a global village as I also explain the increased wave of international students on campus. I resort to the voice of the narrator for the unfamiliar historic terrain, and then turn to the participants' voices to capture the current scenario on campus.

4.2 Framework of campus life prior 1994

Before 1994 dispensation, one is keen to know who the students at Wits were and what they did on campus. Existing literature suggests that Wits has come a long way in terms of students' life on campus. Here I am compelled to ask: What do we make of the following frequently used descriptors about Wits: *'The Historically Advantaged University (HAU)* (Wolpe, 1995*)', 'Oxford in Africa', 'Historically White University (HWU)', 'Moscow on the hill', 'Traditionally White University'* and *'Historically Advantaged White-medium University'* amid it being *"The open university"* (Murray, 1990)? Such labels speak volumes of the nature of students at this institution prior to

1994 in terms of their political, socio-economic status, colour and language and even their life on campus which is the landscape being explored in the current study. This appears to represent the pride of the institution, which has today become part of the legacy as Wits seems to still carry glory despite the discriminatory past.

4.2.1 "Race-based segmentations were historically evident", (Lewins, 2010, p.175)

My decision to look at the context of social life on campus from the racial and ethnic point is not accidental. It is argued that in the so called 'white universities', "race-based segmentations were historically evident" (Lewins, 2010, p.175). South Africa pre-1994 was mainly the apartheid era where HE among other systems was based on policy and legal frameworks that distinguished and separated the various components and participants within the system according to race and ethnic group on one side and institutional type on the other side (CHE, 2004; Scourfield, 1992). The apartheid-designated race/ethnic groupings were African, White, Coloured and Indian; labels which remain distinct in post-apartheid South Africa (DOE). In the discourse of South African Higher Education, the term 'African' refers to native or indigenous South Africans (Toni and Olivier, 2004). It also refers to blacks who speak an African (Bantu or Khoisan) language as their first language. However, today at Wits, 'black' refers to all Indians, Coloureds and Africans registered students (Agar, 1990). The term also refers to all South Africans not categorized under the apartheid system as whites (Scourfield, 1992). This grouping gave rise to three types of universities separated on the same racial/ethnic lines; Afrikaans for white Afrikaans-speaking, English for the white English-speaking and 'Bush Colleges' for Indians and Coloureds, and all except African universities, being self-governing institutions (Sheehan, 2009).

OECD (2008) points out that the set-up of institutions along racial and ethnic compositions of the student population had serious implications on access, governance and funding. Most important and of relevance to the issues being addressed here is the scenario that students of one racial group were barred from enrolling in Higher Education Institution (HEI) of another 'race' unless special permission was sought from and, granted by the then apartheid ruling government.

4.2.2 Wits' liberal traditions

> *...for the University of Witwatersrand (Wits), opposing apartheid and other forms of discrimination has been a proud part of our 90 year heritage (Rothberg, 2012, p.20).*

Liberal universities viewed themselves as intellectual, open universities and are characterised by "universal values of academic freedom," implying that they could teach what they deem necessary and could admit all who had the relevant credentials for their programme (Bunting, 2002). Wits was founded as an open university with a policy of non- discrimination on racial or other grounds (Wits turns 85 today, 2007). As one of the traditionally white 'open' universities, it opposed and defied apartheid government policies (Extension of University Education Act of 1953 and the University Amendment Act number 83 of 1983) and efforts in perpetuating racial segregation in universities. It went on to admit "an increasing number of non-whites or black students into [its] student body" (Agar, p. 435, 1990; Lewins, 2010) creating a diverse student population with different needs and perceptions on and about campus. However, such efforts and contestations by the university meet with scepticism and controversy as some literature suggest that such a move was not as bold and radical as it appears. As Murray (1990, p. 674) asserts, "in practice the University was never fully 'open', and the spread of black students on campus was always thin". The proportion of black students never went beyond sixty percent as a result of the University's general policy of social discrimination. In concurrence, Wolpe (1995) contends that Wits was not like Afrikaans language universities which were instrumental in 'apartheid projects'. It made timid efforts to disassociate itself from the projects and offered some 'liberal resistance' to apartheid (Sheehan, 2009). To augment, Lewins (2012, p. 175) affirms that when Wits contested apartheid, it was convincingly "not it's mainstreaming position and both gender–based and race-based segmentation were historically evident".

Since race was dominant then, certain dimensions of the Wits campus were segregated. For instance, the black students had to go and stay at Lean Thomas residence in Soweto Township while the white students were the ones occupying accommodation on university campus in town in the Braamfontein area, though this arrangement changed

at some point. On the contrary, Rothburg (2012, p. 20) is of the view that during the quota system on the number of black students who could be enrolled in the university, "Wits did whatever it took" to show opposition to the apartheid system. I make no comments on these debates, but within these divergent views it is apparent that there were some noticeable racial and cohort changes at Wits campus in the apartheid era; a diverse group that warrants some definitions of the term 'diversity' as explored by Cross (2004) in his review of diversity scholar and diversity education.

In the 1980s, the ruling party's opposition to the admission of black students to 'white' universities weakened and the proportion of black students on campus increased (Scourfield, 1992). After 1984, the Historically White Universities "attempted to bring larger number of black students on their campuses". Some deliberately housed black students in formal student housing yet it was illegal in the 1980s to have black and white students to share same residential space (Bunting, 2002). By then university residences were just places where students sleep. The increase in numbers was not very significant considering the number of black students in proportion to the white student population. Existing literature points out that until 1998, the majority of university students were whites (see Sikwebu, 2008). The table below shows the increases in black enrolments in the 1980s and 1990s.

Table 4.1: Proportion of black students at Wits 1980 and 1990

Year	Number of Blacks	Percentage of total student enrolment	Number of Africans	Percentage of total student enrolment
1980	1 055	8.04	243	1.85
1990	4 582	23.69	2 599	13.44

(Source: Scourfield, 1992, p. 45)

The percentages in Table 4.1 above give a clear picture of the insignificance of the increases when compared to the total enrolment and the proportion of the white population against that of the blacks. Nevertheless, while the demography of student population was changing drastically, due to the increase of the Black students, Scourfield (1992) reported that the actual number of white students declined for example, 380 white students across the university dropped out in 1990.

The next question one may ask is: what is the out- of- class campus activities of such an altered group of students within an apartheid environment? That is: What were the students doing on campus outside the classroom? Out of campus student activities pre 1994 have not been documented much in the existing literature. Borrowing a strategy adopted by Sheehan, (2009) of grabbing anything that might be a piece of the puzzle, I found some narratives from researches that address other students concerns to be an asset for this chapter.

Other things being equal, in a university environment, students' campus activities outside the classroom are business as usual. However, in environments and contexts where forms of negative discrimination are prevalent especially as a result of political contestations, students' out-of-class activities tend to be restrictive and skewed in response to the existing social order either in support of or resistance to the status quo. As race was so dominant an issue (Sikwebu, 2008), because race was shaping people's lives and students' life on campus, student life was dominated by one dimension which seems to be listened to today: politics. Yet no matter how genuine the political activities may appear, they were subject to surveillance and scrutiny by the people in power.

A flashback to the apartheid era with its conceptions of race and politics of race and legal constraints to perpetuate race discrimination, reveals students taking part in sports, religion, political movements and protest or activism[7]on campus (Sikwebu, 2008). A further look into these activities, reveal that students were affiliated to organisations along racial lines. It is reported that before 1993, student organisations at Wits reflected the main split in South African society with black and white students belonging to separate student groupings for example, Black Student Society and the Student Representative Council (SRC). It was only after 1993 that the black student groups agreed to participate in the SRC (Sikwebu, 2008). While the black student organisations took different ideological thinking, they all emphasised blackness and discarded ethnic identities and converged and mobilised for one purpose; to fight oppression and all forms of discrimination. Sekwebu (2008, p.110) points out that "in the five decades of

[7]While it is not the issue here to discuss the difference between the two terms, but, what is worth noting is the call by Sikwebu (2008, p. 111) for a move away from equating student activism with protest –student activism is broader than overt political involvement in movements organizations along ideological lines and includes political organizations and a range of voluntary anti-established groups.

student organisations that precede democratisation in South Africa, there is no evidence of ethnic-based student movements". In the same vein, literature on the ethnically distinct universities shows that in the 1980s national and continental identities surpassed ethnic allegiance and identification (see Sikwebu (2008). It is reported that before 1994 student organisations were aligned to political and national liberation movements. For instance, there was the Azania Student Organisation that was very influential in 1979 (see Sikwebu, 2008). What this seemingly implies is that since race was framing the students' life on campus, the university environment was appropriate for contestation of race. So the dominant feature of student campus life was politics. The students were extremely active in politics; a dimension that cannot be ignored.

Protests and campaigns on the university campus took centre stage during the apartheid era due to insurmountable student discontent with a number of issues triggered within and from outside the university. The politically-oriented student organisations took part in military campaigns against campus segregation, appalling conditions of the university residences and political and financial exclusions (Sikwebu, 2008). According to Dugmore (n.d), at one point in the mid-fifties there was a high degree of disunity on campus. The students clashed with the university administration regularly and the university was under direct political attack; the SRC and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) jointly (whites and blacks sharing the principle of non-racialism) propagated a more activist role among the students which led to protest and demonstrations against university policies and the country according power to the Nationalists. Wits turns 85 today (2007, p.3), neatly puts it by saying "On 16 April 1959 thousands of students stood in silence mourning the passing on of academic freedom".

When it came to social activities like sport, not every student could access them. Dugmore (n.d) quoted Murray saying that "The University's policy towards black students was one of non-academic segregation and social segregation". He points out those black students were excluded from organised sport and formal functions such as dances. There were also other dimensions of social life on campus that were informally segregated in that it was hard for some students to access certain things not because there was a ruling, but just that the environment was not friendly. For example, you would not go to Wits Bidvest club. That is where most of the staff and white students

used to go. This scenario further extended to segregated seating in the Great Hall; a move which badly divided the students (Dugmore, n.d). This seems to point to limited social activities for this group of students and reflected the hierarchy of the social environment on campus of the day. Thus, race shaped many dimensions of social life on campus. What followed were series of protests and demonstrations to a point where campus politics turned to activism as black students countrywide broke away from NUSAS to form South African Student Organisation (SASO), an organisation that queried the role and relevance of white liberals and radicals in the fight against apartheid (Sheehan, 2009; Dugmore, n.d).

What all this seem to be pointing to is that student activities out of the classroom were restrictive and politically skewed. It will be intriguing to establish the new players and the 'games' they engage in as I now listen to participants' voices and capture the nature of social life on campus at the dawn of and after 1994 which marked the demise of apartheid. It is interesting to find out who occupies this frame and what activities they engage in.

4.3 Frame of campus life post 1994: a wave of change for a changed make-up

> *Let apartheid go.... I know that the struggle happened, but it is 18 years down the line now - it is time to move on (Lepota, 2012)*

The racial historic narrative above is just an illustration of some historic moments to understand the past; the roots. This is necessary as a means of seeing how campuses have changed. Though in some circles, the old generation traditions run deep, the frame of campus life post 1994 seems to be making an important announcement that, "Let apartheid go... I know that the struggle happened, but it is 18 years down the line now - it is time to move on," (Lepota, 2012). The voice of this 18 year old 'born free' is in chorus and liaison with most of the voices in this research study. I am bound to concur that "In a South African story then, detail should not be erased; neither, however, should be permitted to overwhelm the possibility of reconstitution, or forsake the desire for trajectory" (Chapman 1989 cited in Sheehan, 2009).

With the lifting of the ban of organisations such as the ANC in 1990, grounds were being cleared for the birth of a new and more democratic society (Scourfield, 1992) where some new things were to emerge while existing ones, took a new twist. The demise of apartheid in South Africa seemed to mark a new era in social institutions like universities which have become newer vehicles for social and political change meant to redress past inequalities perpetuated by the apartheid racial divide and segregation (OECD, 2008). These are part of the social purposes outlined in the Education White Paper 3. Rothberg (2012) posits that post 1994, Wits made great strides in developing a demographic profile that matches the national profile as much as possible. However, the university finds itself grappling with problems posed by an increasing number of educationally disadvantaged black students (Scourfield, 1992). Since the university is part of wider society, the campus environment is changing all the time. Campus life is a moving target.

4.3.1 Shifts in demographic profile of student population

Post 1994, a stroll across any of the historically white universities clearly revealed the scale of a dramatic demographic shift that had taken place in the composition of the student body (Sheehan, 2009). By 2007 the Wits student population had significantly changed. According to Sikwebu (2008), of the 16 393 students enrolled for undergraduate studies, 65% were blacks and 8 827 were Coloured, Indian and white. According to the Strategic Planning Division (2012, p.10), "the demographics of the student population have significantly changed in the past ten years and Wits now represents an example of a truly transformed University - of 29441 enrolments in 2009, 53% were female and 72% were black students". According to Rothberg (2012), currently a third of the student body at Wits are white students. While this is not a perfect match with the national profile of one fifth, it is something to reckon with, some progress. The table below shows enrolment by race at Wits between 2005 and 2010.

Table 4.2: Enrolment Trend by Race (2005-2010)

Race	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
African	10 856	11 236	11 869	12 335	14 711	15 043
Other	1	2	4	4	6	33
Coloured	637	694	771	802	917	993
Indian	3 906	3 978	3 901	3 887	4 072	4 104
White	8 352	8 320	8 483	8 230	8 063	7 761
Total	**23 752**	**24 230**	**25 028**	**25 263**	**27 769**	**27 934**

(Source: Wits Strategic Planning Division, 2010, p. 3)

Table 4.2 above shows that there is an increase in the enrolment of students from all racial groups except whites from 2005 to 2010. Well, talking about the changing phenomenon, this is the new Wits emerging. There is a great increase in the enrolment of African students and this is attributed to high influx of students coming from rural and township schools because recruitment of black students was previously from elite schools only. For the other races the increase could be attributed to the call by the government to have a fair representation of all races at the universities to redress the imbalances brought about by the apartheid rule; and the opening of doors of higher knowledge to those who had previously been excluded (Sheehan, 2009). The decline in enrolment of white students during the same period is for obvious reasons; they moved to private and overseas universities because they could afford to do so. Again it reflects the change of social life on campus.

4.3.2 A rainbow within a global village

Another seemingly significant development in the composition of the Wits student population is the steady increase in the number of international students admitted to /registered at Wits. Commemorating Wits' 85 years of existence in 2007, the former Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the Witwatersrand, Professor Loyiso Nongxa, remarked that what he particularly likes about Wits is the diversity of the community (Wits turns 85 today, 2007). In 2001 there were 1 652 international students on study permit. Of these, 636 were from SADC , 353 were from the rest of the Africa and 663 from the rest of the world, and by 2007, students from outside South Africa had increased to 2 000 (Van Zyl, Steyn & Orr, 2003). But, these demographic changes

on campus bring up issues of adaptation of students to the new environment. The varied students from varied schools, backgrounds and life experiences with different expectations of their roles in the academic sphere make the campus experience a complex issue.

The table below shows the number of students from other continents enrolled at Wits between 2005 and 2010. It shows that from 2005 to 2007 there is a steady increase of students from other continents who enrolled at Wits and also that the majority of the students are from Africa. What I see coming up is a picture of a rainbow within a global village; many colours of students from within and outside South Africa. This increase in international students increases diversity adding to more campus complexity.

Table 4.3: Enrolment Trend by Continent (2005-2010)

Continent	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Africa	23 240	23 687	24 328	24 652	27 319	27 527
Asia	170	175	192	186	158	154
Australia & Oceania	12	9	10	11	11	10
Europe	190	200	296	248	172	149
North America	107	136	176	150	100	82
South America	27	23	26	16	9	12
Total	**23 752**	**24 230**	**25 028**	**25 263**	**27 769**	**27 934**

(Source: Wits Strategic Planning Division, 2010, p. 4)

4.3.3 Increased wave of international students

For a university to compete in the world university rankings, the issue of registered international students is, among others, critical. In 2012, amongst an estimated 23,500 universities world-wide, Wits was position 363 on the QS World University Rankings 2012/2013 . Wits' goal is to be in the top 100 internationally. Rothberg (2012, p. 21) asserts that high quality research should be encouraged and so should the attraction of more international students and staff. Such a move introduces a different kind of diversity onto the campus tapping from "the richness of the cultures in the world, the diversity in values, and languages..." According to Wawrzynski et al. (2012, p. 119), international students may come to the institution from home countries without the

complex racial history of South Africa". This seems to inculcate a culture of broad-mindedness on campus. As these participants articulate:

> …Since Wits it's [sic] an international institution, I've had the privilege to meet different kinds of people from different kinds of cultures, learning their lifestyle and improving mine. Accordingly it was necessary and like learning from their lifestyle [11E3].

> …Whatever I do is like I'm representing this community because like WITS is my family right now …Firstly, I'm from a township. I'm used to seeing with black people only, but here you have Indians, Coloureds; it's multiracial. You get people… international friends. It's so great because you get to know other people you get to learn other people's cultures, other people's ways of doing things. So it's not only about you. It's like the diversity of South Africa; this is where you get to see it in action. [12H1]

> …I had to let go of my hatred for white people…why…it was obviously affecting me. I couldn't obviously engage with them. I couldn't…it was difficult for me to take anything from them… But basically opinions from my peers and colleagues did not really count if they were white because I would say "…well, you have your Sandton view of life what do you know". And then.. I had to obviously for me to grow as a student, as an individual, as an intellectual I had to let go of that. And … that has obviously helped me in seeing life from a different spectrum and different walks of life. [32SC3]

Rothberg (2012, p. 12) contends that all national and international issues are recognized and voiced at Wits and such debates normally occur in an environment which accepts diversity and tolerance. It is a known fact that "diversity goes beyond black and white… we want to make sure that all races, cultures and nations are accepted and welcome on campus". In his address of the 2012 first year cohort during orientation, the former Vice –Chancellor and Principal Professor Loyiso Nongxa said, "Wits is a home to a diverse community where we strive to celebrate our cultures and embrace our differences". All these narratives suggest who the students on campus are.

4.3.4 Student campus social activities: new twists and turns

> *…the nature of the college environment for students in post-apartheid South Africa is ever evolving… (*Wawrzynski et al., 2012, p.110)

Student social activities on campus change with the times; campuses are moving objects**.** But is race the only thing affecting the campus? When life changes on campus the main change we see is the dominance of race gives way to dominance of class and affinity groups. Life on campus has changed. While previously race was dominant, what we see today is that issues are shaped along class, even affinity groups. When looking at Wits one cannot understand the campus without taking into account these classifications. This does not mean the demise of race issues; they prevail but in rather subtle ways for instance when a participant says: "when I walked in the white students sitting in front grabbed their phones as if I was going to steal them or something"[8].

The popular politically motivated protest that flourished pre 1994 is a thing of the past. This does not mean there are no more protests on campus but that the protests have taken a new make-up; from protests and *toyi-toyi-eing* against apartheid, financial exclusion(Sheehan, 2009), poor accommodation and the construction of the Matrix (Cross and Johnson 2008) to protests for social causes. Students used to lobby for changes of the menu in the canteen (Rothberg, 2012) and now they fight against sexual apartheid (Wits Pride, 2012). The formally unpopular Matrix student centre is now the popular chill place for students (Wits turns 85 today, 2007). According to literature, towards the end of 2009 Wits students protested against a proposed fees hike followed by class boycotts. All classes came to a halt as students cancelled their lectures in solidarity (Lewins, 2010).

Currently, the students and the university staff jointly march against issues like violence, homophobia and injustices gripping the society. For instance, in 2012, Wits community mobilised to protest the news that the Dalai Lama has been denied a visa for a visit to South Africa and worse an address at Wits. On the 23 August 2012, there was

[8] 32SC3

a march against violence following the Marikana[9] massacre. In his email to invite staff to join the march, the Acting Vice-Chancellor and Principal of Wits wrote; "This on-going violence is part of our national and collective shame and we should take this time to seriously reflect on the state of our society, and to disturb the conscience of our community". Another example is the 1st of October, 2012, which marked the Wits Pride anti-homophobia campaign week portraying the theme "Stop Sexual Apartheid" in various vibrant and creative ways. The aim was to educate people about the injustices of past discrimination and what the Wits community discriminate against, emulating such oppression (Wits Pride, 2012). This seems to point out that in these joint activities, students engage in social justice issues where they examine and reflect on the reasons, causes and consequences behind societal injustices.

Sikwebu (2008) posits that post-apartheid marked a decline in student activism and that the decline of traditional political student organisations gave room to new activities and forms of organisations. In 2007, Sikwebu (2008) identified 91 student organisations and clubs at Wits. The categories were as follows:

- Representative student bodies
- Political organisations
- Religious groups
- Sport bodies
- Hobby bodies
- Cancer oriented societies
- Solidarity movements and,
- Interest –based groups including the cultural societies (these were central to his study).

The objectives of most cultural groups were:

- promoting culture among members through activities like cultural dances on Heritage day and organising seminars to discuss cultural practices.

[9] This is an incident where 44 miners lost their lives at Marikana on the 16th of August 2012 following a violent encounter and aggressive fight with the police during the miners' protests against poor salaries.

- creating home away from home say through speaking home languages.

Very few student organisations prepared tutorial sessions for their members (Sikwebu, 2008). What this seem to suggest is that during this time, 2007, students organised themselves for identity purposes thorough upholding their cultural values. Sikwebu (2008) points out that student organisations are organised around new identities as most of these organisations are culturally and religiously inclined. What comes out here is that students' activities on campus have taken a new direction in line with the nature of the organisations to which they belong. The ethnically-based students' organisations whose creation was discouraged pre 1994 (Sikwebu, 2008) have been re-created in post 1994. This is not surprising given the demise of legal apartheid and the emergence of a new democratic government with its policies of human rights and freedom of expression. Sikwebu (2008, p. 110) further argues "…the emergence of ethnically based students' organisations at South African universities is part of a broader search for post-apartheid collective identities". However, this seems to contradict the call for a nation that embraces a diverse national culture.

In 2012, the Student Affairs Division (2012) states that there are 70 SRC Clubs and societies at Wits. These are in the following groupings:

- Academic Societies
- Business Societies
- Cultural organisations
- International societies
- Political organisations
- Social responsibility clubs/unions/movements/committees
    - Social clubs/societies
    - Religious organisations

This categorisation differs slightly from that by Sikwebu (2008). These are the student organisations open for the current cohort of students which include the participants in this study. There is an increase in academic societies. Political organisations were giving way to social, religious and academic organisations. Academic organisations are

organised around the fields of study or disciplines. Whether the students participate in these organisations and for what purpose will be discussed in the coming chapters.

4.4 Conclusion

The discussion presented in this chapter gives the institutional context of social life on campus, a context that is unique and dynamic owing to the changing nature of the wider global environment. What comes out is that previously the dominant feature of the wider university environment was race. As such, one important issue to flag here was the segregated nature of the campus environment. This shaped the choices students made on various aspects of their life on campus. As the campus is part of a wider environment, it is prone to change; race gave way to politics as students decided to fight the injustices brought about by race. That is, while institutionally mandated racial and ethnic segregation was aimed at containing political volatility, it actually turned into political issues where intellectual and social life was dominated by student politics – a dimension being currently lost.

Another important contextual issue worth highlighting is that while there was segregation in university residences, they were restricted to the lodge function, with very little learning and intercultural interaction among students. While post 1994 politics and race gave way to academic and affinity groups as the campus continued to change due to an increase in the diversity of the student body; there emerged a new Wits with its own new campus complexities. Chapter 5 discusses students campus experiences at the point of entry into the university while 6 identifies the spaces students occupy outside the classroom and the effects therein then 7 considers the power of relationships as students relate with others in the various spaces. Talking about the moving phenomenon, I would not hesitate to borrow from Wawrzynski et al. (2012, p. 106) who astutely said, "...the instability and ongoing change characterising South African colleges and universities post-apartheid suggests that how students engage in and benefit from college experience may vary greatly from students enrolled prior to apartheid in the more structured high education systems" elsewhere. What are the students' perceptions of their campus experiences during their early days at the

university? The next chapter addresses this question. The following quotations prepare the ground for chapter 5:

> ...You know, from talks, you hear people talking rumours; 'Wits is the best, Wits is the best'. Wits has been given this thing of being the best you know among, in the communities you know [9E1].

> ...Wits actually stops your social life at first year because I've seen second years who are coping and third years who are coping, but as a first year, since its that's gap from high school to varsity, so you don't have a… a social life you basically don't have a social life [12SC1].

CHAPTER FIVE
'WITS GIVES YOU THE EDGE': WHAT'S IN THE NAME?

> *After registering, the minute they gave me my student card, like oh my god, looking at it…basically holding a student card I was like, oh my, it was like I'm really here. I'm here at Wits. Wow! That was the best experience actually [13H1]*

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to illuminate the students' perceptions and experiences at the point of entry into the institution which influence how they position themselves on campus and what spaces they are likely to occupy or avoid. The question I tackle here is: How did the students come to be in this institution and what influence their positions in it? Or putting it differently: what are the students' initial experiences and perceptions about the university and how do these inform their decisions about their progression in their studies and social life on campus? I argue that the perceptions and images that students have about themselves and the institution at their point of entry inform the preliminary choices or map of the campus spaces they are likely to occupy or avoid. The images which students construct about Wits are not neutral ideas but resources through which students act upon themselves and upon others as they constitute themselves into 'Witsies' or negotiate their new identities. Drawing from data, I unpack the images that the students create and use and the complexities of such creations. In order to provide space for the student voice which in chapter three I considered very valuable, I include some direct quotations from the interviews with the students.

I begin in section 5.2, with the conceptual framework for the chapter. Then in section 5.3 I look closely at how at their point of entry students use images and perceptions to construct Wits. In section 5.4 I examine the students' imagined identity; becoming a *'Witsie'*. In section 5.5 I consider the images that the students hold in relation to 'real' institutional life. In the final section of this chapter, 5.6, I consider the issue of campus membership; gaining access: coming to grips with campus membership. Here I am

considering views from literature in a way that prepares THE ground for discussion in the chapter that follows.

5.2 Conceptual framework

To discuss the emerging issues, this chapter draws on two pillars from the main theoretical framework[10]. One is the work Dutton et al. (1994, p. 239) about member identification and the other is Rodriguez's (2002) concept of blurred images.

Dutton et al. (1994) assume that when a person identifies strongly with the organisation, the attributes s/he assigns to define the organisation also defines him/her. They further point out that when a person's self-conception contains the same attributes as those in the perceived organisation identity, they define that cognitive connection, or link, as organisational identity. This refers to the extent to which a member defines himself or herself by the same qualities that he/she believes define the organisation. Dutton et al. (1994) argue that the images are perceived differently by each member to the extent that each member's own understanding of the organisation's external image may or may not match the reputation of the organisation in the minds of outsiders. For this study, the organisation is the university and its members are the students. I use this framework to theorise images which students have about the university which are represented by 'noise[11] which the students hear and what they do as a result of that 'noise'. As students grapple with ways of negotiating their way on campus they come with and even pick up 'noise' from home, the university itself, relatives, graduates and other people. The 'noise' leads them to behave and act in certain ways. This also includes the images students have about the selves that define them as students.

To augment this conceptual framework Rodriguez's (2002) concept of blurred images and spaces is helpful. From his study on photographing and spatial definition, Rodriguez's (2002, p. 9) proposed that "the edge of a space should not be determined by a physical line, but by the perception of change in the environment, a change one

[10] This is drawn from the main conceptual framework outlined before (see Theory chapter 2)
[11] I used the term 'noise' to refer to the different conversations about the university involving people outside and inside the university campus.

experiences through sight". He exemplified with a person suffering from astigmatism, who, without glasses, sees the world as a series of blurs of mass and colour. The reality depicted before him/her is different. He argued that the eye is producing a blurred image because it is downplaying the impreciseness of the physical limit. So when the eye produces some distortion, the problem is remediated by the corrective lenses (p. 10). Rodriguez (2002, p. 7) asserts that the blurred space is not characterised by confusion, but an array of interactions between its components: "its visual space becomes the spatial generator of our image based culture… a fluctuating zone" where one part is clear and the other part is hazy.

Rodriguez (2002) posits that a photograph allows us to study a fragment of reality ripped instantly from the fabric of time. He asserts that by allowing the camera to display our vision, we can produce a representation of the space that is adequately removed from our reality and also to make evident some reality that may have been missed. A blur emerges as a new identifiable presence within the space depicted by the photograph. It is something used to characterise something as imprecise, undefined or elusive he argues. Thus, in this chapter, the concept of blurred images and spaces becomes a lens to interrogate students' perceptions about the campus environment at their point of entry into the university.

5.3 The construction of Wits: images and perceptions

The way students portray the institution influences their perceptions about life on campus. As soon as students get into university, they bring with them a multitude of views drawn from various sources such as interpersonal connections and media – outsiders' thinking about the institution (Dutton et al., 1994). In doing so, they paint a portrait of the university and place themselves within that picture, what Dutton et al. (1994) refer to as matching with organisational attributes and in the process measuring their fit to establish their survival and belonging to it.

The issue of branding was explored by Chapleo (2011) cited in Wilkins and Huisman, 2011, p.69). Chapleo contends that strong branding can boost an institution's reputation and reputation plays an important role in determining positions in some of the most

globally well-known media rankings. Branding implies the building of a lasting image about a product or service which consumers or customers will feel eternally proud to be associated with (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009, p. 133).

Many expressions and images about the university's status are common among the participants. They include "Wits is the best"[12], "it's internationally recognised", "one of its own kind...it's unique", "Wits has high standards"[13], "...it is a renowned university"[14], "it is one of the best universities in South Africa"[15], "it is well known"[16], and so forth. Expressions like, "Mandela came here"[17], suggest what students want to be identified with the alumni. Some of the views come from the students' interpersonal connections or relations, "I applied to Wits only because it's what my parents thought was a good university" [02H3]. The following quotations also capture influences of other people:

> ...Through word of mouth I have heard a lot about Wits. I have heard of its high standards, I have heard about its graduates, how successful its graduates are; its alumni and all that. I also want to be part of Wits… [20E1].

> You hear people talking rumours, Wits is the best... Wits have been given this 'thing' of being the best in the communities so via that I was able to [join] [9E1].

> …the people I am surrounded with, they were people who were committed with whatever they were doing so I came to here with a positive mind. I suppose that way I manage to cope [01H3].

Other students come to know about the institution and get motivated to join through career exhibitions held at their high schools but they complain about not being fully informed about the institution. 1E3 says:

> ...they told us about Wits, but they never said, they always tell you the good things that Wits graduates have better

[12] 11E3; 9E1; 1SC1
[13] 9H1; 9SC3
[14] 8H1,
[15] 2E3; 11E3; 2SC3
[16] 8H1; 9H1,
[17] 2SC3

> opportunities after the school. But they will never tell you the journey from starting first year until your final year, how it is. They just tell you the final product that's the problem with it.

Some international students used the internet:

> I joined Wits University by looking for a couple of universities online and looking at their reputation and what they did and found Wits University which was closer to my home country [x] and also provided very good education in the field of science [15SC3].

This trend of students choosing to study at Wits because of it being regarded as a 'high standing' institution is noted in previous research (CHE, 2010, Cross & Johnson, 2008). What is emerging in this study reinforces what Cross and Johnson (2008, p. 309) found namely "The high standing of the university was articulated through a variety of descriptors based on information from their parents, friends, media, and the voices of loyal alumni, proud staff members and fellow students". While skillful branding and marketing can assist institutions to project an image of high quality, it may in fact not necessarily be so and so is detrimental to students (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). Students enter the institution with flashy images only to be confronted with complexities and dilemmas about upholding the cherished image as they experience the real campus environment. This resonates with what happens in the media industry as Rodriguez (2002) explains that "we are constantly bombarded with information; we are forced to experience a mass media space, assimilating fluctuating images".

The data reveals that while in some cases enthusiasm is generated from idle talk, some students are aware of that and hence seem to be cautious and are prepared to face the challenges. For instance, one student said:

> …my sister is studying here so she used to tell me that sis, just study…you have to come [here] it's the best. She talked about it… and I was like, okay, let me go there then. People were talking…like they say, you fail because Wits is very difficult what, what and then when I came, yeah, it is challenging but, what I realised is it is not that hard. You have to work very hard…to figure out yourself what to do [13H1].

Others participants expressed their difficulties in gaining access into the university and because of that they considered themselves privileged to have enrolled:

> To be here at Wits well, it's been a rocky journey…it's a great honour. First of all it's difficult. Not everyone gets to be at Wits. It's a great honour because Wits has its own standards so knowing that you are accepted as a student at Wits, it's something of its own [12H1].

> My brother is a lecturer here at Wits and so he made it easy for me to come here. So in terms of getting around and knowing my way around, it was easy to have someone who was already here [03H1].

There are participants who acclaim their entry into the university because of their high performance at school and their passes in matric and so identify themselves with the university and sense their achievement. Thus, confirming what is in the literature that the "similarity between the self-concept and perceived organisational identity enhances continuity and that continuity strengthens a members' identification by making the perceived organisational identity more attractive" (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 244). This is supported by the following quotations:

> I looked at my marks and I felt that they were…good enough because I knew that Wits [has] very high standards…I have just been looking forward to come for a while. …well, basically I am one of those very hard headed academics at school… When I came to Wits University, they had the same sort of ethos in terms of work so I kept the same decorum" [1H3].

> I knew I was the best in my school so I was like okay; the best only goes to the best, yeah as you know Wits is marketed as the best. I chose Wits because of its exceptional standards. When it comes to universities, it's known as the greatest. It produces and it takes only the best students you can find [14H3].

> From high school, looking at my performance, I was like okay, I was performing really well…I looked at the choice of universities and saw that Wits is like the best [1SC1].

The construction of Wits through images confirms the views in the literature that values and practices of specific institutions are instrumental in shaping individual experiences of higher education (Holdsworth, 2006). The literature also points out that rituals, ceremonies and stories objectify and communicate the collective institutional identities to its members (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 243).

There also seems to be an impression among the students that when one holds a Wits qualification one is assured of a job. It seems that students already have confidence in the strength of the courses that they do: "Wits is one of the best universities. If you hold a degree from this university, then it's easy for you to get employed" [01H3].

However, not all students were excited about their experience of being at Wits and rejected the notion of it being 'harder to get in' and reputable. The following quotations capture the views expressed by some students:

> Wits was never my first choice so it wasn't the first university I applied for. I wanted to go to university[X] initially and then I didn't get res…I think there is this whole thing of about [sic] if you get a degree from Wits you are like guaranteed a job or you are of high standard…if you can get into Wits you are really smart, I don't…I don't know of Wits still has its reputation, It doesn't affect me at all [4H3].

> Okay, with Wits, I didn't actually choose Wits. I chose another private university…because of funds, I had to seek for an alternative of which Wits was an option left [14H3].

The narratives above show some variations as well as significant convergences in students' perceptions about university images (Dutton et al., 1994) at the point of entry. As Cross and Johnson (2008, p.308) pointed out, at the point of entry, students have their own readymade constructs embedded in their expectations about what it is like to live on campus. They argue that "such constructs have some bearing on the ease or difficulty with which they experience initiation and integration into campus life" (Cross and Johnson, 2008, p. 308). What is striking in this current study is how the students seem to paint their own images or imagined identities within the portrait of the university which they have created. Within that university image, they shape their own

image and in the process mould their own identity. So the images students construct about the university are resources that they utilise in acting upon themselves and others.

5.4 Becoming a 'Witsie': the imagined student identity

The majority of the students I interviewed seem to identify themselves positively with the university image; the ideal 'Wits student' or '*Witsie'* as they are called. The data provide evidence that at the point of entry, students create preconceived academic identities that align with the status of the institution and its symbol of a "*Proudly Witsie*". At first glance the image that the students create of themselves is one of an ideal student which seems fictitious. When I asked them what it means to them to be a "Witsie", their responses carry strong images of idealised "Witsies' through terms such as; 'witty', 'hardworking', 'intelligent', 'focused' and 'sharp'. The university provides students with a sense of distinctiveness when found to be attractive (Dutton et al., 1994). The following are common sentiments expressed by students as they reveal their feelings, hopes and inspirations:

> ...it just makes one proud to be a 'Witsie'. One, Wits is not an easy institution to proceed in. Eh, you know that Wits is considered as it is tough to be at Wits. Academically, it requires a lot from one to make progress at Wits. When you say that you are a 'Witsie', you have that feeling of pride to belong to the community of intellectuals who are hard workers… [01SC3].

> ...it's a great honour. First of all it is difficult. Not everyone gets to be a Wits student. It's a great honour because Wits has its own standards. So knowing that you are accepted as a student of Wits, is something of its own, far much better than saying that okay, I am actually at University ---- when you say that you are at Wits, everybody treats you with that respect [12H1].

What this points to is that there are qualifications envisaged by participants of being a student on which they model and sculpt their identity. These identities are understandings or abstract views of self which students hold in relation to the institutional image. The students negotiate constructs and behave according to how they

construct the university. Parts of these constructions are perceptions and images. Likewise, Dutton et al. (1994, p. 244) assert people find a perceived organisational identity more attractive when it matches their own sense of who they are…because it provides opportunities for self-expression". Thus, the students use images as resources for negotiating their new identities of 'Witsies'.

At the other end of the continuum there are other students who came to the realisation that there is nothing special about being a Wits student: "...to be a Wits student...what it means is I am kind of enrolled here getting access to education you know, nothing more. I don't see it as anything other than that"[18]. Another student expresses similar sentiments: "To me, a Wits student, eh, it just means that I guess you are exposed to eh ...I don't know, the university rules..."[19]

The label 'Witsie' means a lot to the outsider (Dutton et al., 1994) who surprisingly has high expectations of the students themselves. It is the students who have knowledge of what comes with that name; pressure, the strenuous environment: "...you could just feel that the atmosphere when you came to Wits [it] was serious"[20]. This participant's narrative sums it up:

> …Well, you know, it's quite more especially you know when I go home. People are like: where do I go? I'm like, Wits. You know, it's more like there [at home] this prestige thing; status, being a 'Witsie', is one of the most amazing things first and foremost that they consider. It's more like whoa, you are intelligent to be at Wits. And there are people who have this notion that if you are a 'Witsie' you will never struggle to get a job more like because is nationally recognised and whatever. So, I think in a way, being a 'Witsie' it makes you to say, it's an achievement, in a way to say, this is an institution that everyone wants to be part of but only a few are selected so yeah...[6H3].

The participant then continues but positioning himself/herself:

> …Okay, with me, I've realise personally, I've realised that people prioritise Wits so much. They are like, whoa Wits, okay, for me, I won't say. I think at this point in time, I just

[18] 23E3
[19] 9SC3
[20] 8H1

> see it as being in Wits. It is just me at any institution, me enhancing myself in terms of learn, get whatever. So I think with me, I don't really prioritise being a 'Witsie' much. It's more like to say; yes, I'm in Wits. I'm in the best institution and that's that. I don't really see it as the most amazing thing. Yes, it's okay. I tend to realise that it's the most amazing thing when I start to talk to people. When they ask: where you go, at Wits? And they are like, whoa! That makes you go, oh; by the way, I'm at Wits. Then you tend to think about those things… [6H3].

This discussion seems to corroborate previous findings in the literature that students' identities are informed by their aspirations and feelings. This resonates with Dutton's et al. (1994, p. 246) view that when members associate with the institution that has an attractive perceived identity, it enhances their self-esteem as they acquire a more positive evaluation of self. As part of the findings from their research, Toni and Olivier (2004, p.194) found out that "academic identities of black female adolescents are directed by their life goals, charged by specific feelings and characterised by their experiences"[21]. It also appears that the students' imagined identities interact with the identities of the broader community on campus to colour how the students perceive themselves and are perceived by others. This resonates with Holdsworth's (2006, p. 514) view that the "ways in which young people reflect on their own competence of being a 'student' draw on a set of images and practices associated with being a 'typical' student that 'other' people embody". Down the line when the students get the real experience of the academic life, some tend to negate such assumed identities blaming themselves and not the institution for that.

5.5 Images vis-à-vis institutional life

According to Osborne (1990, p. 80), we cannot "consider persons' experiences of their environments without considering the ways in which those environments have influenced persons' experiences of them". At the point of entry the students have a hazy idea or are totally ignorant of what happens on campus. It is only after a while that

[21] Though Toni and Olivier's research was about the academic identities of black female first year students, I find their results matching the way the students in this study define themselves at the point of entry into Wits University.

reality strikes. Contrary to the views held earlier by some participants about fitting into the institution due to good high school grades, others have come to the realisation that the grades are not an assurance of good performance at the university, as this student laments: "...[You are here] because, yes, you are qualified in terms of high school marks but once you are here, you fail and lose those opportunities"[22].Another student expressed similar awakenings: "To me it means like I have much potential to be here at Wits…I just realised that the method I used in higher school here it won't work"[23]. As literature suggests, in South Africa, the interface between secondary and higher education is the first point in a system where completing the preceding educational phase is not an entitlement to the learner to enter the next one (Leibowitz et al., 2012, p. 25).

Students also become aware that their relations lack full knowledge about what university is all about and hence to some, they got no advice or were ill-advised: "...nobody told me what to expect, how things are going to be, so it was a really difficult experience[24]. However, the participant quickly adds: "But after all it is part of life, you learn the hard way". This seems to suggest that hard as it is, the participant is not willing to give up easily. Another participant says:

> ...people that haven't come here to Wits kind of don't understand the life that goes on here, you know. They don't understand the challenges that we face in terms of how strict the university is...the life here is very intense... [1H3].

The university has its own ways of doing things. Most of the students are aware of the university's ethos and explicit and implicit rules [CHE, 2010]. As one participant puts it:

> ...I guess since Wits has its norms, I guess those norms impose challenges on you in terms of requirements for your study. Well, the courses are strenuous and so it requires you to put in you know, a great effort, also in terms of high institutional life and things like that [9SC3].

[22] 20H3
[23] 1E1
[24] 12E1

Another student observes: "…here if you don't meet the deadline then you fail…and so those experiences just make it a bit difficult for me, I wouldn't say easy"[25]. Other students do not agree with the rules but they have no choice but to adhere to them in order to survive on campus: "I don't like the enforcement of the tutorial system…I shouldn't be forced to do the tuts [but] then, if you don't get your DP for the tuts then you can't get into the exam"[26]. Students have also experienced or witnessed the penalties of violating the rules: "It's either you submit [assignments] or not and if you don't, you just fail"[27]. Other participants have witnessed their colleagues quitting: "There are a lot of people that have dropped out that I know of at the beginning of the year because of workload; they couldn't cope"[28]. Another student also observes: "…with Wits, they can't adapt. The work load is way too much you know. So some children will like, no, I cannot do this. This is too much and they wouldn't do that and they leave varsity" [13H1].

The awareness has influenced the decisions and choices that students make concerning their social and academic activities in order to avert the impact of institutional rules on their academic life on campus:

> … It took me a long time to get the balance I think in 1st or 2nd year. I was very bad with it. I used to party more than I used to study but, Wits is one of those universities where you will quickly learn that if you don't study you fail [4H3].

The students' imagined identities of the self within the university portrait that seem to be divorced from the reality on the ground, creates tension for some students and positive stress for others (Dutton et al., 1994). This could be linked to the suggestion by Cross and Johnson (2008, p. 309) that constructs about expectations are generally aimed at aligning ambitions; that is setting goals and devising strategies for achieving them. These are constructs "about recognizing and interpreting the specific constitutive rules, adjusting to established living standards, and coping with the challenges of campus life". Thus, images that students have created face a potential threat or compromising

[25] 8H1
[26] 4H3
[27] 13H1
[28] 9H1

position that requires what Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) refer to as 'identity-management', a term I have chosen here to refer to the way students attempt to save their image of being a 'Witsie' when the reality on campus seems to threaten that imagined identity.

Guarding the gates: identity management

The excitement that students bring about being a 'Witsie' has an air of agitation; that feeling of 'what if I don't make it', that experience of loss of the familiar and fear of the unknown. As expressed by this student who became conscious that "...it seems though things are more strenuous here"[29]. Another student frankly says, "...here if you don't make the deadline, then you fail and something like that. So those experiences just made it a bit difficult for me. I wouldn't say easy...deadlines, workload, is a challenge".[30] Fear and lack of confidence have a real impact on the student learning experience and hamper that learning experience (Holley & Dobson, 2008, p.141).

The students feel taxed at the same time obliged to keep up appearances and defend the respect and honour that is attached to their imagined identity as voiced by this third year Humanities participant:

> …it's one of those things like if you were good enough to make it in, then you kind of feel special so to speak and you feel like you needed to sustain it. This is why we come to Wits University. This is why we strive to make it here because we know that if you do make it here, there is something special about you [1H3].

Most of the students have experienced or seen challenges looming ahead such as "freedom from being away from home [that] calls for responsibility by self"[31]. In many ways the data speaks of strategies or plans that some students as individuals decide to adopt in order adapt and "survive at Wits", [32] manage potential threats to their student identity and succeed. "When presented with uncertainty, individuals will try to find ways of reducing this feeling" (Maunder et al., 2010, p.52) since the cost of failure can

[29] 9SC3
[30] 8H1
[31] 9H1
[32] 4E3

end up in loss of confidence and self-esteem (Leese, 2010). Here students try by all means to avert that.

Some students note the risk that comes with "the independence; it's like, it's your responsibility to do lots of things. They are not gonna run after you, watch on you..."[33]. This was a common sentiment as others agree that "...you are not going to have people behind you all the time"[34] and another student learns that "in varsity you just have to be confident in everything"[35]. This seems to point to a disjuncture between the university and the school environment in terms of how students should carry themselves. The university environment appears to be open in contrast to the regimented school environment (Cross and Carpentier, 2009). Despite all this, some students realise that, "...it is not that hard. What you have to do is just work very hard...you have to figure out yourself what to do"[36] and [have] "sort of work ethics...just making sure that all the work is done so you can pass your course" [4E3]. In order to adjust to campus life, another student suggests: "...try to be a little responsible and try to be, you know, be diligent"[37]. The findings in this study reveal some contradiction to the notion held in literature that students seem to be certain in terms of how they will manage the transition to college (Kuh et al., 2007). However, what is emerging here appears parallel to the view that some of the students' perceptions may be a function of self-fulfilling prophecy (Kuh et al., 2007) the perception that they are good and will make it.

There are students with mixed feelings about the implementation of their own plans and strategies. They point out possibilities of using wrong plans that do not yield positive results. This participant represents views of this group:

> ...coming to Wits you have to do your own things, but that make you at the end of the day you achieve what you are here for; you pass. But you have to come up with your own initiatives, your own strategies to make that happen. But sometimes coming up with a strategy, it takes time because say, maybe it's a plan, go through it and see if it works or it doesn't. Sometimes it fails. Sometimes it will work. And that

[33] 9H3
[34] 8H1
[35] 1E1
[36] 13H1 ; 9S3
[37] 23E3

> is time consuming. By the end by the end of the time, then maybe you have come up with 3 strategies and is already October it's the time that it works maybe it might be too late by then [1E3]

These self-regulated strategies seem to instil some confidence and hope of achievement in some but not all of the students. This somehow agree with what Leese (2010, p.247) found out that "the experiences of starting a university is very individual" with some students feeling on top of the game, others, aliens, sensing failure and confusion. There are participants who suggest that it should not be a lone journey but one where there is concerted effort by a group or community, as one participant observes: "some people find it difficult to work on their own" [23E3]. I tend to buy the notion by Valadez, McDowell, Loveless, and DeLaGarza (2012) that with beginning students, what might not be self-evident at this point are the sets of social constructs that they have to negotiate as part of their new academic environment; the academic and social identities that are necessary components of discourse communities and social placement within academic communities (Valadez et al., 2012, p. 107). The students face challenges as they try to navigate the academic and social community especially that of becoming a member on campus. In the following section I look at what the literature says about campus membership as a way of preparing ground for the issues emerging in the subsequent chapters.

On the basis of all this according to the students, these are the kind of choices they are likely to make from the onset in their attempt to negotiate membership on campus.

5.6 Gaining access: coming to grips with campus membership

Existing literature has dealt with issues pertaining to gaining membership from different angles. Here I am not reviewing literature again as such but using it to shed light on community membership and its related discourses in preparation for the coming chapters. The aspect of gaining membership on university campus is a very complex one considering the diverse nature of the student body; one characterised by among others, students' varying socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, beliefs, experiences and expectations within an institution that has its own particular culture, norms, rules

and values. To prepare ground for this and other related issues, here I unveil the theoretical dimensions pointing to the phenomenon that prompt students' realisation of wanting to belong once they get into an institution. My starting point is the meanings attached to the following constructs: 'gaining membership', 'to be affiliated', 'sense of belonging' and 'campus community or communities' and then their dimensions. It is very difficult to come up with clear cut definitions here. From the literature, some of the constructs and phrases have meanings embedded in people's perceptions; the ways students view the environments as informed by their experiences and expectations of them.

Gaining membership

Cross and Johnson's (2008)[38] study presents a clear and holistic picture of what campus membership entails. Campus membership is defined as the integration of students into campus in its entirety; beyond the university's physical geographical space (Cross & Johnson, 2008); integration of academic and social lives on campus (Cheng, 2004, p.217). Tinto (1993) posits that integration into social and academic life for students adds to a strong sense of commitment to the university which in turn leads to greater likelihood of persistence which implies a process of students becoming competent members of social and academic communities. Therefore, to create a sense of community on campus requires a link between social and academic activities. Cross and Johnson (2008, p. 304) assert that "campus membership is a result of individual and collective struggles". It is about a sense of belonging or not-belonging to a particular geographically and socially defined group or community, occupying a 'shared space' under specific social relations, and consistent with specific ethos, norms and rules (Cross & Johnson, 2008). Membership calls for the mastery of a particular institutional language. As put by Coulon (1987, 44–45) cited and translated by Cross and Johnson (2008):

> Becoming a member is to gain affiliation to a group, an institution, which requires progressive mastery of the common institutional language. This affiliation depends on each one's particularity, the individual manner each one encounters the world …. Once affiliated,

[38] Cross and Johnson's (2008, p. 302) study focused on "student perceptions of current campus practices, social interaction, their interpretations of these, and how these relate to their experiences".

> members do not need to interrogate themselves about what they do. They know what is implicit in their behaviour and they accept their routinized social practices. A member is not therefore a person who just breathes and thinks. It is a person blessed with a range of procedures, methods, activities, know-how, which make them capable of inventing means of adaptation to give meaning to the surrounding world [Cross and Johnson's (2008, p. 302) translation from French].

The mastery of the institutional language presupposes a sort of 'cognitive consensus' about the institutional normative paradigm or more specifically the dominant set of values, rules, norms and beliefs that must be internalised or learnt, with reference to which agreement is reached about the meaning of social situations and practices (Coulon 1993, p.28 cited by Cross & Johnson 2008, p. 304).

Cheng's (2004) research about 'search of community' on campus life, identified the following: open, discipline, just, caring, educationally purposeful and celebrative as key characteristics that should define colleges and universities that strive to have a strong sense of community. Cheng, (2004) considered a campus community as the binding together of individuals toward a common cause. This implies that when the students identify with the institution and with others, they find a common ground for establishing group or campus membership. When students feel uncertain due to feelings of say, unpreparedness or difficulty in adjustment or with the course, they are keen to reduce that uncertainty (Maunder et al., 2010). There is a strong desire to fit into a group, identify with similar others and not to be 'different'. The individuals tend to seek comparison with people they think are like them (Maunder et al., 2010).

'Politics' of belonging

In their first time at university, students often experience alienation, a lack of socialisation, difficulties making friends, and feeling homesick. This makes them feel that they do not belong and that feeling of not belonging is an important reason for considering withdrawal (CHE, 2010; Cross & Johnson, 2008; Zepke & Leach, 2005). Previous research has shown that due to the increased diversity of the student body, some students feel alienated and bewildered by the academic culture and environment, particularly students who come from backgrounds where there is little or no history of participation in higher education. They lack guidance from relatives and friends to make

them feel comfortable and belong (CHE, 2010; Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Cross & Johnson 2008).

Institutional culture can also make learners feel like fish in water or out of water (Thomas, 2002). On this aspect, Bourdieu (1990, p. 163) quoted by Read et al. (2003) notes that middle-class people are often able "to move in their world as fish in water". Here reference is made to class being a determining factor of fit or no fit. It is argued that academic culture and socially dominant discourses of academic life depict the middle-class student as the 'norm', and students from such backgrounds do not question their right to 'belong' in such an environment. It is only those who deviate from this norm that are informed of their 'difference', their class specificity and having been constructed as the 'other', they might go through university feeling eternally "out of place" (Read et al., 2003, p. 263). It has been noted that many 'non-traditional students have some conceptualisation of their place as 'other' within academic culture well before their first day at university (Read et al., 2003).

According to Meeuwisse et al. (2010), if students sense that the institutional climate is hostile, they feel that they do not fit in it, their social and cultural practices are inappropriate, and that their tacit knowledge is underrated, they are more inclined to withdraw early. On the other hand, learning environments that can be characterised as activating and cooperative environments, assist students to integrate, experience a sense of belonging and achieve (Meeuwisse et al., 2010). Another dimension emerging from the literature is that an increase in diversity of students in terms of background, class, ethnicity, gender and race in a way provides a basis of resistance to the culturally dominant discourses of academia. The presence of ethnic diversity, for instance, enables the construction of 'belonging' and 'otherness' in Higher Education. Students engage in and even challenge these discourses of 'otherness', thus increasing their chances of 'belonging' (Read et al., 2003).

Feeling like one does not belong is often referred to in terms of "not fitting in" (Meeuwisse et al., 2010, p. 531). In her theory of college students' mattering and marginality, Schlossberg (1989) asserted that the feeling of not fitting in and not being needed or accepted is the experience of marginality and the opposite of this is mattering

which refers to the experience of others depending on us, being interested in us and apprehensive of our fate. As students enter into college, they experience uneasiness about their abilities, what their roles are and should be on campus (Schlossberg, 1989). During that transition they often feel marginal; that they do not make a difference and do not matter to their institution. Schlossberg (1989) contended that that marginality is like not fitting in academically and /or socially and may lead to feelings of worthlessness and increased self-consciousness which may impact on the students' ability to perform up to their academic capabilities, thus resulting in diminished academic success and greater academic stress. Cheng (2004, p. 216) contend that the most negative influence on community comes from students' feelings of loneliness on campus.

On the contrary, when students sense that they matter to others, their feeling of marginality lessens and they succeed in numerous ways knowing that they are appreciated by others (Schlossberg, 1989) and receive positive confirmation. In the same vein, Cheng (2004, p. 216) found out that *"*students' sense of community is closely associated with their feelings of being cared about, treated in a caring way, valued as an individual and accepted as a part of community and the quality social life on campus". This suggests that connections with others allow the students to believe in their own personal worth. Students feel central, important and that they belong (Schlossberg, 1989). Literature points out that among others, formal social networks are essential aspects of creating a sense of belonging amongst students (Mathews et al., 2012, p. 113). So is positive peer and faculty interaction. This also influences students' sense of belonging by making complex environments appear more socially and academically supportive (Meeuwisse et al., 2010).

Affiliation into campus community/communities

In everyday life when one becomes a member, it means one is affiliated to a particular group or community or organisation and one is expected to play by the rules, accept obligations and get involved in order to maintain the membership. On the contrary, Cheng (2004, p. 228) proposes that lack of sense of community may well be a result of feeling deprived of care, respect, and individual value on campus. "Student experience seems to involve entering into and maintaining bonds with social groups" (Maunder et

al., 2010, p. 53). Existing literature points out that with the many struggles students face in attending colleges, they benefit from the development of supportive peer groups and communities. Groups such as learning communities foster a sense of belonging, identity and community among students of different programmes, suggesting a supportive campus environment and greater satisfaction (Mathews et al., 2012, p. 115). Groups provide support that students see as influencing their desire to continue college despite the many challenges they face (Tinto, 1997, p. 610).

Drawing from the literature reviewed above, what seems to emerge is that there are multiple circumstances that prompt students' realisation to want to gain membership and belong. I arrived at three main ones, one being the student's self-conception of being 'other' which brings on feelings of alienation. In such circumstances the student seeks similar 'others' to 'fit in' and gain membership. Another factor is the feeling of uncertainty about the social and academic involvement and demands on campus. At the point of entry some students are not sure of what to do in order to survive in the seemingly harsh and alien campus environment. The third aspect is the experience or feeling of not being accepted. This involves feelings of worthlessness, not being part of things at varsity, perceptions of no social support coupled with experiences of overwhelming academic stress (Rayle and Chung, 2007). Perceived academic stress is defined as performing assignments under tight time and deadlines, having an unreasonable load of projects and exams due at once, and not completing academic assignments on time (Ragheb & McKinney, 1993, cited in Rayle & Chung, 2007). To persist in college, such students requires a strong social support system to confirm their worth hence the need to belong. All the aspects raised here pertain to students' perceptions about the campus environment and its activities.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the question: what are the students' initial experiences and perceptions about the university and how do these inform their decisions about their progression in their studies and social life on campus? From the discussions in this chapter, three main points or issues emerge as a result of the kind of 'noise' that the students hear around and about Wits. This 'noise', as already discussed, comes from all

spheres; friends, parents, siblings, media and, the students' own imaginations as well as the branding of the institution itself which poses as '*the* noise' as some sort of established image. With the notion that images are not neutral ideas but resources or actions, the noise so produced does something for the students and they act accordingly. The first point that emerges is that the students use the images that they have constructed about Wits as an asset or resource to seemingly paint their own images or imagined identities within the portrait of the university so created. It is evident that at the point of entry, students create preconceived academic identities that they creatively align with the status of the institution and its symbol of a "*Proudly Witsie*". Within that university image, they craft and shape their own identity. These identities are abstract views of self which students hold in comparison with the institutional image. The students' nonfigurative perceptions seemingly point to a blurred space. I name the space *blurred* to show the vagueness or indistinctness and abstraction of the students' perceptions as a result of the 'noise'. What they seem to see is elusive and this affects their behaviour, actions and the choices they make.

The second point is that the images which students portray for themselves give them the urge to work and keep on fighting to defend their images. They later realise that what comes with the prestigious name is pressure within a serious and strenuous environment. The students feel taxed while at the same time obliged to keep up appearances and defend the respect and honour that is attached to their imagined identity. This makes a crucial point at the point of entry. While some become resilient to challenges as they fight for survival, with others, the image falls away and they find themselves in the state they were at the point of entry. Thus, for some students, adopting the name 'Witsie' becomes an act of resilience against failure, while for others, the experience is so alienating that they succumb to pressure and leave.

Thirdly, still fighting on, some of the students realise that they need to belong for them to survive. Their imagined identities serve as resources which they use to interact with the identities of the broader community on campus to colour how the students perceive themselves and are perceived by others.

I argue here that the perceptions and images that students have of themselves and the institution at the point of their entry are resources students use to inform the preliminary choices or map of the campus spaces the students are likely to occupy or avoid. The students negotiate the images in which case they either transform or refine them or strengthen them or even discard them in which case the images as actions take over and subordinate some of the students. The labels about the institution create a space of action and hence becoming a student is worked for. What all this points to is a closer look at the social spaces that students occupy on campus. My contention is that a name is not the real story. Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld (2005, p. 712) citing and adding to Beder's (1997) work argue that becoming a student is about constructing a new identity and developing a sense of belonging, acquiring new academic skills and also the students negotiating between the old life of family, home and friends left behind and the new university life that lies ahead of them. The literature on membership and belonging assist in the understanding of the issues to be covered in the coming chapter.

CHAPTER SIX
MAPPING OUT THE CAMPUS SPACES: NATURE AND EFFECTS

> *…To be honest, at first when I came here I tried isolating myself. I preferred my own spot where I could stand after my lectures, go there and all that. But, after … I realised that isolation was not a good place… I joined some student organisations like our church structure [organisation]. I joined that and then from there you meet people who are just like you. Then you talk. They tell you others have passed. Others are still going through that. So those who passed they tell you how they did it and those that are at the same level with you are able to help each other. If you see the other falling, get them and if I am falling you know, please come rescue me… [1E3].*

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I noted that as students get into the university they create certain images and perceptions about the university and themselves as they frame their experiences from what they bring and as informed by various spheres. As reality unfolds, they strategise about how to go about those images in which case they discard them, change them or strengthen them. The images may then become critical in negotiating campus spaces. Students find ways of negotiating the shared spaces on campus as most of them realise that in order to succeed in completing their studies, it need not be a lone journey. The above epigraph from a third year student illustrates the common sentiments expressed by most of the participants in this study.

This chapter aims to explore and define what I term the different criss-cross intersecting social spaces (see chapter 2) that the students occupy. The domain of university life we call campus is intricate and fragmented because it comprises of spaces directed by different rationales and different logics driven by varying reasons because of different micro politics. As Oblinger (2006, p.1) states, "space – whether physical or virtual – can have an impact on learning. It can bring people together; it can encourage exploration,

collaboration, and discussion. Or, space can carry an unspoken message of silence and disconnectedness". Physical and virtual spaces are enabling contexts for social spaces. The changes in the student demographic (see chapter 4) have had significant effects on the way that the students experience the campus and the spaces they choose to occupy. I argue that campus social spaces differ. They range from physical to virtual spaces where students' academic and recreational activities on campus occur. The impact of "spaces" becomes more prominent as pedagogical practices in HE start to move away from the traditional, teacher-centred approach to a more flexible, student-centred approach. (Turner et al., 2013, p. 231). The choice of a space depends on the kind of students and the different forms of identities they carry but while these spaces serve different purposes, some are more productive than others and hence the type of identity they shape in students differs. As a result, the campus spaces that emerge are what I coin contested spaces. The questions being addressed here are a). What goes on on campus and why? b). In what spaces does social life on campus take place? c).What are the effects of the experiences these spaces provide to students?

There are two main kinds of campus social spaces where students' activities take place, namely, academic and the recreational spaces. The academic space is the main social domain of learning where formal and informal teaching and learning take place. These spaces include the classroom, the halls of residence and academic associations. Then recreational space is the social space where students spend their leisure time and social interactions take place. Some informal learning also takes place in recreational spaces.

Usually what happens or is experienced in the academic space determines the nature of social spaces students occupy outside the classroom not ruling out the possibility that that the social space also influences what happens in the academic space. How the students live and experience those spaces depends on a multiplicity of factors but primarily on individual background and profile. Negotiating the campus space becomes complex due to these factors coming into play to the extent that statements like these: "I have no social life on campus" or "I don't have much of a social life"[39] or "...you don't have a social life; your life revolves around books..."[40] or "...It's that gap from

[39] 03H1
[40] 10SC1

high school to varsity, so you basically don't have a social life..."[41] or "...but there is no social life"[42] or "I don't really have a social life"[43] are common sentiments expressed by most students at Wits.

The diverse nature of the student body creates an assemblage of local, regional and global experiences on campus. Due to these complexities, there are minute spaces that are created or found within the wider social space. Therefore, in this chapter I delve into these spaces in an effort to unveil what is happening on campus and the reasons behind it as students experience it. However, my main thrust here is the undergraduate students' campus experiences within the social domain, especially its gains and losses.

I begin section 6.2 by considering what the literature says about how and why young people constitute themselves in social spaces. I then move to section 6.3 where I introduce part of the conceptual framework relevant for interrogating the issues discussed here. It consists of the criss-cross intersecting contexts framework and its interplay with Wenger's [1999] concept of communities of practice, Tierney's (1993) notion of community of differences to unfreeze the constituencies where students are so as to examine what they do for academic enrichment and development and physical space vis-a-vis social learning spaces through Jamieson's et al. (2000) proposed guiding principles for the development of on-campus formal and informal teaching and learning facilities. Then in section 6.4, I consider an array of spaces that students occupy and in the process unveil the complexity of the social space in the student's life on campus.

6.2 The formation of students' constituencies on campus: views from literature

In education a space stops to be seen as pre-given, as a bounded, discreet entity, or a backdrop for action, but rather is viewed as itself the outcome of an ongoing, contested productive process, in which social factors and local and global forces operate (Lefebevre, 1991, in Cox, 2011, p. 197). This implies that the spaces on campus are

[41] 12SC1
[42] 11SC3
[43] 12E3

complex to define. They are a result of social contestations from social practices leading to the development or formation of fragmented communities that students favour in meeting their varied individual and group needs. Communities are "a way to make the large college a smaller, more knowable place" (Tinto, 1997, p. 610). The element of division or disintegration is taken as part of construction of a new social order which reveals clearly where the students are and who they can be (Cross & Johnson, 2008). A constructed space repeatedly shapes social practice with the wider social relations and networks forces being instrumental in the processes (Cox, 2011).

What determines how students constitute themselves on campus depends mainly on their social background (Cross & Johnson, 2008) and their needs at any particular point in time. Some learning communities formed in the classroom act as a resource for early friendship formations that assist students in developing a network of supportive peers extending beyond the classroom. The network assists the students in their transition to college and also integrates them into a community of peers (Tinto, 1997). As a social space, the learning community provides room for social networking where students can secure support in a wide range of contexts in an attempt to cope with academic challenges (Morosanu et al., 2010, Tinto, 1997) which they meet inside and outside the classroom. Students develop social networks because networks are rich in resources such as advice, information, companionship and psychological and practical support (Morosanu et al., 2010, p. 667) and maybe because students feel that they are short of those resources. However, the social networks have potentially constraining aspects as well as enabling powers. The demands and commitment they entail could also clash with the students' academic commitments and responsibilities (Morosanu et al., 2010, p. 669).

6.3 Conceptual framework[44]

This chapter draws on five important theoretical pillars drawn from the main conceptual framework namely:

i. The notion of Criss-cross social contexts;
ii. Tierney's (1993) theory of communities of difference;

[44] This is drawn from the main conceptual framework outlined before (see Theory chapter 2).

iii. Wenger's (1999) theory of community of practice;
iv. Jamieson et al. (2000) proposed guiding principles for the development of on-campus teaching and learning facilities and;
v. Ghazzeh's (1999, p. 764) assumption of knowledge about how one perceives the outdoor physical setting.

The notion of criss-cross social contexts refers to the context that impacts on undergraduates' interaction with the peers, their contact with academic staff, activity by self and engagement with academic activities outside the classroom. This view was adapted from Backhouse's (2009) model of intersecting contexts developed to show how those "doing doctoral work and study within a number of intersecting contexts with each person having a unique configuration of contexts" (Backhouse 2009, p. 207). While her model emphasised a range of 'out-of-class' intersecting contexts which are important to doctoral students, in this study I have modified and renamed the model a criss-cross of social contexts placing emphasis on the on-campus contexts that undergraduate students are involved with. The way the student experiences campus life is shaped by a criss-cross of contexts within the campus spaces. When students invest their time in a certain context, this is likely to have a far more immediate influence on their experience than other contexts students have little or no contact.

In addition to the criss-cross contexts, I find Tierney's (1993) theory of communities of difference and Wenger's (1999) concept of communities of practice to be relevant lenses in the discussion of campus spaces in this chapter. The two assist in understanding how and why students form communities on campus. Community of differences (Tierney, 1993) is used here to analyze student activities on campus. I used it to refer to the diverse student campus organizations, communities, forums and other social groups through which students locate themselves in spaces, expressions of norms and the affirmation of differences necessitated by the increased student diversity on the university campus (CHE, 2010). Communities of difference are characterised by conflict or controversy and contestation which surprisingly is purposeful for the survival of the communities and the members themselves. Student organisations are generally constituted as communities of difference. As organisations, these communities serve a variety of purposes which include: being spaces for identity formation, affirmation of

power, spiritual healing, imagination and intellectual engagement (Cross & Johnson, 2008, p. 316). Student outcomes improve as a result of students belonging to some form of learning communities and homogenous groups that have shared ethos based on shared gender, ethnicity, religion or interest (Zepke & Leach (2005). The empowerment, support (Wisker, et al., 2007) and satisfaction that students get by being members of the communities are possible conditions for student achievement.

Wenger's (1999) concept of community of practice refers to any group included in joint undertaking and also reproduces the community in question over time through continuous and gradual recruitment of new members who initially function as beginners on the periphery and gradually enter the community until they become fully functioning members. The community of practice elucidates the role of student organizations. Wisker et al. (2007) point out that a community of practice builds upon the characteristics of a working team. These characteristics comprise a number of people capable of interacting with each other, who are psychologically aware of one another and who perceive and are perceived as belonging to the group or team as well as some joint effort, collaboration or enterprise where members engage in and learn. Such learning is always situated within a specific community of practice making it a popular form or socially based generative workplace (Wisker, et al., 2007). The key principles that pertain to communities of practice are:

- Enterprise which includes shared goals, mutual accountability, fluent communication.
- Mutual engagement which entails individual or group connection.
- Shared repertoire which is about pooling resources, materials and emotional support (Wisker el al. (2007, p. 307).

Student's past success as a team member becomes a springboard or cultural template for future collaboration (Cross & Johnson, 2008, p. 317) and success. In a way the student organizations promote the growth and sharing of resources through bonding, bridging

and linking (Woolcock & Narayan, 2002) social capital as important components of dealing with the challenges of campus life faced by some students.

To interrogate issues of campus spaces raised in this chapter is the notion of physical space vis-a-vis social learning spaces. Jamieson et al. (2000) proposed guiding principles for the development of multi-purpose and flexible on-campus teaching and learning facilities (see chapter 2). While these principles have to do with both formal and informal learning, I found them useful in addressing issues of informal spaces of learning which this chapter is concerned with.

Overall, Jamieson et al. (2000) proposed guiding principles about designing flexible formal and informal learning environments for multipurpose and functionality. They point out that such facilities should be designed to also cater for ease of access to a variety of provisions for informal interactions. The idea is to do away with special-purpose infrastructure which is not only often underutilized, but also a barrier to other activities. Jamieson et al. (2000) are of the idea that facilities for multiple uses could be used concurrently and consecutively allowing merging or aligning of social interaction and individual activities. They propose designs of facilities that maximize student access to use and ownership of the learning environment (p. 230).

For the study, I find Jamieson's et al. (2000) principles relevant in illuminating the social spaces that the students occupy and the extent to which they meet the current needs of students. They allow me to capture the emerging trends as campus social spaces are turning into new learning spaces.

Another component of the main conceptual framework relevant in this chapter is Abu-Ghazzeh's (1999, p. 764) supposition that there are "distinct sorts of knowledge" of how one perceives the outdoor physical setting in which one spends time. Abu-Ghazzeh (1999, p. 764) proposed that there are at least three different kinds of knowledge that inform or constitute the perception of place or place meaning. These are: i) knowledge about the place's objective attributes - their understanding of the purpose of the place , ii) knowledge about the place's affective qualities – understanding of its emotional features and, iii) knowledge about the behaviours that occur in that place – understanding of actions, conduct and activities of the students. I find these different

kinds of knowledge important in gaining an understanding of the students' choices about where to go and what activities to do in particular spaces.

6.4 The complexity of the social space at Wits Campus

Interrogating the whereabouts of students when not in the classrooms for formal learning, points to an answer that unveils an array of spaces. There are the intersecting spaces that the students occupy on campus. Within different intersecting spaces different activities are taking place. Some students create spaces in line with their background and others create spaces as a response to the push they get from their nature academic discipline and the challenges that programmes pose on them.

6.4.1 Navigation into common campus physical social spaces

6.4.1.1Students' residence

The student's residence is physical social space the students occupy mostly during their free time or after lectures. The study identifies three types of residence that students occupy each with its own effects on the occupants. These types are identified by site, access and the students' experiences of the residences.

Residence site

> *Being in 'the Res'45: "I stay in university residence and I think all students should be afforded that opportunity…that way they will grow, you know…" [32SC3].*

One type of residence that some students occupy is the university residence: 'the Res' are of two kinds; the students' residences that are situated on the university's campuses and those situated outside the university within the suburbs or townships. The former, by virtue of being on campus, are closer to the classrooms than the latter. Other than that, the facilities are more or less the same. The quotation above is representative of the

[45] 'The Res" is a common expression the university students use to refer to residence offered by the university

feelings expressed by most students 'in res'[46] because of the numerous benefits and comforts that go with it. It speaks volumes about an important emerging role of university residence and is also suggestive of its limited availability due to high demand. The question one is bound to ask is: *what has become of university accommodation and who then resides in it?*

Occupying the university residence ("the Res").

Getting into university residence now is not that easy. For some it is not even a choice. Well known as 'the Res', University Residence has been an evolving concept in South Africa which has undergone different metamorphoses. Until the early 1990s it represented a racialized structure, a sort of a lodge, through which the University (Wits) imposed institutional racialism (see chapter 4). White students were accommodated on campus while black students were confined to G. Thomas residence in Soweto or some alternative accommodation (Agar, 1990, p. 450). With the abolition of apartheid, the residences were integrated and open to students of all race groups, a process that posed considerable challenges to university administrators. In fact, the process seems to have resulted in considerable Africanization of the 'res' as many white students resisting the process moved out of residence. A limited number of white students remain currently 'in the res'. The increasing demand for accommodation has led to the opening of new residences outside campus while business reconverted residential buildings into apartments for student accommodation.

New conditions for access into 'the Res'

For first- time occupants, one's geographical distance from home and one's level of study are the deciding factors; "basically the policies prefer people living outside Gauteng province" [14H3]. Another participant comments: "I understand that they take preference for [SIC] people that live far you know, like Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Venda and that's cool because those people need places to stay"[47]. First year undergraduate students are given first preference in this case. If there is still space, second preference is given to students who are within Gauteng province but live more than 30km away from the university. Then the next lot (which seldom gets in) is those who come from

[46] 28H3, 29SC1, 01H3, 12H1, 01E1, 13H1,15E1, 12SC1, 25E1, 13H3, 5SC1, 6H3, 32SC3, 14H3, 3E3, 2E3, 30SC3, 20H3, 1E3,9E1,
[47] 20H3

surrounding suburbs and townships in Johannesburg. Here one has to convince the administrators in order to get 'in res' as this participant testifies:

> …I am a 3rd year but I'm living in campus for the first time and the selection for accommodation is disappointing. I don't know how I got into res because I live in Soweto. and everyone told me that 'you can't make it because you live near, try something outside' and I kept trying and I kept trying and I kept trying and everyone told me 'no', but luckily, I got a place and I told them that why don't you consider the situation or the issues that are happening at home [20H3].

The rules governing university residence are considered very restrictive as they do not cater for unbefitting circumstances or conditions at home that are confronted by students who reside within the 30km radius. This participant quizzes the rules: "What if your family is abusive? What if you can't concentrate because the environment at home is not conducive for [sic] you to study? What if I'm abused at home? There are drugs at home and I can't study?[48]

Staying 'in res', is linked to good performance. This is the other criterion used when considering taking in returning residents. If one has been in residence, it is not automatic that one is taken in the next semester. It depends on academic performance; "if you fail a year of study, you cannot go on and stay at [sic] res; you have to find another place to stay... I failed some courses then yes I was out" [11E3]. In a way, such a ruling, nasty as it may sound, motivates students in res to work hard and remain there.

.

"The Res" as site for contestation

Student diversity on campus has turned 'the res' into a site of contestation. The issues of xenophobia, homophobia, tribalism and racism have exacerbated this situation. For instance another issue about university residence which seem to come to light in a subtle way is that of racism; in an effort to reduce imbalances created previously during apartheid, a new imbalance is created. As participant attests:

> …There are more black students involved like with accommodation. Accommodation, 'the res' [university

[48] 20H3

> accommodation], is targeted for all students, but it's so amazing that its only black people who turn to be involved in accommodation. So yes, I think they are trying to do that but it's so unfortunate that as much as they are trying to promote diversity, but it turn [sic] to be unbalanced. [6H3].

A white participant declares:

> I am non res. I guess you know, living around has got new attitude now; those things won't disturb me anymore" [9SC3].

However contestation is not just around the issues imposed by the colonial or apartheid legacy, it is also related to the fact that the res has the potential to become a melting pot where difference is negotiated around culture, lifestyles, etc. This is a domain where institutional mediation could play a central role.

Changing role of 'the Res': From 'a space to sleep' to 'a space to learn': Opportunity for shared learning.

The university residence is a preferred area for studying by many students.[49] This space depicts a changing role of 'the Res' as elaborated below. Most of the participants report the 'benefits' they enjoy, the most common being the proximity to and accessibility of facilities for learning as summarised by this participant: "you have plenty of places to study" [2E3] . The students express and appreciate their closeness to the computer laboratories, classrooms and study rooms; easy access to the different libraries on different campuses:

> ...I can go just to access internet maybe [at] main campus or JCE and the buses are there till midnight. So I think even if I want to study, I can go to the library study throughout the night then take the bus to my res. Even here at res, I can study throughout the night because I have the means [28H3].

> …I'm very happy being in residence considering the fact that I don't travel as compared to those who are living with their parents at home. They find themselves having to travel everyday which does consume a lot of time and the other thing; you find that they are far from the library… [01H3].

[49] 01H3, 32SC3,2E1, 13H3, 9H1, 9SC3

Some students also report favourably on the availability of reading desks and enough lighting in the rooms[50]; creating an environment conducive for study any time. Though staying 'in res' may seem expensive, the benefits outweigh the costs. One participant justified this by saying:

> I can't say paying a lot of money is a disadvantage … an environment where I can study anytime, where I can play at any time, where I can access internet or study rooms at any time, where there is electricity... [28H3].

A key finding from the physical social space on campus is the significance of university residence in terms of supporting the students' academic work and individual growth especially through concerted efforts in learning; shared learning within a community of practice (Wenger, 1999). Apart from the provision of and availability of resources for a favourable study environment, students in university residences also have the privilege of getting Sunday tutorials organised by the university. Astin's (1993) theory of student involvement puts emphasis on how student development is made possible by participation in academically purposeful activities. One participant points out, "…because they have compulsory [tutorials] tuts on Sundays and so it helps" [51]and another emphasises:

> …it's only the res students who get that kind of treatment. We get tutorials each and every Sunday and they help us… it's like res students have to get these tutorials as part of the benefits of just staying 'in res'... [12H1].

Notwithstanding helping with issues like assignment writing and revising for examinations, the tutorials also provide hints on how to study effectively, time management[52] and how to stay with and among people from diverse backgrounds[53]. From their review of literature, Parameswaran and Bowers (2014) concluded that there is vast evidence that general interventions such as public lectures, buddy systems, mentoring, interest groups, formal dinners, sports and music rooms have a positive collective impact far beyond their individual efficacy because they help promote a

[50] 29SC1, 28H3, 12H1, 15E1, 14H3,
[51] 5SC1
[52] 01E1
[53] 13H1

culture of learning in residences. In this study, some of the participants say that over and above getting assistance with their academic work from the university programmes, they learn from their house-mates or from the reading groups that they form with others within residence doing the same programme or similar courses:

> …you've got a lot of people doing different stuff but, they are able to help you. Like people are doing BSc; there is BSc in geology there is BSc in what, we still do stats together. So I still find people to do stats with me. I still find people to do IMS with me. So where I am staying, it's pretty cool [12SC1]

> …I am also surrounded by young brilliant minds from different forms of study and different walks of life. And I interact with them and I obviously learn a few things from them and life continues. … [32SC3]

First year students who are 'in res' are also part of the university programme called "Big sister – small sister or Big brother- small brother" where each one of them is paired with a senior student who resides in the same hostel and does the same course to provide some kind of a mentorship: "We have got seniors around to help us whenever we need help" [29SC1]. This makes it easy for some students to adjust to the new university environment: "…the residence life helps like with settling in and that's what helped me settle in faster" [5SC1].

What also comes out is the issue of students linking their improvement in academic work to living 'in res'. Students who have had the experience of living out of residence attest to how disadvantaged they were by being non-resident. They pride themselves on their record of improvement in their studies once 'in res':

> I am very happy with living at res [sic]. My marks are improving. I am seeing a big change, yeah. I am able to study because usually I would travel because my home is in Soweto. When I would travel, it would take me 2 hrs to get home. I am tired and I don't want to do anything. I don't want to work and my marks used to suffer so I feel that living 'in res' is just the best option [13H3].

> … First year I was staying at home but, since I moved to Wits last year, my first semester and my third semester marks went up… [28H3].

This issue of students realising better performance from staying on campus confirms what literatures says. Parameswaran and Bowers (2014, p.60) citing Blimling (1993) posit that students participating in living-learning programmes[54], also get better grades, and report a more intellectual atmosphere in their residences than students living in conventional halls and off-campus living. The university residence is currently more than a lodge; it is also a learning space. This could have implications for the current university residence policies.

The experience at Res

Students give varied recounts of their experiences of being in 'the Res'. The ways the participants narrate how they live in shared rooms is indicative of a serious lack of own space. One participant remarks:

> I share a room with only one person so we are only two in that room, so we all [sic] have equal space so there is no one interfering with the other… I have my own space to study. She has her own. There is no way that she and I can interfere [about] space… [12H1]

Other students also express the convenience not just of having one's own space to live in, but, also the understanding and respect they get from fellow roommates as expressed by these third year participants:

> …you can actually talk to your roommate; 'I need to study now blah, blah'…it's like you are sharing the same room but you can communicate. You can talk. You can understand one another. It's much easier because there will be no one having power over the other, like say; 'no this is my room you can't tell me what to do' you know, so it's much better living in res…[10H3].

> A good living environment for a student is when my neighbour knows that this is my neighbour and I know that he

[54] This is a focused residential community of inquiry that engages students in curricular and extra-curricular activities.

> is my neighbour. And he respects me and I respect him and he keeps his noise level lower and I do likewise. [32SC3]
>
> ...You are surrounded by people who understand the nature of a student and who won't be making those unnecessary conditions for studying [01H3].

However, while some report loving "everyone in the house com" [55][same floor], other students have problems with their roommates to the extent that they fight each other most of the time but, that is not a big issue considering how much they benefit by the mere fact of being in university residence.[56]

Another privilege which the students have of being in university residence is the surveillance provided by the university in form of the hostel rules especially those pertaining to noise making: "there are laws *ukuthi* [that] you are not allowed to make noise at certain times"[57] and "…it [hostel] does have noise time... after seven, it's a 'no-noise' time…time to study"[58]. One participant summed it up pointing out that it is "very good to be in res because …we are all students and we need all the quietness"[59]. It is not just about rules but an understanding and respecting of one another. This is exemplified in the statements below:

> ...people who are staying around are students as well, meaning that they understand in terms of noise when you say you want to study, they can manage their noise [2E3].
>
> We are all students in res. We understand that the levels of disruptions that we cause there must be kept to a minimum. [30SC3].

A number of students reported that residencies are safe[60], which gives them the required peace of mind at varsity. One participant says: "You don't experience anything bad like

[55] 5SC1
[56] 12SC1
[57] 15E1
[58] 25E1
[59] 29SC1
[60] 28H3, 01E1, 13H1, 15E1, 13H3, 5SC1, 6H3, 29SC1, 22SC1, 30SC3

maybe people who are stealing. Security is very tight"[61] and another, "…the environment I live in is quite secure"[62]. Another observes: "the security is very tight so I feel very safe here. Yeah, it's fine to live at 'res' [13H1]. Maybe the fact that the City of Johannesburg where the university is situated is notorious for all sorts of crimes, and that students are usually mobile late at night, may contribute to their concern about safety. For some students it is more than this kind of safety. The room one occupies is like a cocoon, where one seeks solace when the outside world appears threatening or traumatising as expressed by this participant:

> …I'm staying in a single room even though I'm trying to loosen up, but my most comfort zone is when I'm alone that's, it's where I'm comfortable. I'm my best. It's my best comfort zone and then you know…: No being alone helps me have a 'me time' like I'm far away from the rest of the world. I don't have to listen to anyone. The only person I listen to is my thoughts and all that. I don't know, it's kind of revitalising you know, having that 'me moment' and then later on having to face the world. When I'm alone, I'm dealing with, I try to deal with you know, I saw this today and deal with me and myself and whoever is inside of me just talk to myself and then later on when we are done, I face the world again. It keeps me going [1E3].

What this narration seems to suggest is that sometimes life out there becomes so hectic, upsetting and overwhelming to the extent that one is somewhat shaken. As such, one has to, once in a while, seek solitude to come to grips with that and get back to normalcy, to the 'self' again by the mentality of quietude. Results of this study support the findings of earlier research pertaining to the issue of isolation. For instance, Abu-Ghazzeh (1999, p. 789) explained, based on his study focused on assessing user perceptions of outdoor spaces of a certain university, that "For several individuals, the possibility of being able to get away from people and be alone was appreciated" with some students seeking "a secluded spot where [they] can lay down in peace". Such experiences might be the explanation to a situation why some students in this current study still want to 'feel at home away from home'; vying for the familiar. As one participant expresses:

[61] 13H1
[62] 30SC3

> …living in my res, is like I'm living with my sisters and also those ladies at the reception they are like your mother like they support you… sometimes like, the other day they made a programme just to encourage us and also when we write exams there are posters that wish you good luck for the exams you know. Those kinds of things you feels like here I'm at home I feel welcomed…oh… [01E1]

To some, staying 'in res' assists them with the transition process as this participant attests:

> The residence life helps like with settling in and that's what helped me settle in faster [7H1].

However, some are cautious about the liberty that comes with staying 'in res' especially where one lacks control:

> …The disadvantage is that if you are not used to be disciplined and having a set study time, you will have a problem… Instead of your marks going up they may continue going down because you may prefer going to the mall instead of studying... [13H3]

What this seems to communicate is that university residence is no longer just the traditional students accommodation, a lodge on campus close to the classrooms but, that it is now a place for informal learning**.** Being there is different. To be there is to engage more in learning activities through informal meetings and study groups. From reviewed literature, Parameswaran and Bowers (2014, p. 61) assert that living-learning programmes stand out for the value they add. They point out that amongst residential students, living-learning participants perform better than non-participants through engagement shown by peer interactions, faculty interactions, use of university academic resources, exposure to diversity, enrolment in co-curricular activities, enrolment in enrichment activities, and responsible consumption of alcohol and coping with the demands of coursework. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, p. 603) summed up the benefits of staying in res by saying that:

> ...living on campus had statistically significant, positive impacts on increases in aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual values; liberalisation of social, political, and religious values and

> attitudes; development of more positive self-concepts; intellectual orientation, autonomy, and independence; tolerance, empathy, and ability to relate to others; and the use of principled reasoning to judge moral issues (p. 603).

Literature further points out that learning communities provide a vehicle for students to learn from each other outside the classroom (Tinto, 1997, p. 611). The issue of residence –based learning communities has turned the residence into a potential social learning space. This is contrary to Aia's (2012, p.128) view that; "many campus residence don't maximise their potential as a place where residents can learn, grow and become happier, healthier more successful students".

As students occupy university residence they seem to be more concerned about availability of facilities and a favourable learning environment and hardly about the room per se in terms of comfort of the bedding and the quality of food; as one student points out how convenient the location is: "sitting in my room I am still at school. So I can just go at any time to study… [13H1]. Staying 'in res', allows them to grow intellectually and emotionally. On the same score, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, p. 603) contend that the collective attempt of residential life programmes to enhance intellectual and social development "leads to increases in independence, tolerance, empathy, social interactions, self-confidence. This space seems to seed responsibility in the students." The students learn to be responsible individuals in terms of behaviour, managing their finances and time[63]. This seems to align with views from literature that "An environment that naturally facilitates active learning and social development creates deeper understanding and growth" (Aia 2012, p. 129). What this seem to be pointing out is that recent developments in university residence have made it beneficial and a necessity to all students and current access policies should be reconsidered.

Experience of students living off-campus in privately owned student residence

Shortage of university accommodation was seen by entrepreneurs as a lucrative business opportunity. Many buildings in the Braamfontein area were reconfigured for rental to students around campus. This private enterprise accommodates students from various institutions of higher learning in Johannesburg. While on the positive side it

[63] 13H3, 6H3, 5SC1, 32SC3, 12SC1, 3E3

minimises problems of accommodation, on the downside it does not always produce a social space conducive to learning. For some students, especially international students, availability of basic accommodation at affordable fares comforts them: "it's been very good it's comfortable. It's easy to come [SIC] and it's fully furnished and as an international student you don't have to worry about buying a lot of stuff" [15SC3]. On the contrary, most of the participants in this study who reside in these premises experience some discomfort[64] in staying there. They cite noise as the main complaint and roommates studying at other colleges or universities are the culprits. These students appear not to be busy at all as this participant explains:

> ...you might find that you are staying with someone who is studying at [X college] and that guy is always disturbing and you cannot study because he cannot understand how hard it is, so I think it's not good... [2E1].

Some participants report that students from other institutions also engage in too much 'gig and booze'[65]and are inconsiderate to others who want to work. One participant attests: "you find people they will be [sic] making noise because they are drunk and stuff. I cannot study because at that place during weekends alcohol is allowed in the premises. So like weekends are like... no, no, not for studying" [1SC1] and another reiterates, "the place is not conducive to one's studies; it's not supportive at all" [11SC3].

Other students have problems of travelling to and fro in too much traffic coupled with being away from the university libraries hence participants report that they resort to the 24 hour library on campus and only go to their residence to sleep and eat.

Experiences of commuting students: always on the run

While the residence is becoming an academically mediated space, the success of students living with their parents depends on their ability to negotiate learning spaces where they live. This third type of accommodation entails students travelling to and from home daily to the university. The students live with their parents or relatives, a

[64] 6E1, 2E1, 11SC3, 23E3, 1SC1, 11E3

[65] 11E3. The student uses this informal expression referring to partying that involves a lot of music, dance and drinking of strong stuff.

situation which leaves them expressing mixed feelings about their living conditions. Some are very comfortable with this arrangement as they have all the provisions for doing their work and support from family[66]. As these participants point out:

> …I go home and I study in my room. I have a desk… like I have table and proper lighting. I've got a computer. I've got a printer so it [sic] helps me in order to succeed [9H1]

> ...my parents are very supportive they understand that I need my own time to study… they give me time to work. They've got another house so they leave me alone so that I can study... [1H3]

On the other hand, some students are not comfortable at all[67] and never have been[68] as their residential spaces are filled with tension. They point to a range of sources of discomfort; changing places to rent, difficult landlords, fighting and abuse in the home and disruptive activities; "… having to be involved in family activities, family issues, can be distractive…"[69]. Some students stay with their parents in rented accommodation where there is no stability since families are often changing homes: "moving from one place to another"[70]. Such movements tend to distract the students. Other students claim that they are stymied in their academic work by insufficient resources and lack of support: "But at home I study at certain times because sometimes the conditions [do] not allow me" [10H3] or "by the time I get home, I'm very tired [8H1]. In essence, such students should negotiate their own spaces.

When it comes to performance, some students indicate that when in 'res' one performs better than when commuting from home. As attested by a student who had experienced both types of residence:

> ... first year I was staying at home but since I moved to [Res] last year my first semester and my third semester marks went up and(sic) compared to the first year marks...[28H3].

[66] 8H1, 1H3, 7H1, 33H1, 4H3, 01H3
[67] 10H3, 9SC3, 01H3, 9H1
[68] 20H3,
[69] 9SC3, 8H1
[70] 10H3

One common problem confronting most of the commuting students is the issue of travelling long distances every day. The quotation below is representative of views of most commuting students:

> My parents have to drive. So I wake up at 5:30 every morning which is really, really painful, but I just got used to it now. But in the first couple of weeks when I started varsity, I was like oh, my word; I can't do this! Like, I'm gonna have to find a lift club or something but, I got used to it because I realized it's a lot of us that live outside campus and they have to travel early… [9H1].

Even students 'in Res' are aware of the disadvantages of staying out of the university residence:

> I am very happy being on residences considering the fact that I don't travel as compared those who are living with their parents at home; they find themselves having to travel everyday which does consume a lot of time and the other thing you find that they are far from the library... [01H3].

Among those who commute are some who drive to the university. Apart from waking up and leaving university early or late to beat the traffic and wasting time travelling, they also have to get to the campus early enough to get a parking spot. The parking space for students, while big, appears not enough. There is always a scramble for parking.[71]

This then is what being a commuting student is like. The experiences of students 'in res' do not hold for commuting students who find it difficult to negotiate learning spaces and instead experience inconvenience or discomfort in terms of doing academic work at home. These students are somehow inseparable from the homes and communities they come from and to some extent the misdemeanours and ills or tribulations therein. Such spaces and circumstances probably make students vulnerable in many different ways.

This scenario coupled with deprivation[72] of the benefits of not being 'in-res' is likely to impact negatively on their studies. Statement like this; "I suppose the university need to

[71] 9SC3, 33H1,1H3, 28SC3, 8H1
[72] 28H3

take into consideration that not everyone is admitted to the residences and try to have some programmes also those [students] who won't be admitted to the university [residence] "[73] are indicative of disadvantages of being a non-resident. The matter is how tragically different are the students' experiences of residence and non-residence with the latter students nurtured by a supportive resident environment. This resonates with Jamieson's (2003, p.122) views that every built space on the university campus presents itself to teachers and students in numerous ways. "In turn, each of these ways will be experienced variously by different individuals and, significantly, has the capacity to affect the attitude and performance of any inhabitant". What then are the implications of all this in so far as the students' studies and personal growth are concerned?

In summary the experiences of students in the three types of residential space is varied and it appears the campus residence is very significant to students' academic work. University residence is now more than access to accommodation. Being 'in Res', has become access to different kinds of resources that other accommodation does not provide. What comes out in this study about non-residential students confirms what Agar (1990, p. 450) found that students who experienced problems account for them by referring to family or accommodation conditions being unsuitable to study, alternative accommodation being not easily available or too experience and transport being expensive, unreliable and time consuming "these problems apply mainly to students who are not in University residence". Students that were investigated for the current study expressed mixed feelings about accommodation to the extent that university residence has become a contested space. It would be better if all students should be given the opportunity to stay in Res and that staying out be by choice. What this implies is that the university should reconsider its policy on university residence to accommodate the diverse student population regardless of geographical boundaries. In the next section I look at another physical social space of interest: the library.

[73] 01H3

6.4.1.2 The library: changing contexts and purposes

The library is a recurring reference point for participants, yet unpopular to study in for most of the students. What seems to be emerging is that the library's functional responsibilities are changing. Asked what they do with their leisure time, the library (physical space) is frequented by the participants but they express mixed feelings about their occupation of the place. While some visit the space to do their work and get resources[74], others are "...not so much fond of libraries"[75] or "... don't like the library...it makes [them] sleepy"[76] or "...don't have anything to do in the library"[77]. While others wish "...the library can open for much longer [sic]..."[78], to some, the library appears a less significant space since "...a lot of people still don't use it".[79] For some students, the library seems unpopular to study in because it is no longer a quiet space.

> ....library [X], [students of race [H] are always chatting...all these other libraries you find [Ds] and [F] people chatting. It's irritating. [32SC3]

The quiet atmosphere that some students expect in the library, resonate with what Bryant et al. (2009, p. 15&16) refer to as the 'community activity' in a library which involves seeing and being seen quietly engaged in study which is contrary to a social activity in a library which involves conversation and discussion among people, about either the work at hand or more trivial matters.

It appears there are 'other' unforeseen activities or some misdemeanour in the library than the designated use as this participant points out:

> I will rather go home and look for my research on internet than do 'things' in the library, spend my time there ….. [33H1]

[74] 10H3, 23E3, 28H3, 8H1, 13H1,
[75] 9SC3
[76] 13H3
[77] 33H1
[78] 10H3
[79] 9H1

Since students are free to use other libraries from other campuses[80], It appears some of them are aware of the situation surrounding certain libraries and so choose where to be: "...I will usually go to library [Y]...because it's one of the quieter libraries"[81] and another says, "...library [X]; the cabin in the basement is quiet..."[82] What is coming out here is contrary to what current literature says. From their case study of user behaviour in a newly created open space in the library named 'Open[83]', Bryant et al. (2009, p. 11) observed that given provision of a quieter space for individual study, the users unexpectedly chose to undertake sole study in the 'Open' space section meant for group study which is often busy and noisy and they were happy with the noise level.

In this study, students seem to be aware of the rules when it comes to the use of the library.

> ...it depends on what I'm studying. If I'm reading for myself I can go to my room or to the library, but if we are having a discussion, it has to be a place that we won't make noise to others who are studying. That they can't discuss at the library. We have to go maybe to some ones room then discuss there [28H3]

Students, who are not in residences, prefer visiting the library after lectures:

> ...I use my spare time to do some assignment and work and stuff. By the time I get home, I'm very tired. So I spend my time at the library... in the library I do my work...It's quiet. I prefer peace and quiet when I want to study. I can't study in a disruptive environment [8H1].

Of this group, some students, due to tight workloads and accommodation unconducive to study go to the 24 hr library:

> I am currently staying at [X] properties. It's not comfortable at all and it's not convenient or conducive enough for studies. So that's why I always use the 24hour library study section

[80] 10H3
[81] 23E3
[82] 32SC3
[83] This is an area within the Loughborough University library designed to provide library users with somewhere they could engage in individual or group activity (Bryant, et al., 2009, p. 10).

> and yeah, I just go back to [property X] to sleep and eat [6E1].

What this seem to suggest is that currently this university's libraries are not designed like those in universities abroad which are a one-stop centre or learning commons (Holmgren, 2010; Dewey, 2008) or learning cafés[84] (JISC, 2006, P. 4) or other alternative vision of student working areas exist within an established library (Jamieson, 2003, p. 129) where students easily access everything in one building. Like what Bryant et al. (2009, p. 12) observed in their study that further to its purpose of supporting academic activities, the library, and the 'Open' in particular, has become an important place for social activity within the university community. Open is somewhere to see and be seen. Its popularity implies that it has become a desirable venue on campus, somewhere comfortable where people can work and socialize in an informal environment. The emerging library issues in this study suggest that the facilities should be designed in a way that caters for ease access to provision of food, communal areas for informal interaction and comfortable furnishings (Jamieson et al., 2000, p. 228) for study and work spaces. This implies "creating zones that will meet a variety of student preferences" (Holmgren, 2010, p.183). It is about "providing a range of different learning environments in order to cater for the differing needs and preferences of users (Bryant et al., 2009, p. 12).

For some students there are other options available:

> ...when you don't like studying in the library, you can get into any room, yeah, there are many rooms for studying [sic] which is good [15E1].

> … I prefer to study in tutorial rooms, particularly quiet places on the campus. Eh, yah, not so much fond of libraries [9SC3].

From the above narratives, the library seems not to provide for or meet the varying needs of current users as some students' activities seem to impede or obstruct other users on one hand, and, on the other, the library seems to undermine or not make

[84] This is an open-plan informal learning area within the university that provides individualised learning environments which also support collaborative activities. It is space with a deliberate mix of refreshments, social activities and IT and this makes it a relaxing and friendly place where conversation and social interaction are seen as an essential part of learning. The worth of such areas – their value lies in the way they encourage learning through dialogue, problem solving and information sharing in the most supportive of contexts (JISC, 2006, p. 4).

provision for more space for student interaction that may give room to the creation of learning communities. This shows to a shift in the generic use of the library. What is happening in the libraries at this institution may become the catalyst for deeply rethinking how they possibly could be redesigned to suit the varied needs of this generation of students if the libraries are not to be repositories or void spaces. Could this seem to be calling for resource management on the part of the university, to come up with maybe 'fused-use environments'[85] or what literature refers to as learning commons?

The students' experiences of the libraries are contrary to most of the guidelines by Jamieson et al. (2000) explained earlier on in this chapter. Perhaps most important to the emerging issue of this current study is indicated in Jamieson's et al (2000) fourth guiding principle which maintains that "the present on-campus separation of services and functions does not contribute to the merging of social interaction and individual activities for those students who prefer such environment" (Jamieson et al., 2000, p. 228).

Students also report of a better and modern option to being in the library. The digital era has come with a better space in no physical space for students to search for information, research and share knowledge about their academic work. Due to the availability of free internet access from the Wits Wireless Wi-Fi, students make references to getting library resources from wherever they are as pointed out below:

> ..I prefer studying in my room. I can get on internet on my laptop through the Wi-Fi, Wits Wireless to search for literature for my assignments. I don't have to visit the Holmes library [13H3]

> When you don't like studying in the library, you can get in any room. With Wits Wi-Fi access around, it is easy. If you have a PC you can get on internet to the, they call it e-library and get the information you want online. Just like that, yeah. [15E1]

[85] Fused-use environments' is a concept introduced by Neris (1999) cited Jamieson et al. (2000) where fusion involves diverse activities and the material with the virtual. In my context it refers to an environment for multiple-purposes.

> Most of the time I am in the computer lab or on the stairs or in the matrix …outside the library working on my laptop, surfing the net for information [23E3]

The issues raised above resonate with JISC's (2006, p. 4) assertion that "Wireless connectivity within a brightly lit atrium, learning café or open-plan social area will encourage engagement in learning, and instil a desire to continue activities beyond timetabled classes". Though some students feel constrained by not having on PC or iPads, there is an option of going online from the computer laboratories.

> I personally don't have a laptop or a computer. Let's say I want to Google something, I can quickly go to Ken's house to use the computer [laboratory] from [sic] the campus [12H1]

> We are mostly here on the benches, by the lawn enjoying the sunshine while accessing the library from our laptops or iPads through the Wits Wi-Fi Wireless. We shouldn't go far than that because I don't have anything to do in the library. I use my cell phone. I don't have an iPad or laptop like some of my friends. [33H1]

> I've only used the computer lab and I use the library maybe to photo copy one sheet, so I don't really use them…. we do have the library. A lot of people still don't use it [9H1]

However, some students use the internet for activities other than for study purposes as attested by these participants:

> Sometimes I am in a computer lab watching a movie, listening to music [01E1]

> I am normally in a computer lab searching the maps and the papers. Eh, or I am outside campus, I am in my room watching a movie or something. [32SC3]

> If we are not here (on the lawn) surfing the net, we are at the computer lab playing games [12H1]

What seems to emerge from the above discussion is the changing nature of the university library from a physical space to a more extended social learning space through its continuing virtualisation and online access. Students do not have to be in the

library (physical space) to use the library as social learning space populated by resources of different kinds. Evidence from the study concurs with what is reported in the literature that "as students have become more accustomed to using digital technologies, such technologies have become embedded within the university environment and caused a transition in the way space is used and viewed" (Bryant et al., 2009, p. 8).The students can be anywhere on campus still making use of the library. This resonates with Cairnscross' (2001, p. 4) observation that the "internet is more than just for communicating; it is a marketplace, a library, a distributor". It appears there are effective mediation strategies available on campus to ensure that students access and make use of the virtual resources but this increasing virtualisation is not a guarantee for effective use by students. The above also point to situations where students are on line for socialisation as well. While this is good for relaxation, it becomes a matter for concern when it takes most of a student's time. However, literature points out that recent development in HE libraries would suggest that spaces that to some extent combine academic with 'social activity space' have been introduced and well received by students (Bryant et al., 2009, p. 10).

Thus, besides being a learning resource centre, the virtual space is mostly a site for students' social interaction. This resonates with Dewey's (2008, p. 86) assertion that students, in particular, are living in the digital world, socially and intellectually". This issue of the virtual space is elaborated in the next section.

6.4.2 Virtual spaces: networking "on the go"[86] and across geographical borders

The most common space that students occupy is the virtual space via the Internet. Participants talk of their interest in visiting the computer laboratories to go on internet for social interaction[87] or for doing academic work[88]. Besides the labs, some students sit with their laptops in designated campus areas to get internet services from the wireless university networks. However, students who are not in residence can use this facility for only limited time. Most of the participants interviewed made references to networking

[86] 2E3
[87] 9SC3, 2E1, 13H3, 9HI, 13H1, 01H3, 12H1
[88] 33H1, 13H3, 9SC3, 12H1, 2E3

"on the go"[89] and across geographical borders with friends and relatives in shared social virtual locations through mobile devices. In this vein, Cairncross (2001, p. 3) contends that due to technology, voices, videos and data are digitally delivered around the globe effectively. He points out that the cost of communicating ideas and data is now distance free to the extent that the additional cost of sending a message on an extra hundred miles is effectively zero thereby altering people's views about distance; "death of distance loosens the grip of geography"(p. 3). While the internet provides instant communication at affordable prices, some students make reference to it stealing one's scarce time[90] if it goes unchecked: "one has to exercise self-discipline or else you are engrossed and then miss a lecture or don't write an assignment on time"[91].

6.4.3 The open spaces: motifs and metaphors

The lawns are of critical importance to students (this is discussed in detail in the next section). Campus lawns[92] are popular spaces favoured by most students when not in the classrooms. Apparently they are a common meeting space for all students after leaving the classroom. This resonates with Griffith's (1994, p. 648) assertion that spaces such as lawns, grounds and greenways "create a sense of place on many campuses" and the "open space provides emotional relief from the tight compact academic facilities" (p. 649). Apart from being a space where students can access the library facilities like eBooks, journals, data bases and other library digital collections while enjoying the sunshine it gives a sense of belonging to a community. This is evidenced by another previous researcher, Abu-Ghazzeh (1999, p. 788) who found that participants in one of his group constantly chose spaces that offered them a chance to get together. The type of landscape is essential in their decisions as this influenced their chance "to socialize with other people [with] neatly arranged green lawns are among students' favourite spaces; students use these spaces to sit and read, socialize, or just relax". Describing this convergence one participant in the current study says:

> …just after a long day's lecture, we just come and sit on the grass here [the lawns]. Everybody just comes together like

[89] 2E3
[90] 28H3, 9SC3, 12HI, 1E3, 30SC3, 2E3, 5SC1,
[91] 5SC1
[92] 12H1, 13H1, 9SC3, 15E1, 2E1, 32SC3, 23E3, 33H1, 9H1

> first year, second year, no matter what year and we just all sit in the same blanket. I just like that. It's like we are so close here… [9H1].

Territorial[93] claims of space

One other emerging issue from my findings is that other students seem to claim ownership of certain areas (Jamieson et al., 2000) they frequent them; "here at the park, on the lawn, this is our spot" [12H1]. Some students sit in groups[94] smoking from the 'Hubbly-bubbly'[95]. The groups are communities of difference (Tierney, 1993) which associate along affinity groups and lines. They sit surrounding the gadget taking turns to inhale the contents. What are not clear or known for sure are the concoction contents which students inhale from this gadget.

Other students just sit on the lawn and relax. They talk or chat about nothing and everything:

> We always sit on this lawn; it's a meeting place after hustling with work in the labs, the lectures... We sit here with my friends, just chatting about nothing to anything from girl friends to movies, politics and even planning for the weekend. We eat here and discuss personal problems, assignments, anything, you know... [15E1].

> This is our corner on this lawn where we sit and we think big with my buddies...right now we are in the process of starting a society that will give the students the platform to give their views about whatever issues without really judged or classified to fall under this party or what not.[32SC3].

The issues raised above seem to resonate with the view in existing literature that "the feeling that one belonged to one spot was compelling [and] most students adopted a place to which they returned to daily" (Abu-Ghazzeh, 1999, p. 791). The spaces which students use regularly, especially those that are faculty or other specific, students should have significant opportunity to establish a sense of ownership and responsibility (Jamieson et al., 2000, p. 229). However, in this study, the territorial claims of space

[93] The term 'territory' depicts a space that is defined politically where a particular group of people with some kind of shared belief about their links to each other claims a space. The space has some functional area that has dimensions of identity and authority. The political understanding of such a space foregrounds control with patterns of rules and regulations, exclusions, inclusions and practice that define the contents of that space (Seddon, 2014, p. 13 & 14).

[94] These are usually racial groups

[95] This term refers to a gadget which some students smoke tobacco from. It is assumed that it filters the tobacco though no one is sure of the exact contents.

also do reflect the legacies: spots for Indian students, spots for black students and so forth as this participant observes:

> Students sit on the lawn. They love it out here. The lawn has spots, sort of; I mean patches all over...You see whites alone, Indians alone and the blacks on their own spot. As I said before, there is very little mixing unless they know each other from high school or prior to Wits. So it's very difficult for them to interact with other people. That is how it is here. [32SC3].

The above fragment of the interview seems to point out that historically speaking; the apartheid legacy of higher education remains alive even though it has altered its appearance in a different era. As Mitchell et al. (2010, p. 298) note: "the legacy of the turbulent times still resonates on campus…lingering effects of racial/racist policies and practices are still operative, despite the institutions' new contexts/spaces, policies and practices".

Still on the lawns, some students sit by the fountain or swimming pool admiring the water[96] and even passers-by. Some students seem to get a soothing effect from staring at the water jetting into the atmosphere or creating waves when blown by the wind. While this may sound trivial, it seems to have some psychological effect on some students. As this participant explains:

> …the fountain is the best place... Well, the fountain is the best place because the fountain is quite relaxing; the sound…the sound is quite relaxing. It's visually…its visually entrancing. There is oscillating emotion of the stream in the fountain which is visually entrancing and relaxing. There are also good looking people who walk past [9SC3].

The above observations about effects of certain spaces conform to Abu-Ghazzeh's (1999, p.770-771) finding that the feeling the students have of a particular places "reveals a sense of attachment to spaces; they are significant and have meaning to individuals…represent dimension of person-space interaction". His participants indicated that there was more to the presence of trees and the surrounding atmosphere

[96] 29SC1, 23E3, 6E1,

and realising how they had taken for granted the "attractive and soothing effect of the greenery…a very natural soothing thing, an escape, a retreat" (Abu-Ghazzeh, 1999, p. 786). On the same vein, Griffith (1994, p. 649) posits that "open spaces ...make possible facile and fast circulation as well as aesthetic pleasure".

What also merges from the current study are the rooms or buildings or spaces which students frequent either individually or as a group after formal lectures. One such building is the Matrix which is a student service complex situated at the university's main campus. Here students get a variety of shops and facilities including the health centre, food outlets, banking halls, bookshops, computer booths and others. The complex is a hub of student activity on campus, for students to lounge and meet informally. Students gather around tables in the atrium chatting or eating. Some visit canteens or cafeterias in other university campuses. Students also report spending their time in lecture rooms studying individually or in groups. However, these social and hospitality facilities are isolated and far removed from other resource areas. As such what does this mean?

6.4.4 Campus social spaces and student experience: Overall

On the whole in this chapter, the issue to deal with is how to move from physical spaces/virtual spaces to social spaces and to social learning spaces. What seems to emerge from the foregoing sections of this chapter is how students constitute themselves in such experiences. The students' experiences of the residence vary with the type of residence one occupies. Literature points out that the influence of residence halls on student achievement differ (Spanierman, et al., 2013). Wits students find being 'in residence' quite supportive in terms of nearness to facilities, availability of university-initiated activities, and enough time to do their work. The university residence has altered from a sleeping space to a social learning space for its inhabitants while students not 'in res' report mostly negative experiences: disturbances and distractions from all angles. Imagine a privately owned residence with boozing every weekend and a residence on campus with all the facilities and environment conducive to doing one's academic work. A matter of concern is that non-resident students report being disadvantaged in this respect. Some of them over indulge in social activity to the extent

of failing assignments. What all this seem to point at is that it was once reasonable to think of student accommodation as just accommodation; but currently this has taken a new twist; some form of informal social learning space.

Furthermore, from the students' narratives, the library's function seems to be changing. While some hold the conviction that silence should be maintained in libraries, others hold different views declaring the place unpopular. Students visit the library to either borrow books or read or do their academic work. Some students meet in the library to chat in groups in the process disturbing others who require a quiet environment to their work.

There are also some territorial claims expressed by some students as they occupy certain spaces. This seems to perpetuate communities of difference (Tierney, 1993). This concurs with literature that there is need to let students own space, to use it in different ways at different times, to work in contexts where they know others and feel protected so that social aspects of learning can occur (Aia, 2012; Cox, 2011). This is summarised by Jamieson (2003, p. 122) who contends that "Overall, a university campus needs spaces designated to generate interaction, collaboration, physical movement, and social engagement as primary elements of the student learning experience." He refers to spaces which also "need to be capable of accommodating informal use by students outside of scheduled class times" (Jamieson, 2003, p. 122).

It appears that the structure of physical and virtual spaces allows for particular social formations (social spaces). That is, it enables some and constrains others hence the differing groups conceptualised as communities of practice and communities of difference.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I examined social spaces for academic and recreational activities that students occupy after lectures. Students choose to visit the library, go home, go to their rooms, sit on the lawns or canteen foyers, join others in partaking university-initiated activities 'in res' or visit the computer laboratories or socialise through mobile devices.

However, some elements of the campus spaces or environment constitute challenges for some students. Students express mixed feelings when asked about their experiences in occupying these spaces.

In conclusion three issues emerge with respect to the spaces that the students occupy on campus, namely, (i) that students experience is shaped by an intersecting/ crisscross web of social and learning spaces; (ii) some of these spaces are productive while others are unproductive and (iii) the conflicting pressures that students meet in these spaces given their contradictory logics point to a more practical institutional mediation of student experience, particularly geared at promoting a sense of shared meaning around the significance of the practices and experiences that these spaces provide: social learning spaces. These spaces are in fact concealed under physical and virtual spaces. Overall, the spaces that students occupy are what I refer to as contested spaces. The implication is that in order to understand student campus experiences, one has to be aware of such spaces for one to make provisions for shared meaning through institutional mediation. Aia (2012, p. 129) asserts that an environment that naturally facilitates active learning and social development generates deeper understanding of growth.

Apart from the physical and virtual spaces which students occupy when not in the classroom, another space of interest is the social space of a relational and interpersonal nature; in form of student organisations and groupings. I have already identified some of these spaces as I discussed what the students do or the activities they engage in when 'in the Res'. Issues that emerge from the data concerning this type of space warrant a different angle other than just physical social space; what I term relational spaces[97] as reflected by 'the power of relationships'[98]. The physical and social spaces are not

[97] I adopted the term 'relational space ' from Gittell's (2003) research where he discussed how to create relational space for building shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect in his model – Relational Model of Organizational Change'. Valente (1995 cited by van de Merwe & Heerden, 2009) used the term 'relational' in a model and explained that relational models deal with 'patterns of friendship, advice, communication, or support that exists among members of a social system'. Equally I decided to use it with reference to space occupied by members of a social system.

[98] The term 'power of relationships' has been used in literature to refer to the strength that comes out of relationships people build as members of a group. The strength is in terms of advice, support, communication, and sharing among the members involved. (see Gittell, 2003; van der Merwe & Heerden, 2009). I adopted the term as a theme to show what comes out of the friendships, peer groups and organisations that students form and are members.

necessarily frequented by the students as individuals but in groups. I choose to tackle this aspect on its own in Chapter 7 since it gives an interesting dimension to the phenomenon of campus experiences of undergraduate students which is the thrust of this particular study. I turn to the next chapter about groups and student associations and examine how the students experience these spaces.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

…I do consult peers because we are doing the same thing and I believe I am because we are… [01H3]

7.1 Introduction

In chapter six what comes out strongly is that students create and organise themselves in spaces on campus when outside the formal learning classrooms. Some of the spaces are more productive than others in terms of student development and learning. Not all students create or occupy such spaces. Finding a space is problematic for some students as they grapple with negotiating life before university and the life that they are to lead as university students. The challenge then is how to manage this state of affairs in a way that at least cuts across campus so that the social space turns into an effective social learning space.

It is argued in this chapter that the issue of relationships is central to students' campus life as a social space. The quotation above is representative of the perceptions of most of the participants for this study and points to the power of relationships. With this in consideration, this chapter explores some of the students' initiatives where learning and development are taking place. The question being addressed here is: What is the nature of the relationships that students have with other people on campus and how are such relationships linked to students' learning and development? To explore this, themes to be considered include: the role of a community of friends, the domain of peers and students' perceptions of staff. Before delving into these issues, the conceptual framework that speaks into these issues is considered.

I begin section 7.2 with a summary of the conceptual framework for this chapter which is part of the main conceptual framework discussed in detail in chapter two. In section 7.3 I consider the notion of community of friends. I draw on interviews with undergraduate students to examine how they make friends, the role of such friendship in

their life on campus and how that relates to their experiences outside the classroom. Then in section 7.4 I consider the domain of peers. Here I examine how other students influence the student's social life and the effects of that on their learning and development on campus. In the last section 7.5, I consider the students' perceptions about staff. I identify how the students relate to the university staff and how that relationship affects their experiences on campus.

7.2 The Conceptual framework[99]

The discussions in this chapter draw on the notion of mediation which becomes the basis of the following set of concepts: i) bonding, linking and bridging from Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) social capital theory; ii) the domain of students' perceptions of peers and staff; iii) development of awareness, skills and knowledge beyond the classroom; and, iv) changing values, norms and behaviour as a result of the communities mediating students' experiences on campus. These constructs are referred to in the main conceptual framework that is located in Chapter 2; the theory chapter.

I found that Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) concepts of bonding, linking and bridging are critical manifestation of the power of relationships and are therefore relevant in exploring how students relate with other people on campus. The concept 'bonding' refers to a situation where you are with people like you. It assumes that people are connected because they have common characteristics. For instance, students who belong to the same ethnic group or have same religious beliefs relate to each other on those grounds. Students who are in the same programme and year of study are connected on these grounds. The bond between them is what they have in common. It makes them feel at ease when they are together. By the concept bridging, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) refer to connecting with people 'not like you'. With reference to students, it entails that, though different, they link due to some shared activity. It "involves overlapping networks" (Stone, 2003, p. 13). For instance, the students may belong to different years of study but are doing the same programme or come from different ethnic groups but belong to the same student academic association, club or organization. The concept 'linking' assumes building connections with people of influence – those

[99] See Chapter 2 for details of the conceptual framework

who are in positions power by virtue of their social, economic or cultural capital, who can open avenues to resources. In the university set up this entails students connecting with say, academic staff and even senior students, those in authority who "can be used to garner resources" (Stoner, 2003, p. 13). The assumption is that these people are experts and as such play particular roles in students' lives. Through them, it is assumed that students get assistance on how to negotiate their way on campus, perhaps in their academic work.

For the purpose of this chapter, the domain of students' perceptions of peers and staff is also used to explore the issue of the power of relationships. The domain of students' perceptions refers to how the students view others as they interact with them in their social spaces. The assumption is that the perceptions they hold could enable or hinder student development and growth or student achievement.

The development of awareness, skills and knowledge and changing values, norms and behaviours are a result of the influences of the communities mediating the crisscross social spaces and the students. These constructs are used to locate what students stand to gain or lose from the interactions they engage in.

7.3 The community of friends

> *…The only way you could overcome that is to study and you know, get into a community of friends that are doing the same course and basically to share ideas as to how to come up tops against that kind of work…[30SC3].*

These sentiments by a participant reflect how students rely on friends when it comes to their social experiences on campus given the pressure of work they are confronted with. There are communities of friends that students hang out with. What comes out strongly in this study is the nature of such communities, the role they play, be it positive or negative, and the effects they have on students' life on campus. I explore this aspect with reference to the processes through student make friends, how the select friends and the role of friendship.

Making friends

Students choose friends from within the diverse student population at the university across all levels of study and gender. For some students having friends on campus is not taken lightly – it is rather a challenge "trying to find good friends"[100]. The establishment of new friends is vital in student life. As articulated by one participant, it is a process where one "…successfully constructs are relationship with other people. Eh, I think I relate well with other people. To me that is a big deal…" [30SC3]. For some students, making friends is a complex process that calls for the application of set standards to making the judgements: "I was able to make friends you know. Actually, I made my friends through academic [SIC] so wouldn't say I met my friends at the parties" [25E1] and another participant bluntly says:

> …the only thing that stands out to be particularly successful would be making friends that I am really compatible with of all people here I managed to get decent group of friends that I don't think I would change … [9SC3]

There is also an air of mistrust in some students when it comes to making friends. This serves to highlights the importance attached to trust and respect in establishing relationships (Fox & Wilson, 2009, p. 701) as expressed by this participant:

> …in an environment with different people, [the challenge] is meeting wrong people. Like not everyone is good. Not everyone is the right person for you. Not everyone can make a good friend for you. That's the challenge, meeting wrong people you know. But, it's quite good to deal with that because you get to know a person that is not good to be your friend because some people are just there to destroy you, you know, destroy everything about you, but it has been a good experience so far [25E1]

These expressions point to the students' deep concern about who to relate to, the way they engage with each other to enhance their social experiences. This seems to concur with the view of Wilcox et al. (2005, p. 713) that "…friendship is about having friendly faces around and making initial contacts which may and may not develop into friendship".

[100] 13H3

Some students become sceptical about making friends arguing that it might distract them from their studies; "when I came here I decided that I don't want to have any friends just because I just felt like I know what I came here to do and I must just do that" [1H3]. Students like these are what Cross et al. in CHE (2010) labelled as "loners". The question one is bound to ask is: what do such students fill their social space with?

For some students, friends are a necessity on campus for dealing with various situations that confront them. So the students select friends according to the purposes they serve in their lives on campus. Asked about friends, this participant says;

> …my social is like my support group we come together, we sit together and if you had a really bad lecture we can sit together and like convene… we can talk about some boys too, the assignment or a lecture to lecturers. I don't know everything… [9H1]

Another participant points to a situation where s/he is always with friends: "I do have, I have a lot of friends, but there are those who are my closest friends. I know a lot of people here at campus, so I'm hardly alone. If I'm not with them then I find someone to be with" [12H1]. This seems to suggest that some students are afraid of loneliness and probably the gloomy social side of campus life and therefore are in or seek the company of friends.

It appears that the transition from school to university tends to coincide with other forms of transition, particularly the transition from a social space where individual life is shaped, influenced and supported by family members to a situation where most of the choices and decisions come to depend on the individual student. Under such circumstances, a gap is left that can only be filled by friends. Archer (2012) cited in Dyke (2015, p. 550) conceptualises this socialisation as taking the form of 'relational reflexivity' "whereby people engage with the social reality they encounter". There is access and sharing of resources through networks of friends. Moreover friends very often represent or are assumed to be replacement of the gap by family absence. In this regard, friends become a fundamental need on campus; without them the student can be

left with feelings of loneliness and insecurity that can translate into inadequacy in academic life. This resonates with Malcolm's et al. (2000, p. 6) finding that "making friends was seen as the single most important factor" among the first year Science students they studied at Wits. Spanierman et al. (2013, p. 322) also established from their research that making friends was important to the participants".

Criteria for selecting friends

The most popular criterion is that of choosing friends from students at the same level of study or who are doing the same course[101]. It appears students are steadfast in their bond with their own kind (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). The following quotation is representative of most of the participants' sentiments:

> …being with the one that you are on the same level; the ones that you are working with. Being able to gain and share information with it is much better, it makes it easier… I have friends that I work with most of the time. Yeah, we actually are all third years… [10H3]

The issue is not just about being in the same course, same level of study and assisting each other. The students' social life has gone through unprecedented change due to pressure of work on campus with this participant estimating; "70% study, 30% social life" [7E1], and another misconstruing changes in his social life openly announces; "I don't really have a lot of time for my social life" [29SC1] and yet another is also parochial and miscomprehends: "You don't have a social life; your life revolves around books. Books; that's the Wits culture, you study, study, study" [12SC1]. So the students would rather socialize as they do their work:

> …socially, we tend to… hang out with the people who are doing the same courses and what not because we spent a lot of time in the company of each other because of the load of the course [32SC3].

It seems bonding with the other of the same expands the students' sense of community (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). As articulated here:

[101] 30SC3, 01E1, 32SC3, 01H3,

> …I chill with friends, but there is not enough time in our days to chill. There is too much work so we have to work most of the time. I live with friends on res. For now I think there is being a shift on my social life because I'm now friends with people who are doing the same thing as me, the same level and everything… that's what it is all about now studying, getting what you have to get. I don't like have friends who do not go to Wits with me and yeah… [1H3]

Due to the pressure of work, relationships are basically work/study related. Working without rest could be detrimental to students' health. This resonates with the literature on shared learning experience of learning communities. These communities cement friendship as well as "bridge the academic-social divide that typically plagues student life" (Tinto, 1997, p. 610). Tinto further contends that students get the opportunity to meet the two often competitive needs; social and academic. Learning communities assist the students to draw these two worlds together (Tinto, 1997)

Besides choosing friends from those doing the same course, the other popular criterion is choosing from the ones doing the same course but at different levels; "…maybe those who are doing third year, second year. They help you, giving you all this advice, what you should do with a particular course and stuff" [13H1], and another says:

> …people I study with, yah, people I do the same course with. Even if it can be a second year, third year or first year, it doesn't matter because you are doing the same course. We help one another [10H3].

What comes out here is that the relationship is not about the juniors seeking assistance from the seniors. It is reciprocal. This suggests that the emphasis is on the same course; 'someone like me' as pointed out by this participant who says, "my friends, they are doing the course with [me] so they know exactly what I'm going through" [1H3] and another; "I can learn from them what they know and it's easier with someone that I know compared to someone that I don't know" [33H1].

In both cases, the idea of affinity seems critical. The first inclination is to seek people who are like you religiously, academically and socially – bonding and then a bit of linking and building bridges with the 'other' to increase resources. What this suggests is

that students befriend those who experience and have an understanding of the circumstances surrounding them in terms of academic work. This concurs with Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) concepts of bonding, linking and bridging.

Some students make friends with others who are not only in the same course, but same residence and same campus.[102] These students have no time for unnecessary movement, they have limited mobility, so they occupy some defined spaces probably due to the amount of work they have to do: "we are always looking at books" [15E1], and "there is a lot of pressure"[103]. Hence they would rather have their friends within close proximity:

> …most of my friends are on campus, at res, so most of my social life is here on campus, and I suppose the work load necessitates it to have your social structure close to you [32SC3].

Even the talk on campus seems to suggest a busy environment: "most people that I meet they just talk about academic things and give you some advice" [01E1].

Some participants consider it mandatory to work all the time and therefore attribute their failure to not doing exactly that:

> …like first block I was like doing quite well. Second block everything went down, like I am failing and stuff like that. I don't study everyday hey; I only study when I have a test that's why I am failing [10SC1]

What this seems to suggest is a campus environment characterised by a lot of work pressure yet working continuously under pressure, with no time to relax, maybe detrimental to the students' academic health (see Tinto, 1997). These findings confirm those of a previous study on first year experience of Science students at this same university (Malcolm et al., 2000) which established that "the chief learning concern was unanimously declared as the volume of work".

The accounts presented by students tend to privilege bonding at the expense of bridging and linking (though not completely exclusive). Students find their friends primarily

[102] 01E1, 12H1, 9SC3, 7E1, 6H3, 28H3, 01H3, 32SC3
[103] 21E1, 7H1, 5SC1

within the cohort (those in the same year of study), the affinity group (those doing the same course), the same social space (those occupying the same residence or living on the same campus; or even sharing their hobbies or recreational interests) and so forth. The consequence is the proliferation of fragmented social identities. This particular claim places the need for mediation of campus practices at the centre of institutional interventions to promote linking and bridging strategies as well as a sense of campus as a shared space to which they attach greater shared meaning. *But what role do friends play in those privileged spaces?*

The role of friendship

Friends play an important role in some of the students' lives on campus. The commonest role expressed by most of the participants is that of assisting each other[104], thus, accessing and sharing resources; "usually the first port of call is the person who sits next to you in class and if you get help there I don't think there is a point in moving to the lecturer" [30SC3], "…you will find that they know what you don't know and then you understand" [13H1]. "I always go to my friends… yeah, I go to my friends, if I really have problems let's just say with an essay or something… if I'm stuck with something, I always ask" [9H1]. Some students study together[105] working on assignments or some projects; "obviously we talk about school (work)" [1H3].

Students also advise each other about academic work, understanding of difficult aspects of the course and what was learnt in the lecture or tutorial[106]. These activities are a result of what takes place in the classroom. Other students find the material presented in lectures challenging to the extent that they have difficulties understanding it. Most of the participants talk about the challenges they experienced especially in the early days of the first year of study at the university in terms of coping with the pace with which the lecturers teach[107]. The other issue is lack of skills in multitasking; some students cannot listen, summarise what is being taught and write meaningful notes at the same time.

[104] 6H3, 7E1, 32SC3, 12H1, 13H3, 19SC1, 12E1,2E1, 01H3, 9H1, 21E1, 29SC1, 01E1, 28H3

[105] 8H1, 12H1, 1H3, 33H1, 32SC3.

[106] 32SC3, 10H3, 8H1, 12H1, 30SC3, 33H1, 01E1

[107] 2E1, 9H1, 01E1,

Some of the students from rural and township schools were used to being taught most of the subjects in the vernacular language and yet at Wits the medium of instruction is English; "for us we are from the rural areas. Some other subjects like the life sciences we were taught in like there are, they were it was English (sic), but you were taught in your home language" [21E1]. Coupled with this is getting to understand the English accent of most of the lecturers[108] and, that of the larger university community. So such students come to the university unprepared for the work in terms of understanding what is taught. This seems to point to a disjuncture between what some schools do and what the university expects of students when they come to higher learning. Some students therefore seek the assistance of and support of friends. The loners are likely to succumb to pressure and leave.

Friends also serve as family by filling in the empty space created by being away from home[109]. As expressed by this participant:

> …just because we are here it doesn't mean that we have lost touch with our families, you find your mom called: your brother is sick. That affects you… [you] need them (other students) to support you. They are not just friends. They are sisters. Yeah, like you have found a new family here… [12H1].

Friends provide emotional support[110]: "…with personal issues, especially if you are not performing the way you wanted to perform, then you talk to them. You cry and then it's fine" [13H1]. One participant points out:

> …my social is like my support group. We come together. We sit together and if you had a really bad lecture, we can sit together and like convene… we can talk about some boys too, the assignment or a lecture to lecturers…everything… [9H1].

[108] 12E1
[109] 7H1
[110] 32SC3, 29SC1,

The students seem to be comforted by their friends who provide a shoulder to cry on and calm them down.

These participants go further to narrate how some friends provide re-assurance;

> …if you are not doing so well and your friends are like; don't worry I'm also not doing well. It makes you feel better, sort of like: so don't think you are alone… when my friends feel the same way as I do and there are some people in my class who do voice their opinions and then I feel like okay I'm not alone, so I'm like okay good maybe… [9H1].

> …like if I speak to somebody, let me say like, if I'm not doing well in something, if I take it out and that person start giving advice, I feel welcomed and I feel encouraged and I feel like I get the strength to stand. … [01E1]

> Other students view friends as a source of inspiration: "my friends love work and eh, they have a really good impact on me" [13H3] and "having to know that somebody believes that you can do it" [32SC3].

Literature has conceptualised social support as embracing six functions of personal relationships – attachment, social integration, opportunity for nurture, reassurance of worth, a sense of reliable alliance and the obtaining of guidance – each ordinarily associated with a particular type of relationship (Wilcox et al., 2005) and this seem to tally with the findings above. Malcolm's et al. (2000, p. 8) assert that when students feel socially accepted and make connections through friends and peers, "[T]his is culturally consonant with the ontological concept of *ubuntu*" – a worldview perspective that claims: 'I am because of you'.

In such circumstances, chances are that the students' worries and feelings of ultimate failure and probably exclusion[111] are overcome and hope of success prevails. Thus, a student may benefit from the goodwill of his/her the friends in that s/he realises the need to persist and continue to work knowing that s/he is not alone in his/her predicament. The findings here seem to correspond with what literature documented about the students' views. Especially important was emotional support for feelings of self-

[111] 15E1, 6H3,

confidence and ease in the self, but instrumental, informational and appraise support gave students confidence in terms of their academic work (Wilcox el al., 2005, p. 720).

In addition to seeking friends for collaborating on academic work, students also find company in their friends when they take a rest from academic work: "basically we just chat and fool around about boys… With my friends, it's just to relax and distress and talk about the boyfriends and whatever" [1H3] and "…we always go out, we always do stuff together, we sit together at break, yeah, [and] we are like really close..."[112] There is a sense of socialisation; "we talk about everything; from religion to music to how the day was. We talk about everything, difficult issues at home"[113].

Relationships can be both social and academic. As evident from the literature, the shared experiences of learning communities cement friendship as well as "bridge the academic- social divide that typically plagues student life" (Tinto, 1997, p. 610). It further states that, the two spheres are usually areas of contestation causing students to feel torn between the two worlds. Now students are able to "meet the two without having to sacrifice one in order to meet the other" (Tinto, 1997, p. 611). The only interesting question which I can flag at this juncture is*:* Could this possibly be pointing to social learning space within the students' social space?

For some students friends do not matter much: "I do see my friends once in a while, but basically academic comes first" [5SC1].

However, it becomes cause for concern for some students when friends fail to be responsible and resort to leisure through and through. As lamented by this participant: "you have your friends who … most of the week she doesn't really like to work, things like that, but they can go out, but I turn (sic) to be like stay home and do my homework and then on [the] weekend that's when I like have my time" [9H1]. Participants also spoke about friends who tend to influence them in a negative way: "in some assignments we work together, but sometimes it can have a negative effect when they

[112] 9H1
[113] 12H1

gonna tell you not to go for a class or something like that…" [8H1]. While some say friends "have very good influence"[114], for others, peer pressure is strong:

> …friends you know, like they are the ones who push you to the edge like fail. So, yeah, for me it's peer pressure. Like, you want to be in the same standards with your friends...for example, if she goes to parties you want to go even though you know your work load that you are not done with your work, but still you wanna go there. For me it's just peer pressure [21E1].

Thus, such friendship is detrimental to one's life on campus and some students are aware of this so there is what I would term 'boundary maintenance'[115]. Conversely, there is maintenance of friendship by those who are proud of their choices and find solace in their friendship: "So it's sort of, of all people here, I managed to get decent group of friends that I don't think I would change" [9SC3]. Nonetheless, in some instances, it is more than friends that matter in students' lives on campus as this participant clearly points out*:*

> …when we have maybe an assignment we come together as students who are doing that particular course and we discuss regardless of being friends or not being friends. We always come in with one point, with one thing in mind to discuss the assignment. We interact. [28H3]

The students' constructs on friendship point to some interesting insights. First, it appears that the transition from school to university tends to coincide with other forms of transition, particularly the transition from a social space where individual life is shaped, influenced and supported by family members to a situation where most of the choices and decisions come to depend on the individual student. Under such circumstances a gap is left that can only be filled by peers who very often represent or are assumed as a replacement of the gap by family absence. Friends become thus, a fundamental need on campus; without them the student can be left with feelings of loneliness, insecurity that can translate into inadequacy in academic life. On this score,

[114] 13H3

[115] This is a term that I coined to refer to how students create spaces between themselves and their friends in a situation where they realize their friends are distracting them from focusing on their studies.

Holdsworth (2006) asserts that the time students spend at the university is not just limited towards the attainment of qualifications but, as most stakeholders are aware:

> …one of the most important aspects of going to university is the opportunities it provides for making new friends, enjoying less restricted social life and taking part in a range of non-academic activities. Yet, this rather privileged ideal of education is not something that all students feel they have, or even want access to (Holdsworth, 2006, p. 496)

Second, peers matter too**.** I continue with this aspect in the following section.

7.4 The domain of peers: *"…one should always be afforded the opportunity of being alone with the influence of their peers" [32SC3]*

The students also relate with students other than their friends when they engage in group activities on campus. Reference is made to how students relate with peers in a way they tend to gain social capital (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000) through sharing ideas[116]and "you learn more from your peers…and become a community of knowledge where you actually interact and share information" [13H3]. For some students, peers come in handy when tutors and lecturers are not within easy reach or are not well understood:

> …sometimes it's more easy to understand your peers…they will give you some advice … then also your peers they also have the major influence on your learning environment…, [8H1].

Another participant says:

> …sometimes we study in groups, so we help each other when we are studying...because I can learn from them what they know and it's easier with someone that I know compared to someone that I don't know [33H1].

In some cases students go out of their way to seek other students for help:

> ...sometimes I ask some second year students whether they understand this; help me with some of that, even my group, I mean my friends, I ask my roommate; oh, help me… [7E1].

[116] 10H3, 13H3, 5SC1, 32SC3, 8H1

Existing literature points out that rather than struggling, students may be able to get answers on support needed from members of their groupings (Gerrard & Billington, 2014, p. 254).

Some students just long for someone to share what they are going through in their studies otherwise they remain discouraged and eventually give up: "I speak to somebody, let me say like if I'm not doing well in something, if I take it out and that person start giving advice, I feel welcomed and I feel encouraged and I feel like I get the strength to stand…"[117] There are some students who are motivated to work when they see their peers working: "…the people around, the resources we use, like looking at possibilities, they actually promote positive learning" [10H3] and:

> ...every time when you come like outside of res or outside of a lecture, you always see students like with their books. And also when you go to the library, you'd see that there are other students who are very committed in their careers. Yeah, so it's a good thing. It also encourages you that you need to work smart; you need to work hard like those people… [01E1].

> ...having social interaction is a good thing and I guess I wouldn't study well if I was lonely eh but, eh, mainly to chat with my academic colleagues... just hanging out and chatting [9SC3].

From what emerges above, it is sufficient to say that there is a change in behaviour of the students due to peer influence. It appears some students establish that kind of relationships with people who share their aspirations. This tallies with what is in the literature that development of supportive peer groups helps students in balancing the many struggles they confront on campus (Tinto, 1997). The environment also compels the student to work and uphold peer values, as articulated by this participant:

> Like your colleagues and staff, they have really high expectations and you also have high expectations and do well to keep up with them to move and not stay behind. So yeah, it's [sic] things like that [7H1].

[117] 01E1

The issue of peer interaction echoes some of the findings in Malcolm's et al. (2000, p. 7) research where they report that "students found that peer support and social acceptance was crucial" to their stay on campus. In the same vein, Tinto (1993) asserts that peer interaction is one of the main ways of successfully integrating the academic and the social systems of the campus culture. Existing literature further contend that isolation and potentially limited peer interaction could be a result of serious academic involvement and any activity that draws students' time and energy away from campus have negative impact on the students' campus experience(Astin, 1993). It is against this backdrop of a supportive network of peers that academic engagement arises (Tinto, 1997).

The role of affinity groups: ***"I feel it's more than just getting your degree..." [01H3]***.

> …in a way, joining organisations, it does contribute to your social life and it makes it nicer because you get to learn things that you didn't know… [10H3]

A key discovery in this study is the academic role of affinity groups in their members' lives. This concurs with literature that "more learning is taking place outside the class time than ever before with an increase in collaboration, students are learning in small groups outside of the classroom" (Brown and Lippincott, 2003, p.14). Some students identified strongly with student organisations on campus. Reference is made to students' affiliation to Christian Action Fellowship (CAF), a religious association[118] where "the common denominator in all of us is our love for God and we just connect there" [13H3]. The role of this organisation is not just about the spiritual uplifting of its members, but, students report being assisted with their academic work[119] as well.

Besides engaging members in prayer and worship every lunch break, services on Fridays and Sunday evenings, the CAF conducts tutorials or holds study groups for all CAF members[120]. "So there are people who are post grads who save as tutors to the undergraduates" [01H3] who are doing the same course. "If there is no one who does the same course within the CAF, they will find someone, a friend or something like that

[118] 10H3, 12H1, 13H3
[119] 01H3, 13H3, 32SC3, 25E1
[120] 12H1, 13H3, 01H3,

who will help you out" [12H1]. With all these activities, what does it mean to the members?

The implication is that all the members get help with their work and do well and that students who conduct the tutorials not only develop confidence in their academic work but also leadership skills: "also there are leadership structures there… as you are leading there you are developing the leadership skills [01H3]. The members gain knowledge: "get to learn things that you didn't know; you can easily get access to their knowledge, maybe get [more] help than someone who is not in that group"[121] and advice: "do find different ideas, how other people think about education, how other pursue their careers" [10H3], in a more relaxed space and familiar territory where everyone is like "brothers and sisters"[122]. Another participant points out that those are the people "who would expect me to grow and not just pulling me down" [13H3] and another one says, "...it is helping and being with the people of the same, sharing the same values. It's nicer; it's really motivating in a way"[123].The organisation's activities apparently encourage a sense of belonging among its members.

Also emerging from the interviews is that some students spend their leisure or 'me' time in the company of teammates playing sport together on campus. Besides improving one's health through exercise, such activities also help them to reduce stress: "That's my time to refresh my mind" [12H1], and even build one's confidence: "it boost yourself esteem as an individual" [28H3]. The students also develop skills of playing the game and teamwork:

> …so you find that you meet a lot of people from different backgrounds for different reasons. So you interact with everyone as a Wits team. So the spirit of being a team is just something else [28H3].

The possibility is that activities like these may promote qualities of discipline, tolerance and focus.

[121] 10H3, 13H3
[122] 12H1
[123] 10H3

Other students report being involved in student cultural societies such as Zulu Society, the Ba Pedi Association and the Mpumalanga Student Association. These are ethnicity societies formed on language basis; isiZulu, iSePedi but, as one participant points out "they are very diverse... I was involved in Mpumalanga Student Association. I'm not from Mpumalanga at all"[124]. A Ba Pedi member reiterates; "I joined the Ba Pedi. I'm not a Pedi speaking person..." [10H3] and another confesses; "yes, I'm part of Zulu society but I'm not that fluent in Zulu..." [6H3] and yet the literature says that culture uniquely influence the student experience (Tinto, 1993). Students point out that the zeal to be members comes from the willingness to learn something different and to be widely socialised:

> ...I take challenges. I'm saying no, I cannot just be a student. Let me do things that I'm not used to; let me go out of my comfort zone. Let me go out from my box and other things [6H3].

This points to an unusual situation of joining a group which upholds values that are different from one's own indicating the diversity of experiences and views one comes to know through such associations.

Another unusual dimension or unique development in the activities of some of the ethnicity societies is that of offering tutorials to its members: "you learn a lot..." [10H3]. There are competent senior members of the societies who take on the role of tutoring their junior members[125] according to areas of specialisation. The seniors liaise with staff members of their own ethnicity when confronted with difficult academic stuff. It also appears that particular ethnic groups and practices reflect something of the diversity culture and belief. Members seem to gain knowledge that helps develop respect for individual members, shared camaraderie and groups. This resonates with existing literature that group memberships means that "students have further support networks" and belonging is "a fertile environment within which motivation, and subsequently achievement can develop" (Gerrard & Billington, 2014, p. 254).

[124] 6H3
[125] 01H3, 7E1, 28SC3, 12H1, 9SC3, 6H3

On the downside, to some students, belonging to students' organisations is a sacrifice in terms of time[126]. This is expressed here:

> ...like you've got to have time on your schedule like you often have to go to main campus during your break to go and have a meeting or on weekend you will go somewhere and meet up, you've got to want to do it [9H1]

> When you have to play games, they pitch, then yes, it's gonna be a team. So the difficult part is we do not have people who are willing to sacrifice other things for this team [12H1]

> …you have a lot of work from Wits already and just to join these societies stuff, it does become hard to manage the time, but then it's really interesting. I think you can do it if it doesn't eat your time [7H1]

> …if you play with time, you are just committing academic suicide… [28H3]

This appears to be typical example of students' dilemmas in seeking to maintain a balance between social activities and their studies. They seem to come to the realisation that they have to manage their time efficiently and effectively such that the social activities "just don't collide with my academic work" [12H1] but, at the same time succeeding on both sides.

What stands out is role of friends and peers generally and amid the prevailing conditions of the university campuses. There is the gap factor: absence of the familiar – family and others of the same, including social practices entrenched in the students' lives. There is also the desire to come to grips with the other life, to adjust and succeed, all of which may require a helping hand - the resource factor: the need to access and share the scarce resources which others seem to possess. *The main concern is that there is non-participation by some students in student organisations and social events.*

Non- members and non-participants by design

[126] 9H1, 32SC3, 5SC1, 29SC3, 6H3

What stands out from the findings is that most of the social events are organised by, and for, those who are resident on campus. So as much as some students might want to be members of student organisations, the set-up of the organisations' activities deny them that opportunity. Consequently, they are non-participants by design. There are no distinct boundaries that determine the design but all of these: race, class, religion, politics, socio-economic status, citizenship, affinity and type of residence somehow influence decisions in a subtle way. Five categories that are common among the students are identified here.

One is of a socio-economic nature: some students are adamant and find it unjustified to pay the prerequisite subscriptions: "I don't want to identify with them enough to pay that kind of money, you know, yeah, to pay that fee" and yet they want to take part: "I will play casually if it's happening this year but, I won't pay to go and do it" [9SC3].

Then there are those who are willing to be involved but because they are not in campus residences, by design they are not afforded the opportunity to do so. They find it problematic to participate because the time at which most organisations carry out their activities, is more or less the same time non-residence students are travelling back to their out-of-campus residences or are getting reading materials from the libraries:

> …there are not enough extra curricula activities which happen during the day for people to get to know each other. A lot of stuff that will, they happen after let's say 5:30 or 6:30, like the sports club or whatever… There aren't enough events organised where most people can come to them. If you don't have a vehicle, I won't leave at 8 o'clock at Wits just because I want to play football. It's not possible… [03H1]

This seems to point to a disjuncture or mismatch between students organisations' and some students' schedules. The question now is how do non-resident students' get involved and benefit from these organisations?

Another category is of those who are unwilling to be affiliated to the organisations because of "fear of failing" [32SC3] their academic work and sheer unwillingness to be involved. As expressed by these participants:

> ..I don't play any sports. I don't belong to anything…I don't know, you know...I am so afraid to fail. I'm like no, I feel like maybe it's gonna distract me somewhere. So I have to focus on the studies this year and then next year I will start to join a certain organisation... [13H1].
>
> ...I haven't got much time to do that because really, I really need to pass and I really need to find myself at Wits next year... [2E1].
>
> ... I am not particularly drawn to any of them. It's quite... I think as a team, you have to be willing to engage... [23E3].

The other category constitutes those who are ignorant about the existence of such students' organisations as this participant reveals:

> ...I don't even know of any or how to. I don't know how to go about if I want to do sports. How will I? They don't even tell you how to, what you should do, when you want to sign up... I don't think we knew how to go about it if we wanted to be part of a group or sports or anything like that … [33H1].

A related category is of students who are just by themselves. As expressed by this participant: "… so many students who are isolated because they go by themselves. They don't interact with other people out here because the environment is quite strange" [127]

Last but not least, there are students who do not participate on racial grounds:

> …it's not racial; we just want people we feel comfortable with. We are not used to playing with whites though we do not have problems with them [1SC1]
>
> …Yes, there are for instance clubs and societies you know, you've got your Zulu society. You've got your whatever society… those societies they are diverse …black students in ball games. Then you find less of other races in some societies, for instance, the Deshy camping club. Deshy camp is meant for white students, yeah. I like that club but it is not easy to join. Its

[127] 6H3

> three years now applying, yeah. I have given up and no sporting for me here, never [5E3].

The question that arises is; how much is missed by such a group of students in terms of growth and development considering testimonies given by some students that there are "many other societies within the university where students come together and share whatever that they share in common and in that way you are developed holistically as a student"[128]? Bonding, though an easier option, does not offer students the opportunity of bridging and linking.

7.5 Students perceptions of staff: The mute space outside the classroom

> *…The way university life is; it's one of those kind of, 'I meet you, you teach me, then I go', and you really don't get to interact that much with the person [13H3]*

The quotation above speaks to the type of relationship some students have with the academic staff; that of social distance. Asked about their interaction with academic staff, some participants make reference to anecdotal encounters they have with lecturers and tutors in[129] and outside[130] the classroom. Students make strong reference to language barrier[131] when it comes to interaction with staff. This is widely perceived by the participants to be the case.

***Feeling like 'language captives'*[132].**

Contrary to students from model C schools, students report that those from rural and township schools are not familiar with the English language which is the medium of instruction at the university. The language issue is a complex one; it is threefold, spiral and has some ripple effects. First, and apparently one of the worst is that some students

[128] 01H3
[129] 13H1, 01E1, 1H3, 21E1, 7E3
[130] 28H3, 32SC3, 29SC1, 10H3,12H1, 9H1,
[131] 28H3, 12H1,13H1, 9SC3, 6E1
[132] 'Language captives' is an expression I have coined to refer to the way students from rural and township schools feel when it comes to their experience with the use and effects of the English language in the university environment.

cannot make a distinction between good and bad English[133]. This affects them negatively in both their speaking and writing; "failing assignments"[134]. Second, some students feel as if they are 'language captives': "we are never that free when it comes to the white lecturers...sometimes they use English that is not familiar with us....We always prefer black lecturers because they understand us" [28H3] or "...you have to adapt to the accent and stuff..." [21E1] and that:

> ...we find it difficult at times to adapt to the funny accents. Okay, maybe 'funny' is not a good word to use, but ... some of our lecturers have got acquired accents...so it's more...than just relying on what the lecturer says in class...You actually have to copy or read for yourself because when they read, you won't hear a single thing that they say some of them. That's how bad it is... [6E1]

This issue of language, especially the lecturers' accent, resonates with Malcolm's et al. (2000, p. 7) finding where they pointed out that "some students laughed that: 'we don't even know if they are speaking English!"

Creation and experience of a *'mute space'*.

Third, some students report the labels they get from some lecturers as a result of poor use of the English language: "...we have tutors and lecturers who go like; 'your English is so black', what kind of, what's that? I am a second English speaker" [12H1] or the lecturer "doesn't want you to speak; 'do you know the [X][135] newspaper? Yeah, don't speak that English; the [X] newspaper English' so I just keep quiet"[136]. The students so labelled do not only feel robbed of esteem: "that makes me sad"[137] but also silenced:

> I always keep quiet... I just sit still...I don't know how to put this but, not just because your English is poor or something like that and then because some students including myself now we are, we wouldn't talk to tutors in tutorials because they say your English is poor what,

[133] 13H1

[134] 28H3

[135] Here reference is made to a particular South African newspaper that is notorious for using poor English

[136] 13H1

[137] 12H1, 13H1

> what...we are afraid to just talk...So you will always keep quiet and stuff so...*"* [13H1].

In this case, the language issue has created a 'mute space'; a situation where silence takes precedence over interaction between some of the students and some of the staff. One participant reports: "It's more like here the interaction between a lecturer and students is very minimal. "There is no really that interaction unlike at high school" [6H3] and other bluntly says*:*

> Interaction with lecturers is limited. I don't generally consult with lecturers. I don't feel like... I don't feel comfortable to have friendly chats with them… I don't know them. Eh, I get uncomfortable having personal conversations with people I don't really know [9SC3]

Others view lecturers as people who are too busy to relate with students outside the classroom and "the resources have actually been friends and the tutors"[138]. This seems to contradict Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) concept of linking which assumes that students connect with people in power to obtain some resources.

While others experience how impersonal some academic staff are: "They don't even know your name, you even graduate without any of your professors knowing your name" [6E1], on the contrary, some appreciate the recognition they get from the lecturers; "acknowledging our presence that's what I enjoy … [01E1].

Most students report absence of interaction[139] with academic staff outside the classroom. The most probable encounter students refer to is during consultation times. For some students, going to consult the lecturers is the last resort: "If I don't understand in class and I don't understand my peers, yes, the next port of call is the lecturer" [32SC3], "we go to their offices…to ask for help if we do not understand" [10H3]. Others view it differently. They feel positive about consultations and affirm that the best person to consult is the lecturer:

[138] 6E1, 10SC1
[139] 6H3, 9SC3, 13H3, 6E1, 33H1, 10SC1

> …I just feel my lecturer knows me best; he knows my performance and knows how I am doing everything…a good number of them are very good…there were times they might be a bit scary, put us under a lot of pressure, but then, it's like the way of giving you a lot of push so that you can work hard [29SC1].

While every student seems to be aware of the bureaucracy surrounding consultation of lecturers and tutors from their offices, somewhat paradoxically it is this red tape coupled with fear of the lecturers and lack of confidence to speak in English that deter some from seeking the much needed help. The narratives below sum it all:

> See the lecturers for help? No. I think it's more of my colleagues. It's not the lecturers. No, I've never consulted with a lecturer… lecturers and teachers from high school they are quite different. With a lecturer, they don't... I won't say they don't want to help students. They do want to help but it's not in the same way; they won't sit down and lecture to you. It's more like to say, 'it's consultation time'. There's still a queue you know, out there. People want to consult the lecturer. You have to be precise and be on your point. Let me say, I'm just confused, I'm going to a lecturer to consult, no, no; 'you have to be concise and come to me with some substance. You just cannot come here and say you don't understand a simple term; you haven't studied that term'. It's more like saying consulting a lecturer you have to prepare yourself so yeah… [6H3]

> … if I need help, I'll see a tutor because they always make time to be available to help…consult with lecturers, no…: because I feel lecturers to be busy people they are not gonna have time for me…It's just my own little understanding of what I feel a lecturer to be a very busy person. like I feel that they … to us the lecturer, then I always think about the big gap between us, I'm just a first year student and here you have a lecturer probably a doctor and… [8H1].

> Yes, you can go to your lecturers at consultation times and ask for help and everything, but it's not like at school where you can get everything. Here you have to do things in a certain way for the certain procedures. It is quite difficult. [10H3].

This seems to confirm the view in the literature that improving space utilisation by the central timetabling of spaces where teaching and learning take place and academics worked, reduces the possibility of causal encounters between academics and students (Temple, 2008).

Students who get the opportunity to interact with academic staff through involvement in staff projects find satisfaction in doing that (Kuh et al., 2005). One participant comments: "With my lecturer there I am learning a lot. I mean, she taught me how to, you know, I'm learning how to put together interviews for the research that she will be doing …that's lot of fun" [1H3]. In some instances, some lecturers encourage students to be best they could be[140] and contrary with the experience where other lecturers are viewed as "difficult people"[141] and the students point out that they are all adults here and in an adult institution so lecturers should not over exude their power just because they are in position of power. Students suggest that instead of them being treated like small kids, university policy should be enforced to reprimand offenders.

Experiences of unfulfilled expectations in student-staff interactions.

Instead of recounting the nature of student-staff relationship that prevails, some students talk about what is absent; their expectations; they call for re-assurance. One participant itemises his/her expectations:

> …more support from lecturers; where they can like, make themselves available more often and tell us, when they are available, where we can access them, tell us not to be afraid to come to ask them… sometimes when you have this connection with your tutor or lecturer then you develop that relationship between you two, then like somehow when you know the person, then maybe you want to perform better in their subject…you'd probably develop a greater understanding of what they're teaching and it's also gonna allow you to perform better… [8H1]

While another suggests how to create a positive environment; to break the silence:

> …if you are comfortable where you are, then it's positive. If you speak, if you are comfortable where you are, that's very important. Then you become very positive because

[140] 1H3
[141] 5E3

> you can be able to talk, to explore, to experience you know that you are free [13H1].

In contrast to their occasional negative encounter with academic staff, students seem generally contented with their interactions with administrative and support staff. The possibility is that their concerns about academic work may crowd support staff issues. Relating their interactions with support staff on campus, reports about security staff takes high priority*:*

> …Because you'd walking on campus 2 o'clock in the morning, you don't even see a single security [guard] on campus. They are all in their offices or something like that. so it's risky and you read from Vuvuzela; there are people that are getting robbed on campus and cars being stolen [and] you ask yourself : 'how that happens if we are supposed to be having campus control'... [6E1].

Some students make references to incidence of being mugged on campus especially at night:

> …I once got robbed on campus so basically after I got robbed on campus, I don't even feel it's safe to walk around campus like late at night like when I go to the library, studying and everything [29SC1].

It seems reasonable to conclude that security issues are necessary as they impact on student's movement on campus.

This section reveals that the students' relationship with staff is not healthy. There appear to be a disjuncture between the current nature of student-staff interaction or lack of it with what the students expect and vie for.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the relationship that the students report having with other stakeholders on campus. What comes out strongly is 'the power of relationships[142]' and

[142] The term 'power of relationships' has been used in literature to refer to the strength that comes out of relationships people build as members of a group. The strength is in terms of advice, support,

hence students occupy relational spaces[143]. Similarly Dyke (2015, p 552) citing Archer (2012) contends that the relational approach "emphasises how people interact with the legalities of the situations in which they find themselves, respond, reproduce, adapt or change those realities through their actions" What comes out is the importance of friendship and peers in the lives of the students. Students make friends around commonalities such as same course same year of study and sane residence. Usually the common denominator is the course leading one to conclude that academic discipline has influence on social life on campus. Another striking revelation is the new role assumed by students' affinity organisations; that of assisting their members with academic work through study sessions and tutorials. These are spaces that facilitate the formation of student ideas. Of concern is the seemingly loose nature of such initiatives. Not all students enjoy such privileges.

From this chapter what also comes out strongly are the negative encounters which students have with some of the lecturers in the classroom and the outcomes tend to spill out into the students' social domain. Language issues create parameters through which the disadvantaged students define themselves. Such parameters tend to relegate this group of students into what I refer to as the mute space. The prevalence of bonding and mute spaces may warrant stronger institutional mediation. This could be detrimental to the students' social growth and development. It seems reasonable to conclude that the power of relationship is necessary and vital in that it impacts on the way students occupy spaces on campus. There is an increasing recognition of the value of student – initiated academic associations arranged through affinity groups aimed at providing collective support to students as they confront the complex challenges posed by the university social and academic demands. The question then is what does this entail for the growth and development of the university student of the 21st century? The next

---

communication, and sharing among the members involved. (see Gittell, 2003; van der Merwe & Heerden, 2009). I adopted the term as a theme to show what comes out of the friendships, peer groups and organisations that students form and are members.

[143] I adopted the term 'relational space ' from Gittell's (2003 include the page number here) research where he discussed how to create relational space for building shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect in his model – Relational Model of Organizational Change'. Van de Merwe and Heerden, (2009) used the term 'relational' in a model and explained that relational models deal with 'patterns of friendship, advice, communication, or support that exists among members of a social system'. Equally I decided to use it with reference to space occupied by members of a social system.

chapter, 8, seeks to provide the response to this pertinent question through addressing the main question for this study.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS: 'OPENING THE BUD TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITY'

8.1 Introduction

As substantiated in the literature, the context of increased demands placed on universities in South Africa for the recruitment of more undergraduate students especially from previously disadvantages communities, coupled with the demand for epistemic access for such students, requires a focus on students' campus experience. The aim was to establish the students' perceptions about the campus; where they are and what they do outside the classroom and the resources they draw on in so far as their academic achievement is concerned. This Chapter is structured in the following way:

In section 8.1, I present the focus of this chapter. While in section 8.2, I synthesise the consolidated themes as a way of revisiting the main research question that I asked in chapter 1. I discuss the theoretical insights and their implications. Then in section 8.3, I present the unexpected emerging issues that amazed me in the course of the study. The overall and meta-theoretical insights are discussed in section 8.4. In section 8.5, I reflect on the study celebrating the somewhat quirky contribution it makes to knowledge. To round off the study in a lucid manner, in section 8.6, I discuss the limitations of the study before highlighting the areas for future investigation and then look back at my role in the study in section 8.7.

This interpretive qualitative case study sought to explore and document campus experiences of undergraduate students at Wits with the view to establish how they relate to student achievement. Participants were drawn from three faculties; Humanities, Science and Engineering and the Built Environment. Specifically the study was concerned with listening to and viewing the social campus space from the perspectives of the students. Thus, the method used proceeded to encourage students to talk freely about how they negotiate the university campus space, the social domain outside the

classroom. Through a set of semi-structured interviews, the participants and the interviewer engaged in conversations that allowed the participants to express their experiences on campus resulting in the generation of data that proved useful to this study.

In the preceding chapters 5, 6, and 7 issues and themes emerging from the interviews were presented and discussed as I interpreted the data. But this is not the end of the story. I found myself asking: What does all this imply in relation to the main research question: How do campus experiences of undergraduate students influence their achievement? [Refer to Chapter1]. The aim of this final chapter is to wrap up the study by collating the main findings in such a way that this main research question is addressed. This involves providing a summation of students' experiences on campus through a synthesis of the major themes from the data chapters while unveiling the new strands in this segment of the discourses of students' experiences. Just a recap of what I did to arrive at this would save to revive the reader's memory and aid to the understanding of what I am about to unveil here.

From the ongoing global debates about students' experiences in HE, this study sought to explore the undergraduates' campus experiences at the University of the Witwatersrand. I investigated the students' experiences and perceptions of the spaces they occupy outside the classroom, the decisions they make and the actions they take to negotiate or not negotiate such spaces and, the effects thereof. Specifically throughout all the stages of data collection methods, I sought to capture from the students' domain of perceptions, their voices about campus social experiences outside the classroom in terms of the specific areas they occupy, the activities they engage in, groups, communities and student organisations or associations they belong to. In addition I also sought suggestions from the students as to what the university could do to entice them into remaining on campus and complete their studies.

The in-depth interviews and memos employed in collecting this data resulted in large amounts of data and long hours of transcriptions. The analysis was complex in that the composite interview schedule that I used (see Chapter 3) did not only yield a mixture of issues but also rich narratives that required patience and a clear and sober mind to read

over and over again in order to capture the essence of it all. After analysing the data using Osborn's (1990) phenomenological data analysis framework (see Chapter 3), three main consolidated themes that emerged from the data began to form a pattern: (i) students' experience of blurred spaces at the point of entry into the university (ii) choice of and contestation for spaces and, (iii) the power of relationships as reflected in relational and mute spaces. These patterns reveal that the space called campus evolves and is complex. The university has to turn the inhospitable spaces into inclusive and safe spaces in order to improve student experiences. It requires institutional mediation on student agency in order to create enabling conditions that maximise and enhance student growth and academic development. The three consolidated themes about the students' experiences of the campus' social spaces are summarised and expanded in the next sections of this chapter.

8.2 Back to the basis of the study: Research question and implications

The main question I set out to explore is: How do campus experiences of undergraduate students influence their achievement? In this section, I revisited this main question in view of the issues emerging from the study. Let me hasten to say that by answering this question, I am not declaring it closed, but providing a platform for further debates and future research. Despite being a case study, this research seems to highlight some noteworthy current issues in HE. While the study cannot be generalised (a limitation of case study), it could however, be used as an eye-opener worth of further debate and research of cases in other unique contexts. This is about 'opening the bud to understand the complexity'.

The issues that are emerging from the study reveal an overall complexity of students' life on campus. Let me hasten to mention that I was not seeking a causal relationship in the response to the question but to establish some connections or absence of connections between students' campus experiences and their achievement[144]. The question sought to address how campus experiences of undergraduate students interface with their

[144] The meaning of achievement goes beyond marks (see chapter 2 for the broad definition of this term)

achievement. The assumption was that they may influence positively. That is, enhance student achievement, or negatively that is, constrain their achievement. Or just divert and constitute a separate area, in which case the potential positivity is lost or their negativity impossible to control. The space called campus is so complex that the way students interact and engage with it has a bearing on their achievement. There is a relationship between students' campus life and their achievement but, the bone of contention is the nature of that relationship.Where students are on campus, what they do or not do and how they feel about it, influences their perceptions of the campus. Students who have a positive campus experience are more satisfied with the campus than students who have a negative experience. Students who find something or someone to connect to or link with are more likely to engage in educationally purposeful activities and are likely to persist and achieve their educational objectives (Kuh et al., 2006). To detail these issues in order to expand on the answer to the question, I now turn to a synthesis of the emerging consolidated themes; the theoretical insights from this study.

8.2.1 Theoretical insights derived from the study

This study identifies and raises some theoretical insights that may contribute to an understanding of students' campus experiences. These insights discussed below.

Insight one: Epistemological Break

At the outset it must be noted that one key feature of the reviewed literature is its reliance on quantitative research to address issues about student experiences. The first insight identified in this study is the epistemological break with such previous related studies of Higher Education access. CHE (2010) which informed the overall project suggested a critical cultural approach. Previous studies focused on numbers while neglecting the student campus experience notwithstanding a few who targeted university staff and students and did not capture the student' voice per se with regards to campus issues (see Chapter 2). This study is conducted in an attempt to get comprehensive students experiences, perceptions, awareness and understanding about the campus with the intention of adding knowledge to contemporary debates about students' experiences. There is a limited theoretical perspective informing student experience and achievement debates in previous researches and for this reason, the

epistemological break required theoretical positioning: degree of scepticism towards theory that tends to overlook empirical complexity. In this study, there is epistemological break of dominant theories to capture the student experience phenomenon. Thus, the study draws on Wenger's (1999) theory of communities of practice, Tierney's (1993) concept of communities of difference, Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) theory of social capital building, specifically their notions of bonding, linking and bridging and theory of space to understand the campus experience phenomenon. Furthermore, this study shows a reframing of an epistemological angle by studying the phenomenon within some facets of phenomenology.

Insight two: Racialisation of physical and social spaces

Another insight from this study is the racialisation of the physical and social campus spaces as enduring legacy with the profound implications for campus experiences. Prior 1994, the university campus spaces were highly segregated along racial lines. They were perceived as spaces where students could, restricted though, express their responsive to oppression and racial discrimination through out-of-class political activities. Before democracy in 1994, university campus spaces exhibited politically contested territories. The campus spaces relayed racial divide via institutional practices and students responded through formation of political student associations whose activities oriented campus social spaces (see chapter 4). After 1994, the campus has become different. Though there has been a shift to class, race and its current manifestation in form of xenophobia and tribalism, still remain a major challenge on campus. The legacy of apartheid and the imposed campus segregation along racial lines remain part of South African students. A glimpse at students outside the classroom reveal this pattern of black students on their own, whites on their own, coloureds on their own and Indians on their own with some dotted international students neutralizing these groupings. The contestations that manifest, while racial in a subtle way have to do with territorial claims of spaces on lawns, in libraries, in university residents and in student associations; communities of difference. Most of these groups and communities, unlike those in pre 1994, are social spaces for learning. However there are campus complexities within these spaces that require institutional mediation to enhance the learning endeavours.

Insight three: Campus change and complexity

Another insight linked to the above but, unanticipated, is the dynamic nature of campus spaced as institutions; the space we call campus is a moving target (see chapter 4). The campus social space is not static but, evolves all the time. Increased diversity in terms of background, class, ethnicity, gender, and race, if not well managed, can be an institutional liability in that it can generate resistance to culturally dominant discourses of academia and constrain the feeling of 'belonging'. Some students feel alienated and bewildered by the unfamiliar academic culture and environment, particularly those who come from backgrounds with little or no history of participation in HE. In a high performance university environment like Wits, individual effort and independent thinking are rewarded, while uncertainty, dependence and a lack of self-confidence are seen as signs of failure. This happens in a context where neither family support nor the advice from their established networks of friends is easily available. It would not come as a surprise that in the next couple of years, some of the campus issues I am grappling with in this study may take a new twist. With the ever changing nature of the student body due to socio-economic and political factors coupled with issues of globalisation, the global village and more advanced information systems, the students' experience of the campus space will evolve too. The strangeness created by increased diversity of the student body can have crippling effects on student motivation and retention. What this implies is that the university should keep watch of the campus through research to understand what is going on and work towards improving it to the advantage of the students.

Insight four: Blurred spaces and imagined identities

Students attach meaning to their experiences according to the ethos they carry with them. As they enter the shared space which is controlled by agreed upon rules, norms, and values, in search of shared meaning, they anticipate a campus with a warm environment. Unfortunately their expectations are usually not met due to the scope of diversity they encounter, varying individual needs and contextual complexity. Evidence from the study indicates that the students experience blurred spaces at the point of entry into the university (see chapter 5). I introduced the notion of blurred spaces to show how the domain of students' perceptions can be distorted or obscured by varying factors

as students enter into the university. The undergraduate students create fictitious images of the institution based on the discourses and /or 'noise' they hear from their relatives, friends and the media. The 'noise' comes in different forms: excitement, agitation and confusion. Some of it is in the form of established images from the university marketing department. That 'noise' impacts on the choices and the decisions which they make.

What emerges from the study is that the students creatively align their identities with the image of the institution in an effort to try and fit into the campus environment and become students. Images of the university are depicted in a manner that compels students to show allegiance to or understanding of the context it symbolises. The images take over and subordinate the students. If students perceive the university environment as being alien, hostile and inhospitable, and no one recognises this disjuncture, or takes the necessary steps to counteract it, there can be catastrophic consequences for such students. To keep the idealised identity, the student has to strategise and occupies a particular space through what I term identity management. The label about the institution creates a space of action of internalising the spirit of the institution and hence to become a Witsie is to be worked for. Like they have to speak and pronounce like model C school learners. The students who fail to do this alignment either fall on the way side or remain resolute but occupy what I referred to as the mute space when in the company of others. This is the construction they have. The students behave according to the way they construct the university – 'World Class'. The naming a phenomenon shapes perceptions. In this instance, the students come to their senses of purpose with much clarity. Adopting the name 'Witsie' becomes an act of resilience against feelings of failure. What comes out from the study is that in a way such images or labels propagate and maintain institutional dominance and the students have to come to grips with campus membership in order to survive. This creates tension and potential threats for some students. My argument is that a name is not the real story, there is more to it. In order to hold on there, students come to the realisation that they cannot do it single handed and hence seek membership in student associations.

Insight five: Intersecting criss-cross social contexts: contested spaces.

This study captures the view that there are diverse forms of social spaces ranging from physical to virtual within the lives of the students on campus (see to chapter 6). In such spaces the students have varying perceptions of the spaces to the realisation that they have to decide how to negotiate them. The students get into the university with different backgrounds, initiate their communities out of affinity, and occupy certain spaces to reshape their identities. I introduced the notion of criss-cross intersecting social contexts in that chapter. I offered this as a modified notion of Backhouse's (2009, p. 292) intersecting context model which places the PhD person at the centre of a variety of intersecting contexts of both academic and social spheres with each person having a unique combination of contexts of varying importance. Backhouse's model is focused on PhD student experiences. My notion of a criss-cross intersecting context is strongly focused on the social domain of the undergraduate student. This notion places the undergraduate student at the centre of an array of social spheres; the varying spaces which they choose to occupy depending on their needs and aspirations. These include but are not limited to spaces like lawns, campus sports grounds, swimming pools, water fountains, libraries, student residences, virtual spaces, the activities the students engaged in, and their interaction with friends, peers and staff. The choice to be in any of these contexts or spaces is determined by i) the space's accessibility since some of them are spaces of contestation ii) the extent to which such spaces are able to meet the student's needs and develop them academically. This may explain why attempts by the institution to provide student support structures fail.

One context which the students occupy is the student residence. Due to the diversity of the student body, the nature of student residence has changed in terms of its role, conditions of access and also in the way the students experience it. The university residence has turned into a site of contestation owing to racism, tribalism and xenophobia. Access to accommodation "in res" has now become access to different types of resources that other 'out of res' accommodation does not provide. Apart from the resources that are within reach, the presence of residence based learning communities make university residence a more attractive and highly demanded place. Moreover, it is been cited by students as a safe haven. The issue of safety is paramount in this area of Johannesburg which is notorious for mugging, theft and rape. On the

contrary, students in 'out of res' accommodation, that is, those who are either renting or living with their parents, have differing experiences where in certain instances negotiation of learning spaces become problematic. The residence has the potential to become a melting pot where differences are negotiated around culture and lifestyle.

Another space that has also taken a new twist is the university's library. The library does not provide the affordances that promote or encourage the creation and engagement of student communities already prevalent in some universities in America, Europe and Australia. From the study, there is tension in the library. Some students require the quiet nature of the conventional library while others assemble in groups and chat in corners creating new forms of 'noise'. The notion of noise in this case does not just mean speaking aloud and interfering with student concentration but also they flood the space with distracting information via chat groups, WhatsApp's, short message systems (sms), twitter, blogs, facebook and emails. Virtualisation is said to be "liberating, enriching and invariably democratizing" (Cairncross, 2001, p. 4) however the consequences are that students are apparently quiet but largely displaced from the library. The implication here it might almost seem, is that the library has to transform into a space that accommodates the varying needs of the students, one where a variety of student activities can happen simultaneously without any of the students feeling offended. Some students no longer frequent the library due to the availability of e-books, e-journals and other e-library facilities easily accessible and available in virtual spaces. So a point to note is the changing nature of the university library from a physical space to a more extended learning social space through its continuing virtualization and on-line access.

From this study, surprisingly, an open space, such as the university lawns constitute a critical space. University lawns have a particular meaning forged by Wits politics. More than space for relaxation, they were spaces for student political, religious, and social mobilisation. They reflected territorial battles that have taken a new twist now. The lawn has become an assembly point for different student communities with mixed agendas to the point that students now have territorial claims of some areas there. In this open space, students also occupy the virtual spaces through mobile devices and

wireless university network. These allow students to network on-the-go with their parents and friends across the geographical boundaries. The students participate in virtual communities in shared virtual locations and activity which some students despise for its entrancing nature; if not vigilant, one could waste time there at the expense of productive activities. On the other end of the continuum, there are shared university-created academic virtual platforms like SAKAI where students and lecturers can communicate and work on course assignments. In addition, using the university WiFi, students now have access to e-library material and therefore need not go the library to source information for writing assignments. All this can happen on the lawns in the company of friends, peers and communities. In this manner, students share ideas about their academic work in a relaxed atmosphere.

Insight six: Communities bond, bridge and link: relational spaces for student-driven activities.

This study also draws attention to the proliferation of student-driven activities on campus. There is more of bonding and very little of linking and bridging among the students. Bonding, though an easier resource to obtain it does not benefit students much on its own when it comes to their achievement. This study suggests that increasing diversity and social complexity on campus and the related pressures posed on students, open space for the creation of a multiplicity of individual and joint responses. These reactions very often gain expression in form of associations that bring groups together around the challenges that the students confront. As part of these creations, there is the importance of making compatible friends: bonding, which further intensifies the power of relationships. This concurs with the view that "student experience seems to involve entering into and maintaining bonds with social groups" (Maunder et al., 2010, p. 53). The symbiotic nature of the purposes of Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) concepts of bonding, bridging and linking surfaced the power of relationships in creating *relational spaces*[145] for student-driven activities. The friendship formation criteria used by the students and their affiliation to ethnic associations demonstrated the applicability of

[145] I adopted the term 'relational space ' from Gittell's (2003) research where he discussed how to create relational space for building shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect in his model – Relational Model of Organizational Change'. Valente (1995 cited by van de Merwe & Heerden, 2009) used the term 'relational' in a model and explained that relational models deal with 'patterns of friendship, advice, communication, or support that exists among members of a social system'. Equally I decided to use it with reference to space occupied by members of a social system.

bonding and bridging concepts while the '*mute space"* is indicative of less of and /or absence of students linking with the people in power or with the required resources.

Due to varying needs, students join or form student associations (communities, groupings and clubs) that respond to their personal agency. Student associations put in place by the university are there but students ignore them and/or replace them or reproduce them differently. One striking development is that many students are currently constituted in informal and formal academic support associations that provide mutual support on issues concerning their academic work. An interesting new development is the changing roles of the student associations like the faith-based organisations and cultural groups which now offer tutorials to members. Senior competent members of the societies take on the role of tutoring their junior members according to areas of specialisation. The seniors liaise with staff members of their own ethnicity when confronted with difficult academic work. It also appears that particular ethnic groups and practices reflect something of the diversity of culture and belief. Members tend to gain knowledge that helps them develop respect for different individual members, shared camaraderie and groups. However, becoming a member is a matter of choice so it takes students a long time to appreciate that if they join they stand to benefit.

Student associations have become networks for civic engagement that provide ample opportunities for intellectual growth and leadership development, social and spiritual support to compensate for family absence, and chances to reach out to others in the university community. An incredible revelation is the new responsibility assumed by student affinity associations, which assist their members with academic work through study sessions and tutorials. What emerges is an increasing appreciation of the nurturing role of student associations with regards to academic development and personal growth. Of concern here are two issues. One is the seemingly loose nature of such initiatives and lack of effective institutional mediation to enhance their impact. Second is the mute space which I alluded to earlier on which some students occupy. The bonding more than linking and bridging forms of social capital seem to prevail among students and their associations, yet arguably all three aspects, including linking and bridging are essential for a stronger community (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000) since each one of them caters

for a different type of relationship and assumes a particular type of support. It follows that "a balance of the three forms of social capital may also be vital" (Stone, 2003, p. 13). There is considerable potential to enhance bonds and build links and bridges through adequate and effective practical forms of institutional mediation.

8.3 Unanticipated emerging issues

There are some issues that emerge from this study which did not appear to directly address the research question especially the issue of campus social space. They do however, illuminate the contemporary context and the concerns the campus community is facing.

Initial first year lectures are a nightmare

Referring to chapter 3, I explained the disarray of my interview data due to the use of a composite interview schedule. This made the initial analysis of data very cumbersome but it had to be done. In trying to locate some of the responses pertaining to my own interview questions from the transcriptions, I came across some surprises. Despite efforts to redirect the interviewees' response to the social domain which is the area of interest for this study, the interviewees now and again brought up issues concerning their academic experiences in the classroom. These responses became so frequent that it rang in my mind that there is a serious issue which I could not ignore. Most first year and a few third year students narrated lack of skills in multitasking during their very first lectures at the university.

Most first year undergraduates interviewed for this study expressed the multitude of difficulties they faced during lectures during their early days at the university. These include problems of listening and taking notes at the same time. Coupled with this are difficulties in keeping pace with the lecturer and in getting what some lecturers are saying in 'English'. The other issue was the inability of some of these students to understand let alone speak fluent English. The students from rural and township schools reported that they were used to be taught most of their subjects in vernacular at high school. For them to participate in class confidently without fear of possible ridicule

became very difficult. As a result they chose to keep quiet and in instances where they attempted to speak in broken English were laughed at by other students or ridiculed by the lecturer, they decided not to contribute in the discussions. When outside the classroom, they occupy the mute spaces*:* a situation where silence takes precedence over interaction between the students and some members of the staff. These unprecedented issues require institutional interventions if the students are to enjoy their initial lectures for these create an impression for other forthcoming lectures.

8.4 Overall theoretical insights derived from the study

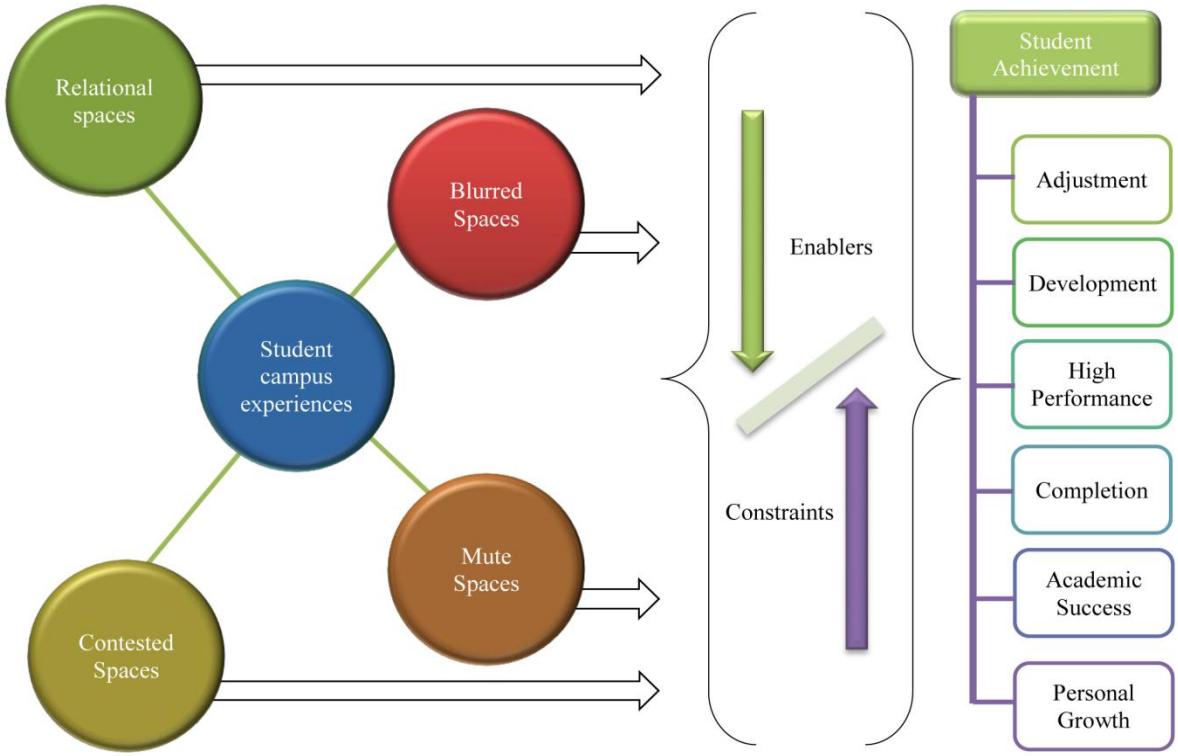
The emerging issues in this study advance the understanding of the link between campus social experiences and student achievement in a broader sense. The campus space that is emerging is a social learning space. There is a shifting configuration of the campus spaces into an essential learning space for student academic and social development. Within this pattern, learning communities emerge as a consequence of both individual, collective and in some cases institutional agency. This requires a new approach particularly at a time when these trends are being precipitated by the extension of classroom practices on campus via ICTs. What has emerged from this study is of value to the university in understanding the campus complexity and suggesting specific spaces which require institutional mediation to maximise student agency and promote student development. The student actions and activities are vital in transitioning the campus to match students' needs. What emerges is that campus spaces are oriented by the students' activities. Student agency addresses the manner in which students' aspirations, expectations and perceptions influence the way they carry out their activities and execute their roles as students. The students' domains of perceptions could restrain or promote student achievement. The development of awareness, skills and knowledge and the changing values, norms and behaviours, has a bearing on how the communities mediate on the crisscross social contexts and the other students. This poses serious challenges to researchers. What is perhaps needed is turning campus social spaces into social learning spaces that are flexible; where activities are delineated with and through students as creators of their spaces. There is a need for the university to examine students' actions in order to understand them and its credence so as to arrive

at suitable mediation. *However,* one *is bound to ask:* what do I make of the theoretical insights? To address this question, I am with Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 6) who contend that "theory emerges …from disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected". As one collects the data and examines the parts, one is actually constructing a picture (Bogdan& Biklen, 2007, p. 6). The theoretical insights discussed above bring out a picture of critical spaces which inform student campus experiences. Put together, the main themes constitute what I refer to as the 'Achievement-Space Linkage Model' (ASL Model). I elaborate this in the section that follows as I rethink university campus for the new generation….

8.4.1 Rethinking a university social campus for the 21st century students: meta- theoretical insights

What emerges from this study is the overall complexity of students' campus experiences. The central overarching issue appears to be that the student's experience is shaped by an intersecting criss-cross maze of social and learning spaces, the value of which depends on the profile of the student and student agency resulting in campus complexities. My schema of critical spaces comprises four social spaces grounded on the identity space and these are: the blurred spaces, mute spaces, contested spaces and relational spaces. Though fluid, these are spaces that shape student campus experiences Students' experiences develop and are located in these spaces. What happens in each of these spaces can promote and/or inhibit student achievement. These themes form the data that constitute my 'Achievement-Space Linkage (ASL) Model' illustrated in figure 8 below. I argue that each of these spaces has to be critically studied in order to understand campus experiences of undergraduate students and the nature of their activities. What does each space entail?

Figure 8.1: Achievement-Space Linkage (ASL) Model



The students' experiences are related in systematic ways which point to the existence of varying critical social spaces on campus. First, from the students' initial experience at the point of entry into the university, there is what I refer to as *blurred spaces*. Within these spaces, students endure alienation, lack of knowledge about the place, academic pressure and confusion because they are overwhelmed in such an environment. On the whole, the blurred spaces consists of three dimensions: 1) images of the university carried by students from prior assumptions arising from historical influences and unverified information from friends, family members and media, 2) the information is personal and informal, and 3) the inadequacy of some induction and orientation programmes. The students' perceptions are mixed and contradictory. There are a number of tangents that exist between perceptions and the decisions they take. This is depicted by the portraits that the students create about the institution and the imagined identities of themselves as they attempt to strategise individually to align themselves with the university portraits. However, not all students attempt to or succeed in their identity management strategies hence some simply withdraw from their studies.

Second, there is what I coin *contested spaces.* The types of spaces the students choose to occupy it be residences, the library, virtual spaces and even open spaces like the lawns become contested territories with the result that others win and enjoy the resources therein while some are left or kept out. The social spaces are not only an embodiment of specific definitions of socialising and ways of socialisation but are linked to specific activities and the most striking instances of embodiment is seen in the nature of the social spaces themselves. Some of these spaces are more productive and others are unproductive again depending on the dialectic student agency and prevailing forms of mediation.

The third is what I refer to as *the power of relationships* as manifest in the creation and occupation of *relational spaces.* These are spaces portrayed in the roles of communities of friends, domain of peers and as members of communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) and communities of differences (Tierney, 1993). Within these communities there are shared goals where accomplishment is met, shared knowledge in terms of how their academic work is connected and related and, mutual respect in terms of how the activities they engage in create value for the individuals and the communities:

> We look for help with my friends sometimes we study in groups, so we help each other when we are studying...because I can learn from them what they know and it's easier with someone that I know compared to someone that I don't know [33H1].

As members of communities, students occupy relational spaces where there is sharing, advising, communication and support. The communities bring about changing values, norms and behaviour that either hinder or support student achievement. A student learns appropriate social norms according to how group members react (Pascarella & Terenzine, 2005). The communities foster these aspects within the student groupings and this enhances student growth and academic development which are aspects of achievement.

However, the main concern is about students who report that they "don't belong to anything (association, group or student organisation)"[146] or "haven't got much time to do that"[147]. The implication is that obviously some of them do not realise what they are missing by not being members of such communities.

The fourth is the concept of *mute space.* This refers to a situation where silence takes precedence over interaction between some of the students and some of the staff. This state points to some relational constraints. In this space the students decide to keep to themselves. There are two sides and groups of students to this space. One could be that the students have the necessary social capital, feel sufficient and contend to work individually, do well, pass and leave. The other could be that the students lack the necessary of cultural/ social capital, feel inadequate and have low self efficacy, stay to themselves and struggle quietly, usually do bad such as inability to express oneself in English. In both situations are not healthy. With the first, upon graduation, the individuals become misfit in the world of work or in society for they have problems in socialising, sharing or understanding others around them. The second lot is much worse in that chances of failing and dropping out are very high and they remain introverts and close doors to social learning.

The students' differentiated experiences within the varying spaces and their indicators, have implications for the ways in which students negotiate the campus space and how the institution should mediate. Accordingly, the conflicting pressures which the students confront in these spaces given their contradictory logics, point to the need for a more practical institutional mediation of student experience, geared at promoting a sense of shared meaning around the significance of the practices and experiences towards growth and academic development that these spaces provide. The contention is about concerted effort of turning social unproductive spaces into effective social learning spaces where learning and development that have some bearing on academic achievement take place.

[146] 12H1, 7E1, 34H3, 22SC1, 16E3
[147] 2E1

8.5 A niche in the space of students experiences discourse: strands for realignment

In doing this PhD, the major issue is that one is expected to make a contribution to knowledge in the field. However this does not imply re-inventing the wheel. New knowledge either comes as new, novel or reframing the way of doing things and I take the latter.

8.5.1 Knowledge implications of the study

This study makes some significant empirical and theoretical contributions to the research into undergraduate students' campus experiences. As one of the few qualitative studies about students' experiences and the only one on campus experiences in the South African context, this research adds to the debates in the existing literature. In this study, I propose there is need to understand the campus complexity and rethink the state of affairs with regards to students' experience of the campus in a way that maximizes student activity for their academic growth and development. The institution looks at social spaces where learning and development are taking place and mediates on them. Thus, the institution identifies and mediates social spaces where learning takes place after the 21st century. The nature of the relationship between the campus and social life should be that the campus as a social space, should be turned into a social learning space. This is the nature of the campus that is emerging. The new space generated by this study is that for future researchers into higher education issues, shift the research trend and consider investigating issues around the campus space. *The Achievement-Space Linkage Model* (ASL Model) I proposed in this study can be used by researchers as an analytical tool to look into campus spaces in an effort to understand students' experiences and stir further debates in this area.

8.6 Implications for practice and areas for further research

The theoretical insights emerging from this study present implications for campus institutional mediation and further research. University campus life should be reorganized so that students' dreams are kept alive despite incidence of failure. This

involves turning the campus social space into a social learning space, to another level where students see the need to stay on campus, become students and help with studies. The learning that may interface with academic work is when some of the actions of the students are turned into proactive actions that result in learning and development that has an orientation towards academic achievement; the learning and development that feeds into academic work. This calls for further research with regards to possible forms of interventions to be put in place to realize the proposals. Before addressing this, attention is paid to the limitations of the study.

8.6.1 Limitations of the study

The emerging issues of this study are limited to the three faculties of the studied university. A different sample of faculties in the same university might have produced different results. It is also possible that involving students from other years of study could have produced different results. Furthermore, while acknowledging the benefits accrued from using a collated interview schedule (see Chapter 3) to collect data, the complexity experienced cannot be ignored and that said, it is possible that the use of a single interview schedule could have altered the findings. Notwithstanding the intricacies associated with qualitative study especially within a case study approach, the emerging issues cannot be generalized to the whole population or other faculties or /and universities. However, they serve to elucidate the niceties of the phenomenon and trigger further interrogations as readers consider evaluating the transferability of the emerging issues to similar contexts. Finally and most importantly, the emerging issues show a link between student experience and their eventual achievement they cannot be used to ascertain the causal relationships between the two.

8.6.2 Suggestions for further research

> *…A new discovery is seldom fully effective for practical purposes till many minor improvements and subsidiary discoveries have gathered themselves around… (Marshal cited in Cairncross, 2001)*

This study was a case of three faculties within one university and as such the insights could save as a pointer to the presence of a problem but cannot be generalized to other faculties or universities in South Africa. It would be interesting to conduct a study covering faculties in other universities. This could unveil interesting insights into campus experiences of undergraduate students. Equally, the study focused on where the students are and what they do when not in the classroom. The students' experience in the classroom could be another interesting area for research. Among other issues, this study suggests specific spaces which require institutional mediation to maximize student agency and promote student development. This presents a possible study that explores possible institutional mediation strategies and interventions.

This study proposed the Achievement-Space Linkage (ASL) Model which shows spaces that shape student campus experiences. Other studies to explore student experiences using this model as an analytical tool could offer invaluable insights about its strengths and weaknesses, in the process opening space for further interrogation adding to the body of existing knowledge in the field of research methodology.

A study on campus experiences of post graduate students would unveil interesting insights into the spaces this group of students occupies.

8.7 Closing thoughts

At the start of my study, I thought doing PhD was is all about reading and writing. This was a misconception. I became an apprentice in critiquing research work for my colleagues in the discipline of Higher Education. At the start of my studies I was not sure of my ability to discern an article good enough for publication. It was through practice and networking with other novice and seasoned researchers that I developed an appropriate sense of critical engagement. I joined postgraduate reading groups where we critiqued some texts and engaged in discussions of the issues read.

There are also some methodological reflections for this study. The research proposal is not a blue print. The process of data collection especially conducting the interviews left

me coming up with strategies that were undocumented elsewhere, in order to set the ball rolling. As stated elsewhere in the methodology chapter, the collated interview protocol that was used for this study brought some methodological complexities. I had to listen extra hard to avoid getting embarrassed by asking questions that had been discussed before. The analysis process was affected by the massive data emanating from the long interviews. To deal with this, I decided to use two data analysis tools to form what I termed *two-staged multiple levels data analysis process (see Chapter 3 for details).* All said and done it leaves one wondering how better I could have done this study. This is where issues of further studies come in.

8.8 I just have to say this…

In this PhD journey crazy things happened. I scrutinised any written word that fell into my sight, it be a road sign, a piece of paper on the floor, an advert, and you name it. The moment I see such, I linked it to my thesis one way or the other. Furthermore, as I mingled and mixed with the undergraduate students, I did not stop to wonder what was going on in the students' life on campus day by day since the campus is a moving target. I challenge researchers to keep on digging. I also take away from this experience a newfound enthusiasm for research and writing for publication, recognizing the endless mutual benefits of it in the life of an academic. For me, this marks the beginning of another phase and a step further in academic enquiry.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: APPLICATION FOR ETHICS CLEARANCE

University of the Witwatersrand
Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Wits School of Education
Private Bag 3
Wits 2050
Johannesburg

16 October 2010

The University of Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3
Wits
2050
Johannesburg

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FACULTIES OF SCIENCE, HUMANITIES AND ENGINEERING BULT AND ENVIRONMENTAL.

I write to request permission to conduct research in the faculties of Science, Humanities and Engineering and Environmental Built. My study targets the first and third year undergraduate students in these faculties.

I am a PhD student at Wits University in the Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in the School of Education. My research is titled: ***Campus experiences of undergraduate students: does it matter to student achievement?*** **T**he study aims to explore the ways in which undergraduates students experience their lives on campus and what meaning they make of such experiences to position themselves for success in their early years of study. This is a qualitative case study of the three faculties at Wits.

Data will be collected through individual semi structured interviews and focus groups. It is envisaged that my research activities will not interfere with the students' lectures and other academic activities. All the ethics issues will be taken into consideration.

It is hoped that the study will add knowledge to existing literature about understanding student experiences in higher education.

Yours Faithfully

Elizabeth Sipiwe Ndofirepi (Student number: 511315).

APPENDIX B: ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South A
Tel: +27 11 717-3007 • Fax: +27 11 717-3009 • E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.a
www.wits.ac.za

STUDENT NUMBER: 511315
Protocol number: 2010ECE187C

08 November 2010

Mrs. Elizabeth Ndofirepi

Elizabeth.Ndofirepi@students.wits.ac.za

Dear Mrs. Ndofirepi

Application for Ethics Clearance: Doctor of Philosophy

I have a pleasure in advising you that the Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate has agreed to approve your application for ethics clearance submitted for your proposal entitled:

Campus experiences of undergraduate students: does it matter to student

achievement?

The Protocol Number above should be submitted to the Graduate Studies in Education

Committee upon submission of your final research report.

This project falls under the aegis of a multi-country study entitled:

Institutional Initiatives to enhance participation, retention and success in African Higher Education: A multi –country study on good practice to inform policy.

A general Protocol Number (2010ECE162C) has been provided to Prof. Michael Cross, the university's project leader.

Yours sincerely

M Mabeta

Matsie Mabeta
Wits School of Education

Cc Supervisor: Prof. M. Cross (via email)

APPENDIX C1: PARTICIPANT INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEWS

Dear Student,

I am a PhD student in the Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of The Witwatersrand (Johannesburg –South Africa). My research topic is: **Campus Experiences of undergraduate students: does it matter to student achievement?** This study is based on a qualitative design and seeks to explore, through interviews, campus experiences of undergraduate students at Wits, in both academic and non-academic interactions and how such participation influences the student's academic success. This study is part of a major project entitled**: Institutional Initiatives to Enhance Participation, Access, Retention, and Success in African Higher Education: A Multi-Country Study on Good Practice to Inform Policy.** This is a project involving four universities in three countries in Africa: Kenya University of Kenya; Nnamdi Azikewe University of Nigeria; University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) and University of the Witwatersrand of South Africa. The project aims to identify effective examples of good practice (student – based, evidence- based) to enhance participation, access, retention and success in African higher education.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. You have been asked to participate because you are a first/ third year student and in one of the Faculties of Engineering and the Built Environment, Humanities or Science. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can choose to participate or not and there is no penalty for not participating. If you want to stop participating at any time, you may do so. You do not have to answer any questions that you don't want to.

If you participate in this study, you will be interviewed by a researcher and your voice will be audio-recorded. However, the recordings and transcribed data will be kept confidential and anonymity is guaranteed throughout the study. Individual interviews will take place early in 2011 and each will last about one hour. The resulting report will not link the data to individuals' names but a secret code (a number or pseudo name) will be used. Your responses will not be made available to staff members in the university.

The research report will be submitted to the University for degree purposes and archiving. An electronic copy may be produced online for academic purposes and some papers may be written from the study and be published in some educational journals. We will not identify you in any way in the published results of the study so your responses will be anonymous.

This study should not pose any risks, cause any discomfort, result in any side effects or have any direct benefits to you. If you feel that you have in any way been disadvantaged during the course of the study, or if you have any other questions about this research study, or concerns about privacy, please contact: the supervisor Prof Michael Cross on 011 717 3093 or Elizabeth S. Ndofirepi on 011 717 3032 to discuss them.

Your participation will be greatly appreciated. The study will inform the major project mentioned above and contribute to informing policy decisions on access and success issues in African higher education. If you are willing to participate, **please complete the form** by providing the following details: your name, gender, nationality, race, Faculty, e-mail address and a telephone number and indicate whether campus resident or out of campus resident and e-mail Elizabeth.Ndofirepi@students.wits.ac.za These contact details will be used to set up an interview time with you. Please keep this letter so that you have our contact details should you wish to contact us in future.

Tender regards,

Elizabeth Sipiwe Ndofirepi

APPENDIX C2: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION AS A STUDENT.

I, (**full names**) _____

hereby confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet produced by the researcher:

- I agree to participate in Elizabeth Ndofirepi's study entitled: ***Campus experiences of undergraduate students: does it matter to student achievement?***
- I understand that I will be interviewed for a maximum of one hour, that the interview will be tape-recorded and that tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet by the lead researcher.
- I hereby consent to this recording of the interview and to the use of my responses in the project.
- I further understand that my responses will be treated confidentially, I will not be identified in any way on the transcript of the interview or in any of the published results of the study and that I may withdraw from the project at any time by contacting the researchers.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that there is no penalty for not participating. I have not been coerced or pressured into signing this consent form.

I am registered in the **faculty of** ----------and my student number is----------.

My contact numbers are: ---------- (home) ---------- (cell)

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature----------Date----------

APPENDIX C3: DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT TO BE AUDIO-RECORDED

I_____ (**print first name**) _____ (**print surname)**, hereby give my consent to be audio-recorded by the researcher for the purposes of the study to be conducted by Elizabeth S. Ndofirepi.

I agree to participate in her research study which is intended to explore campus experiences of undergraduate students and how the experiences influence the student's success. I understand that my name or number will not be divulged without my authorization. I also understand that I may, at any stage and without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the interview sessions.

I am registered in the **Faculty of** _____ and, my **Student number** is_____.

My contact telephone numbers are: (home) _____ (cell) _____.

Place_____

Date_____

Participant's signature_____

Researcher's signature_____

APPENDIX C4: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Please note that these contact details will be used to set up an interview time with you and to summarize features of the interview sample without giving names. *Thank you.*

Name---------- **Surname**----------

Student Number ---------- **Gender**----------**Age**----------

Faculty----------**Year of study (e.g 1st year)** ----------

Race---------- **Nationality**----------

Residence (**on campus or out of campus**) ----------

Email address----------

Telephone/cell number----------

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX D: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The interviews are intended to probe issues related to student social and academic experiences including their interpretation of these experiences. They should be open-ended and allow the interviewees to talk about individual experiences and views on the issues without losing the focus of the study. As such the following questions are intended to guide the interviewer and not to be followed with rigidity. The questions are grouped into categories and, in each category a main question or area of concern is identified together with a number of possible prompts that the interviewer can use in probing the response. It is not intended that each and every question be asked in exactly the form stated. Start by introducing the themes of the interview and then turn to each of the themes with a general introductory question.

***Introduction**: What degree are you registered for and Why did you choose this degree? How did you get to be here at Wits? Why Wits?*

***Becoming a Witsie**: Wits is a particular kind of academic community with its own ways of doing things. What does it mean to you to be a member of this community?*

1. Have you had to change anything about yourself in order to adjust to campus life at Wits? What and why?
2. What does it mean to you to be a Wits student? Do you see yourself as a member of the Wits community? How would you describe this Wits community?
3. What kind of challenges do you face as a member of the Wits community?

***Academic experience**: We would like you to talk in detail about your experience with the courses you have done, the lectures you have attended, tutorials and laboratory work, highlighting the difficulties you have faced and what you've done to overcome them.*

4. What do you think of the course you are doing? (Is it interesting? Is it relevant to your context? Is the knowledge important to you?)
5. What conditioned the choice of your course?
6. Who do you turn to for help with your studies? (Lecturers/tutors/fellow students/others?) Why do you choose these people?
7. Do you consult directly with lecturers in their offices? Why?
8. Is there a lecturer that left a big impression on you (kind-of-for-life)? Tell us about him/her.
9. What makes the environment in which you learn a positive or negative environment?
10. What kind of support do you get to make your academic experience worthwhile?

***Social experience**: Tell us about your social experience as a Wits student, your interaction with other students and academic staff, how you spend your leisure time, hobbies and recreation activities.*

11. Do you have friends on campus/in your courses/in your residence? Do you have friends that you can talk to about your studies/about personal issues?
12. When you are not in lectures or working, how do you spend your time on campus? Where do you hang out? What do you do with your leisure time? (Holidays / weekends / free time)
13. Do you participate in any social or political activities or belong to any student organizations at Wits? Which ones and why? (What have you learnt from these organizations? What role are they playing in your life? Would you advise other students to join?)
14. Is your social and campus experience conducive to your studies at Wits?

Interaction with administrative and support staff*: when enquiring about your studies, registering as a student, paying fees, changing courses, obtaining transcripts, etc, you interact with several administrative and support service staff. Tell us about your experiences in your interaction with this staff.*

15. How would you describe your interactions with administrative and support service staff?
16. Can you describe some positive or negative incidents you might have had with them?
17. What do you think should be done to improve the interactions with administrative and support staff?

Residence life*: Some students live with their parents, some live on campus or university residences, some rent flats or room where these are available, and as such they all enjoy different living conditions that may enable or interfere with their studies. Are you happy with your living arrangements?*

18. Where do you stay and are you happy with your living conditions? (What are the problems and benefits associated with staying there? Would you move if you had a choice? Why?)
19. How would you describe a good living environment for you as student?
20. Describe the place where you study after lectures.
21. How does your living environment have an influence on your studies?

International students*: Has the fact that you are a foreign student influenced your social and academic experience differently from South African students? Elaborate*

22. Were you in Johannesburg before? What was difficult about coming here?
23. Do you feel like an outsider or is it easy to fit in? Why?
24. Has the International Office helped in your enrollment and adjustment to Wits life? How could they help?
25. What other support would have helped you?

General

26. Can you recall an experience as a student at WITS that made you really happy? Describe it in detail.

27. Can you recall an experience as a student at WITS that made you angry or frustrated? Describe it in detail. In this case, what has kept you going?
28. What can the university do to improve your experience at Wits?

APPENDIX E: DATA COLLECTED

This appendix gives a summary of the data collected for this study and indicates how the data has been labelled in the citations herein. Efforts have been made to observe ethics issues particularly confidentiality and privacy by omitting details that serve as leads. These are all interviews.

Faculty of Humanities	**Faculty of Science**	**Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment**
4H3	28SC3	7E1
20H3	30SC3	15E1
1H1	5SC1	16E3
14H3	9SC3	21E1
1H3	10SC1	2E1
3H1	33SC3	12E3
6H3	29SC1	25E1
28H3	1SC1	7E3
01H3	11SC3	6E1
13H3	15SC3	23E3
7H1	22SC1	1E3
13H1	32SC3	11E3
9H1	29SC3	2E3
12H1		3E3
8H1		5E3
10H3		01E1
33H1		20E1

APPENDIX F: CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE

Faculty of Humanities: Education Campus

Room 208/9, Administration Block, 27 St. Andrews Road, Parktown **Tel:** +27 11 717-3021/18 · **Fax:** 0865533480 or +27 11 717-3219 E-mail: maropeng.maake@wits.ac.za

PERSON NUMBER: 511315

Mrs Elizabeth Ndofirepi
D129 Empire Gardens
Empire Road
Parktown
2193

12 May 2011

Dear Mrs Ndofirepi

CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (FULL-TIME)

I am pleased to inform you that the Graduate Studies Committee in Education has approved your research proposal entitled: **Campus experiences of undergraduate students: Does it matter to student achievement?**

You have been admitted to candidature and comments from the readers are for noting by you and your supervisor.

Please contact your supervisor(s) for assistance with the corrections as they have been given copies of readers' reports.

I confirm that Prof Michael Cross have been appointed as your supervisor.

You are required to submit 3 bound and 1 unbound copies of your thesis to the Faculty Office for examination. The copies go to the examiners and are retained by them.

Your attention is drawn to the Senate's requirement that all higher degree candidates submit brief written reports on their progress to the Faculty Office once a year.

Please note that higher degree candidates are required to renew their registration in January each year. Please keep us informed of any changes of address during the year.

Yours sincerely

Maropeng Maake (Mr)
Faculty Officer
Faculty of Humanities: Education
Cc Supervisor(s) Prof M Cross
Student file
HD30

REFERENCES

Abu-Ghazzeh, T. M. (1999). Communicating behavioural research to campus design: factors affecting the perception and use of outdoor spaces at the University of Jordan.
Environment and Behaviour, 31(6), 764-804.

Acar, E. (2013). Effects of interfaith dialogue activities: The role of a Turkish Student Association at an East Coast US University. *Academic Journals, 8* (14), 1144-1149.

Acker, S. R. & Miller, M. D. (2005). Campus learning spaces: investing in how students learn. *EDUCAUSE Centre for Applied Research. Research Bulletin. 2005*(8), 1-11.

Agar, D. (1990).Non-traditional students: perceptions of problems which influence academic success. *Higher Education,* 19(4), 435-454.

Agee, J. (2009). Developing qualitative research questions: a reflective process. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *22*(4), 431-447.

Aia, N. Z. (2012). Residence Halls Designed for success. American School & University: www.asumag.com

Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Backhouse, J. (2009). *Doctoral studies in South Africa: models, pedagogies and student experiences.* (Doctoral thesis), Retrieved from http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/7475

Baker, S. E. & Edwards, R. (n.d.). How many qualitative interviews is enough? Expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and case studies in qualitative research. *National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper*. Southampton: Economic and Social Research Council.

Ballantyne, J., Madden, T., & Todd, N. (2009). Gauging the attitudes of non-traditional students at a new campus: An Australian case study. *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management, 31*(4), 301-313**.**

Berg, B. L. (1995). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences (4th Ed.)*. Boston,MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Billot, J. (2010). The imagined and the real: Identifying the tensions for academic identity. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *29*(6), 709-721.

Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theories and Methods* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education Inc.

Brown, M. B. & Lippincott, J. K. (2003). Learning Spaces: More than Meets the Eye. Educause Quarterly Number 1. Retrieved September 4, 2013 from http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ EQM0312.pdf

Bryant, J., Mathews, G. & Walton, G. (2009). Academic libraries and social and learning spaces: A case of Loughborough University Library. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 41*(1), 7-18.

Bunting, I. (2002). Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid. In N. Cloete, P. Maassen, R. Fehnel, T. Moja, H. Perold, & T. Gibbon (Eds.), *Transformation in higher education: Global pressures and local realities* (1st ed., pp. 58-87). Dordrencht: Taylor and Francis. .

Burnard, P. (1991). A method of analysing interview transcripts in qualitative research. *Nurse Education Today*, 11, 461-466.

Cairncross, F. (2001). *The Death of Distance: How the Communication Revolution is Changing Our Lives*. London: Texere Publishing Limited.

Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) Information Booklet, (2010). *Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation*, 22-23 April 2010, Cape Town: Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

CHE. (2005). *Study on throughput and retention higher education: call for proposals*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

CHE. (2010). *Access and throughput in South African Higher Education: Three case studies*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

Cheng, D.X. (2004). Students' sense of campus community: What it means, and what to do about it. *NASPA Journal, 41*(2), 216-235.

Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (1997). *Research Methods in Education.* New York: Routledge.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison. K. (2002). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: Routledge/ Falmer.

Cooper, R. (2009). Constructing belonging in a diverse campus community. *Journal of College and Character, 10* (3), 1-10.

Cox, A. M. (2011). Students' experiences of university space: an exploratory study. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 23*(2), 197-207.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, Mixed Methods Approaches*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conduction, and Evaluating Quantitative and qualitative Research.* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

Cross, M. (1992). *Resistance and transformation: cultural, education and reconstruction in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.

Cross, M. (2004). Institutionalizing Campus Diversity in South Africa Higher Education: review of diversity scholarship and diversity education. *Higher Education, 47*(4), 387-410.

Cross, M. & Carpentier, C. (2009). 'New Students' in South African Higher Education: institutional culture, student performance and the challenge of democratization. *Perspectives in Education, 27*(1), 6-18.

Cross, M. & Johnson, B. (2008). Establishing a space of dialogue and possibilities: student experience and meaning at the University of the Witwatersrand. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 22*(2), 302-321.

Cross, M., Shalem, Y., Backhouse, J. & Adams, F. (2009). How undergraduate students 'negotiate' academic performance within a diverse university environment. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 23*, 21-42.

Cushman, K. (2007). Facing the culture shock of college. *Educational Leadership, 64*(7), 44-47.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998). *Strategies for quantitative Inquiry*. London: Sage Publications.

Department of Education (DoE) (2006). *Higher Education Management Information Systems.* Pretoria: Department of Education.

Dewey, B. I. (2008). Social, intellectual and cultural spaces: Creating compelling library environments for digital age. *Journal of Library Administration, 48*(1), 85-94.

DiCicco-Bloom, B. & Crabtree, B. (2006). Making sense of qualitative research: the qualitative research interview. *Medical Education, 40,* 314-321.

Dugmore, H. (n.d.). Defending the 'open' university: The origins of student protest at Wits. *Witsies against apartheid Part II*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

Dutton, J.E., Dukerich, J.M. & Harquail, C.V. (1994). Organisational images and member identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 39*(2), 239-263.

Dyke, M. (2015). Reconceptualising learning as a form of relational reflexivity. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 36*(4), 542-557.

Edwards, B. (2000). University architecture. London: Spon Press.

Firfirey, N. & Carolissen, R. (2010). 'I keep myself clean…at least when you see me, you don't know I am poor': Student experiences of poverty in South African higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 24*(6), 987-1002.

Fox, A. & Wilson, E. (2009). 'Support our networking and help us belong!'": listening to beginning secondary school science teachers. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice, 15*(6), 701-718.

Frankel, B.G. & Hewitt, W.E. (1994). Religion and well-being among Canadian university students: the role of Faith Groups on campus. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 33*(1), 62-73.

Fraser, W. J. & Killen, R. (2003). Factors influencing academic success or failure of first- year and senior university students: do education students and lecturers perceive things differently? *South African Journal of Education, 23*(4), 254-260.

Froggatt, K. A. (2001). Issues in research: The analysis of qualitative data: processes and pitfalls. *Palliative Medicine* 15, 433-438.

Gerrard, S. & Billington, J. (2014). The perceived benefits of belonging to an extracurricular group within a pre-registration nursing course. *Nursing Education in Practice, 14*, 253-258.

Gittell, J. H. (2003). The Southwest Airlines Way: Using the Power of Relationships to Achieve High Performance. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 8*(4), 597-607.

Gonzalez, K. P. (2002). Campus culture and experiences of Chicano students in a predominantly white university. *Urban Education, 37*(2), 193-218.

Griffith, J. C. (1994). Open space preservation. *Journal of Higher Education, 65*(6), 645-669.

Groenwald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(1), 1-26.

Guba, E. & Lincoln S. (1994).'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research'. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Harrison, N. (2006). The Impact of Negative Experiences, Dissatisfaction and Attachment on First Year Undergraduate Withdrawal. *Journal of further & Higher Education, 30*(4), 377-391.

Henning, E., Van Rensburg, W., & Smit, B. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Herman, C. (2011) Elusive equity in doctoral education in South Africa. *Journal of Education and Work, 24*(1-2), 163-184. DOI: 10.1080/13639080.2010.534773

Hessy-Biber, S. N. & Leavy, P. (2011). *The Practice of Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Hinchcliff, L. J. & Wong, M. A. (2010). From services-centred to student-centred: A "Wellness Wheel" Approach to developing the library as an integrative learning commons. *College and Undergraduate Libraries, 17*(2-3), 213-224.

Holdworth, G. (2006). "Don't you think you are missing out, living at home? Student experience and residential transitions. *The sociological Review, 54*(3), 495-519.

Holley, D. & Dobson, C. (2008). Encouraging student engagement in a blended learning environment: the use of contemporary learning spaces. *Learning, Media and Technology, 33*(2), 139-150.

Holmgren, R. A. (2010). Learning commons: a learning-centred library design. *College and undergraduate Libraries 17*(2-3), 177-191.

Human Sciences Resource Council. (2008).Higher University Dropout Rates: a threat to South Africa's future. M. Letseka, M. & S. Maile, (Eds.). *HRSC policy brief*. Pretoria: HRSC.

Hurtado, S. & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of College transition and perception of the campus racial climate on Latino College students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education, 70(4), 324-345.*

Hycner, R. H. (1985). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. *Human Studies, 8*, 279-303.

Jamieson, P. (2003). Designing more effective on-campus teaching and learning spaces: a role for academic developers. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 8 (1-2), 119-133.

Jamieson, P., Fisher, K., Gilding, T., Taylor, P. G. & Trevitt, A. C. F. (2000). Place and spaces in design of new learning environments. *Higher Education & Development, 19*(2), 221-236.

Jessop, T., Gubby, L. & Smith, A. (2012): Space frontiers for new pedagogy: a tale of constraints and possibilities. *Studies in Education, 32*(2), 189-202.

Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) (2006). Designing Spaces for Effective Learning: A guide to 21st century learning space design. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

Kara, A. & DeShields, O.W. (2004). Business studies satisfaction, intentions, and retention in Higher Education: An empirical investigation. *MEQ,* 3.

Keup, J. R. (2006). Promoting New-Student Success: Assessing academic development and achievement among first-year students. *New Directions for Student Services,* (114), 27-46.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K. & Hayek, J. C. (2007). *Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions, and Recommendations.* ASHE Higher Education Report, 32

Kuh, D. G, Kinzie, J, Buckley, J.C, Bridges, B.K & Hakey, J.C. (2006). *What matters to student success: A Review of the Literature*. Washington D.C: NPEC.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J.,Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J. & Associates. (2005). *Student success in college: creating conditions that matter*. Washington, D. C: Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. & Whitt, E. (1988). The invisible tapestry: culture in American colleges and universities. ASHE – ERIC higher education reports 144, Washington DC: *Association of Study of Higher Education*.

Kuo, J., Hagie, C., & Miller, M. T. (2004). Encouraging college student success: The instructional challenges, response strategies, and study skills of contemporary undergraduates. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 31*(1), 60-67.

Leese, M. (2010). Bridging the gap: supporting student transitions into higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 34*(2), 239-251

Leibowitz, B., Rohleder, P., Bozalek, V., Carolissen, R., & Swartz, L. (2007). 'It doesn't matter who or what we are, we are still just people': Strategies used by university students to negotiate difference". *South African Journal of Psychology, 37(4), 702–719.*

Leibowitz, B., Van der Merwe, A., & Van Schalkwyk, S. (Eds.). (2012). *Focus on first year success: Perspectives emerging from South Africa and beyond*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA.

Lewins, (2010). Crisis of inequality at Wits (SA), in Universities in Crisis, *Blog of the International Sociological Association (ISA)*, Accessed on August, 2nd , 2012 from http://www. Isa-sociology.org/universities-in-crisis/?p=175

Lepota, G. (2012). BBC African Debate on South Africa@18: Does 'black and white' still matter in the Rainbow Nation? A debate held and recorded at Wits University's West Campus, 31 August 2012. Accessed 29/09/2012 archived at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-19345289

Lester, S. (1999). An Introduction to phenomenological research. Taunton: Stan Lester Developments.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Malcolm, C., Keane, M., Hoopla, L., Kaka, M. & Ovens, J. (2000). Boarders, boundaries and frontiers: First experience in a culturally diverse university. 'People working together: A study of successful schools,' Johannesburg: RADMASTE/Department of Education**.**

Maringe, F., & Gibbs, P. (2009). *Marketing Higher Education: Theory and Practice.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Matthews, K. E., Andrews, V., & Adams, P. (2011). Social learning spaces and student engagement. *Higher Education Research & Development, 30*(2), 105-120.

Maunder, R. E., Gingham, J., & Rogers, J. (2010). Transition in Higher Education: Exploring the experiences of first and second year psychology undergraduate students. *Psychology of Education Review, 34*(1), 50-54.

McInnis, C., James, R., Hartley, R. (2000b). *Trends in the First Year Experience in Australian Universities.* Melbourne: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2006). *Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry*. Boston: Pearson Education.

Meeuwisse, M., Severiens, S. E., & Born, M. P. (2010). Learning environment, interaction, sense of belonging and study success in ethnically diverse student groups. *Research in Higher Education, 51*(6), 528 -545.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Fransisco: Jessey-Bassy.

Merriam, S. B. (2001). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education.* San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.

Meyer, M. E., Spencer, M., & French, T. (2009). "The identity of a college student": perceptions of college academic rigor among first year students". *College Student Journal, 43(4),* 1070-1079.

Michie, F., Glachan, M., & Bray, D. (2001). An evaluation of factors influencing the academic self-concept, self-esteem and academic stress for direct and re-entry students in higher education. *Educational Psychology, 21*(4), 455-472.

Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis,* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Mitchel, R. W., Wood, K. G., & Witherspoon, N. (2010). Considering Race and Space: Mapping Developmental Advising. *Equity and excellence in Education*, *43*(3), 294-309.

Mobilising Regional Capacity Initiative (MRCI) (2010). Institutional Initiatives to Enhance Participation, Access, Retention and Success in African Higher Education: A Multi-Country Study on Good Practice to Inform Policy: *African Higher Education Collaboration Project proposal* for members; S. Y.Essach, l. R. Akudolu, O. I. Ogachi & Cross,M. Signed on 8th day of October 2009. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Montgomery, T. (2008). Space matters: experiences of managing static formal learning spaces. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 9*(2), 122-138.

Morrissette, P. J. (2011). Exploring student experiences within the alternative High School context. *Canadian Journal of Education, 34*(2), 169-188.

Morosanu, L., Handley, K., & O'Donovan, B. (2010). Seeking support: Researching first-year students' experiences of coping with academic life. *Higher Education Research & Development, 29*(6), 665-678.

Morrow, W. (2009). *Bounds of Democracy: Epistemological Access in Higher Education.* Cape Town: Human Science Research Council (HSRC) Press.

Mowbray, S. & Halse, C. (2010). The purpose of the PhD: theorising the skills acquired by students. *Higher Education Research and Development, 29*(6), 653-664.

Murray, B. K. (1990). Black Admissions to the University of the Witwatersrand. *Journal of Southern African Studies, 16*(4), 649-676.

Nasir, N. S. & Al-Amin, J. (2006) Creating Identity-Safe Spaces on College Campuses for Muslim Students, Change. *The Magazine of Higher Learning, 38*(2), 22-27.

Oblinger, D. G. (2006). 'Space as a change agent' in D.G. Oblinger (ed.*) Learning spaces*, EDUCAUSE.

Ochse, C. (2005). "Race differences in academic expectations and perceptions of ability in relation to actual achievement." *South African Journal of Higher Education* 19(2), 334-344.

O'Leary, Z. (2004). *The Essential Guide to Research*. London: SAGE.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008). *Reviews of National Policies for Education: South Africa*. Paris: OECD.

Osborne, J.W. (1990). Some Basic Existential-Phenomenological Research Methodology for Counsellors. *Canadian Journal of Counselling, 24*, 79-91.

Ozga, J., & Sukhnandan, L. (1998). Undergraduate non-completion: Developing an explanatory model. *Higher Education Quarterly, 52*(3), 316-333.

Padgett, R. D., Goodman, K. M., Johnson, M. P., Saichaie, K., Umbache, P. D. & Pascarella, E.T. (2010). The impact of college student socialisation, social class and race on need for cognition. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 145*, 99-112.

Parameswaran, A. & Bowers, J. (2014). Student residences: from housing to education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 38*(1), 57–74.

Parmar, D., & Trotter, E. (2004). Keeping our students: Identifying factors that influence student withdrawal and strategies to enhance the experience and retention of first-year students. *LATISS: Learning and Teaching in the Social Sciences, 1*(3), 149-168.

Pascarella, E.T, and Terenzini, P.T. (1995). The Impact of College on Students: Myths, Rational Myths and some other things that may not be true. *NACADA Journal, 15*(2), 26-33

Pascarella, E.T, and Terenzini, P.T. (2005). *How College Affects Students: a third decade of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, L. D., Bridges, B. K. & Flowers, L. A. (2011). Effects of Greek affiliations on African American students' engagement: Differences by racial composition. *College Student Affairs Journal, 29*(2), 113-123.

Pidgeon, M. (2008). Pushing against the margins: Indigenous theorizing of "success" and retention in higher education. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 10*(3), 339-360.

Rayle, A. D. & Chung, K. (2007). Revisiting first-year college students' mattering: social support, academic stress, and the mattering experience. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice, 9*(1), 21-37.

Read, B., Archer, L., & Leathwood, C. (2003). Challenging cultures? Student conceptions of 'belonging' and 'isolation' at a post-1992 university. *Studies in Higher Education, 28*(3), 261-277.

Rodriguez, G. A. (2002). *Blurring Spatial Limits: Photoghraphing and Spatial definition*. Santo Domongo: Massachussettes Institute of Technology.

Rossman, R. B., & Ralllis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rothberg, A. (2012). Beyond Black and White. Johannesburg: BlzEd

Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. *New Directions for Student Services, 89*(48), 5-15.

Scott, D., & Morrison, M. (2006). *Key ideas in educational research*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Scott, I. (2012). First- Year experience as Terrain of Failure or Platform for Development? Critical choices for Higher Education. In B. Leibowitz, A. van de Merwe & S. Schalkwyk, (Eds.), *"Focus on first year success: Perspectives emerging from South Africa and beyond"* (Revised ed.). Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA Press Stellenbosch.

Scott-Sheldon, L. A., Carey, K. B., & Carey, M. P. (2008). Health behaviour and college students: Does Greek affiliation matter?. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 31*(1), 61-70.

Scourfield, J. H. D. (1992). The Classics after Apartheid. *Classical Journal*, 88(1), 43-54.

Seddon, T. (2014). Making educational spaces through boundary work: territorialisation and 'boundarying'. *Globalisation Societies and Education, 12*(1), 10-31.

Sheehan, H. (2009). Contradictory Transformation: Observations on the intellectual dynamics of South African Universities: *Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies, 7*(1), 68-103.

Shouder, T., Inglis, G. & Rossini, A. (2014). Listening to students: making learning spaces your own. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 46*(1), 26-27.

Sikwebu, D. (2008). A search for Post-Apartheid Collective Identities: Ethnic student Organisations at a South African University, *Journal of Higher Education Association/Research Education South Africa, 6*(2&3), 107-133.

Spanierman, L. B., Soble, J. R., Mayfield, B. J., Neville, H. A., Aber, M., Khuri, L. & De La Rosa, B. (2013). Living learning communities and students' sense of community and belonging. *Journal of Students Affairs Research and Practice, 50*(3), 308-325.

Stone, W. (2003). Towards Building Capacity and Sustainable Communities: Bonding, Bridging and Linking with Social Capital. *Stronger Families Learning Exchange Bulletin 4 Spring/Summer*.

Strategic Planning Division (2010). Facts and Figures. Retrieved on September 18, 2012 from www.wits.ac.za

Sullivan, R. M. (2010). Common Knowledge: Learning spaces in academic libraries. *College and Undergraduate Libraries. 17*(2-3), 130-148.

Swanson-Kauffman, R. M. (1986). *A combined qualitative methodology for nursing research.* Washington: Aspen Publishers.

Tam, M. (2010). University Impact on Student Growth: A quality measure? *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 24*(2), 211-218.

Temple, P. (2008). Learning spaces in higher education: an under-researched topic. *London Review of Education, 6*(3), 229-241.

Thaver, L. (2006). "At home", institutional culture, and higher education: some methodological considerations. *Perspectives in education, 24*(1), 15-26.

Thomas, H. (2010). Learning spaces, learning environments and dis'placement of learning. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 41*(3), 502-511.

Thomas, L. (2002). Student Retention in Higher Education: the role of institutional habitus, *Journal of Educational Policy, 17*(4), 423-442.

Thomas, S. P., Thompson, C., Pollio, H. R., Greenberg, K., Conwill, W., Sall, A.,... Dias -Bowie, Y. (2007). Experiences of Struggling African American Students at a Predominantly White University. *Research in the Schools, 14*(2), 1-17.

Thorne, S. (2000). Data analysis in qualitative research. *Evidence Based Nursing, 2000*(3), 68-70.

Tierney, W (1993). Building Communities of Differences: Higher Education in the twenty first century. Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

Tinto, V. (1993). Leaving College: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition. Chicago: The University of Chicago.

Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: exploring the educational character of student persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education, 68*(6), 599-623.

Toni, M. N. & Olivier, M. A. J. (2004). Academic Identities of Black Female First Year Students. *South Africa Journal of Education*, *24*(3), 194-199.

Turner, A. Weich, B. & Reynolds, S. (2013). Learning spaces in academic libraries: a review of the evolving trends. *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, *44* (4), 226-234.

University of the Witwatersrand, (2002a). *Report of the Institutional Culture Survey*. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

University of the Witwatersrand, (2003b). *Success at the University of the Witwatersrand. Report of the Working Group on Retention and Throughput.* Document C2003/412. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

University of the Witwatersrand, (2006). Throughput, Retention and Access of Postgraduate Students: Report of working group 1 of the University Graduate Studies Committee (UGSC) to Senate. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

Valadez, C., McDowell, F. D., Loveless, D. J. & DeLaGarza, C. (2012). The early college experience: identity, community and academic discourse – South Texas student stories. Taxas: CEDER Yearbook, Texas A & M University-Corpus Christiu, Centre for Educational DEVELOPMENT, Evaluation & Research.

Van der Merwe, R. & Van Heerden, G. (2009). Finding and utilizing opinion leaders: Social networks and the power of relationships. *South African Journal of Business Management*, *40*(3), 65-76.

Van Zyl, M., Steyn, M. & Orr, W. (2003). "This is where I want to belong": Institutional culture at Wits, staff perceptions and experiences in 2002. Cape Town: Institute for Intercultural and Diversity Studies of Southern Africa, University of Cape Town.

Walker, R. (2000). Indigenous Performance in Western Australian Universities: framing retention and success. Canberra: DEETYA.

Wawrzynski, M. R., Heck, A. M. & Remley, C. T. (2012). Student engagement in South African Higher Education. *Journal of College Student Development, 53*(1), 106-123.

Wenger, E. (1999). *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning and identity.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wiart, L., Dorrah, J., Hollis, V., Cook, A. and May, L. (2004). Mothers' perceptions of their children's use of powered mobility. *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Paediatrics, 24*(4).

Wilcox, P.,Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': The role of social support in the first‐year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 30*(6), 707-722.

Wilkins, S. & Huisman, J. (2011). International student destination choice: the influence of home campus experience on the decision to consider branch campuses. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 21*(1), 61-83.

Wisker, G., Robson, G. & Shacham, M. (2007). Postgraduate research success: communities of practice involving cohorts, guardian supervisors and online communities. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 44*(3), 301-320.

Wits Annual Report (2011). Wits Annual report for the year ended 31 December, 2011. Academic Administration, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Wits turns 85 today. 4TH October. (2007). Retrieved from http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=1719&1te...

Wits Pride is here again, 26th September. (2012). *Wits Pride*, p. 1-2. Retrieved from http://www.wits.ac.za/newsroom/newsitem/201209/17800/news_

Wolpe, H. (1995). The Debate on University Transformation in South Africa: the case of the University of the Western Cape. *Journal of Comparative Education, 31*(2), 275-292.

Woolcock, M & Narayan, D. (2000). Social Capital: implications for development theory, research and policy: *The World Bank Research Observer, 15*(2), 225-249.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. London: Sage.

Zepke, N. and Leach, L. (2005). *Integration and Adaptation: Approaches to the student retention and achievement puzzle. Active Learning in Higher Education, 6*(1), 46–59. DOI: 10.1177/1469787405049946