

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA



UFS
UV

GATEWAY COMPARATIVE REPORT 2015-2020

BLOEMFONTEIN CAMPUS

Report compiled by Quantemna

Programme Coordinators:

Lucy Sehloho (Bloemfontein Campus)

Tshegofatso Setilo (South Campus)

Dulcie Malimabe (QwaQwa Campus)

Assistant Researchers:

Codi Rogers (Bloemfontein Campus)

Ruben Langenhoven (Bloemfontein Campus)

August 2020

Executive Summary

A comparison of the Gateway Orientation sessions presented on the Bloemfontein campus of the University of the Free State from 2015 to 2020 revealed that across all six years, the majority of students were satisfied with the sessions, and found them impactful, helpful and relevant. There are, however, some noteworthy differences between the years highlighted in this report.

Regarding the profile of the students participating in the Gateway Orientation sessions, the most salient finding was a sharp increase in the proportion of black African students participating, especially between 2016 and 2020. This was coupled with a sharp decrease in white and coloured student participation. In addition, off-campus student participation rates remain a problem. After calls by the students for increases in the number of off-campus students participating, a substantial increase was seen between 2017 and 2018. However, this was counteracted by a sharp decrease seen between 2018 and 2019, and a further decrease between 2019 and 2020. In fact, in 2020, only a quarter of all participants were off-campus students. Further analysis revealed that a substantial proportion of off-campus students were not informed in time about the sessions in order to attend. Improving logistical arrangements targeted at off-campus students may provide a means of counteracting this problem.

It is also of note that the proportion of male students participating in the sessions have been low throughout the years, but especially so in 2020, where over three quarters of participants were female. Reforms are needed to ensure that participation rates are representative of the gender distribution in the student population.

Due to a change in the format of evaluation, session ratings were only comparable between 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

All elements evaluated only corresponded 100% between 2018, 2019, and 2020 however, resulting in comparisons in the report being especially focused on these three years. It is somewhat concerning that a clear decline in students' satisfaction on all aspects measured becomes apparent when 2017 and 2018 is compared with 2019 and 2020. The drop in satisfaction is especially salient between 2018 and 2019, with ratings on most aspects improving somewhat in 2020, but not to the extent that it is back on par with the ratings prior to 2019. Two related aspects that showed further decline instead of improvement in 2020, was students' perceptions that the sessions helped them to feel welcomed and integrated into the university culture, and their engagement with new peers during the sessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Take steps to ensure that the **diversity of the student body** regarding race, gender and residential status, is represented in the students participating in the sessions.
- Revisit the **format and content of the sessions presented in 2017 and 2018**, and consider re-incorporating some aspects in future iterations of the programme.
- Improve **logistical arrangements related to off-campus students**, especially ensuring that they are notified in time in order to attend the sessions.
- Promote **engagement with new peers** during the sessions by including more opportunities for students to interact with fellow students, especially in the Faculty of Health Sciences.
- Try to help off-campus students to **feel part of the sessions** to especially improve the **developmental impact** of the sessions for them.

Students' lack of engagement with new peers during the sessions has been an ongoing problem, and reforms are recommended to address this negative trend.

Splitting the sample by residential status showed very similar ratings between on- and off-campus students for 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 across all aspects measured. That said, in 2017 on-campus students were somewhat more satisfied than off-campus students with most aspects measured. This trend shifted around in 2018, with off-campus students somewhat more satisfied than on-campus students with most aspects measured, but reverted back to on-campus students being more satisfied in both 2019 and 2020. The drop in ratings between 2018 and 2019 were more pronounced for off-campus students than for on-campus students, and especially so regarding the venue and the developmental impact of the sessions, which saw a greater than 10% drop in positive ratings for off-campus students. It is encouraging to note improvements in ratings for both the venue and the developmental impact of the sessions for off-campus students in 2020. Although satisfaction with developmental impact improved only slightly for off-campus students between 2019 and 2020 (two percentage points), there was a significant improvement in students' satisfaction with the venue (seven percentage points) between the two years.

Splitting the data by faculty revealed that the drops in ratings seen between 2018 and 2019 were most pronounced for students in the Faculties of Education, Law, and Natural and Agricultural Sciences, with the percentage of students assigning positive ratings across all aspects measured dropping by more than 10% in these faculties. Also, of note is a particularly salient drop of nearly 20% in positive ratings for session content between 2018 and 2019 in the Faculties of Natural and Agricultural Sciences and Health Sciences. It is encouraging to note that this negative trend was reversed to some extent in 2020, with students' satisfaction with session content increasing by 15% and 12% in the Faculties of Natural and Agricultural Sciences and Health Sciences, respectively. Apart from session content, and as expected given the overall trend, there was also an increase in students' levels of satisfaction across most other aspects measured in all faculties between 2019 and 2020. That said, 2020 satisfaction levels surpassed that seen in 2018 only in the Faculty of Theology, with all other faculties still falling below the 2018 levels. Regarding engagement with new peers, the most notable decrease between 2019 and 2020 was seen in the Faculty of Health Sciences, dropping from 57% of students engaging with new peers in 2019, to only 35% of students in 2020.

In conclusion, although the Gateway Orientation sessions were by and large received well by students across all six the years, and can therefore be seen as having been successfully implemented, some areas of concern do remain. Although there was a definite improvement in ratings between 2019 and 2020, the ratings are still not on par with that seen prior to 2018. Making some changes to the programme, as per the recommendations outlined here, may help to counteract this trend.

Introduction

The University of the Free State (UFS) has been presenting Gateway Orientation sessions to their first-year students since 2015. The aim of the sessions, as first defined in 2015, is “to welcome first-year students, familiarise students with the university, ensure students are registered for their programmes, refer students to academic advising, career counselling and other support services on campus, and orientate students around the services that the Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support (UFS) provides”. The aim of this report is to provide a comparative overview of the ratings for and satisfaction with the Gateway Orientation sessions presented in 2015 to 2020 on the Bloemfontein campus of the UFS.

The changing format of both the Gateway Orientation sessions and the evaluations conducted of the sessions, made comparisons between the years challenging. In 2015, the Gateway Orientation programme consisted of nine sessions, which were presented over the course of the first week following registration, and were repeated over the course of the week following the RAG initiative. Students’ experiences of the sessions were evaluated via an online survey and focus group discussions.

- **Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice (IRSJ) session:** The purpose of this session was to inform students about the IRSJ and its mandate at the UFS
- **Finance session:** The purpose of this session was to teach students how to manage their student accounts, bursary obligations and their own finances
- **Free Thinking session:** This session was about the University’s expectation of developing critical thinking and scholarship.
- **Gateway Arts & Discussion Session:** This session was about engaging arts and culture as social commentary for critical reflection
- **Health and Wellness session:** The purpose of this session was to inform students about the support services that are provided by the University of the Free State.
- **Media and Technology:** This session concerned the optimal use and leverage of learning support technology for success
- **Academics:** This purpose of this session was to inform students about achieving academic success, gaining advice and balancing their student lives
- **Career:** The purpose of this session was to inform students how to manage their CVs and actively develop a career path while studying
- **Beyond Boundaries:** The purpose of this session was to show students how to overcome stereotypes and build friendships beyond difference

The 2016 Gateway Orientation programme consisted of seven sessions, and each session was evaluated by means of a paper-and-pencil survey immediately following the session. The seven sessions presented were:

- **Faculty Preparation Programme:** This session was presented separately to students from each faculty. The purpose of the session was to inform students about progression rules, how credits work, examination regulations, and assistance provided by each of the faculties.
- **Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice (IRSJ) session:** The purpose of this session was to inform students about the IRSJ and its mandate at the UFS.

- **Citizenship session:** The purpose of this session was to inform students about the Receive and Give (RAG) initiative.
- **Centre for Teaching and Learning session:** The purpose of this session was to inform students about the support services provided by the Center for Teaching and Learning of the UFS.
- **Finance session:** The purpose of this session was to provide students with the necessary skills to help them manage their finances.
- **Free Thinking session:** The purpose of this session was to teach students about free thinking; what it is, why it is important, where and when it takes place, and how it can be effectively implemented.
- **Health and Wellness session:** The purpose of this session was to inform students about the support services that are provided by the University of the Free State.

In 2017, both the format of the Gateway sessions and the evaluation thereof was changed substantially. Only four Gateway session were presented to first-year students, namely:

- **Academic Advising and Success:** The purpose this session was to inform students about the support services provided by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and thus corresponded with the Centre for Teaching and Learning session presented in 2016.
- **Campus Engagement:** This session corresponded with the IRSJ Gateway session presented in 2016, and aimed to provide students with information about the Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice (IRSJ) and its mandate at the University of the Free State.
- **Campus Support Services:** This session corresponded with the Health and Wellness session presented in 2016, and had the main aim of informing students about the support services that are provided by the University of the Free State.
- **Financial Skills:** This session corresponded with the Finance session presented in 2016, and aimed to provide students with the necessary skills to manage their finances, including highlighting and sharing important information of fees, and enabling students to calculate the average cost of their studies at the UFS.

The 2017 Gateway sessions were evaluated through asking students to provide immediate feedback via a paper-and-pencil survey after each session. The feedback provided relate to four specific areas, namely:

- **Impact of the session:** Three questions examined whether students felt the session helped develop their ability to succeed, and was a good use of their time. Students were also asked to indicate how satisfied they were with the impact of the session on their development.
- **Relevance:** Two questions asked students whether the content of the session was relevant to helping them succeed, and whether the session content was on-topic and focussed.
- **Engagement:** Two questions asked students whether the session was relevant and interesting, and if their questions were satisfactorily answered.
- **Logistics:** Four questions asked students about the convenience of the session time, how timeous the information about the session time was, their satisfaction with the venue and the friendliness of the staff members.

In 2018, the sessions presented were increased from four to six, and included:

- **Academic Advising and Success:** The purpose of this session was somewhat different to its purpose in 2017, with the main aim to introduce students to Academic Advising and its importance.
- **Student Life:** The Student Life session was a new session that was introduced in 2018, and had the purpose of introducing students to the programmes available at Student Affairs.
- **Support Services:** This session corresponded with the Campus Support Services session offered in 2017, with the main purpose to inform students about the support services that are provided by the UFS.
- **Service Learning 1 and 2:** The Service Learning session were new session introduced in 2018, and had the purpose of introducing students to the Service Learning module, and presenting students with a practical presentation on the Service Learning module.
- **B-Safe:** The B-Safe session was a new session introduced in 2018. During this session, Protection Services, the SAPS, and the Community Policing Forum did a presentation to students on how to be safe on and off-campus.

The specific areas evaluated in the 2018 Gateway session evaluation were the same as that evaluated in 2017, with the exception that students were also asked to evaluate the contents of the sessions. The specific questions asked under each area also differed somewhat:

- **Impact of the session:** Questions examined whether students felt the session helped develop their ability to succeed, was a good use of their time, if their expectations were satisfied, if they were inspired to get involved on campus and if they will make use of services and resources shared in the session.
- **Relevance:** Questions asked students whether the content of the session prepared them for their studies and was focussed and relevant to the topic.
- **Engagement and sense of community:** Questions asked students whether the session was interactive and interesting, if their questions were satisfactorily answered and if they felt welcomed and integrated into the community. They were also asked if they engaged with new peers in the sessions.
- **Logistics:** Questions asked students about the convenience of the session time, how timeous the information about the session time was, and their satisfaction with the friendliness of the staff members.
- **Content:** Questions asked students whether the content of the sessions was important, useful, relevant, clear, and easy to understand as well as engaging and interesting.
- **Developmental impact:** Students were asked to rate their experience of the developmental impact of the sessions.
- **Satisfaction with venue:** Students were asked to rate how satisfied they were with the venue where the sessions were held.

In 2019, the Gateway Orientation sessions were reduced to only three sessions, namely:

- **Academic Advising:** The purpose of this session was similar to the purpose of the Academic Advising and Success session in 2018, with the main aim to introduce students to Academic Advising and its importance.
- **Support Services:** This session corresponded with the Support Services session offered in 2018, with the main purpose to inform students about the support services that are provided by the UFS.

- **Student Life:** This session corresponded with the Student Life session offered in 2018, with the main purpose of introducing students to the programmes available at Student Affairs.

The specific areas of the 2019 Gateway sessions that were evaluated, as well as the questions asked to evaluate each specific area, were exactly the same as that of the 2018 evaluation.

In 2020, there was an addition of two sessions, resulting in a total of five Gateway sessions, which included:

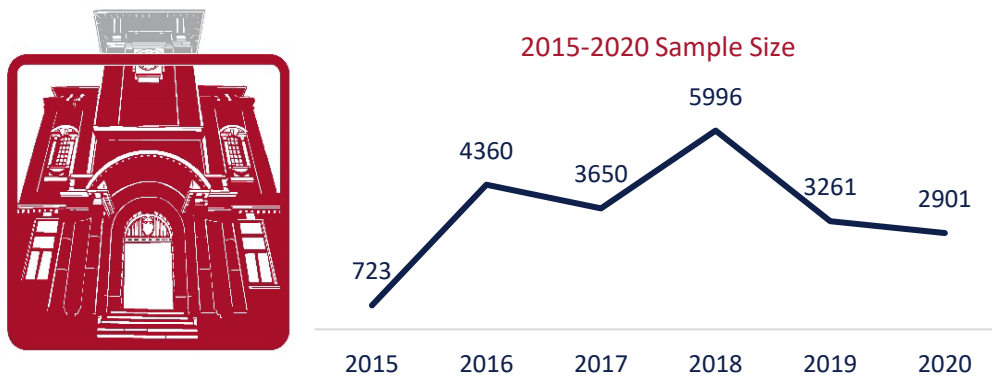
- **Academic Advising:** The purpose of this session was similar to the purpose of the Academic Advising and Success session in 2018, with the main aim to introduce students to Academic Advising and its importance.
- **Faculty Specific Orientation:** This session was similar to the Faculty Preparation Programme presented in 2016, and was presented separately to students from each Faculty. The purpose of the session was to inform students about progression rules, how credits work, examination regulations, and assistance provided by each of the faculties.
- **Support Services:** This session corresponded with the Support Services session offered in 2018, with the purpose of informing students about the support services that are provided by the UFS, including the Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support, and Student Counselling and Development.
- **Wellness and Safety:** The purpose of this session was to sensitize first year students about safety on and off-campus as well as wellness and how to obtain help through Protection Services
- **Student Life:** This session corresponded with the Student Life session offered in 2018, with the main purpose of introducing students to the programmes available at Student Affairs.

The specific areas of the 2020 Gateway sessions that were evaluated, as well as the questions asked to evaluate each specific area, were the same as that of the 2018 and 2019 evaluation.

2015-2020 Comparison of the Gateway sessions on Bloemfontein campus

Participation Rates

Despite an upward trend in participation rates between 2015 and 2018, as can be seen in the graph below, participation rates decreased sharply between 2018 and 2019. A further decrease was noted in 2020. A survey was sent out to students in 2020 to shed some light on this downward trend. Students were asked to provide reasons for why they did not attend the Gateway sessions. Results from the survey indicated that late registration was the main reason for students not attending the Gateway sessions. Similar to reasons given for non-attendance in 2015, other reasons included not being in Bloemfontein at the time of the sessions and a lack of communication regarding the orientation programme.



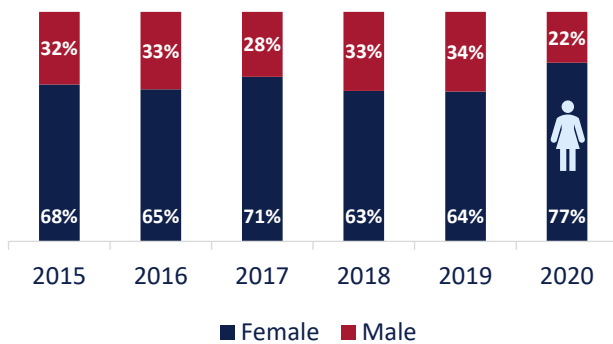
Participant Profile

This section details and compares the profiles of the participants in the 2015 to 2020 Gateway Orientation sessions.

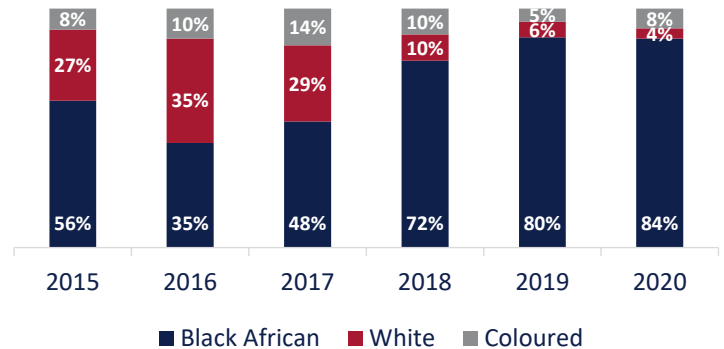
Biographical profile

Across all six years, the majority of the respondents were female, with the greatest proportion of females seen in 2020 (77%). The racial distribution, on the other hand, showed marked shifts over the years. The proportion of black African students participating decreased somewhat between 2015 and 2016, but from there increased sharply from only 35% in 2016 to 84% in 2020. This increase was coupled with a sharp decrease in the proportion of white and coloured students between 2016 and 2020, dropping from a combined percentage of 45% (35% white and 10% coloured) in 2016 to just 12% (8% coloured and 4% white) in 2020.

2015-2020 Gender Distribution



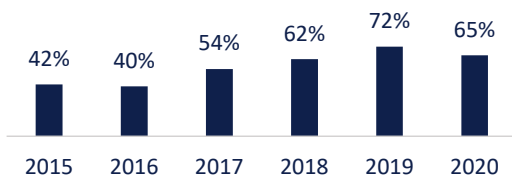
2015-2020 Race Distribution



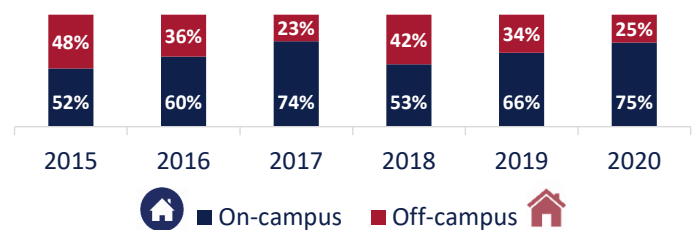
First generation students, residential status, and faculty distribution

A sharp increase in the proportion of first-generation students participating in the Gateway Orientation sessions can be seen between 2015 and 2019, increasing from below half of the participants in 2015 to nearly three quarters in 2019. However, the proportion of first-generation students dropped somewhat between 2019 and 2020. Despite calls from the 2015 cohort of students to increase off-campus student participation rates, there was a drop in off-campus student participation between 2015 and 2017, with the proportion of off-campus students dropping below 25% in 2017. In 2017, students again asked for an increased focus on getting off-campus students to participate, and in 2018 off-campus student participation increased by nearly 20%. However, a decrease of nearly 20% was again seen between 2018 and 2020. The finding that a substantial proportion of off-campus students in both 2019 and 2020 were not informed in time in order to attend the sessions may be one of the factors playing a role in the decrease seen.

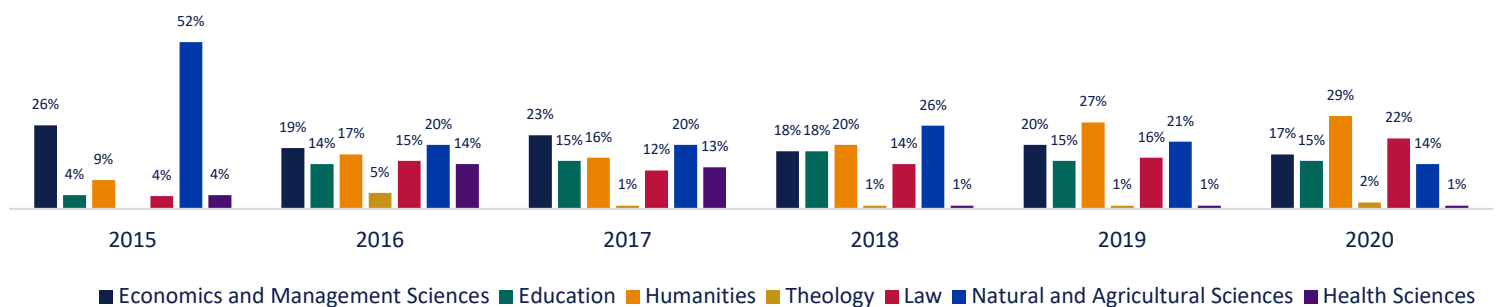
2015-2020 First Generation Students



2015-2020 Residence Status



2015-2020 Faculty Distribution

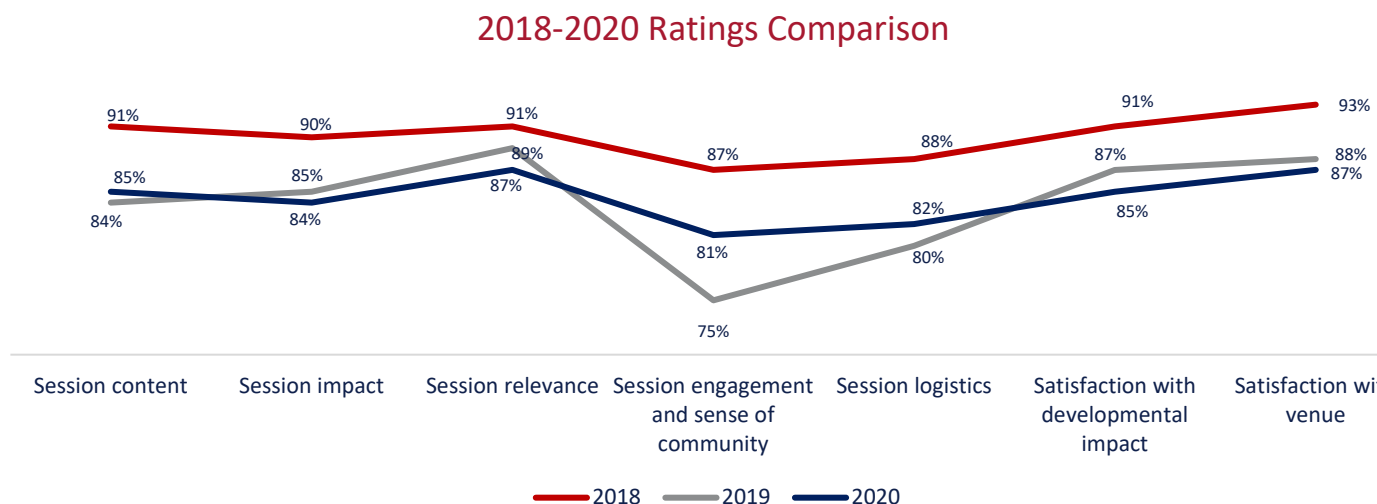


Session Feedback

Ratings and satisfaction of all sessions combined compared between the years

The evaluation of the Gateway Orientation sessions in its current form began with the 2017 cohort, but all aspects measured were the same only for the 2018, 2019 and 2020 cohorts. Since only 2018, 2019 and 2020 are therefore directly comparable, only data for 2018 to 2020 are included in the graphs. Findings from 2015 to 2017 are, where applicable, reported on in the text.

From the graph below can be seen that, although ratings were positive for all years, there was a clear drop in satisfaction between 2018 and 2020, with the ratings for most aspects being at their lowest in 2020. Although there was a particularly large drop in ratings for session engagement and sense of community from 2018 to 2019, with only 75% of participants in the 2019 cohort indicating that they were satisfied with these aspects, compared to 87% of participants in the 2018 cohort, an increase was seen again in 2020 (81%). In the 2017 cohort, the ratings for session engagement and sense of community were at their highest, with 89% of participants assigning positive ratings to these aspects.



Students in the 2015 and 2016 cohorts recommended that the sessions be made more interesting and entertaining so as to better engage students. It seems that this was achieved with the 2017 cohort. However, students in the 2018 cohort again recommended making the sessions more interactive and engaging. Unfortunately, the changes that were made seem to have not been received so well by the students in 2019, although the upward trend noted for 2020 is encouraging.

Apart from improving student engagement during the sessions, the 2016 cohort also asked for an improvement in session logistics. The ratings for session logistics raised to its highest in the following year (2017; 89% assigned positive ratings), but then dropped sharply between 2018 and 2019, recovering slightly in 2020. That said, the ratings overall were still very positive, with more than eight out of ten students indicating that they were satisfied to some extent with all aspects related to session logistics across all the years.

The 2017 cohort was also the most positive cohort about the session impact (91% assigned positive ratings), session relevance (93% assigned positive ratings), and satisfaction with the developmental impact of the sessions (93% assigned positive ratings). Although the sub-factors making up each of

these aspects differed somewhat between 2017 and the later three years, it is still worthwhile to reconsider the 2017 format of the sessions for use in future iterations of the programme.

The specific aspects making up each of session relevance, session engagement and sense of community, session logistics, session content, and session impact are explored in the section below to gain a better understanding of the above findings.

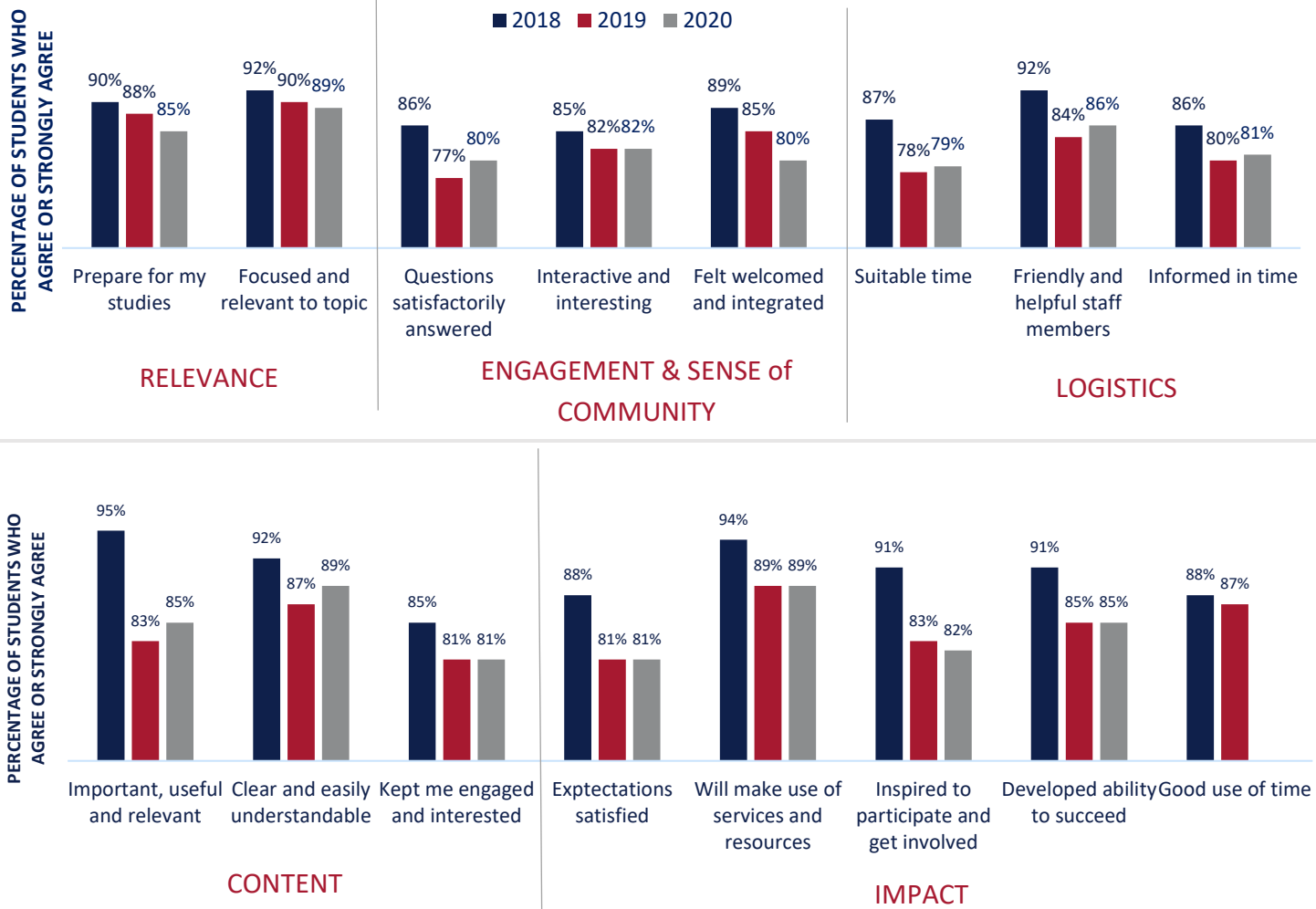
Ratings and satisfaction of all sessions combined – an in-depth comparison of 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020

The specific elements used to measure session content, session engagement and sense of community, session impact, and session logistics were similar to some extent only for the years 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, and therefore only comparable between these four years. For 2017, however, the aspects differed somewhat, and therefore only 2018, 2019 and 2020 are included in the graphs below, although 2017 findings are reported in the text where applicable.

From the graph below can be seen that the vast majority of participants were positive during 2018, 2019 and 2020. That said, there was a clear decline in satisfaction for most aspects measured especially between 2018, and the next two years. The satisfaction levels in 2020 were the lowest of the four years for a quarter of the aspects measured. Particularly salient is the drop in students' levels of satisfaction with their questions being satisfactorily answered during the sessions, dropping from 90% of students being satisfied in 2017 to only 77% being satisfied in 2019. This was, therefore, the main factor driving the reduced positive rating seen in the previous section for session engagement and sense of community in 2019. It is encouraging to note that this aspect was again received more positively in 2020, with eight out of ten students indicating that their questions were satisfactorily answered. That said, 2020 saw a 5% decrease in the sessions helping students to feel welcomed and integrated into the university culture.

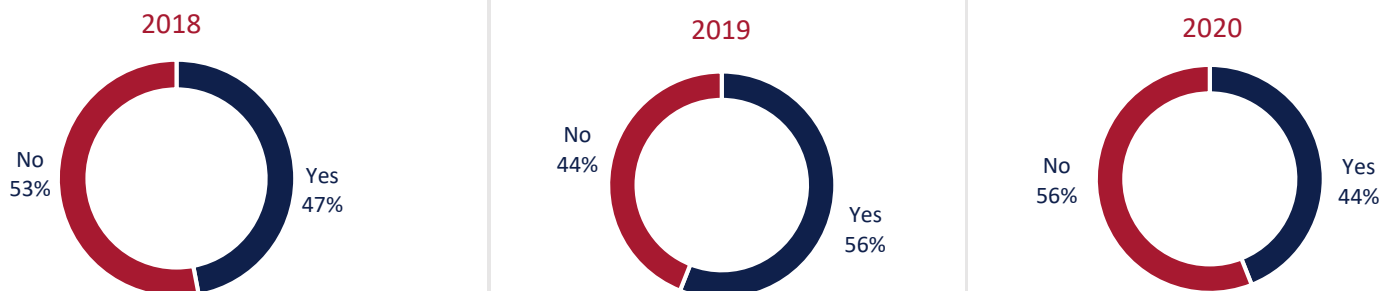
It is somewhat concerning to note a clear decline in students' satisfaction with session logistics between 2018, 2019, with only a slight improvement noted in 2020. The decline was apparent for all three aspects measured, namely the sessions being at a suitable time for students to attend, the staff members being friendly and helpful, and students being informed in time in order to attend the sessions. It might be worthwhile to conduct further research to determine the precise reasons for this decline so that it can be addressed and improved for future iterations of the program.

A comparison of session ratings between 2018, 2019, and 2020



Although there was an increase in students' engagement with new peers between 2018 and 2019, a decline was again seen for 2020, dropping to its lowest across the three years. This trend coincides with the already noted decrease in students' perceptions that the sessions helped them to feel welcomed and integrated into the university culture in 2020.

Engaged with new peers: 2018 - 2020



Most valuable aspects of the sessions in each year

As noted above, the different sessions presented, and the different format of the sessions, made comparisons between all the years (2015 to 2020) difficult. Therefore, what students found most valuable about the sessions in each of the years are highlighted here. In 2015, nine sessions were presented to the students. However, students' responses were only analysed in aggregate form, with no information provided for the individual sessions.

2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice (IRSJ)•Finance•Free Thinking•Gateway Arts & Discussion•Health and Wellness•Media and Technology•Academics•Career•Beyond Boundaries
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•<i>Citizenship</i>: Most important information = The RAG initiative•<i>Centre for Teaching and learning</i>: Most important information = Tips for academic success•<i>Finance</i>: Most important information = Financial assistance•<i>Free Thinking</i>: Most important information = Be independent thinkers•<i>Health and Wellness</i>: Most important information = Support Services•<i>Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice</i>: Most important learnt = Reconciliation, diversity and forgiveness
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Academic Advising and Success - most impactful session•Campus Engagement•Campus Support Services - most interactive and engaging session•Financial Skills - most relevant session
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Academic Advising and Success - best prepared students for their studies•Student Life•Support Services - most focused and relevant to the topic•Service Learning 1•Services Learning 2•B-Safe - most interactive and interesting session
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Academic Advising•Support Services•Student Life - most positive ratings
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Academic AdvisingFaculty Specific OrientationSupport ServicesWellness and SafetyStudent Life - most positive ratings

In 2016, students found the information they received about (i) financial assistance, (ii) how to be independent thinkers, and (iii) support services very valuable. In addition, the 2016 cohort were complimentary about the RAG initiative, the tips they received for academic success, and what they learned about reconciliation, diversity and forgiveness

In the 2017 cohort, the academic advising and success session was seen as the most impactful session, while the campus support services session was seen as the most interactive and engaging session, and the financial skills session as the most relevant session.

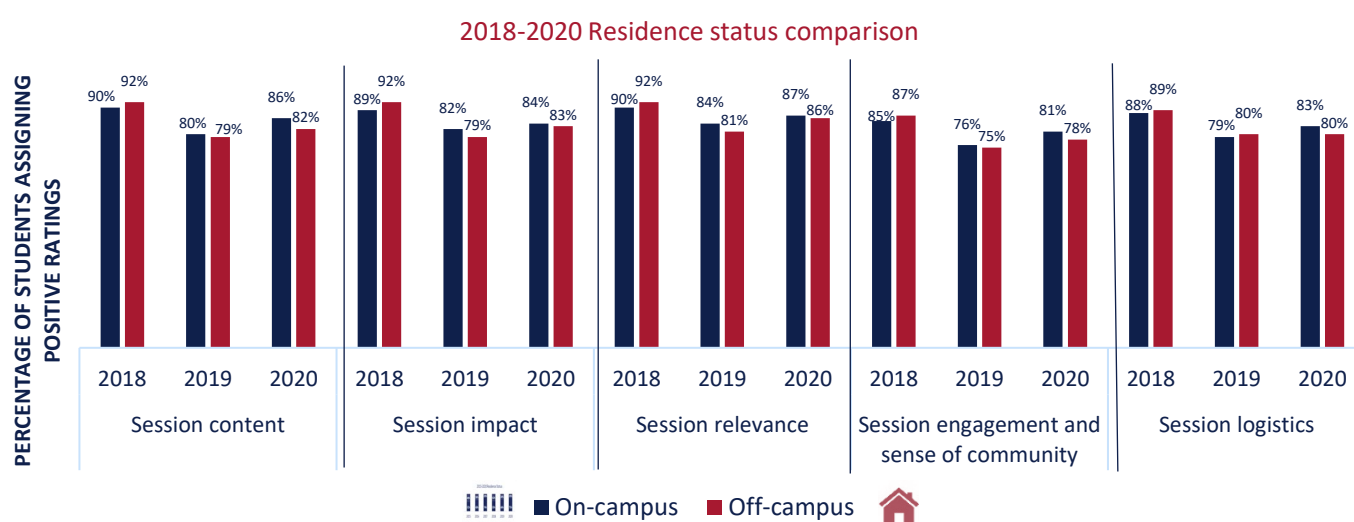
The 2018 cohort was again positive about the academic advising and success session, indicating that it was the session that best prepared them for their studies, as well as about the support services session, indicating that this session was most focused and relevant to the topic. The B-Safe session was presented for the first time in 2018, and was seen as the most interactive and interesting session.

In the 2019 cohort, the number of sessions was cut down considerably to include only three sessions, namely a session on academic advising, support services, and student life. Although all sessions were rated favourably, the highest ratings were received for the student life session.

The 2020 cohort saw an addition of two sessions, namely a session aimed at each faculty specifically, and a wellness and safety session. Therefore, a total of five sessions were presented in 2020. Similar to 2019, all sessions were rated favourably, with the student life session receiving the most positive ratings.

Ratings and satisfaction according to residence status

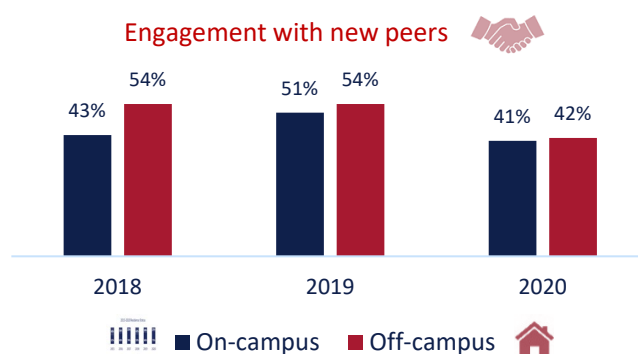
From the graph below can be seen that on- and off-campus students were positive about all aspects measured in 2018, 2019 and 2020. That said, it is interesting to note that in 2018, off-campus students were more satisfied with all aspects measured than on-campus students were, but in 2019 and 2020 this trend was reversed, with on-campus students more satisfied than off-campus students with most aspects measured.



For both on- and off-campus students, a drop in ratings can be seen between 2018 and 2019, with the drop more pronounced for off-campus students than for on-campus students on all aspects measured. For on-campus students, the most salient drop in ratings was for session content, with nine out of ten

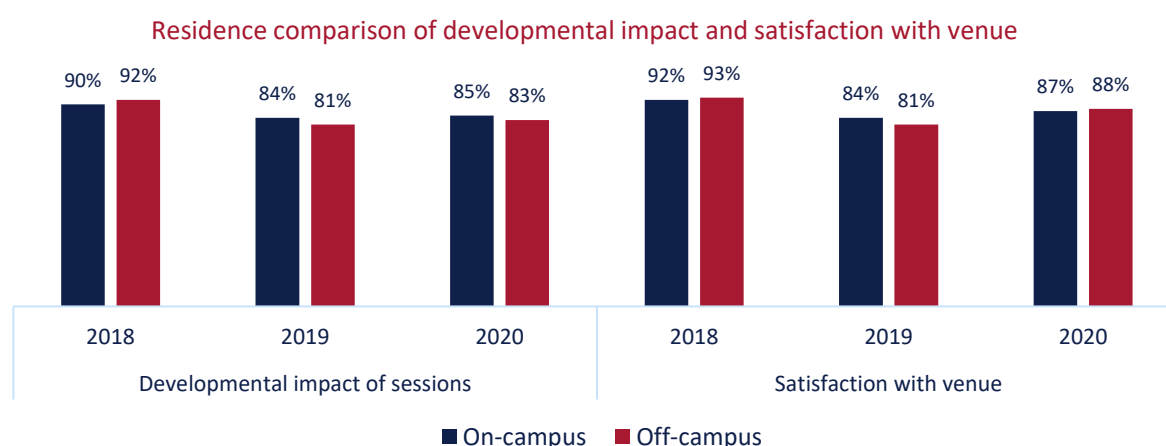
students in 2018 assigning positive ratings to aspects related to session content, compared to eight out of ten students in 2019. Session content also saw a pronounced drop in ratings between 2018 and 2019 for off-campus students, with the percentage of students rating aspects related to session content positively dropping from above 90% to below 80%. In addition, off-campus students also saw a drop of more than 10% in positive ratings for aspects related to session impact, session relevance, and session engagement and sense of community. It is encouraging to note that the ratings for both on- and off-campus students picked up again in 2020 on all aspects measured, although it was still below the levels noted in 2018.

Engagement with new peers was low across all years and for both on- and off-campus students. There was a slight increase in engagement with new peers for on-campus students between 2018 and 2019, increasing from below half of the students to just above half, while the proportion of off-campus students who engaged with new peers during the sessions remained constant.



Unfortunately, 2020 saw the engagement with new peers reach its lowest point, with less than half of both on- and off-campus students (41% and 42% respectively) indicating they engaged with new peers during the sessions.

On- and off-campus students were satisfied with the developmental impact of the sessions and the venue in 2018, 2019 and 2020. That said, for on- and off-campus students, there was a clear decrease in levels of satisfaction regarding both the developmental impact of the sessions and the venue where the sessions were held between 2018 and 2019. This was especially pronounced for off-campus students, for whom a more than 10% decrease in levels of satisfaction was noted for both the developmental impact of and the venue for the sessions. While 2020 saw an increase in satisfaction with the developmental impact of the sessions and the venue where the sessions were held, 2018 students remained the most positive regarding these aspects.



Although, as noted, the aspects related to each of session impact, relevance, engagement, and logistics did not completely correspond between 2017 and the later three years and were therefore not directly comparable, findings for 2017 did show that on-campus students were more satisfied with all aspects measured than off-campus students were. This finding is in line with the findings for 2019 and 2020, but in contrast to the findings for 2018.

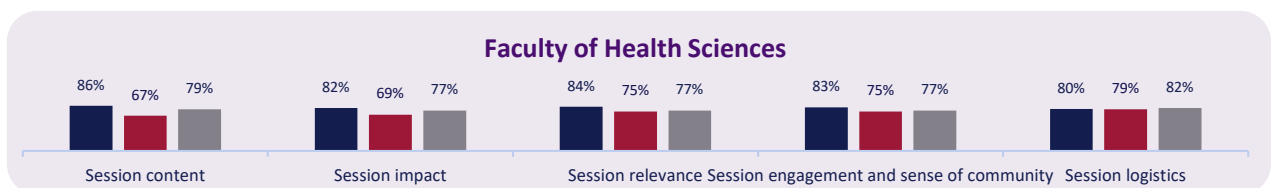
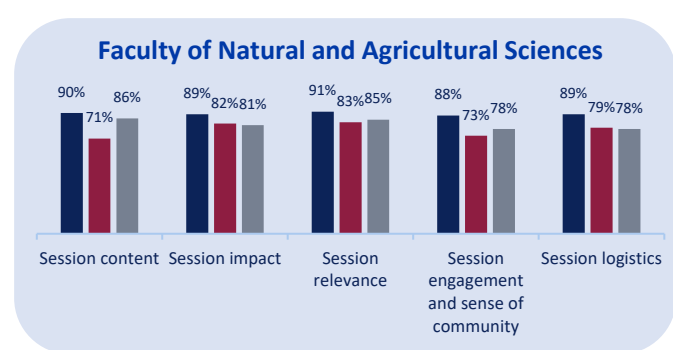
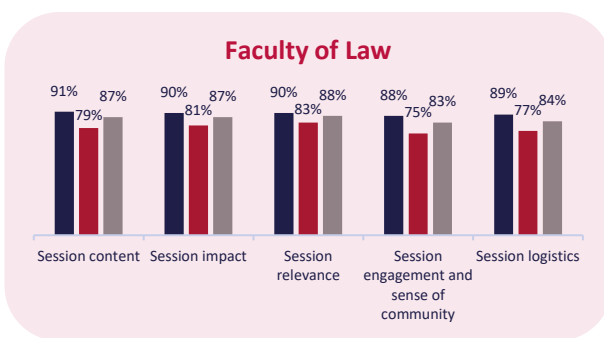
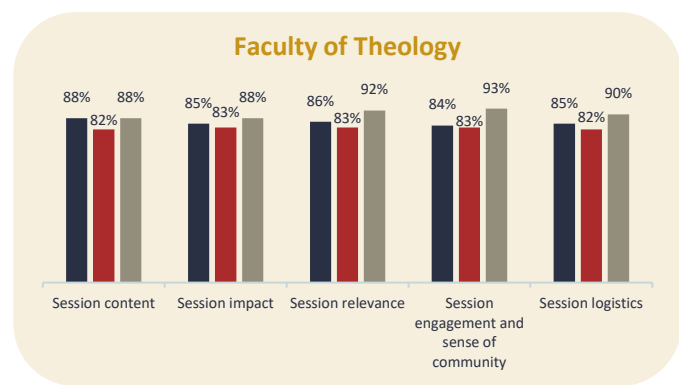
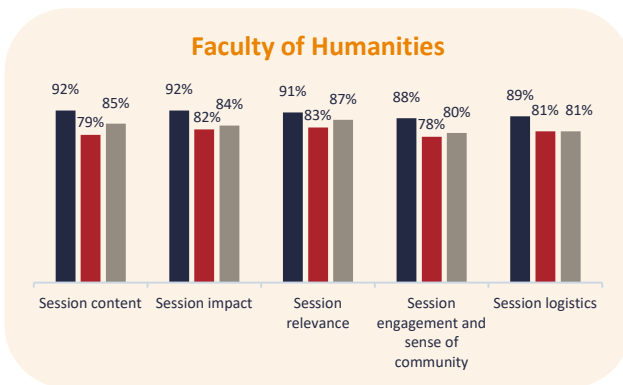
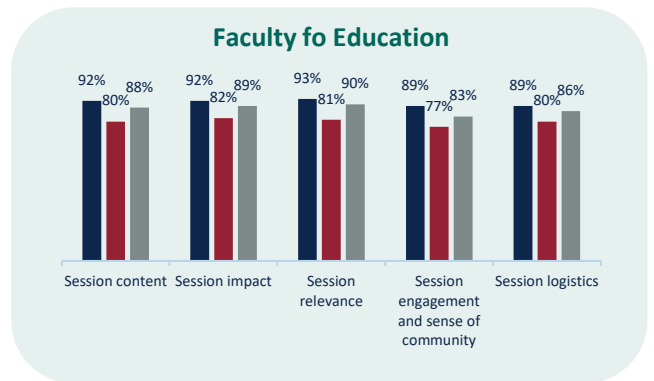
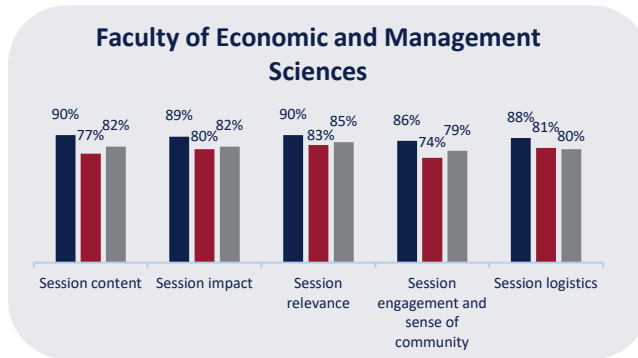
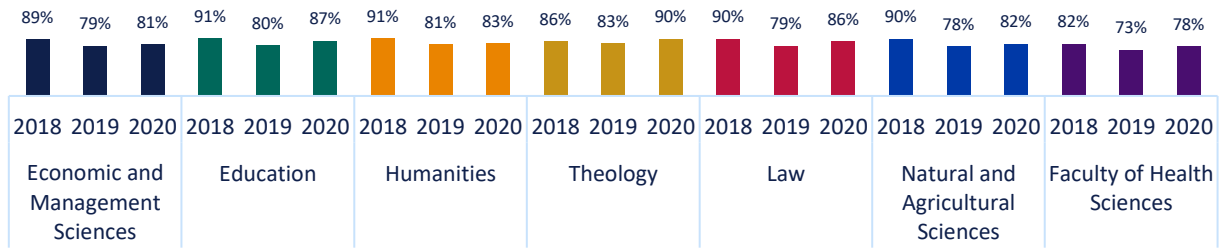
Ratings and satisfaction according to faculty

From the figure on the next page can be seen that although the ratings for 2018, 2019 and 2020 were positive in all faculties, there was a clear decrease in levels of satisfaction within all faculties between 2018 and 2019. The decrease in positive ratings was especially pronounced for students in the Faculties of Education, Law, and Natural and Agricultural Sciences, where the percentage of students who rated session aspects positively decreased by more than 10%. Students in the Faculty of Theology, in contrast, showed the most similar ratings for 2018 and 2019, with 86% and 83% of students respectively assigning positive ratings to aspects related to the sessions. It is encouraging to note that the trend was reversed again in 2020, with an increase in students' levels of satisfaction across all aspects measured seen in all faculties between 2019 and 2020. Apart from the Faculty of Theology, where ratings were highest in 2020, the ratings for 2020 were still below that seen for 2018.

A more in-depth look at specific aspects measured revealed a decrease in positive ratings for all aspects measured (session content, session impact, session engagement and sense of community, and session logistics) between 2018 and 2019 within all faculties. Session content and session engagement and sense of community showed the greatest decrease in positive ratings across faculties, with positive ratings for session content dropping by more than 10% in all faculties except the Faculty of Theology, with a particularly salient drop of nearly 20% in the Faculties of Natural and Agricultural Sciences and the Health Sciences. In addition, session engagement and sense of community dropped by more than 10% in all faculties except the Faculties of Theology and Humanities. Other salient findings were that the positive ratings for session relevance dropped by 12% in the Faculty of Education; while session logistics dropped by 12% in the Faculty of Law, and session impact dropped by 13% in the Faculty of Health Sciences. As noted above, this downward trend was, for the most part, reversed in 2020. Particularly salient was that students' satisfaction with session content increased by 15% in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences between 2019 and 2020, and by 12% in the Faculty of Health Sciences. That said, satisfaction levels in 2020 were not yet back on par with the levels of 2018 with most aspects measured within all faculties, except the Faculty of Theology. In the Faculty of Theology, session ratings were on par with 2018 regarding session content, and surpassed 2018 regarding session impact, session relevance, session engagement and sense of community and session logistics.

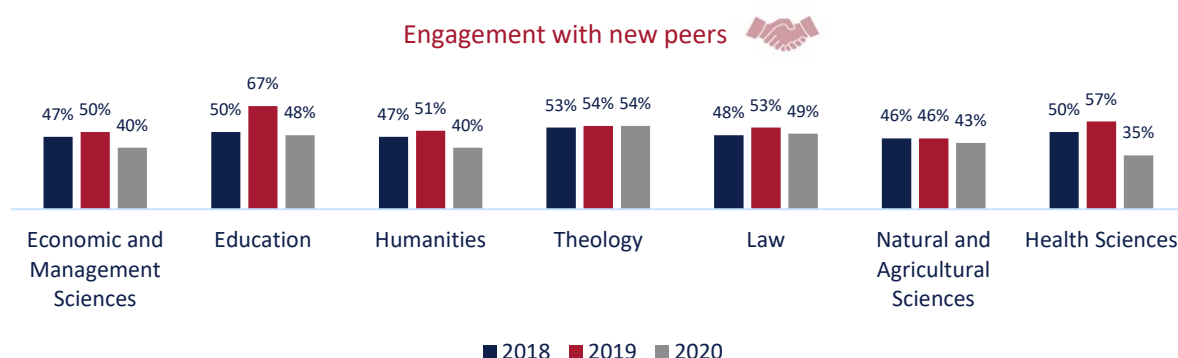
Although not directly comparable to 2018, 2019, and 2020, session impact, relevance, engagement and logistics were all rated favourably in 2017 across all faculties, with at least eight out of ten students in all faculties assigning positive ratings to all aspects measured.

2018-2020 Faculty Comparison

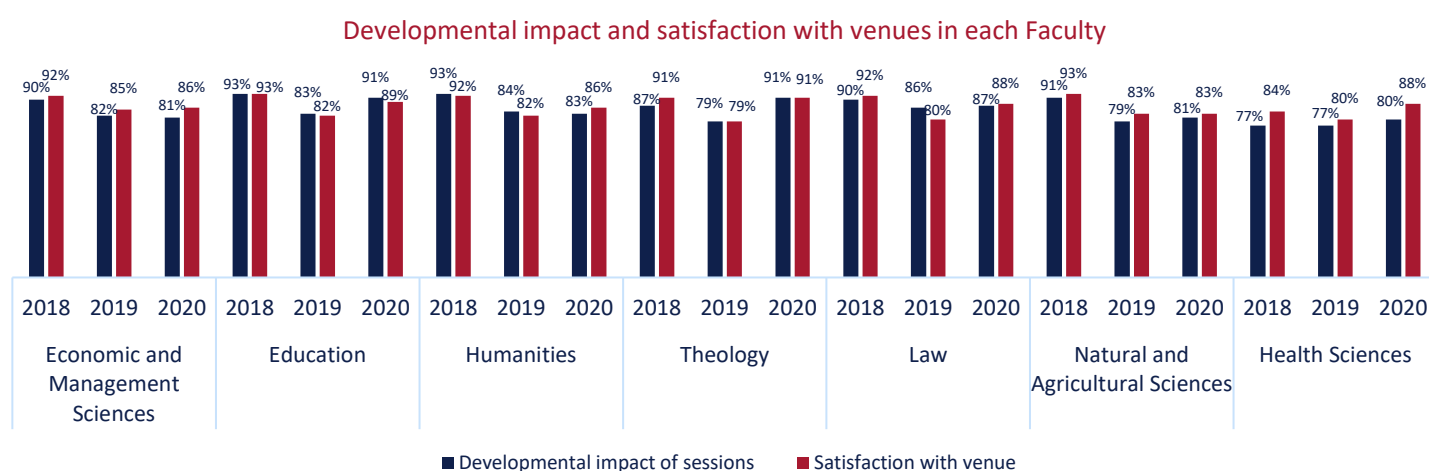


■ 2018 ■ 2019 ■ 2020

In contrast to the findings above, engagement with new peers showed an increase between 2018 and 2019 in all faculties except the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, where ratings stayed constant. An especially sharp increase was evident for the Faculty of Education, where only half the students engaged with new peers during the sessions in 2018, compared to two-thirds of the students in 2019. Unfortunately, 2020 again saw a drop in the engagement with new peers, except for The Faculty of Theology which remained the same as in 2019. The most notable decrease was seen in the Faculty of Health Sciences, where, in 2019 the majority (57%) of students engaged with new peers compared to the only 35% of students in 2020.



The ratings for the developmental impact of the sessions and the satisfaction with the venue were positive in 2018, 2019 and 2020, although a decrease in positive ratings could be seen for both aspects in most faculties in 2019. Particularly salient drops in ratings relating to satisfaction with the venue were evident for students in the Faculties of Education, Theology, and Law, where positive ratings dropped by more than 10% between the two years. The developmental impact of the sessions was rated more consistently, although a drop of 12% could be seen in 2019 for students in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences. As seems to be the trend, compared to 2019, 2020 saw an increase in satisfaction with both the developmental impact of the sessions and with the venue where the sessions were held. That said, levels of satisfaction with both aspects in 2020 were still lower than in 2018, except for the Faculties of Theology and Health Sciences.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the Gateway Orientation sessions were received well by students across all six the years evaluated. Comparisons between the years were made difficult by the changing format of both the sessions presented and the evaluation of those sessions, but did reveal some important insights.

A steady decrease in participation rates have been noted over the years. Although late registration was the main reason why students didn't attend the sessions in 2020, there were some students who noted a lack of communication regarding the programme. This seems to be especially problematic for off-campus students, for whom a sharp drop in participation was seen between 2018 and 2020. Furthermore, the sessions are not representative of the gender distribution in the student population, with less than a quarter of participants being female in 2020. Reforms are encouraged to increase the rate of male students' participation.

Regarding the sessions themselves, the most concerning finding is that the rates of satisfaction, albeit still mostly positive, have shown a clear decrease, especially when the ratings for 2017 and 2018 are compared with that of 2019 and 2020. It is encouraging to note that ratings have recovered somewhat in 2020 compared to 2019, but is not yet back on par with that of 2017 and 2018. It would be worthwhile to revisit the format and content of the sessions in 2017 and 2018, and to consider re-incorporating some of the elements from those years into future iterations of the programme. In addition, off-campus students' participation rates and levels of satisfaction are not completely on par with that of on-campus students, and special measures would need to be implemented to turn this trend around, especially concerning logistical arrangements. Engagements with new peers is also an on-going problem, with ratings dropping to their lowest levels yet in the 2020 cohort. It is perhaps worth considering including elements in the sessions especially aimed at helping students to interact with their fellow classmates. Finally, it is encouraging to note that although a sharp drop in students' satisfaction with session content was noted between 2018 and 2019 for students in the Faculties of Health and Natural and Agricultural Sciences, this trend was more or less reversed in both these faculties in 2020.