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Equity and Admissions Policies of Undergraduate Students at the University of the Witwatersrand: A Case Study of the Faculty of Humanities

BY

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A mini research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Management in the field of Public and Development Management

October 2011

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Masters of Management in the field of Public and Development Management at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Samuel Fenyane

October2011

DEDICATION

I dedicate this report to my late grandfather Booi Piet Fenyane and my late grandmother Babelinah Stephelinah Fenyane.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my mentor and supervisor Professor Michael Cross whose guidance, encouragement and untiring support, has inspired and sustained me throughout the writing of the report. I feel so honoured and privileged to have been mentored and supervised by him. He is inspiring me every day; he does not know who I am, where I grew up, but has touched my life and I thank him for that.

To the International Pentecost Holiness Church Student Society community and Wits students, too numerous to mention individually: your courage, enthusiasm, hard work, professionalism, honesty, integrity and sincerity is the foundation on which this project is built.

I dedicate this thesis to my parent Frieda Fenyane and who nurtured my love of books and interest in reading. To Suzan Fenner for loving and caring for me as if I came from the same womb as her own children, I express my deep gratitude in this report. To Linda Dlamini, my brother, for the support you gave me during my stay at Wits. The Fenyane and Mndawo families thank you for the support you provided me.

To God Almighty who taught me that "To be educated in our community is to be a shining light that holds a flag of morality, Puritanism and love of fellow humans. Education that does not seek to serve the nation that does not contribute in human development and civilization is useless. Educated people have a responsibility to act as role models to the community at large in so far as setting good example on how to live life in a peaceful, harmonious and dignified way. Education that is not rooted in respect for fellow human beings is useless and not necessary." **I thank you** NTATE

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APS – Admissions Points System

CHE – Council for Higher Education

DoE – Department of Education

FH – Faculty of Humanities

HE – Higher Education

HEIs – Higher Education Institutions

HL – Home Langauge

NSC – National Senior Certificate

NSFAS – National Student Financial Aid Scheme

RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning

SEnC – Students Enrolment Centre

UCT – University of Cape Town

WSoA- Wits School of Arts

ABSTRACT

This study looks at the nature of the selection and admissions policies in place in the faculty of humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. Data was collected qualitatively using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The university has changed its selection and admissions policies many times. At first, admission to the university was based on merit only. However, as time went by, the university adopted the principle of redress to compensate for the injustices of the past. The study argues that the university has gone a long way to address the race problem in its enrolment strategy. The problem remains, however, a class one due to an emphasis on merit. It suggests that the concept of merit needs to be reconceptualised to embrace equity and access. The study concludes that the current policy is not addressing redress fully and effectively. Therefore the study strongly recommends that the policy be reviewed and that a policy of affirmative action be adopted to ensure that students from poor backgrounds with potential are given a chance to access higher education.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1. Background to the Study

When I was doing my undergraduate studies, I was involved in student governance and students' representative committees at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 2005 I was Education Officer, in 2006 I became Bursary Officer and in 2007 I was voted Education Students Council President for the duration of 2008. I was also a member of Wits School of Education Executive Committee, member of the Faculty Executive Committee and the Senate Committee. It was through these experiences that I was exposed to challenges faced by higher education in South Africa, such as the question of formal access and epistemological access, the high dropout rate by undergraduate students, research output and the issues around throughput.

I wanted to know more and understand better the selection and admissions policies of undergraduate students because these were the students who elected me and deployed me to represent them on these committees.

Another reason for the choice of this research topic was fact that it is linked to a major multi-country study led by Professor Michael Cross of the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Professor Sabiha Essack of the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Professor Lilian-Rita Akudolu, of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria, and Dr Ibrahim Oanda of the Kenyatta University in Kenya, entitled "Institutional Initiatives to Enhance Participation, Access, Retention and Success in African Higher Education: A Multi-Country Study on Good Practice to Inform Policy". Part of this wider project deals with admissions policies.

Student selection and admissions in South African higher education are matters of concern at a time when the pass rate of grade twelve learners is consistently increasing every year. This reintroduces the debate on student selection and admission policies in higher education. Universities first reviewed entry requirements in 2008 when the National Senior Certificate (NSC), school-leaving qualification, was introduced. The NSC was introduced as the school exit qualification and universities set an Admission Point System (APS) based on document analysis only (Ballim, 2010). Although various points systems are being used, they all use the basic principle that the symbols obtained for school subjects are converted to numbers, which are then totalled across the school subjects to get a composite score. In some cases, institutions weigh certain subjects (e.g., the points for Mathematics and English are doubled), while in other cases all subjects carry equal weight although additional requirements are set for performance in critical subjects (HESA, 2006). The first cohort of NSC graduates was enrolled in 2009 and the second in 2010. For universities, increasing the APS admission scores for programmes would give access to students who are more likely to succeed in their studying and thus increase the output rate (Bowman, 2010).

Many universities and their faculties have changed admissions policies since 2008. Grade 12 pupils hoping to attend some of the universities in 2011 in South Africa would have had to meet more stringent admission requirements than in previous years. According to the University of Pretoria registrar, Professor Niek Grov, admission requirements had generally become stricter due to the high demand for study at the university (Bowman, 2010).

In the past, academic merit was one of the key criteria used in selecting students for limited space. At the Universities of Cape Town and Pretoria a student must meet both the minimum requirements for university as well as programme-specific requirements, and must write tests – e.g. the National Benchmark Tests (NBT). These tests are developed by the National Benchmark Test Project, commissioned by Higher Education South Africa (HESA). According to HESA (2011):

> The NBT is an assessment for prospective first year entry students into Higher Education. The assessment was designed to measure a writer's levels of proficiency in Academic Literacy, Quantitative Literacy and Mathematics as related to the demands of tertiary study.

However, the final Grade 12 results remain the first determining factor for admission (Bowman, 2010)

Wits University is not the only higher education institution that is concerned about admissions policies of undergraduate students. Other universities are also amending their selection and admissions policies. Rhodes University has increased admission points for first-year applicants to various faculties who must now score 40 (up from 35) points. Universities that employ stricter admission policies tend to have policies on a variety of measures to support students. This is to ensure that students are afforded the best possible opportunity to excel and that excellent pass and graduation rates and high research output are maintained (Bowman, 2010).

1.2 Admissions policy at the University of the Witwatersrand: The legacy

The University of the Witwatersrand was founded as an open university with a policy of non-discrimination – on racial or any other grounds. This commitment faced its ultimate test when the apartheid-government passed the Extension of the University Education Act in 1959, thereby enforcing university apartheid. The Wits community protested strongly and continued to maintain a firm, consistent and vigorous stand against apartheid, not only in education, but in all its manifestations including the admission of its students (the Senate Policy on Admissions and Exclusions, 1991)

Over the years the University has issued many policy statements relating to selection and admission. Especially in the 1980s a range of inter-related concerns were raised: the recognition of inequality in terms of race, class, gender and education and the importance of equal opportunities in selections and admissions. The Vice Chancellor, Professor Mervyn Shear, pointed out in 1991:

> A poor educational background combined with poverty makes it difficult, if not impossible, for most blacks to attain a tertiary education … and a vicious cycle is perpetuated. It is our aim at Wits to break this cycle by working in our own field of tertiary education to help correct the imbalances in our society (Senate Policy on Admissions and Exclusions, 1991:11).

The Senate policy on admissions and Exclusions (1991:11) further states that:

> The selection of undergraduates must be done in such a way as to constitute a student body which is closer than that at present to being representative of the South African demography.

It has been argued that where the university claims not to discriminate as to the composition of its student body, and yet applies criteria for admission based on school systems which are vastly unequal (in terms of resources, ratio of learners per teacher, etc.) it could be accused of perpetuating discrimination (Senate Policy on Admissions and Exclusions, 1991). In order to achieve the equalising of opportunities for access and success, confirmed in the Senate policy on admissions and Exclusions (1991), an affirmative action admissions policy was introduced progressively over the past ten years (1981-1991) to address the problems of those applicants whose education was neglected or disrupted. It is clear that results based on such an education cannot be used as an accurate measure for establishing a candidate's suitability for tertiary education.

And yet, the primary purpose of the University's admission policy must be to admit only such applicants considered to have a reasonable chance of succeeding (Senate Policy on Admission and Exclusions, 1991). Coupling recognition of the grossly inadequate educational preparation of many students with the offering of academic support was thought to be a suitable way to maintain the standards of the university's degrees and that that would be to the benefit of all concerned.

According to Ballim (2010), the University of the Witwatersrand chose not to use the NBT as a requirement for all admissions to the University in 2011. However, students are required to have a minimum of 50 percent for English either as the language of learning and teaching or as home language. The Faculties of Humanities, Commerce, Law and Management have amended their APS for 2011 to attract students who were better prepared for higher education. Ballim (2010) maintains that "in a recent study undertaken by the University, there is a strong indication that the NSC examination results are a fair predictor of the likelihood of success of students in their first year of study". The Wits study also indicates that, in comparison with students who wrote the old matriculation examinations, the NSC students arrived at university with different sets of competencies and abilities. NSC students appear to be performing similarly to previous cohorts in courses that are reading-intensive, or where group work and project-based learning are important components of the course. On the other hand, the NSC students who entered university in 2008 appear to have struggled in the mathematics and science courses. Carol Crosley, deputy registrar at the University of the Witwatersrand, maintains that "the university has a moral obligation to ensure that the students we admit have a reasonable chance of success and our research is showing that the APS we are using are providing us with this". (Bowman, 2010)

Wits University is concerned that the use of the NBT rather than the NSC for deciding on admission has already resulted in practices which place students from poorer schools at a disadvantage. In universities where NBTs are used it is evident that it is easier for better resourced schools to proactively prepare their students specifically to write alternative admissions tests (Ballim, 2010). This is part of the reason why Wits has decided not to use the NBT as a requirement for an admission.

1.3 Problem statement

Since the introduction of the New National Senior Certificate, most universities in South Africa, including the University of the Witwatersrand, amended their admission policies or requirements. One of these amendments included additional requirements that applicants must meet in order to secure a place in university, such as written national benchmark tests

(NBT), a minimum 50 percent pass in English and hikes in admission points (Bowman 2010). In the Faculty of Humanities, the Admission Requirements for applicants who matriculated after 2008 when the NSC was introduced moved from 28 to 34 points. It is against this background that this study will examine the admissions policies and procedures of undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand in the Faculty of Humanities.

1.3.1 Research Questions

This study addresses the following main research question:
What is the nature of the selection and admissions policies in place in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand?

In doing so, it deals with the following sub questions:

a) What selection and admissions policies are in place within the Faculty of Humanities?
b) What principles and values underpin them?
c) What are the underlying assumptions considered in the formulation of these policies?
d) What can be done to improve them?

1.4 The Argument

The study argues that the university has gone a long way to address the race problem in its enrolment strategy. The problem remains however a class one due to an emphasis on merit. It suggests that the concept of merit needs to be reconceptualised to embrace equity and access.

1.5 Rationale

The purpose of this research is to examine admissions policies and procedures of undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand in the Faculty of Humanities. The study contributes to an understanding of the selection and admissions policies. It provides useful suggestions to policy developers in higher education institutions who work with selection and admission policies or similar topics.

1.6 Outline of chapters

The study is divided into seven main chapters as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the contextual issues that led to the problems highlighted in the research questions. The chapter also discusses the purpose of the research and explains how the research will be approached.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter examines national and international literature on admissions and selection in higher education. The main issues explored in this chapter are: selection, admission, equity, access, affirmative action. The literature shows that selection and admissions in higher education have always been based on three major criteria – merit, equal opportunity and affirmative action or redress; the differences in institutions are in the emphases placed on each of these. Included in this chapter is literature that examines the notions of equity and social justice.

Chapters Three and Four: Research design and Methodology

These chapters discuss the research approach and design of the study as well as the methodological mode of inquiry used in the study. It also explains how data was collected and analysed, and deals with the ethical issues and the limitations of the study.

Chapter Five: Selection and admissions: the legacy

This chapter explores the context that led to the selection and admissions policies when Wits was established in 1921 and how this remained relatively stable until the 1950s; it then traces how the policy changed in various ways until the early 1990s. It argues that selection and admissions at Wits has always been based on merit and that the students Wits admitted prior to 1994 were students from wealthy families. The chapter further claims that, although the University was founded as an open university with a policy of non-discrimination on racial or any other grounds, in practice Wits was never an open university.

Chapter Six: Aligning selection and admissions with the principle of redress

This chapter examines the current selection and admissions policy, including the change that has informed the policy. Evidence in this chapter shows that since the adoption of this policy, the enrolment of non-traditional students has increased drastically. It discusses the principles underpinning this policy. It highlights the tensions between admission and throughput and the provision of support.

Chapter Seven: Current selection and admissions policy: Practice and implications

This chapter explores the structure and strategies put in place to implement the selection and admissions policy. This chapter discusses these structures and strategies and asks if they are addressing redress and inequalities. The chapter argues that Wits has gone a long way to address the race and gender problem but continues to select and admit students on merit and this is seen in the Admissions Points System that they are using. The APS has been

increasing every year (from 2004 to 2010 the APS increased from 18 to 34) to attract students who get good grades in matric. Such students are found mostly in former model C schools.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter discusses conclusions emerging from the study. This is done with reference to the main question the study is asking. The chapter makes explicit the main argument of the study, and makes some recommendations that emerge from the findings of the research. This chapter also outlines those areas that require further research.

CHAPTER TWO

ADMISSIONS AND SELECTION OF STUDENTS: WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the debates that dominate selection and admissions policies in higher education. It argues that selections and admissions policies in higher education differ depending on the emphasis they place on factors such as merit, equal opportunity and affirmative action or redress. Because societies are unequal, increasingly universities admit students based on the principles of equity and social justice to allow students from educationally poor backgrounds, who have potential, to pursue higher education.

The first part of the literature discusses the key concepts as they are used in the debate. The second part of the literature is organised into two themes: the first looks at the international literature on the selection and admission policies in universities. The second discusses the South African literature on selection and admission policies, and the use of racial categories and its implications for admissions. Still as part of the second theme, a third part discusses and analyses the recent South African debate on race, gender, equity and admission policies.

2.2 Key concepts: selection, admissions, equity, access and affirmative action

This section discusses concepts of selection, admission, equity, access and affirmative action. These concepts are being used in the debates and different meanings are often attached to them. Therefore it is important to clarify what meanings these concepts suggest as discussed in the literature and debates.

2.2.1. Selection

Harman (1994) posits that the concept of selection is used in different ways in the literature on higher education. It is used to refer to the mechanisms employed to choose between qualified candidates for entry when demand for student places exceeds supply, and it is also used to refer to all those decisions or selections made throughout both schooling and at entry to higher education affecting whether a person is admitted and, if admitted, to which field of study, program or course. Vossensteyn (1997) explains selection as the entrance procedures and criteria used to determine who may enrol in higher education, or in specific higher education institutions or programmes, and who may not. For Harman (1994, p316):

> Selection is often both a highly complex technical matter and a political one. It is highly technical in terms of the choice of the method or methods used, and judgements made about the utility of different methods. It is political in the sense that whatever method used can be readily contested, both on technical grounds as well as on social and economic grounds.

Fulton (1992) states that selection methods can be summarized as choices between three options: the use of criteria based on previous achievement and aptitude, or potential to benefit; criterion-based and norm-based assessment; and assessment which is based within secondary schools, and national or institutional examinations. Selection in higher education relies a great deal on the utility of particular forms of examinations and testing (such as aptitude tests, achievement tests, and quasi-psychometric tests) as means of assessing academic achievement and potential for success in higher education as suggested by Harman (1994).

The literature would suggest that selection entails all the mechanisms that are put in place by government and institutions of higher learning, based on the students' previous achievement in secondary school and the potential to achieve tertiary education. It is also based on the kind of students the government and the university want.

2.2.3 Admission

The Council for Higher Education (CHE) (2004) defines admission as policies and procedures that an institution sets up to manage the admission, selection and placement of students. Admissions management includes the systems, structures, staff and services that an institution establishes to recruit students, process applications, and select and place students in particular programmes. Harman (1994) posits that admission is used to refer to the process from when a potential student develops an interest in entry to higher education until enrolment in a particular institution and course takes place. The admission process includes various activities carried out by government agencies such as publicity and recruitment, the administration of examinations and tests, and the work of admissions centres which handle applications on behalf of a group of higher education institutions. It also includes the activities carried out by higher education institutions such as advertising and course counselling, and activities undertaken by potential students including submitting applications, sitting examinations, and participating in interviews. Admission, then, is when a student meets the minimum admission requirements at university and gets offered a place to study.

2.2.4 Equity

The Education White Paper (no 3 of 1997) maintains that the principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. Applying the principle of equity implies, on the one hand, a critical identification of existing inequalities which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination or disadvantage, and on the other hand, a programme of transformation with a view to redress. Such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also the taking of measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals and institutions (DoE, 1997). Harman (1994) holds a different opinion and views equity as

the idea of fairness and justice in selection and admission processes and outcomes. In relation to higher education, the concept is generally based on the assumption that in a fair and just system each person should have equal access to a place in higher education, provided academic merit criteria are met. However, it should be noted that the term can be used differently. In particular, equity can be employed to mean:

- equal access to the system, or
- equal participation in the system, or
- equal attainments through the system, or
- equal opportunities after the completion of the course (Harman, 1994).

Bitzer (2010) posits that various implicit and explicit conceptions of equity in higher education might include the following:

- Individuals who have the ability to attend university should be able to do so.
- Barriers to access to university should be at the minimum.
- Selection for university places should be on merit.
- Selection for university places should be without discrimination on the basis of variables such as social class, gender, religion or ethnicity.
- Individuals should have a fair opportunity to develop their talents.

Bitzer (2010) further maintains that worldwide, there has been a massive growth in access to higher education in the past number of years. However, in spite of an increase in participation, representation of particular groupings remains low, particularly in relation to socio-economic status. This is the reason why higher education institutions need to use equity as a criterion in their admissions policies.

2.2.5 Access

The Higher Education Authority (2006) of Ireland states that access programmes can be seen as all actions taken by higher education institutions to improve the participation rate of underrepresented groups and students experiencing socio-economic disadvantages.

According to Griesel (1999) access to higher education would mean that a lower-income student should be financially able to attend a four year course and live on campus. Most of the South African population is seen as belonging to the low-income and middle-income classes. Thus, access to higher education goes hand in hand with funding matters. The Council on Higher Education (2001) suggest that access is an equity-driven concern and relates to the strategies and procedures that an institution undertakes to make its educational services accessible to a diversity of students. This usually involves adjusting traditional entry requirements. It also involves developing flexible entry requirements and selection mechanisms, such as an assessment for the purpose of recognition of prior learning (RPL), institutional- or programme-specific entry tests or alternative admissions procedures, and mature age exemptions. Harman (1994) concurs that access means the ability of members of a particular under-represented population, or sub-groups of this population, to gain entry to higher education as fully enrolled students. Emanating from this review the concept of access in higher education is used as a mechanism for increasing participation and redress.

Griesel (1999) groups access into four categories:

- Access as gate-keeping through entrance testing and placement
- Access as redress through alternative routes of preparation.
- Access as institutional survival through flexible modes of delivery and
- Access as quality assurance through a reconfiguration of curricular content.

2.2.6 Merit and Meritocracy

Roemer (1998) maintains that although access is the preserve of academically selected students, and is thus merit-based, this merit is usually inherited and largely dependent on circumstances. Clancy and Goastellec (2007) acknowledge that merit-based admission needs to be augmented by some form of affirmative action. The rationale is that since access to higher education is, to varying degrees, competitive, it will always privilege those with superior economic, social and cultural resources. One response is to redefine merit as

the distance between the academic levels reached by students and the diverse handicaps faced by them, whether in terms of their personal characteristics, family, community or schooling experiences. Bitzer (2010) states that socio-economic standing is widely accepted worldwide as an equitable student selection criterion and that people from low socio-economic status backgrounds are highly under-represented in higher education. This situation is prevalent mainly because school completion rates and school achievement levels closely relate to social class and race Bitzer (2010).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1985) argue that merit-based admission favours students from privileged backgrounds and does not give equal opportunity to those students coming from disadvantaged families. This is the reason certain universities adopted affirmative action policies. Herman (1995) agrees with the criticism of educationists that selection criteria generally favour students coming from families with a high socio-economic status, and students from elitist secondary schools and that this constitutes discrimination against the students of minorities. This is in line with Clancy and Goastellec (2007) who claim that universities are established to serve the needs of the elites. According to Erasmus (2010) in practice, 'merit' refers to high matric scores. This score is one subjective measure that has become institutionalised as the socially acceptable measure of what constitutes 'socially valuable ability' for the purposes of academic performance. However, Erasmus (2010) citing evidence by Hall (2006) and Bhorat and Oosthuizen (2008) reveal that matric scores are "effectively a proxy for wealth and power, historically racialised predominantly as white in South Africa".

As a consequence of demographic, economic, political and ideological pressures on access, inherited merit has gradually been abandoned and replaced by the norm of equality of rights over the last three decades (Goastellec, 2006). Increasingly it is felt that higher education should be accessible to larger numbers of individuals regardless of their social origin. It should thus represent the national diversity, and testify to the democratic dimension of the legitimacy of the state.

CHE (2001:7) points out that the Higher Education Act (1997) does not specify a minimum admissions requirement for Higher Education (HE) study; but it does require that 'the admissions policy of a public higher education institution must provide for the redress of past inequalities'. It is in this context that the widening of higher education (HE) access has become an equity-driven concern and relates to the strategies and procedures that an institution undertakes to make its educational services accessible to a diversity of students. This usually involves adjusting traditional entry requirements. It also involves developing flexible entry requirements and selection mechanisms, such as assessment for the purpose of recognition of prior learning (RPL), institutional- or programme-specific entry tests or alternative admissions procedures, and mature age exemptions CHE (2001:3). In the South African post-apartheid context there is a strong imperative for public higher education institutions (HEIs) to commit themselves to furthering social justice through widening access and increasing representivity. CHE (2001:5).

Although higher education systems have been diversified institutionally and geographically to enlarge and widen access, pure merit still prevails, according to Clancy and Goastellec (2007). For a student to benefit from affirmative action she must have comparable skills, knowledge and that in itself constitutes merit. This means that affirmative action does not counteract the disadvantages students experience when they have not had the benefits of an education system that prepares them adequately for higher education. If affirmative action and merit go hand in hand only those who have had access to privileged schooling can possibly benefit.

2.2.7 Affirmative Action

Affirmative action refers to a body of policies and procedures designed to reverse discrimination against marginalized groups including ethnic minorities, and women. Its main objective is to redress the effects of past discrimination (Wanyande 2003:50). Affirmative action is effected when a deliberate action is taken that gives such groups priority in admissions. Onsongo (2009) further maintains that this priority to the disadvantaged does not mean that minimum qualifications are ignored. This means that students from

disadvantaged backgrounds, who apply for admission into universities, are still expected to show academic potential or show that they have a chance of succeeding in their studies. What it means is that if there are two or more qualified people and one of them is a member of the disadvantaged group, then priority is given to that disadvantaged person. Writing about the use of affirmative action in the US, Tierney (1997) identified three forms of affirmative action: a compensatory procedure to address past injustices; a corrective tool to address present discrimination, and an intervention to promote social equality and diversity in a given society. Affirmative action is assumed to be a temporary measure aimed at enabling members of the disadvantaged group to participate in those areas in which they have been disadvantaged (Onsongo, 2009).

2.2.8 Overall

This section discussed the different concepts that are used in the literature of selection and admissions of students in higher education institutions. Selection and admissions policies of students are based on these concepts. These concepts will be used in the study to illustrate the values and principles that underpin the selection and admissions policy of undergraduate students at Wits University.

2.3 Theme one: the international literature on the selection and admission policies in universities.

According to Herman (1995) most colleges and universities today base most if not all of the measures for selection on merit, either in the quality of grades at school graduation or in entrance tests of academic aptitude or ability, or both. School-leaving examinations, whether it be the advanced and ordinary level General Certificate of Secondary examination in England and Wales, the Scottish Certificate for Secondary Education, the French Baccalaureate, the West German Abitur, the Intermediate Examination in Pakistan, the Attestat in Russia, the Senior Certificate in South Africa or the Scholastic Aptitude Test scores and High School Grade Point Average in the USA, provide the single most important measure of academic ability for selection to higher education. Harman (1994) agrees that

examinations and tests are usually viewed as relatively attractive methods of selection because they provide seemingly fair, objective, and reliable measures. They also provide a means to predict future higher education performance.

Griesel (1999) confirms that the routes through which students are admitted to the higher education system in South Africa, especially for degree programs, are firstly the Senior Certificate with Endorsement, secondly at the discretion of Senate and thirdly by qualifying for mature age exemption. The traditional cohorts of school leavers are admitted on the strength of their performance in the Senior Certificate examination currently known as National Senior Certificate (NSC).

Marques and Miranda (1996) also found that the route to university admittance is based on high schools results. If a student passed his/her matric or grade twelve in South Africa, the student stands a better chance of being selected and admitted into a university. Most institutional studies found a correlation between students who do well in matric or grade twelve, and those who do well in their University studies. Marques and Miranda (1996) also confirmed that the four-year transversal study on access to higher education in Portugal showed that the high-school record (grades 10/11 and grade 12) is the best overall predictor of academic success in the first year of higher education both in qualitative and quantitative aspects of performance, and consistent correlations between results in these two levels of secondary education were systematically found.

According to the World Bank (1993:32) for universities to educate their students effectively,

> ...institutions should be able to enrol only as many applicants as they can responsibly teach, and to accept only students who possess the knowledge and ability to fully benefit from their studies. Selectivity should help ensure that enrolment growth is related to instructional capacity and, if selection criteria have good predictive validity, that opportunities for further study will be allocated to those who are most likely to benefit academically. Students perform best when they follow courses of study that match their abilities and interests.

However, research done by Kotecha (2001) shows that this mechanism does not supply sufficient numbers of prepared students for admission to higher education studies. This is due to the fact that, in the South African context in the past, there were severe inequalities in the education system. It was envisaged that the academic support programs offered by tertiary institutions could possibly address some of these problems. Griesel (1999) posits that while the senior certificate is formally the requirement to enter the higher education system, research has indicated that it is not a good predictor of a student's intellectual ability. What this means is that students who are admitted to university based on their senior certificate results only, might not be prepared for university education. Therefore academic support programs are provided to help students cope with the demands of higher education.

The first theme of the literature shows that most scholars agree that admission to university should be first based on merit (this includes grade 12 examination results, aptitude tests, and interviews). This is because merit has proven to be a good predictor of academic performance in higher education. However, like Hall (2006) and Soudien (2010), some scholars argue that universities cannot always use merit when selecting and admitting students. The argument is that merit privileges those who are wealthy (students coming from wealthy families who can afford to take model C schools where they can get good results and meet requirements for university entrance). They argue that universities need to apply the principle of equity and affirmative action because society is unequal and the education system favours those who are privileged. Equity and affirmative action are important because these give learners who are disadvantaged an opportunity to participate in higher education. These will also ensure that the university population reflects the society in which it finds itself, as argued by Hall (2006) and Soudien (2010).

2.4 Theme two: Selection and admission policies in South Africa

This section discusses the South African literature on selection and admission in higher education institutions. It deals with different methods or requirements that are taken into consideration when students are selected and admitted in South African universities.

2.4.1 Matriculation examination results as tool for selection and admission

Herman (1995) maintains that selection for tertiary education in South Africa is to a large extent based on achievement in the Senior Certificate examination. The examination is taken after 12 years of formal schooling in Standard 10 (now grade 12) and leads to the award of a School-leaving Certificate with or without Matriculation Exemption. The candidates who achieve the Matriculation Exemption are eligible for undergraduate studies at university, subject to additional entrance requirements which the individual universities may require from students.

2.4.2 National Benchmark Examinations

The literature shows that in many countries national examinations have been used to select applicants for admission into higher education. For instance in Slovenia for an applicant to get admittance into universities they must pass the Matura. Matura is the national examination system and is the only route to university for students studying in high school. Higher education institutions define their own admission requirements for each study programme separately, and both the student's overall achievement at secondary school and the Matura or final examination results are taken into account when selecting and admitting students. In such cases, the Matura score normally contributes 60% and the grades obtained by internal, continuous assessment of students by their own teachers in the last two years in secondary education, 40% (Gabrscek, 2001).

Gabrscek (2001) further maintains that candidates who have passed the Matura, but could not get university admission, can enrol for a four year technical course. When students have completed and passed the final examination after an appropriate four-year technical course, they can enrol for access to Higher Education in Slovenia. The admission requirement for some university – or higher professional courses can also consist of a test of certain skills, such as art and music talents and psychophysical abilities.

Dayiog and Turut (2007) describe how admittance to higher education in Turkey is through a central examination given once a year. The applicants are placed into the departments and universities of their choice depending on their placement score, which includes the examination score along with the high school cumulative grade point average (CGPA) (the equivalent of matriculation results or NSC in the South African context) of the student.

2.5 Theme three: debate on race, gender, equity: Implications for admission policies

The following section discusses the positions of those in favour and those opposed to the use of racial categories to address equity.

2.5.1 The legacy: a racialised system with racialised categories

Sehoole (2006) argues that even before the institutionalised system of apartheid, racial segregation was practised in the admission policies of South African universities. Blacks were denied access to higher education and this denial of access led to their seeking access to higher education internationally. Clancy and Goastellec (2007) describe how in South Africa, the first colleges, built in the Cape Province (1830-1870), initially registered the children of British migrants and not indigenous people. Soudien (2010) discusses how the extension of the Universities Act of 1959, which promulgated separate universities in South Africa based on race, was created to reflect the segregated character of the apartheid society. In the post-apartheid era, a key consideration in the idea of the transformation of the university is that universities do *not* reflect the new South Africa. Soudien (2010) argues that the university should take its character from the society in which it is located.

One might argue that race should be used as an important consideration for university admission in order to rectify the injustices of the past. Bitzer (2010) points out that South Africa has unfortunate political and social histories, and therefore the extent of social stratification in universities remains unacceptably high and needs to be rectified. Herman (1995) posits that liberal and socialist educational reformers understandably argue that

maximal access to universities is desirable in the interest of equity and justice, even more so in the case of those who have historically been discriminated against; this is particularly necessary where such discrimination resulted in the economic disadvantage of those discriminated against.

Favish and Henry (2010:271) comment on the lack of progress on redress in South African universities: "While the increase in the number of black students is welcomed, it is of a very small base". The proportion of black students is still far from approximating the demographics of the South African population. According to an analysis of data from the University of Cape Town (UCT) it would appear that there is no empirical basis for arguing that race should no longer be a factor in admissions. Major challenges remain with regard to redressing past racial inequalities in the proportion of black students enrolled at UCT, in the spread of black students across the university and in success rates (Favish and Henry, 2010). Based on this literature one might argue that race should be used as a proxy in order to rectify the injustices of the past.

2.5.2 'Dismantling the system using the master's tools'

Le Grange (2010:335) argues that university admissions policy should be based on the principle of fairness. He suggests that "fairness in the case of university admission policies would mean that one cannot simply apply the same criteria for admitting advantaged and disadvantaged students. The implication is that, in a country which has experienced decades of legal discrimination based on race, and where legacies of disadvantage remain, colour consciousness in public policies is crucial for a certain period of time". The implication of what Le Grange (2010) says is that race should be used as a criterion in admissions policies in order to give those who are disadvantaged, opportunities to study in higher education because of the way they were denied access in the apartheid era. Le Grange (2010) further states that admitting more black students based on racial preference will diversify the student population in higher education since there are still relatively few black students in these institutions.

2.5.3 The lack of success in dismantling the legacy of apartheid

Benatar (2010) presents a different view in that it is disadvantage, rather than race, that is relevant. Higher education admissions policies need to find methods of identifying disadvantage and using them in their admissions policies. If the policy is to favour moderately disadvantaged students, then all the applicants who are admitted, and who would not otherwise have been admitted, will be moderately disadvantaged. Benatar (2010) goes on to argue that if higher education institutions use race as a basis for admission, some students might use their race classification to benefit, regardless of their socio-economic status.

According to Erasmus (2010), by using racial categorisation like the apartheid's Population Registration Act of 1950, universities are confirming apartheid's objective to have these categories permanently established in our society. She argues that this repetitive process of race classification entrenches the normalization of these categories and will lead to a racialised future, even as we use them in a racial project for redress.

Erasmus (2010:250) confirms the findings by Hall (2006) that "participation rates for white South Africans in tertiary education continue to be among the highest in the world, and for 'blacks' they remain the lowest. South Africa's higher education system remains markedly unequal, with only small changes over the past 12 years". Erasmus (2010:250) citing Hall (2006) concludes that "with the continuing advantage of white South Africans as a demographic segment, a race-blind policy will perpetuate historical patterns of discrimination and that it is appropriate to take disadvantage (in this instance, conflated with racial profiles) into account in admissions". Hall (2006) illustrates that 'the playing fields are not level' in the learning environment, and that this unevenness manifests in terms of race. It is in this regard that Erasmus (2010) concurs that race categories should be included for admission as a temporary compromise until such time as more sophisticated tools are available that take into account the historical and contemporary 'mix' or articulation with class (Hall, 2006).

Research findings are unequivocal about the inequality of the South African education system; therefore higher education institutions cannot use the same selection and admissions policy for all applicants. The category of 'economically disadvantaged' does not necessarily encompass the inequality that exists as a result of the vast numbers of dysfunctional schools and the legacy of Bantu education that previous generations have had to endure as a direct consequence of apartheid policies. Considering the educational backgrounds, rather than the socio-economic backgrounds of applicants, would create a sounder basis from which to make an assessment of those applicants that most need to benefit from redress as a result of historical inequalities. Selection and admissions policies also need to take into consideration those social sectors that are specifically included in the South African constitution as ones that require measures to ensure equity, such as women and those who are physically challenged. This will ensure that the student demography in tertiary institutions reflect the South African population in the broadest sense.

There are complex problems in creating admissions criteria that will remedy demographic distribution, since opportunities for higher education are generally distributed unequally among races, social classes, and geographic regions (though this does not come out often in studies) and sexes. According to Harman (1994) a useful distinction may be made between 'under-representation' and 'bias'. Under-representation would suggest that one group has proportionately fewer members in higher education than that group's proportion of the total relevant population, whereas bias would be a deliberate strategy for the exclusion of particular groups – and such groups can be defined by their academic performance.

The use of race as a criterion for admission in higher education will balance the demography of the student population in South African universities. As the literature shows that it is widely accepted that ideally all major sections of a society should be equally represented in higher education and that selection methods should not be biased against any particular ethnic, social, regional or gender group since the university must reflect the society in which it finds itself (Soudien, 2010). The implication of using race as a criterion for admission means that black students who show academic potential will be given preference over students of other races.

2.8 Conclusion

Debates in the literature maintain that selection and admissions to university have always been based on merit. The chapter discussed how students who are selected and admitted on merit have a better chance of succeeding in their studies and this has been confirmed by studies. However, because societies are unequal for various reasons, some students have been born into circumstances which do not allow them to do as well at school as others and therefore merit favours only those who can afford to go good schools and get good marks in their matric examinations. In order for Universities to promote a just society and rectify social inequalities, universities have adopted admissions policies based on the principles of equity, redress and affirmative action to admit students who could not meet the criteria for automatic acceptance into universities. The literature review outlined the current South African debates in selection and admissions policies in higher education and their assumptions.

CHAPTER THREE
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to address the research question, the study draws on the concepts of social capital and cultural capital as formulated and defined by Bourdieu (1987, 1997). These are helpful to understand the background of students the University of the Witwatersrand is targeting and admitting.

3.1 Social Capital

According to Grootaert and Van Baastelar (2002), Hanifan (1916) is the first theorist who formulated the concept of social capital. Hanifan's discussion was concerned with the cultivation of goodwill, fellowship, symposia, and social intercourse – those who make up a joint unit.

The concept of social capital broadly refers to "social networks, the reciprocities that arise from them and the value of these for achieving mutual goals" (Schuller, Baron, & Field, 2000: 1). Social capital refers variously to the internal social and cultural coherence of society, the norms and values that govern interactions among people and the institutions in which they are embedded; it is the glue that holds societies together and without which there can be no economic growth or human well-being. Without social capital, society at large will collapse (Malhotra, 2003: 20) since it refers to those stocks of social trust, norms, and networks that people can draw upon to solve common problems.

For Bourdieu (1997: 51)

> …social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or, in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in the material and/or symbolic exchanges

> which help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them; in this case, they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges. Being based on indissolubly material and symbolic exchanges, the establishment and maintenance of which presuppose re-acknowledge of proximity, they are also partially irreducible to objective relations of proximity in physical (geographical) space or even in economic and social space.

Coleman (1990) argues that social organisations constitute social capital and these in turn facilitate the attainment of objectives that could not be achieved otherwise or could only have been achieved at a greater cost. From this perspective therefore, social capital becomes like any other form of capital. For instance, in the context of this study, Wits University admits students based on their matric results, which is seen as a good 'capital' investment: the completion of degrees in time guarantee a return on investment in the form of a good academic reputation. Coleman's work was particularly concerned with "the relationship between educational achievement and social inequality" (Coleman, 1988:p5). This study argues that by changing its view of what constitutes a good social capital investment – i.e. African students who would become the beneficiaries of a system that focuses on redress, the return on such an investment would go beyond merely good academic reputation, and would result in a reputation as a contributor to social transformation as well as academic excellence.

Adhikari and Dahal (2008) maintain that recently the role of social capital in the governance of collective resources has become a topic of widespread interest especially in development policy debates. It is increasingly accepted that customary institutions, as a form of social capital, matter in the management of collective resources as they provide structure and foster trust and norms of reciprocity for cooperation and coordinated actions. Coleman (1990) agrees that social capital is made up of relationships of authority, which in turn creates relationships of trust and norms.

Social capital recognizes norms, roles and responsibility, based on trust, and the resultant collective actions; it contributes to the sustainability of the organizations. It also encourages accountable leadership, loyal members and consensual processes. It has contributed to the mitigation of conflicts and the creation of environments that are conducive to the building of peaceful organizations (Adhikari and Dahal, 2008).

Research into the role of families' educational choices (Sandefur et al., 1999) provides insight into how parental input into post-school education potentially has a positive impact on educational attainment. Gewer (2009) maintains that parental education, income and the size of one's family relative to the socio-economic context may be important factors in the provision of bonding social capital, particularly when it comes to educational choices. For those who come from poor socio-economic conditions, access to resources is generally a challenge. It is in this context that the theory of social capital will be used in this study to shed light on the kinds of students Wits admits. This would help to understand the type of social capital these students bring to campus and their networks, how these students bond, bridge and link with other students, and how all these factors could enhance their academic performance.

3.2 Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, developed the concept of cultural capital in the early 1960s in order to help address a particular empirical problem—namely, the fact that economic obstacles are not sufficient to explain disparities in the educational attainment of children from different social classes. According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1979), cultural habits and dispositions inherited from the family are fundamentally important to school success. Family characteristics are more influential than schools in affecting students' life chances.

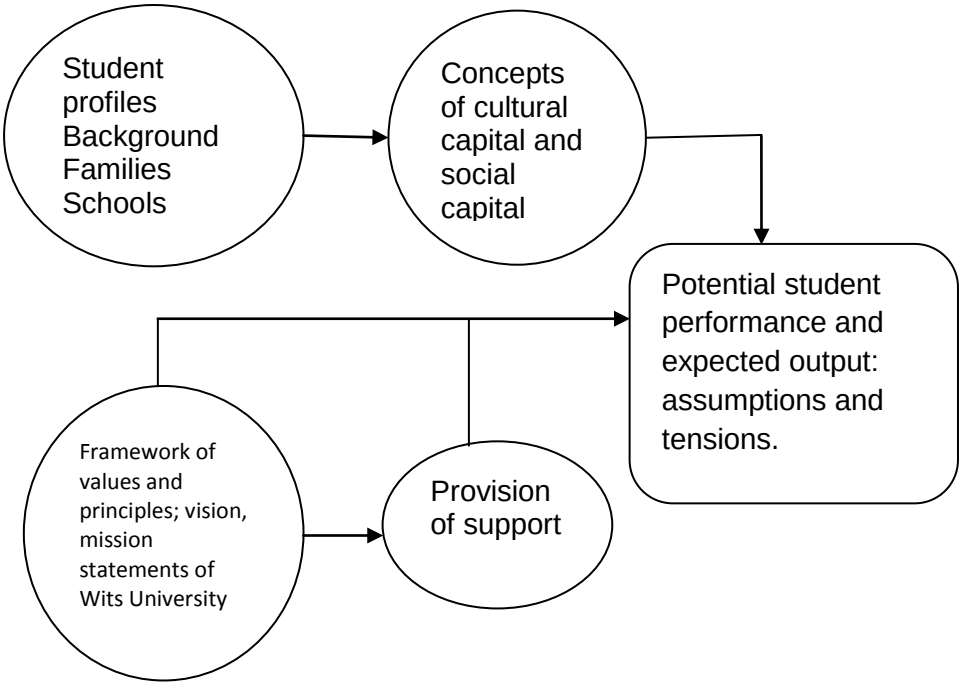
This is not to deny the importance of socio-economic factors. Christie (2008) maintains that closer analysis of students' performance at school shows clearly that it relates to their social backgrounds. Middle class students tend to do better than their working class counterparts.

Wealth and poverty make a difference. Whether or not the culture of the home matches the culture of the school also makes a difference. In other words, schools generally mirror the patterns of privilege and disadvantage of the broader society, rather than remedy them, though there are always individual exceptions. This is supported by Bourdieu who argues that the major role of education is cultural reproduction: the production of the culture of the dominant class.

Bourdieu (1986) maintains that cultural capital exists in three distinct forms and that in its 'embodied' form, cultural capital is a 'competence' or skill that cannot be separated from its 'bearer' (that is, the person who 'holds' it). As such, the acquisition of cultural capital necessarily presupposes the investment of time devoted to learning and/or training.

Christie (2008) quotes a notable study that links school performances with students' social background, namely the 1966 Coleman's report on Equality of Educational Opportunity. The aim of this major research project was to investigate why public schools were not offering equal educational opportunities to all individuals. The research found that schooling did not help disadvantaged students to catch up with others. It did not help them to overcome their initial disadvantage. Instead, these inequalities widened as students moved through school. They tended to perform poorly and lagged behind their privileged counterparts. The report also showed without a doubt that students' personal and family characteristics were more influential than schools in affecting students' life chances.

In summary, the concepts of social and cultural capital provide a conceptual basis for examining the background and profiles of students being targeted by universities as well as the kinds of intellectual and academic assets they carry with them. In addition, the study pays attention to the framework of values, principles and vision that underpins student admissions and the assumptions held about expectations and potential student performance. The following diagram summarises the conceptual framework used in this study:



3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has described the key theoretical concepts of social capital and cultural capital that will be used to ground this study.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Overview

This chapter sets out the methods that were used in the process of data collection. It presents the research approach and describes the design of the study. It also gives reasons why these methods and this approach were thought to be appropriate for the study. A description of the sample procedures and the respondents is discussed. The chapter also discusses the instruments that were used to collect data and how the data was analysed. It presents the lessons learnt during the conceptualisation of the research methods and how it was changed to meet the research objectives. The chapter concludes by discussing the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

4.3 Gaining deeper insights through a qualitative research approach

A qualitative approach was adopted to answer the research question as captured in Section One because it allows for in-depth description and analysis of an institution as a social entity, forming a unit of analysis as suggested by Merriam (2002). The data consist of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. This approach allows for flexibility in the data collection process so that modifications can be made as the research evolves. Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry. Qualitative researchers agree that the purpose of qualitative research is to explore, understand, explain and describe social phenomena from the participants' perspectives (Ploeg 1999:2; Key 1997:1). This method helped the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of policy processes in terms of how admissions policies are formulated, and what values and principles underpin them.

3.4 A collective case study approach

McMillan & Schumacher (1993) maintain that in a case study, a single case is studied in depth, which could be an individual, a group, an institution, a programme or a concept. The strength of this design lies in its potential to enable the study of things in detail (Denscombe, 2003). With case studies, it is possible to gain a unique perspective of a single individual or group (Denscombe, 2003). It can also explain why certain things happen. This study is a case study because it focuses on the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. The Faculty of Humanities has five schools and each of these schools has its own selection and admission policy. The study seeks to examine admissions policies and procedures of undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand within a specific context. The Faculty of Humanities was chosen because of the nature of its admissions process and the policy relationships between the faculty and its schools. Another reason it was chosen is because the faculty has been increasing its admissions points to attract students who are better prepared for university education; these required point scores to differ from discipline to discipline within the faculty. Through a collective case study of these five schools in the faculty, it was possible to do an in-depth study. Stake (2000), refers to a study extending to several cases as a *collective case study*. Stake (2000: 437) further argues that in a collective case study, individual cases are selected because it is believed that the relationships between such studies lead to a better understanding, and perhaps better theorising about a still larger collection of cases. The use of multiple cases in this study created opportunities for within-case and across-case approaches of data analysis (Denscombe, 2003).

4.5 Data Collection Methods

Mouton (1996) and Yin (2003) caution that most data collection methods on their own have pitfalls and it is imperative to use multiple methods to avoid these. The principles of data collection, as suggested by Yin (2003), are as follows. First, the researcher should use multiple sources of data to assist with triangulation such as document analysis and interviewing. Second, a chain of evidence should be presented so that an external observer

is able to follow the logic, progress, inductions and deductions made throughout the research. This evidence is important for assessing the reliability of the data collected. Data collection methods that were used in this study are document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. These provided the necessary information that would enable insight into the admissions policies and procedures of undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand in the Faculty of Humanities.

4.5.1 Extensive Literature review

The literature mapped out general trends in the debate and contextualised the study theoretically (see chapter 2).

4.5.2 Document Analysis

Data was collected from documents of previous research done on selection and admissions in the university, the faculty, and the schools. This information had already been collected for some other purposes. It is also available from internal sources, (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg archive).

4.5.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used for this research because the research questions required soliciting the opinions and experiences from various perspectives. An interview protocol was utilized which was a list of questions or general topics that the interviewer wanted to explore during each interview. Although it was prepared to ensure that similar questions were posed to each respondent, the interviewer felt free to probe and explore within these predetermined enquiry areas.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), qualitative interviews may be used either as the primary strategy for data collection, or in conjunction with observation, document analysis, or other techniques. A basic decision that is part of the interview process is how to record

interview data. Whether one relies on written notes or a tape recorder appears to be largely a matter of personal preference. For instance, Patton (1990: 348) says that a tape recorder is 'indispensable' while Lincoln and Guba (1985:241) 'do not recommend recording except for unusual reasons.' Lincoln and Guba base their recommendation on the intrusiveness of recording devices and the possibility of technical failure. Recordings have the advantage of capturing data more faithfully than hurriedly written notes might, and can make it easier for the researcher to focus on the interview; in this study the researcher recorded all the interviews.

The researcher conducted the interviews at the informants' place of convenience, either in their offices or where they felt comfortable, using the interview protocol. An email (with the problem statement and research questions and rationale) was sent to each informant, explaining the purpose of the research and to request time to meet the informants and conduct the interview.

Initially I had planned to interview five administrative staff who dealt with admissions in their schools within the Faculty of Humanities. I first interviewed the administration manager in the School of Education and I got from the interviewee the relevant data. Then I moved to the School of Languages and the School of Social Sciences. Here I found that these schools do not have personnel who specifically deal with admissions. The explanation I received was that these two schools do not offer specific degrees (unlike the other three schools in the faculty). I then had to change my interview sample and I went on to interview the assistant dean of the faculty (undergraduate studies) and the faculty registrar. They both explained that the faculty does admissions on behalf of these schools and sends a register to the schools. The schools are not involved in the admissions of students. This was explained as follows:

> **Faculty registrar**: But in social sciences, for example, there is not a specific degree that is why …the BA goes through them so the student has to meet the 34 points and whatever.
> **Interviewer:** In social sciences the school does not decide who to accept or decline?

Faculty registrar: No, they do not have a specific degree, specific to them.

I therefore changed some aspects I had included in my proposal; I had planned to interview eight people. However, because of an unexpected finding, I interviewed six (6) people only. These people provided data on selection and admission and also gave data on how the policy has changed over time, the principles and values, the perception, and assumptions underpinning these policies. As a result, the way I had planned to analyse the data as discussed was not affected.

4.6 Sampling

Sampling is defined by Merriam (1998:60) as the selection of a research site, time, people and events in field research. According to Merriam (1998:62) the number of participants in a sample depends on questions being asked, data being gathered, the analysis in progress, and the resources available to support the study.

This study used purposive sampling to gather data, because it allowed the researcher to use a particular subset of people. In this case eight (8) people were selected to be interviewed, five of whom were administrative managers in the schools, one person who was the faculty registrar, one person who was the assistant dean responsible for undergraduate admissions and the one who was the student faculty representative council members (SRC). However, as discussed above, only six interviews took place. The people interviewed, are the people who administer the admissions policies and procedures of undergraduate students in the faculty and schools. The interviews were intended to collect data on selection and admission criteria and on how policy has changed over time. It also examined the principles, values, perceptions, and assumptions that underpin these policies.

4.7 Data analysis

The results were analysed using the thematic content analysis method. Stake (1995) describes this method of data analysis as a way of analysing data by organising it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts or similar features.

Using this model of data analysis, interview data was first coded using different colours. Coding is the process of dividing or segmenting data into topics or categories. The different colours represented different themes. The themes were used broadly to relate to the different admissions policies, assumptions and perceptions about these policies. The coding procedure assisted in reducing and categorising a large quantity of data into more meaningful units for interpretation.

4.8 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are central issues in all research measurement. Reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the research. Reliability refers to how well an idea fits actual reality i.e. it addresses the question of how well the social reality being measured through research matches with the constructs researchers use to understand it (Neuman, 2006). Respondents were allowed an opportunity to check data presented in this report for accuracy and/or modification. This was done to reduce or eliminate misinterpretations of the data in order to ensure a more accurate analysis of the results. This research project does not intend to find a single version of the truth but is interested in authenticity. It is about giving a fair, honest and balanced account of the critical issues from the viewpoint of the interviewees. This was obtained through building rapport with the interviewees.

4.9 Ethical Aspects of the study

The research was conducted in such a manner that the ethical code of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg was adhered to at all times. During the data collection stage

of the research, the interviewee was approached on a voluntary participation basis and no coercion of any nature was applied. The respondents/interviewees were made fully aware of the purpose of this research and in what way the information was to be used. This was made possible by participation and consent forms which highlighted the purpose of the research. All information was private and confidential and anonymity has been ensured at all times.

4.9 Limitations of the Study

This research is limited to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and one faculty examining its selection and admissions policy. As a result, the success of this research depended on the co-operation of the interviewees. Some of the interviewees were not forthcoming about their work and this somewhat compromised the scope of the research. The focus of the study is limited to equity and admission policies at the University of the Witwatersrand. It would be useful in future research to include issues of throughput.

CHAPTER FIVE
SELECTION AND ADMISSIONS: THE LEGACY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to describe, analyse and interpret the legacy of selection and admissions policies at Wits prior to 1994. The chapter then moves on to discuss selection and admissions in the 1980s and how the policy changed in the 1990s leading to the current policy. It gives the statistics and shows the profile of the students Wits used to admit in the past.

This chapter questions the legacy of selection and admissions policies at Wits and argues that this had always been based on merit and that the students Wits admitted prior to 1994 were students from wealthy families. The chapter further claims that, although the University was founded as an open university with a policy of non-discrimination on racial or any other grounds, Wits was reality never an open university.

5.2 Admission policy at Wits: the legacy

Admissions policies at Wits were simple before the 1980s. The institution was established to serve the needs of the white population in South Africa. White students constituted more than 90% of the student population. CHE (2010) posits that since its establishment, Wits was serving the English-speaking population of Johannesburg as indicated by the number of white students as compared to black students who constituted only 6% of the student population. Despite the claims made by the institution in the 1950s about Wits being an 'open university' the dominance of white student population did not change much despite the opening of places for black students. There were very few blacks who could apply and be admitted at Wits then. In 1959 when the policy on racial separation at universities was enforced by the apartheid government, there were 297 (6%) black students and 4813 white students at Wits (Murray, 1990).

Since its establishment, Wits was a white institution drawing on the best, the elite. Wits has built a strong identity as a defender of liberal values and played a leading role in research in South Africa (CHE, 2010). Admissions criteria at Wits were purely on academic merit, applied without regard to considerations of race, colour, or creed (Murray, 1990).

Although the admissions criteria at Wits was based on merit, other races, i.e. blacks, were only admitted in limited numbers and only to participate in academic life. They were not allowed to stay in residences and participate in sports like their white counterparts. According to Murray (1990), the official policy of the university was one of academic 'non-segregation and social segregation'. This supports the argument that Wits never granted full equality to black students and confirms the argument that Wits was never an open university that recognised or applied the principle of fairness. Not everyone with potential to achieve higher education was admitted and given an opportunity to participate in other social activities.

5.3 The crisis of apartheid and the review of access in the 1970s to mid 1980s

In the period between the 1970s and mid-1980s, the question of access remained largely a matter of admission to the university or formal access. Debates among students raised a range of issues from the ethnic organisation of universities, the oppressive physical environment and student non-participation in university governance structures, to curriculum transformation and the meanings, definition and functions of a university education. But the general emphasis remained on physical access to the university space (or formal admission) (CHE, 2010).

The pressures in 1976 from students, schools and the community led to Wits doing a survey about its role in society and what the community thought about Wits (Perceptions about Wits, the role of a university in a changing society). Wits started making changes to its admissions policy and the Vice-chancellor and Principal, Professor Charlton, created a budget to fund black students. As a result, Wits passed the policy of affirmative action in its admission policy in the 1980s to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds who

did not meet automatic entrance requirements to the university were given an opportunity to study at the University. And, indeed, a few black students gained access to study at Wits as is evident in table 1. The number of black students rose from 8% in 1980 to 24% in 1990.

Table 1: Total enrolment 1980- 1990					
Year	**Total enrolment**	**White %**	**Indian/coloured %**	**African**	**Total Black %**
1980	13126	92	6	2	8
1981	14165	91	6	3	9
1982	14624	90	7	3	10
1983	15790	89	7	4	11
1984	16536	87	8	5	13
1985	16497	87	7	6	13
1986	18023	84	9	7	16
1987	18086	82	9	9	18
1988	18718	81	8	11	19
1989	1853	78	10	12	22
1990	19341	76	11	13	24

Adapted from the Senate policy on admissions and exclusions (1991).

Although Wits introduced the policy of affirmative action, the principle of meritocracy still applied. Hence, their admissions policy made it clear that the institution must admit to the university only those applicants considered to have a reasonable chance of succeeding i.e. those meeting the academic requirements for each year of study (Senate policy on admissions and exclusion, 1991).

5.4 Faculty of Arts (currently Humanities): enrolments and admission strategies

The minimum admission requirement in the Faculty of Arts was a matriculation certificate, or a certificate of completion exemption from the matriculation examination. In addition, a student needed to have passed at the higher grade in English (1st language) or have at least 40% in English (2nd language) higher grade and a pass at the higher grade in at least two of the following: any further language, biblical studies, biology, economics, geography, history, mathematics, physical science, physiology, art, drama, music or speech and drama.

There were various selection requirements and procedures which students had to fulfil before being admitted. Central to these requirements was the matriculation rating or points (calculating the admission rating by converting the symbols obtained in the matriculation examination to numbers, then adding the numbers: the sum is the admission rating the applicant has obtained).

5.4.1 Selection Tests

If an applicant obtained a rating less than the required one (this changed every year) and /or did not have the correct subject grouping, an applicant would be asked to write a selection test. Selection tests were intended to help establish potential for successful study at university. If an applicant passed the test, s/he would be made a provisional offer until the matric results were published for the offer to be confirmed.

5.4.2 Selection procedures for specialist and professional degrees

Applicants for the specialist or professional degrees were required to present themselves for an interview and sometimes were also required to undergo further tests and auditions prior to selection for admission. Applicants who failed to attend the interviews, write tests and or auditions were not considered for admission to a specialist or professional degree.

5.5 Changes in the admissions policy.

Wits argued that South African society was unequal (Senate policy on admissions and exclusion, 1991). Because of the apartheid system, most black students would have been born into circumstances which did not allow them to do as well at school as white students would have done, and that to further compound and aggravate that legacy of inequality by only looking at the students' school results as the basis of admitting them into university, was simply perpetuating those inequalities. As one of the school administrators put it:

> The institution admitted black students who showed academic potential with low matric results, most of them were put in development programs or extended programs (School Administrator**,** interviewed 17 February 2011, School of Education**)**

According to the Senate policy on admissions and exclusion, 1991:

> Coupling recognition of the grossly inadequate educational preparation of the black students admitted in terms of that policy, with offering academic support to such students, enabled the standards of the University's degree to be maintained.

However, more serious debate and changes in the selection and admissions policies started in 1994 when the principle of redress became a major issue in all the higher education institutions. This will be the main focus in the next chapter**.**

5.6 Conclusion

The study shows that the majority of students at Wits remained white despite an open admissions policy. While no data is available one can speculate that the emphasis on merit allowed the university to attract students from wealthy families, who graduated from private or model C schools. Wits introduced affirmative action in their selection and admissions policies to admit more black students in the 1980s and this was stated in the policy and the number of black students increased from 8% to 24% in 1990.

CHAPTER SIX
ALIGNING SELECTION AND ADMISSIONS WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF REDRESS

6. Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses the current selection and admissions policy. This chapter is based on the question: what were the social changes that informed the admissions policy at Wits? In other words, what were the debates and government policies that led to Wits adopting a policy based on the principles of equity and redress? This analysis aims to find out the assumptions underpinning this policy and how the tensions between policy and principles have played out. It argues that after 1994, the publication of the *Education White Paper 3, A Programme for Higher Education Transformation*, led to changes in the selection and admissions policy at Wits, and has led to the increase in the number of black students studying at Wits.

6.1 The changing policy context

The new political dispensation in 1994 demanded a serious overhaul, restructuring and transformation of higher education in order to redress the injustices of the past. An obvious way in which transformation could be demonstrated was in formal access to higher education for historically disadvantaged students (CHE, 2010). Institutions were required to develop new admissions policies that were inclined to the principles of redress and performance. Wits developed a new admissions policy based on these principles.

The Education White Paper 3, A Programme for Higher Education Transformation, published in 1997, presented a vision of a 'transformed' higher education system guided by the principles of equity and redress (CHE, 2010:p2). The paper argues for “increased and broadened participation, and states that successful policy must overcome a historically determined pattern of fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency”. Universities must increase access for blacks, women, disabled and mature students, and generate new

curricula and flexible models of learning and teaching, including modes of delivery, to accommodate a larger and more diverse student population. These principles have been embraced – to smaller or greater degrees – by the majority of higher education institutions.

The Education White Paper 3 (1997:7) goes on to say:

> The principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. Applying the principle of equity implies, on the one hand, an honest and incisive identification of existing inequalities which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination or disadvantage, and on the other hand, a programme of transformation with a view to redress. Such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals and institutions

6.2 Wits: bent on performance at the expense of participation.

The Higher Education Act (no. 101 of 1997) requires the council of each university to establish and publish an admissions policy. This policy must provide “appropriate measures for the redress of past inequalities and may not unfairly discriminate in any way”. The Wits admissions policy is in line with this Act. It aims to address equality and access by engaging with entrance requirements and setting explicit targets and monitoring processes (CHE, 2010). Wits has committed itself to admissions practices that are fair and transparent; to at least maintain 'the current demographic profile of its students (68% of whom are black and 50% of whom are women) through the adoption and maintenance of an admissions policy that seeks to identify and admit students with potential to succeed at the University (CHE, 2010). Since the adoption of the admissions policy, the university has increased the number of black and women students as reflected in the tables below.

Enrolment trends by Race (2005-2010)

Race	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
African	10856	11236	11869	12335	14711	15043
Chinese	1	2	4	4	6	33
Coloured	637	694	771	807	917	993
Indian	3906	3978	3901	3887	4072	4104
White	8352	8320	8483	8230	8063	7761
Total	23752	24230	25028	25263	27769	27934

Enrolments by gender (2005-2010)

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Female	11799	12138	12677	12760	14508	14737
Male	11950	12090	12350	12503	13261	13196
Total	23752	24230	25028	25263	27769	27934

The tables present information on the number of students admitted by the university from 2005 to 2010. The information shows annual increases in the number of black and women students who previously could not access higher education (as compared to the number of black students admitted in the 1980 to the 1990s see table 1 in chapter five). The number of black students increased from 45.71% in 2005 to 53.85 % in 2010 while female students constitute 52.76 of the student population the same year at Wits.

6.2 Redress and Throughput: the tension

The policy makes it clear that when they are admitting students, they do not just redress by replacing white students with a black students, they are admitting students who are likely to complete their degrees in a reasonable time. CHE (2010) also posits that greater numbers of students must be given access to higher education, and recruited from a broader

distribution of social groups and classes for the visible signs of apartheid to be erased. Although the students admitted are best performers from their schools, the problem is that some of these students are the 'non-traditional' students, who are not prepared for higher education. This is where the tension is, because 'non-traditional' students required extra support from the institution and lecturers so that they can cope with the demands of higher education. Wits was not used to this kind of practice. In the past the institutions did not allow students extra time, individual attention or different evaluation criteria because of personal circumstances or need. Students have to be self-reliant, resourceful, motivated and 'get on with it'. Minimal support is made available and students are expected to take the initiative to find any extra support they need. Academic selection replaces academic support, and contact between students and lecturers are sporadic and formal. Students are expected to set goals and devise strategies to achieve them on their own (CHE, 2010). All this affects Wits, because the institution wants to maintain its reputation through knowledge production, rethinking and throughput.

6.3 The provision of support

With the changing strategy in the admissions and selection policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the needs of the limited number of 'non-traditional' students were addressed through academic support or bridging programmes, as discussed in chapter five. Most of these are perceived as 'underprepared' i.e. lacking the necessary social and cultural capital to cope with the academic pressures posed by the Wits environment as discussed in chapter three.

Redress as a major principle points to the need for support, otherwise students would not succeed. This has to be seen in the light of the responsibility accepted by Wits University for creating an enabling environment that provides the best possible opportunity for success for all students admitted. Improvements have been made in the provision of university services and in the Division of Student Affairs, which provides services such as student accommodation, sports, student wellness, counselling and career development, student governance, and support for students living with disabilities.

What this means is that, at policy level, Wits has committed itself to providing the necessary collective resources (institutional forms of support and mediation) to students who need help to supplement individual resources or to compensate for the lack of these. Resources means the necessary pedagogical, service and social structures as well as mediation strategies that enable a productive and generative learning environment that is inclusive and supportive, particularly for historically disadvantaged students (CHE,2010).

6.4 Conclusion

The new democratic dispensation in 1994 led to many changes in South Africa including higher education, selection and admissions policies. Higher education institutions changed their selection and admissions policy to accommodate the principles of equity and redress. These principles were embraced by major universities in South Africa, including Wits. The current admissions policy is based on these principles. This chapter argued that in terms of race and gender Wits has gone far but too much emphasis on merit has undermined class redress. The chapter also demonstrated that due to lack of preparedness of the non-traditional students, Wits has put in place support structures to help students cope with the demands of tertiary education.

CHAPTER SEVEN
SELECTION AND ADMISSIONS IN PRACTICE

7.1 Introduction

This chapter describes, analyses and interprets the implementation of Wits' current selection and admissions policies. The chapter commences by discussing how students get to know about Wits and its admissions policies. This chapter attempts to answer the question: What are the structures and strategies put in place to deal with selection and admission to the university? The chapter interrogates the practices, structures and strategies in terms of admissions and redress. The chapter argues that the Wits admissions policy advocates for the principle of redress and it has gone as far as race and gender are concerned.

7.2 How and what students get to know about studying at Wits

The CHE (2010:58) did a study on "Imagining Wits: What do staff and students think of Wits?" Most students commented that Wits offered more than just a qualification: it offered both a formal curriculum and opportunities to develop leadership skills. Some alluded to the slogan 'Wits gives you the edge'.

Many students considered themselves 'lucky' or 'honoured' to be at Wits and also felt they were 'top students' in the country. The implication is that they have to re-imagine themselves as special, privileged and future leaders in their respective fields. As various students put it:

> Wits offers a high standard of education; Wits is world-recognised and the standard of education is very high; I will be getting a good quality of education; an internationally recognised university (CHE, 2010:p58)

Besides family, friends and peers, several factors seem to have brought Wits to their attention:

> You look at the news, even when I was still in high school, and when any news analysis is done, it was always a professor from Wits University. So there is a question of distance, and although there is RAU next door, but for me things like that – when you see them on TV – they influence your perception a lot. I guess it means getting the best form of education since this campus is one of the best in South Africa if not the best. It is quite an achievement you know, especially toward the black people. There is so much more respect for Wits than most other universities. If you happen to come to Wits there is this prestige about it. (CHE, 2010:58)

One of the students who was interviewed for this study said:

> Wits and other big universities … but in Johannesburg I would say I wanted to be at Wits. Yes, I did apply to other universities, they did consider me but actually I wanted to be at Wits…to be a Witsie based on its status (Fourth year black student, School of education, interviewed 17 February 2011)

Students also get to know about admissions policies and admissions criteria at Wits through the media, career counselling and community outreach projects. According to the data collected in this study, all the respondents said that Wits admissions criteria are slightly higher than other institutions in the country. As the deputy registrar puts it:

> We get those students because our admissions criteria are high. We know that compared to other universities because the university said quite unashamedly they are wanting to check academically excellent students because once they are here we have an obligation to make sure that they work their way through the system. (Deputy Registrar, interviewed, 18 February 2011)

The other view that was expressed was that Wits only targets students in the urban areas and neglects those in the rural areas (although this claim needs statistical verification). The

selection and recruitment process at Wits may not be as inclusive as it portrays itself, since it may be isolating some students who may not be in a position to seek information for themselves. The SRC student who was interviewed puts it as follows:

> In that regard, I doubt [it], there are lots of schools that I feel have not been reached yet, because when you find … I remember in January when students were here to register a lot of them were in the long queues to apply they only knew about it then they were not told prior so lots of them did not even know they had to apply maybe in August. They did not even know when forms were issued out so yes there are open days but it does not reach all students, it does not target all students. Some students who are in rural areas or other places are more disadvantaged than Johannesburg areas, they are more disadvantaged to accessing education and I don't see that… I don't think the university is doing enough to go to those schools and try and find those children who are academically achieving, encourage them to come, maybe even offer them funding.

7.2.1 Overall

Students know of Wits through friends who studied at Wits, through the Wits website, Wits open day and career exhibitions. Wits promotes itself as 'giving you the edge', 'an excellent institution with high standards which is internationally recognised'. These claims make it clear that there are high expectations on students creating no small measure of insecurity among 'non-traditional' students. It makes them see Wits as something beyond their reach, as opposed to traditional students who feel inspired. At a social level, Wits reflects the past (apartheid legacies are still entrenched) and this can be alienating to the 'non-traditional' students, making them feel marginalised. This suggests that Wits is a high performing and a low participation institution. Class redress is minimal though not evident from either a policy or statistical perspective.

7.3 Structures put in place to manage the selection and admission process

The Student Enrolment Centre (SEnC), also known as a one stop-shop, deals firstly and predominantly with undergraduate students who are coming into the university. So the office is responsible for managing all the enquiries related to applying to Wits, accommodation, financial aid, sport and other bursaries, career education, curriculum advice and selection test information, requests whether they are in person, by email, telephone, or post. SEnC tracks and monitors all the enquiries they receive each a year.

Application forms can be collected from SEnC or these are accessible on the Wits website. SEnC implements the admissions policies (if there is a policy of equity and transformation and taking quotas from different areas, then that is applied through the SENC). It also does the initial screening of applications. SEnC receives and processes applications forms, and sends an acknowledgement letter to the applicants. Faculties do not deal with any of that but they receive applicants who meet their entry requirements and SEnC then sends these through to the faculties. Faculties have very little to do with where students come from. That has to do with SEnC and what they do before the applications come through to the faculty.

A section of the staff is responsible for decision-making about those applications, which they do in conjunction with the faculties. An admission consultant in SEnC will liaise with the different faculties, so that there is input from, for example, a humanities contact person, or an engineering contact person. They meet with the faculty on a regular basis. Decisions about applications are made, preliminary admission decisions are taken and then, when the matric results come in, these are confirmed.

7.4 Admissions in the Faculty of Humanities

The faculty is the link between the SEnC and the schools in the university. The moment applicants register they become the faculty's concern. The faculty looks after them and makes sure that they register every year and are doing the correct courses; the faculty also arranged counselling for students, if necessary, and monitors the progress of students until graduation. The faculty policy on admissions has specific rules that guide them, which is in the guide for applicants. There is a specific criterion that says an applicant has to meet a minimum number of points which is 34, and then additional criteria may be set, depending on the degree. The English requirement is a 5 on NSC level. If an applicant meets faculty and school requirements, then the faculty will make the student a firm offer. However, if an applicant gets 30 to 33 points, they are put on a waiting list. If the faculty does not meet their target in terms of the number of students that they planned to admit, the applicant on the waiting list will be made a firm offer.

7.4.1 The structure of the Faculty of Humanities

The faculty of humanities is divided into five different schools:

- The Wits School of Arts,
- The Wits School of Education,
- Human and Community Development,
- The Wits School of Literature and Language Studies, and Literacies
- The School of Social Sciences

Each school has its own specific admissions requirements. For instance, for the Bachelor of Arts (3 years) an applicant has to meet the following requirements: English Home Language or First Additional Language – 5 points and then 34 points or above, overall. Applicants between 30 - 33 points will be waitlisted subject to the availability of places. While the professional and specialist degrees requirements are the same as the general degrees, additional requirements are usually set: these may include the writing of a faculty selection

test: for BA (Social Work), a written assignment; BA (Fine Arts), an interview/submission of portfolio; for BMus, an interview and audition; and BA (Dramatic Art), an interview, written assignment and/or audition. Applicants with 30 - 33 points will be waitlisted. The Bachelor of Education (4 years) degree has the same entrance requirements as the general degrees (i.e. 5 point for English (home Language or First Additional Language and 34 points, overall). Consideration may be given to applicants with a lower rating, subject to further selection procedures. Applicants between 30 -33 points are waitlisted.

As indicated in the first section, applicants first have to apply through the Student Enrolment Centre and indicate what they want to study. If they want to do something in the School of Arts (WSoA) they get a letter from SEnC asking them to contact a student liaison officer who deals with student applications. This officer will book an appointment for an audition or an interview. If they are successful in the interview or audition, the WSoA informs the SEnC which sends a letter saying that they have been accepted into the School of Arts and they are sent a firm offer.

7.5 Strategies and instruments used in the selection and admissions process

The university has put in place strategies and instruments to administer the selection and admission process. The strategy and instruments are discussed in the following section.

7.5.1 The admissions points system (APS)

Wits uses the Admissions Point System (APS) in their selection and admission for all students. The APS serves as a criterion that an applicant has to meet like a certain number of points, depending on the choice of the degree. Wits claims that this APS will help them to select and admit students who are capable of achieving and succeeding in their studies. As the Registrar puts it:

> We believe that the student has the potential to succeed at university. We do not discriminate in terms of the school that you went to; you don't get extra points because you

> went to a private school ok, or less points because you went to this school or… that school. That is why we have what we call admission criteria. Those are also…eh, they are widely distributed it's there for everybody to see, the advantage of it is there… we do not say that if you are from this race group you must do this or if you are from this school you must get that.

However, some of the respondents in the study say success at university is largely dependent on hard work, independence, resourcefulness, and ambition; other indicators also point to the importance of strong social and cultural capital from family and the community. In other words, matric results are only one of a number of other important criteria that are indicators of success at tertiary level. This suggests that chances should be extended to most students who for one reason or another could not make the 34 points cut-off. The literature in chapter two supports this view where Griesel (1999) argues that while the senior certificate is formally the requirement to enter the higher education system, but this study shows that it is not a good predictor of a student's intellectual ability.

7.7.2 Auditions and interviews

Music students have to do an interview and auditions. They have to play the instruments or sing what they have prepared. Fine Art students come for an interview and present a portfolio of art work to the heads of the division. In drama students have to prepare three items: one is a CV, one is a critical essay on a film they have seen, or a play write or theatre movement and the fourth thing is related to what they plan to study. If they want to do acting they have got to prepare a monologue, if they want they want to do television studies they have to prepare a storyboard, if they want to study something like stage design, props, or costumes, they have to present a portfolio of their designs to the panel.

Successful applicants still in matric will receive a provisional offer. Matric results will determine final acceptance. If applicants are not successful in their auditions and interviews they are rejected, even if they meet the 34 points that are required in the faculty of humanities. Auditions and interviews are critical in the selection process in the WSoA.

In the School of Education an application must follow the same procedure as that of the School of Arts. The only difference is that in the School of Education they are no auditions and interviews. An applicant has to meet the 34 points that are required and the 5 points for English Home Language or First Additional Language, and then will be made a formal offer.

7.8 Profiles of students admitted at Wits: race and gender

Student enrolment statistics show that in terms of race and gender Wits has gone far specifically post 2000. The majority of students enrolled at Wits for the past five years are blacks, and female students constitute more than fifty percent of the student population.

Enrolment trends by Race (2005-2010)						
Gender	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**
African	10856	11236	11869	12335	14711	15043
Chinese	1	2	4	4	6	33
Coloured	637	694	771	807	917	993
Indian	3906	3978	3901	3887	4072	4104
White	8352	8320	8483	8230	8063	7761
Totals	**23752**	**24230**	**25028**	**25263**	**27769**	**27934**

Enrolment trends by gender (2005-2010)

Gender	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**
Female	11799	12133	12677	12760	14508	14737
Male	11950	12090	12350	12503	13261	13196
Totals	**23752**	**24230**	**25028**	**25263**	**27769**	**27934**

(Adapted from: Wits facts and figures, the strategic Planning Division)

According to the Annual Report of the University of the Witwatersrand, 2009, enrolments by race reveal that, Africans comprise 55.3%, Whites 27.5%, Indians 13.9% and Coloureds 3.3% of the entire 2009 student enrolment. The table on enrolments by gender reveals that female students constitute 53% of the student population. This indicates the progress made by Wits in addressing the under-representation of certain race groups and gender and this is consistent with policy.

7.8.1 Family background and place of origin

According to the Annual Report of the University of the Witwatersrand (2009), 90.13% of the total student enrolment came from South Africa, of which 72.29% were from Gauteng and the remaining 17.84% from the other eight provinces in South Africa. In the Gauteng region, 36.66% of the total student enrolment was from Johannesburg. Students from other African countries constituted 8.33% and the remaining 1.53% from other continents. The report and statistics do not reveal family background and where applicants attended their secondary education. However, the report reveals where the majority of the students are from and this is line with admissions policy which states that the university seeks to admit students who reflect the demographic patterns of the Gauteng province (Wits, 2009).

According to Carnoy and Chisholm (2008) Gauteng is the largest contributor to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product and to its employment. The level of education is substantially higher in Gauteng than the national average. Education statistics for the ages 20 and over show that 13% of this section of the population has tertiary education, 41% have at least Grade 12 and only 8% have no education at all Carnoy and Chisholm (2008). Of the province's working-age population, 45% are employed, mainly in elementary occupations and the formal sector. The official unemployment rate is the lowest for this province. The average school class size in 2006 was 39:1 and most of the schools in Gauteng have proper school infrastructure including, libraries, laboratories, access to the internet, water and electricity. The majority of the teachers in Gauteng are considered to be relatively well qualified as compared to their counterparts in other provinces.

Emanating from this one may argue that core of these students come from middle-class backgrounds and graduated mostly from model C and private schools in the Gauteng Province (Wits, 2009). Most Wits students appear to come from affluent families because the majority of the students are self-funding. Less than half of the student population are on bursaries, scholarships and financial aid, these include the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) indicated by the statistics below:

Type of funding	**Total no. of students**
NSFAS	1111
Merit Award PG	677
NRF	357
Scholaships UG	3903
Scholarships PG	25
Bursaries (Internal)	1584
Bursaries (External)	2383
Government Bursaries	968
Other PG Funding	305
Total	**11313**

(*Information obtained from the Wits scholarships and financial aid office: 2011*)

The table above shows the number of students who are currently on bursaries in 2011. Out of more than 26000 students, 11313 are on bursaries including NSFAS; most of the bursaries are private bursaries awarded on merit and merit is found in model C schools where there is a strong social and cultural capital. Although the statistics include postgraduate students, the numbers of students who are fee payers exceed the number of students on bursaries and scholarship.

7.9 Redress and inequalities

Wits policy aims to address the injustices of the past by giving the kind of students who, prior to 1994, would not have had access higher education, a chance to study at Wits. Wits still continues to select and admit students on merit and this is seen in the Admissions

Points System that it is using. The APS has been increasing every year (from 2004 to 2010 the APS has increased from 18 to 34) to attract students who get good grades in matric. One may argue that these students are found mostly in former model C schools in the Gauteng although this needs to be substantiated by data. The chapter claims that Wits has made progress in so far as gender and race are concerned, but too much emphasis on merit has undermined class redress**.**

7.10 Conclusion

The chapter discussed the structures and strategies put in place to administer and implement the selection and admission process in the university. It provided steps taken from application to registration and demonstrated how these structures relate to one another. It has discussed the strategies that the university uses in the selection of its students: interviews, tests and the APS system and the assumptions behind them. The chapter argued that in terms of race and gender Wits has made progress but too much emphasis on merit has undermined class redress. Wits still admits students mainly from privileged families and the majority of the student population comes from the Johannesburg area.

CHAPTER EIGHT
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The starting point of the study was to understand the nature of the selection and admissions policies in place in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. The study was carried out because I wanted to have a better understanding of the selection and admissions policies.

On the positive side, the majority of the respondents, who are also employees of the university, emphasised that Wits is committed to fair and equitable admissions. They claimed that the admissions policy is transparent and the admissions are open to everyone who meets the admissions criteria regardless of background or place of origin. Although the university is situated in Johannesburg, the centre of Gauteng, the students admitted should reflect the demography of the province. Policy also claims that Wits is committed to academic excellence and admits students who have a chance of achieving tertiary education. The admissions policy indicates commitment from Wits to redress inequalities and reduce the under-representation of black and women students in certain disciplines without compromising standards (CHE, 2010). There is recognition that there have been inequalities, and therefore the university has put in place structures to support students to achieve in their studies.

However, on the negative side, despite policy, reality on the ground reflects only partial success in aims of redress. Redress is a complex process and putting support structures to help students cope with the demand of tertiary education and eventually succeed in their studies takes long and needs more resources. This is also reflected in the study done by the report of the working group on retention and throughput:

> Managing under-preparedness takes time and resources. Some would argue that this is the function of the school system … but … the tertiary sector simply has no other immediate choice than to take on the work with enthusiasm and commitment if equity and redress are

> priorities. Universities can and should assist underprepared students but cannot be expected to independently redress many years of inadequate education at school. (Wits 2003a: 42)

The study argues that the university has gone a long way to address the race problem in its enrolment strategy. The problem remains however a class one due to an emphasis on merit. It suggests that the concept of merit needs to be reconceptualised to embrace equity and access. Achievement in higher education depends on more than matric results; there are students who, despite poor matric results, still succeed in tertiary studies. Therefore, chances should be extended to students who do not make the 34 point cut-off point system.

8.1 Recommendations

A major recommendation of the study is that if the university is serious about redress then it needs to review the selection and admissions policy and adopt a principle of affirmative action that will recognise disadvantage; it needs to devise ways in the admissions process to admit students who come from poor backgrounds and who show academic potential but do meet the 34 APS cut-off point. It would then be incumbent upon the university to introduce more support structures that will meet these students' needs. The university should re-introduce the foundation programme for non-traditional students. The government should look more into subsidising institutions so that more facilities, including support structures are put in place, and academic and support staff are trained to meet the expectations of the under-prepared students.

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APPENDICES

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS 2011

The interviews are intended to probe issues related to student social and academic experiences in relation to the academic staff, administrative and support staff and other students, including their view or interpretation of these experiences. They should be open-ended and allow the interviewees to talk about individual experiences and views on the issues without loosing the focus of the project. 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 (See examples below).

ADMINISTRATIVE/SUPPORT STAFF

Administrative experience*: Would you please tell us about your work experience at Wits University, highlighting, if possible, where you worked before, the nature of your work, the support you provide to students, and where and how you interact with students?*

1. How long have you been working at Wits University? Did you have a similar job elsewhere? Elaborate.
2. What attracted you to Wits University? What makes you stay at Wits?
3. What are your specific responsibilities regarding students?
4. What are the different kinds of support you provide to students in your unit?
5. In addition to your job, what other kinds of activities are you involved in (within the university)?

Admission of students: *How would you describe your admissions policy, procedures and criteria in the post-apartheid South Africa? We are particularly interested in the profile of students you are targeting, the criteria used in student selection and recruitment, the changes in admissions policy and the underlying assumptions.*

6. What strategies does the university employ for recruiting students?
7. What informs your policies for admitting students?
8. What is profile of the students does the university target?
9. What difficulties does the institution encounter in recruiting students?
10. Has there been any student protest over admissions into the institution?
11. How were these protests dealt with?
12. How are the students involved in your admission policies?
13. How have your admissions policies changed in the post-apartheid South Africa?

***Changing student profile**: University statistics show considerable changes in the composition of Wits students in the last 15 years. How would you describe these changes and what challenges have they posed to your work, particularly in terms of support students require and your interaction with them?*

14. In your opinion, would you say that there has been a change in the type of students studying at Wits since 1994? In what way? How would you describe current students compared to students who used to come to Wits in the past?
15. How are these changes reflected in your own work?
16. What do you think of this generation of students and their approaches to life at the University?
17. What other kinds of difficulties do you think students experience at Wits University these days?
18. Are you involved in the lives of students outside of your job functions?

***Funding and residence life**: Since the late 1980's Wits University has increased the number of students from poor backgrounds who rely on financial aid for their studies and often run into financial difficulties. What strategies are in place to address this? Are they working? Why?*

19. Many students drop out or are excluded due to financial constraints. Do you agree with this observation?
20. What strategies is Wits using to address this problem? Are these working?
21. Is the financial aid provided for the students sufficient to ensure access and retention?
22. Who in the university should be involved in finding funds for students? Whose responsibility is it?
23. Any suggestions on other people we should interview?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR STUDENTS

The interviews are intended to probe issues related to student social and academic experiences in relation to the academic staff, administrative and support staff and other students, including their view or interpretation of these experiences. They should be open-ended and allow the interviewees to talk about individual experiences and views on the issues without loosing the focus of the project. 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 (See examples below).

Introduction*: Why did you choose this degree? How did you get to be here at Wits? Why Wits?*

Student background/biography*:*

Tell us about your life before coming to Wits? Where did you grow up? What school did you go to? What kind of social or political life did you have? Did you work? What about your parents and your home situation?

1. Was coming to Wits what you expected it to be like? Why?
2. Did your experiences before coming to Wits help you to adjust to life at Wits? Why?

Admission of students: *How would you describe the admissions policy, procedures and criteria used in selecting students at the university in the post-apartheid South Africa? We are particularly interested in the profile of students the university is targeting, the criteria used in student selection and recruitment, the changes in admissions policy and the underlying assumptions.*

3. Are you involved in recruitment and admissions of students?
4. Are you satisfied with the processes that the university follows for recruiting and admitting students?
5. In your knowledge, what are the most common challenges that students encounter when they join the university?
6. How does the university deal with such challenges?
7. Has the changing student profile affected the SRC's approach on issues of student recruitment and admissions? How?
8. In your opinion, has the university done enough in the formulation and implementation of its policies on student recruitment and admission? Kindly substantiate your response.

***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?*

9. Have you had to change anything about yourself in order to adjust to campus life at Wits? What and why?
10. 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?
11. 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.*

12. 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?)
13. What conditioned the choice of your course?
14. What is your experience in the lectures? (Do you find them interesting/boring/irrelevant/difficult to follow/confusing/helpful? Do you participate in lectures or just listen? Why? And what about tutorials/laboratories?)
15. Who do you turn to for help with your studies? (Lecturers/tutors/fellow students/others?) Why do you choose these people?
16. Do you consult directly with lecturers in their offices? Why?
17. Is there a lecturer that left a big impression on you (kind-of-for-life)? Tell us about him/her.
18. What makes the environment in which you learn a positive or negative environment?
19. What kind of support do you get to make your academic experience worthwhile?

Thank you very much for your time

29 August 2011

Dear Student,

Topic: Equity and admissions policy of undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg: A case study of the Faculty

Of Humanities

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project titled '**Equity and admissions policy of undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg: A case study of the Faculty of Humanities'.**

You have been asked to participate because you are a student in one of the Faculty of Humanities. 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 don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to and if you don't want your interview responses to be used in the study, you can contact us and I will remove your responses from the study.

If you participate in this study, you will be interviewed by a researcher. Individual interviews will take place during September and October of 2011 and each will last about one hour. Your responses will not be made available to other staff members in the university.

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 project, or concerns about privacy, please contact me, Samuel Fenyane 078 1913 703 or fenyanesb@yahoo.com .

If you are willing to participate, please e-mail me with your name, e-mail address and a telephone number. These contact details will be used to set up an interview time with you.

Please keep this letter so that you have my contact details should you wish to contact me in future.

Warm regards,

Mr. Samuel Fenyane

Cell: 078 1913 703

29 August 2011

Dear Lecturer/Staff member,

Topic: Equity and admissions policy of undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg: A case study of the Faculty

Of Humanities'

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project titled '**Equity and admissions policy of undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg: A case study of the Faculty of Humanities'.**

You have been asked to participate because you are involved with undergraduate students either in an administrative capacity and working with the admissions policy in the university. Participation is entirely voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating. If you want to stop participating at any time, you may do so. You don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to and if you don't want your interview responses to be used in the study, you can contact us and I will remove your responses from the study.

If you participate in this study, you will be interviewed by a researcher. Individual interviews will take place during September and October of 2010 and each will last about one hour. Your responses will not be made available to other staff members in the university.

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 project, or concerns about privacy, please contact me, Samuel Fenyane 078 1913 703 or fenyanesb@yahoo.com .

If you are willing to participate, please e-mail me with your name, e-mail address and a telephone number. These contact details will be used to set up an interview time with you. Please keep this letter so that you have my contact details should you wish to contact me in future.

Warm regards,

Mr. Samuel Fenyane

Cell: 078 1913 703

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Topic: Equity and admissions policy of undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg: A case study of the Faculty

Of Humanities

I, (full names) _____ hereby agree to participate in the '**Equity and admissions policy of undergraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg: A case study of the Faculty**

Of Humanities' research project.

I understand that I will be interviewed for about one hour, that the interview will be tape-recorded and that tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet by the 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.

Signature: _____ Date: _____