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Student organisations and university experiences at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about how you feel about university life.
    - What elements have you found rewarding?
    - What has been difficult?
2. University life can be stressful and challenging, have you experienced any stress?
    - How did that make you feel?
    - Which resources do you think are most useful in stressful situations?
    - Which entities of student life are most difficult to deal with?
3. How does being a member of a student organisation influence your student life?
4. To what extent would you say you are engaged with the university community?
    - How did being a member of a student organisation impact that, if at all?
5. What do you think makes the Wits community distinct from other communities?
6. How do you influence this community and how do you think it affects you?
7. Do you share any emotional bond with this community?
    - Please elaborate
8. Does this community adequately fulfil your needs?
    - How?

Appendix C

Consent form (Interview)

I _____ consent to being interviewed by

_____ for his/her study on _____. I understand

that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed _____

Appendix D

Consent form (Recording)

I _____ consent to my interview with

_____ for his/her study on

_____ being tape-recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

Signed _____

Appendix E

Example interview transcription

B: Tell us the degree you are studying and the year of study

I: I'm studying Bachelor of Arts, 2nd year, Doing Economical Concepts, Media, international relations

B: Perfect, now the first question is ehh, how u feel about university life, generally, your own feelings about university life?

I: I have mixed feelings, in fact, about university life. Eehh comparing it from my first year and now now, eeehh, what I thought university life is and what it is really is two different pictures. Before it was something very glamorous, ehh, esp. from O week u think it's more of a party scene, its more relaxed and then afterwards when u get into university work u find that it's very intense. There's a lot of work to be done, balancing, trying to find time management and all those things you must learn to have a responsibility coz there's no one looking after you. Then it's all up to you can decide at 8 o clock, watch, 7 o clock when it goes on, you decide that its cold today, no I'm not going to class. But all those things have reparcussions. So u must be a responsible person.

B: okay, So would you share on what you found most rewarding about University. What's been what's been the positive highlight? What's been the good part?

I: I Think the positive part is finding yourself. Knowing you are, really, than before. Coz from High school, the Society that one came from. You thought the person that u r ehh but its never been tested so u had friends based on the fact that they are there. But when u come to university u don't have to have a friend because he is in your class. You can have a friend he is doing

medicine and you are doing accounting. So you really get to know yourself. You really get to know if you are a hard working person or not. Ehh and it takes the best out of u and also the weakest points in your life. You realise that I actually can't do this. I can do this, I can't do this. I think that's one of the greatest things about university. It gives you that experience

Okay. Earlier you spoke about, ehh, u know. Time management and the difficult parts of university, so we know that university life can be stressful and challenging. Have you personally experienced any stress from from university?

I: Yeah I have, yeah

B: Tell us more about it

I: Ehh, I think one of the things which was very stressful is to. You see I'll divide it into 3 categories. It's the studying part, friends and then if you are involved with societies and organisation. How do you manage all those three and still succeed. It's not an easy thing. Even how do u prioritise, which one do you put first? Most students would say that going to class is the most important thing. But once you are in university there things that you must do based on what you are affiliated to. Which in your judgement say but this class can wait I must go do this thing and assist this person. Or you must assist yourself. Or. So it's very different. It's very stressful in terms of school. Just itself, subpart of the other two categories, the work load, the reading, preparing for tutorials. Coz you have to, time management all of that. While you are looking forward to a weekend to relax while all that weekend again you have to prepare for the following week. So you have to be very strategic and understand what is supposed to do and

have time good time table where you divide things. If you are just going to do things as they come I don't think u will succeed.

B: Interesting, So how did those stressful situations make u feel? How do you feel about them? How did you feel when you were in stressful situations or how do you feel when you are in stressful situations.

I: Eeeehh one of the things which was very or how I felt when I had stress is that it's a painful part but once you are overloaded with work, you are behind, you are stressed. While you are still behind you can't do anything because of that stress. So u find a person based on that stress, he is behind but he still not catching up with work. You find yourself wondering around and sitting with friends. And not doing the work which is supposed to be done while you are still behind based on that stress. So that's one of the elements, one also sometimes, the element can be that you can be stressed and it makes you push a lot. Coz I'm speaking in two different times I've had where I wouldn't be able to work based on that stress or I would be stress and be able to do very well, excel and study for very long hours in the library. Try concentrate and try have a very clear programme of how the week is going to run. So by this time you know that this Tut is done, you are already going to consult, you are going to do this, to prepare everything in time. Based on stress. So it depends on how one handles it.

B: Interesting, so when you are in stressful situations, which resources do you think are most useful in dealing with the stress?

I: I think to be honest, now, I haven't used the advantage which we have in the university, to go to CCDU or consulting with somebody else. Usually you find that you will be stressed and you don't even tell your mom that u stressed when she calls you and asks how is it going at school

and you just say everything is fine. And I think actually just telling someone subpart of even being a psychologist or anything. Just telling someone, it actually assists or that person can advice you. Coz you will find that in university there a lot of people who like advising. Sometimes it's not correct, sometimes it is correct. But just to have more information, actually does assist. But that can only happen by saying what is happening and the person will say but do you know that there is an extra class of this, do you know that on Sunday there are tutorials, do you know that there people doing a study group on this. Just by talking. Then it can assist.

B: So did you personally use the strategy of talking to people in order to address your problems or did you…?

I: Yeah, I think in my first year to be honest, I didn't do that. And it was very stressful and resulted badly..eeehh afterwards I've tried to use the advantage of talking to people, trying to consult with people on anything which is happening in your life. So that you can get the best advice or sometimes it's not even about getting advice. It's about talking to someone, someone to listen to you, for whatever that is stressing you. Coz in university it's not only education which will stress you. There's a lot of things up to girlfriends so all these things u must put into mind. From finances to girlfriends, personal life, education. So it's all in one and u have to manage it at the same time while moving forward.

B: Which kind of people would you talk to? Would you talk to your friends? would talk to your parents? Would you talk to the society members you worked with? Which kind of people were you likely to speak to about your problems?

I: I think ehhh, I'm not sure if this is correct, but I have been able to separate the problems I have in categories. I personally don't think it's the best think but this is how it has happened where

you find that I have an issue about a relationship. I know who to speak to about that. I have an issue about finances, I know who to speak to. So it's not the same person. There's an issue about Politics at school. I know who, which comrades to speak to. So that's one thing I have done. Even though I'm not sure then, that assists, fully, coz maybe then the person you talk to, you are giving just a part he doesn't understand the full picture. Coz it's not as if when you are stressed sometimes it's just one thing. These things come together. You need to speak about it.

B: Eeeh what have been the benefits of being in a student organisations. You are a member of SASCO, what have been the benefits?

I: I think the benefit is a selfish one, some would say. Ehh, I think one of them is being able to sleep at night knowing that I have assisted two students, I've assisted three students in building their career. That's one thing which is really positive about being in this and especially the organisations I've joined, they are very selfless organisations. When you look into it, there's nothing actually you get in return that that you've assisted somebody. Sometimes you assist people on things you can't assist yourself in or yourself you need assistance but you assist other people before. Even speaking on that, Student Representative Committee, I'm, not to say that it's the most difficult one, but I'm on a position where it's a very stressful portfolio. It's a portfolio which needs results and its results which can be seen. The funding one where you say but we haven't received money for the last two months but what are you doing? So it's a very stressful one and careers are depending on it, families are depending on it. A student comes to you and looks up to you and says I owe this, I need this much and keeps on calling you and you can see that there's no other hope than you. So it's very stressful but one ehh now and gain has managed to do some things and that's the positive part and there's a lot of support amongst these

organisations. I think that's the good thing. There's a lot of support. It's not an individual thing at the end of the day and that has assisted a lot.

B: So with your own personal difficulties, and personal stressors and everything you have faced personally, did you find being a member of being a student organisation helpful in anyway, in dealing with the challenges you had?

I: To be honest, it's not easy to make an assessment. I can easily say that yes it was, but one should look at it very closely. I will make an example. You have your personal problems, let's say finance or finding residence. But you are in this organisation or the SRC which takes your time for you to be solving your problems to solve other people's problems. There there's a bit of conflict. What is supposed to happen?

B: Was that also the case when you were just a member, not in the SRC but just a member in the South African Students Congress?

I: Yes, there are instances where it would be the case. Going as up even to education where you know there's a very important meeting but there's a very important lecture at the same time. How do you balance that? So, to a certain extent it has assisted. It has exposed one to a lot of things to understand the society, to understand what needs to be done but on a personal life also. It has assisted in getting out the best of one's self, at the same time also there are disadvantages. One has to be honest with that. That there are disadvantages; you have to compromise a lot. For example, you would compromise your time with your girlfriend and if your girlfriend doesn't understand politics you might even lose her for what you are doing. So those are the things which are pressed with everything coz some people don't even understand why you are even associated with politics and why you are helping other people

B: So you said it also assists you in getting the best out of you, how does it do that?

I: What it does is that, as I said before, the society which we come from then coming to university, university itself just takes out certain elements you did not know about yourself. And then getting more involved with organisations, it even streamlines where you are best in. you know that I'm good in doing this, I'm not good in doing this, this what I have to focus on in trying to make it strong. If you are able to take criticism, to be criticised, if you are able to point out what is a problem, how to solve it coz all this things come out based on being in the organisation. It's not as smooth as people think it is. Sometimes you get criticized in meeting s and hold their temper and say they are correct in what they are criticizing. I'm supposed to do A, B and C not D and E. So I think those are the elements that positive about it.

B: So to what extent would you say you are engaged with the university committee in general? Obviously the university community would include everyone in the university. Not engaged to a particular sector. To what extent do you feel you are engaged with the general community of the university?

I: I think mine is, I don't know if it's a correct way, to say it's very different. As I said, I've been able to separate my life in terms of politics, this and that. So you will find that I'm also in the entertainment industry in the university. I even advice some house comms how to do their events. So people relate to me in different ways. Some think I'm a party person. Something I'm just a student which is in the library, some think he in the SRC, he can do this, AB and C. And there are 28 000 students so I don't know mostly half of them but yeah I think I interact with students in different capacities. But I think the one that has come out lately is the role of the SRC and SASCO. It has come out very clearly that you are a political person coz now and again even

in whatever the decision that I make. It comes out that there is some understanding of politics in campus that this is supposed to be done like this. Even though your question, I wanted to understand, is it related to students only or to lectures and management?

B: Just the university coz the university community includes everyone up to cleaners, everyone. But not to say you know everyone coz that's not possible, but do you feel in are in touch with the university community itself. Do u have an understanding of what the university is about, the different entities, everything that it involves. To what extent are you engaged in it?

I: I think I do understand the university community to a certain extent. I learn something every day about this university. You find out there's even this and that. The least I can say is that I know most probably all the buildings now in the university but I can be surprised that there are some I don't know but I think I've learnt a lot, I've understood. And that's the good thing about the university. It's very diverse. It's about ideas challenging each other. Yeah, I may understand to a certain extent, the community but it's very diverse. Theres everything in the university. You'll find people who can count, people who can't count, religious groups, some atheists. There a lot of ideas, there's everything in the university. And there are common things that make us a community which make us a community which are the common factors, where we are and the surroundings which we have, Johannesburg, how then we interact to each other. But, and the common problems which alive student, I understand to a certain extent again, even with workers in the university to a certain extent also. But one learns everyday something new and I think that's the good thing about university. One should be willing. You find that there are certain people which are not willing to learn. You'll go to a philosophy class, they'll tell you prove that there is a God and you are from a very religious family and you fail to prove there is a God. That challenges you. Some people even decide to deregister those classes. While it's not really about

proving whether there is a God or not. It's about capacitating you with thinking, getting to know different ideas. And I think that's the good think about the university. But given that faculties are different even people think differently from those faculties. Humanities students those which are doing commerce, their thinking are different, even analyzing politics or what is happening in the world is different. You will go now to an accounting class, they won't speak about Mubarak or what is happening in Libya. If you go to an International Relations class now, they will refer to that. So those are the differences.

B: So to what extent do you think being a member of a student organization influences your engagement with the university community?

I: I think it, firstly there is a responsibility, eehh based on the organization I'm in. it has very clear aims and goals, what is supposed to be done, what is supposed to be achieved based on the constitution of the country. Ehh, so I engage from that position which has a very clear direction what we are supposed to do. And one of the aims or the ultimate goals is to ensure that everybody feels protected and the environment is conducive for one to study for one to be able to study in this environment that is created here. So it maybe financial, or academic support, from home, whatever reason. We must create, once we are in campus, all the necessary institutions or places if you have a problem, how to solve them and thrive for that goal which you have, so there's a huge responsibility of how we engage to students. You can't just engage in any way. There is a clear directive on how we engage how we act in certain instances based on the constitution of South Africa and our own organization. So I think the engagement is the one that guides the university to say but this is what we agreed upon, this is what we see the university being and let's ensure that happens. For example, ehh the university, those that are in management of the university claim that this is a student centred university. One must explain

what that means and put it in reality. Or what it means to students and what what it means to management may be two different things so let find a common ground, what that means and how does it affect the society we live in; South Africa, Johannesburg, and is it in the correct way ehh so there's a huge responsibility from the organisations and how we engage with it coz on my personal thinking is what happens in the university, especially a university like Wits, gives direction to the whole country or people who are here will actually give direction to the whole country where this country is supposed to go. So the decisions we make now, some may think are very minimal, but they have a huge impact on what happens to the greater society and how we solve the problems which we have.

B: So what do you think makes the Wits community ehh, distinct or different from other communities?

I: Ehh it's a very good question. Ehh, difficult to give it an answer. It's very clear that it though, distinct and different from other communities. Eehh and there are different views. I think one of the things that Wits has been able to do, I stand to be corrected. Some may argue against me, to a certain extent it's been able to realise the word diversity based on classes, first and foremost. Working class and those which are seen as very rich. That u will find in this university. Even though it's not in its full realisation but it will be very difficult to argue now to say that there are only rich kids at Wits or there Black kids at Wits or there are White kids. It's very diverse. You find everybody here. You find people from all religions groups. You find different cultures, you find different personalities. All across the country. So and in in fact even in its plans it's trying to entrench more of this diversity and make it a bigger reality.

B: So how do you personally influence this community and how does it influence it?

I: [LAUGHS]

Ehh I wouldn't say personally I do influence it. I do influence it though from an organisational perspective, I think I do. There way I do influence it is based on the goals of the constitution, *Freedom Charter* of what needs to be realised. Making sure that there is quality education. The quality education which we give out is education which is ready for the outside world. Which will be your industry or where ever where the people are supposed to go to. I think that to a certain extent we've been able to achieve from our organisation. Even though some may doubt it or have never realised it but I think we have done that. We have to give ourselves a pat on the back. I think another very direct influence is that we have been able to actually make sure that this diversity becomes a reality. We've made sure that freedom of expression, rights of students, rights of human beings are realised in this university from whatever line of thinking. I think it's one think we have been able to ensure, based on religion, even going to homosexual issues. All those things. I think our organisation has been very strong and straight forward to say that this is the line of march. You'll even see from the campaigns that we have had from Xenophobia and all of that. I think we have been able to influence that direction.

How the society or community at Wits influences me, I think its learning. It's one to be able to learn what happens with this culture, what happens with this culture, where do these cultures come from, what is the meaning of these cultures. From Races and understanding people from Israel's, Jews, this is what they do. Fascinates that these ones from Palestine, this is what they do. A person from Kenya, a history from, tells you what happened in Kenya. I think one learns a lot. One of the things, I may not say now, is evident eehh and I say it does influence me but will be evident in the future is the communication and the connection one makes in university coz one of the things one should always realise in the university which most students don't,

unfortunately, is that everybody who is in the university, especially this university has the potential to become anything in this world. They can be the most powerful people. WE have seen with graduates coming from this University. They have been very powerful individuals, not only in South Africa but in South Africa njalo [pardon] in the world, the universe itself. So everybody you meet here, subpart of what they are studying, as long as they are students at Wits, you should never undermine them coz you don't know what it will happen. So it's very important. So I think that's what I've further out of this community. To never undermine anyone. Try and respect. You should never undermine anyone. Try and respect and learn as much as possible. Not only in class but outside also. Get different views before you speak

So would you say you share any emotional bond with the university community?

I hate to admit that but I do. I think it's based also on the organisation I'm in. Some will argue that we should be very disciplined and live above that but some of these things are very emotional. You find a student sleeping in a garage, it's an emotional issue. Something has to be done. To come back to some students and tell them that you have paid off their outstanding fees, rejoice and cry, it's emotional. To a certain extent. To lose friends in the university coz they are not passing or they don't have finances or something. It becomes an emotional issue again coz these are your personal friends. Sometimes you can't do anything, even if it's not friends at these stage I'm in now, it becomes emotional based on the organisation and where I stand. So I think one is attached emotionally to every decision that is made in the university from from buildings to whatever, it becomes emotional. And I have a privilege to sit in the senate. I'm a senate member in the university. Where it was very emotional for me to find that you have a program of how issues are going to be resolved from this time to this time and decisions are made based on this quorum. That the gathering meets quorum. By the time you reach item six, people have left

the room coz their issue have been solved. That's emotional for me. Why don't you take this issue seriously? Just because where come from your faculty or whatever has been sorted so you don't care about another faculty, another issue, it becomes emotional to a certain extent and also seeing people being incompetent and form a point of view of academics strictly, from tutors, lectures, even students, it becomes emotional to a certain extent. Why don't you do this? Why didn't you do this? Why are you compromising this person? To a certain extent coz these things go at a certain expense. I think this university is one of the most expensive universities. And that being said it's not an easy thing itself. So yeah there's a lot of emotions.

B: Okay, lastly I want to check if this community, Wits University, adequately fulfils your needs.

I: [LAUGHS]

I don't understand your question

B: What don't you understand?

I: The needs I have for the university?

B: No no, the needs you have as a human being, as an individual, in relation obviously to the university. Ehh, be it social needs, be it growth, anything, learning, anything, do you feel, this community, from what you desire from this community, is it being fulfilled.

I: I will have to be fair to this community and say I can't answer in blanket. There are different days. One is able to do certain things based on the surrounding which we are in and I think its helpful and is a positive thing. But there are some things we can't do again based on the community we are which becomes a frustration. So based on a personal capacity or personal need, I think the university is going on the right direction. Ehh especially on social needs, I think

it is going on the right direction. It's not yet there. Coz you'll still find there are students which still don't have books, there students who still go hungry. Even though you said I must speak from my personal capacity, I'm speaking from where I stand as a fundraising officer. These are the things that concern me personal. So that is why I relate to that. So I think there is a direction. I'm convinced that at a certain point, not everything will be done but we are working towards a better life. So to a certain extent a lot of things are right. Some people with different views from parking, busses, meals at res; variety. Some will argue that just having a meal is correct. Some will argue a variety of meals. How is it correct?

B: So where do you fit?

I: Just having a meal.

B: Is enough?

I: I think it's enough for me.

[LAUGHS]

I think it's enough for me. Ehh, yeah, I think the university does provide, to a certain extent, a lot of things which one needs. From Psychological issues to sports and all of that. It's just that some things come at an expense. So that's the only critical issue which one has to look at and it's a different matter itself.