Students' experiences of and perspectives on (dis)advantage: a case study at a South African university

By

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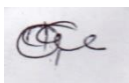
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Declaration

I, Oliver T. Gore, declare the following:

i)   The Doctoral Degree research thesis that I herewith submit for the Doctoral degree qualification: Philosophiae Doctor in Development Studies at the University of the Free State is my independent work, and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the perceptions, understandings and experiences of (dis)advantage amongst students in higher education. The context is one where inequalities and inequity of outcomes in higher education persist, despite the South African government introducing policy that seeks to address the social injustices brought about by previous apartheid policies. Specifically, higher education policy has conceptualised inequalities under the concept of historic 'disadvantage' that is primarily race-based. Nonetheless, various interventions that target increasing enrolment, student funding and student academic development etc. have not translated into equal student success and outcomes in higher education.

Drawing from the capabilities approach, the thesis investigates the evidence of 'well-being freedoms' [capabilities], 'well-being achievements' [functionings], and 'agency freedoms' and 'agency achievements' in order to examine whether and to what extent higher education provides opportunities to all students to succeed. The approach enables a focus on individual students as the bearers of advantage or disadvantage in comparison with each other. The normative position taken is that advantage occurs when students have wide freedoms (real opportunities) and agency to decide and to achieve the educational, economic and social goals of higher education, including academic success, economic opportunities, personal development, and preparation for good citizenship. It is argued that students with a wider capability set and agency to convert resources into educational achievements are advantaged, and the narrower the capability set, the more disadvantaged they are.

A qualitative case study was conducted at one mid ranking research and teaching university in South Africa. 26 in-depth interviews were conducted with final year and honours students from the Faculties of Economics and Management Sciences, Education, The Humanities, and Natural and Agricultural Sciences. Additional interviews were conducted with seven key informants, who included four university staff members and three student representative council members. Students were asked about their experiences of getting into university and about their experiences at university while the university staff and SRC members responded to questions on what student disadvantage looks like, and on how the university was responding to it. The interviews were transcribed verbatim before descriptive and thematic coding, and analysis was undertaken using NVivo QSR11 software.

What emerged is that dimensions of advantage and disadvantage between black and white students are more complicated than one might expect. For example, low income black students have personal, navigational, resilience and aspirational resources that have enabled them to successfully complete their undergraduate studies although with lower degree grades compared to white students. They have commitments to relationships and the good lives of others, which is less evident among well-off students. Undoubtedly, however, material well-being is a key factor constraining educational well-being. Based on the dialogue between capabilities conceptualization and empirical data, there is a need to nuance the definition of (dis)advantage, particularly by focusing on how different forms of disadvantage intersect with each other. The findings also demonstrate that the capability approach provides a robust framework for evaluating student (dis)advantage through its multidimensionality, which offers flexible spaces to establish how the different dimensions of (dis)advantage interact together. Among other things, the capability approach helps us to identify areas where interventions could be implemented through the use of conversion factors e.g. pedagogical arrangements, that constrain and enable students' freedoms to secure educational achievements

The original contribution of this thesis is the use of the capability approach in understanding students' (dis)advantage in the South African context, and the development of capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage. Findings and recommendations from this thesis can provide insight to policymakers on the need to consider the intersectionality of the various dimensions that constitute educational well-being, while the capability approach offers a multi-dimensional, contextualized approach to conceptualisation of (dis)advantage, which could be considered by policy-makers, practitioners and scholars.

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Acronyms and abbreviation

BEd	Bachelor's in Education
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CTL	Centre for Teaching and Learning
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
FHE	Free Higher Education
HAU	Historically Advantaged University
HDU	Historically Disadvantaged University
HE	Higher Education
HOD	Head of Department
ILO	International Labour Organization
IRR	Institute of Race Relations
ITP	Institutional Transformation plan
LGBTI	Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
NEET	Not in employment, Education or Training
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NSH	No Student Hungry programme
SRC	Student Representative Council
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFS	University of the Free State
UK	United Kingdom
UPP	University Preparation Programme
USA	United States of America

Chapter 1: Why we need to rethink 'disadvantage' in the higher education context

1.1 Introduction

Despite the pivotal role that young people can play in national development, they constitute the most disadvantaged group in South Africa. Among other things, they are marginalised in employment, which ought to provide them with increased income that can make a great contribution to their overall wellbeing. In 2016, approximately 44.2% (16 830 000) of the youth aged between 15-39 years were not in employment, and were also not engaged in education and training (Not in Education, Employment or Training)[1] (Stats SA 2018). When this is deconstructed by race[2] for the 15-24 age group for the same year, 32.7% are Africans, 32.8% Coloured, 19.0% Indians/Asians, and 11.0% white. This corresponds with global trends where youth form the greatest proportion of the unemployed. The International Labour Organisation (2017) states that whereas the population count of the youth has increased by 139 million people worldwide, youth labour[3] has declined by 35% between 1997 and 2017. At the same time, the proportion of youth from the overall global labour force shrank from 21.7% to 15.5% in the same period (ILO 2017). Besides exclusion in the economy, youth face other forms of marginalisation in South Africa, e.g. they are often excluded from participating meaningfully in political spheres that are a prerogative of older people (Republic of South Africa 2014).

Widening participation in higher education could improve the lives of the youth and their communities in general. However, increasing student enrolment does not automatically imply equal opportunities to take part and succeed, as there are also forms of inequality in higher education which differentially shape students' chances. While policy frequently uses the term 'disadvantage' for interventions, this has not translated into equal participation as black students continue to achieve lower success rates than white students. In this context, we can begin to question the appropriateness of the strategies adopted and especially the use of

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[1] The NEET is the proportion of the youth who are not in education, and not in employment and training from the total population of that age group.

[2] Because of the need to monitor transformation, the South Africa government still uses the apartheid categories of Afrikaans, Coloureds and White. I also use these categories in this thesis as I draw from these official statistics. I use the term black to refer to people of African, Coloured and Asian origins.

[3] The ILO definition of youth is ages between 15 and 24 years.

historical 'disadvantage' by policy. This is crucial considering there has been little attempt to define 'disadvantage' using the perceptions and experiences of the students affected. This study addresses this research gap by investigating the concept of '(dis)advantage' from the perceptions and experiences of the students involved, which is crucial for informing interventions to improve access, participation and success in South African higher education.

1.2 Why does disadvantage matter in higher education?

Addressing disadvantage in universities is relevant as it is concerned with the removal of micro- and macro-structural inequalities, given the background of the South African education system which still grapples with redressing the effects of apartheid. South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world. Economic measures show huge disparities between the country's rich and poor. For example, the country measures 0.67 using the Gini co-efficient, which reflects extreme inequalities[4] (Stats SA 2018:460). From an estimated total population of 57.73 million in 2018, black people constitute the majority of the population: Africans 80%, Coloureds 8.8%, Indians/Asians 2.5% and whites 7.8%[5] (Stats SA 2018). The majority of the impoverished are black people who do not have access to the necessary income resources for them to improve their lives. In 2017, white households had an annual average income of R619 980 per annum against those of Africans with R123 971, Coloureds R226 739, and Indians/Asians R381 303[6] using the average household income measure (Institute of Race Relations 2018:464). While these figures show an increase in household incomes from 1996 (white R131 504, African R30 460, Coloured R41 243, and Indian/Asian 89 648), they indicate that the gap between the rich and the poor widened as white household income was just over 4 times that of black households in 1996, and is now at 5 times in 2017[7]. However, these economic measures do not reflect all the facets in which people are deprived. Multi-dimensional measures that use an average of these indicators (standard of living, health, education, and economic activities) to assess development confirm high levels of poverty in South African society[8]. Using the multi-dimensional index, from a population of about 55

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[4] The Gini co-efficient is an income measure of equality and inequality within countries or within groups of people in a country. It ranges from 0 to 1; where 0 represents a perfectly equal society (where everyone has the same income) and 1, a perfectly unequal society (i.e. one person having all the income).

[5] These are mid-year population estimates by group and sex for 2018.

[6] These statistics include all the incomes i.e. salaries, and other incomes such as pension, and social grants.

[7] Although it is problematic to generalise white people as rich and blacks as poor because some black people joined the ranks of the rich (Seekings & Nattrass 1995), the general point about racial inequality continuing is correct since the majority of the black remain poor.

[8] Multi-dimensional index measures the average proportion of indicators (health, education, standard of living and economic activities) which the poor people are deprived.

million in 2012, 10.3% of the population (5 446 million) were poor and 17.1% of the population (9.04 million people) were close to multi-dimensional poverty (United Nations Development Programme 2016:06). These statistics suggest the presence of structural inequalities that disadvantage the majority of the population in improving the quality of their lives, given the persistence of poverty even with the past two decades of implementing transformational policies.

Despite the perseverance of inequalities in the country, official government policy recognises higher education as key in disrupting disadvantage, as young people play a major role in the development of the country, and are agents of social change, economic growth and innovation (RSA 2015). Promoting youth participation in higher education could address the inequalities, help them to improve their wellbeing, and contribute to the development of their society. This is reflected in South African's current National Youth Policy 2015-2020 that aims to:

> strengthen the capacity of young people to enable them to take charge of their own well-being through building their assets and ultimately realizing their potential to the fullest (RSA 2014:12).

This could be achieved in part through higher education's role of advancing social justice and reducing inequalities (Sen 1992; Deneulin 2009; Nussbaum 2006). Through education, people are able to think critically, participate in public debates, and those traditionally marginalised can have their voices included (Sen 2003). Additionally, this helps students to have social mobility through qualifying and securing paying jobs. In 2017, the unemployment rate among those who had completed tertiary education was 13.2% compared to the 27.9% who had completed secondary education (Stats SA 2018:614). University graduates, therefore, stand a better chance to secure employment compared to those who have completed only their secondary level of education. The majority of youth who are disadvantaged could, therefore, benefit from widened participation in higher education given that they constitute the largest proportion in the population: 36.1% (15-34 age group) against, 29.09% (35-64 age group) and 5.3% (65 and above age group) (IRR 2018:01). Although there is debate on whether and to what extent higher education addresses inequalities in the population, the point to make is that the South African government officially recognises higher education as one of the means of reducing these disparities.

1.3 South African policy reform and the notion of 'disadvantage'

Inequalities in South African higher education can be better understood through examining the history of the country and specifically how apartheid promoted separate development of the population based on race. The Department of Higher Education and Training's Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET 2012) notes that while efforts have been made to redress the injustices of apartheid, its legacy still negatively affects the education system. The deeply entrenched patterns of inequality are present in South African society, and determine the distribution of education and the ways in which families reproduce educational achievements. In 1948 the Nationalist Party instituted an administrative system where social services were provided unequally and separately on the basis of race and ethnicity. The administration of education was segregated according to ethnicity, i.e. Native, Indian, and Coloured groups. Reddy (2004) explains that these arrangements were meant to consolidate white supremacy and domination in the economic, social and political spheres. On the other hand, the black population was supposed to assume more subordinate roles and practices in addition to providing cheap labour to white-owned industries and homes. The government advanced an ideology to support the apartheid project through instituting Bantu education through the Bantu Education Act of 1953[9]. Reddy (2004) explains that the unequal distribution of resources by race aimed to advance the notion of black people's inferiority and to divide them ethnically to weaken them in their attempts to challenge the status quo.

Disadvantage was also reinforced through differentiation. This meant that black people were restricted from accessing the white universities, and this saw a decline in the enrolment of black students in these universities. For example, between 1954 and 1968, the number of black students declined from 26 to 3 at the University of Cape Town and from 72 to 4 at Witwatersrand University in the same period (Horrell 1968:11). Not only did the government exclude them from the white universities, but the apartheid regime created separate universities

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[9] Bantu Education Act, 1953 was a legal provision that segregated black people. It legalised apartheid through separating the educational facilities including the universities based on race and ethnicity. Other related legal provisions followed e.g. Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1976 that stipulated Afrikaans and English as the language of instructions after primary schools.

for black people in their ethnic regions[10] parallel to the white universities[11]. Thus, total enrolment for Fort Hare, University of the North, Zululand, and the University of the Western Cape rose from 644 in 1960 to 2099 in 1968 (Horrell 1968:125). Even though there was an increase in the enrolment of black students in these universities, they were designed to produce low-level administrative labour for blacks and to advance white supremacy. Unintentionally however, they became centres for the struggle against white domination. By 1994, a total of 36 higher education institutions 10 historically disadvantaged universities and 7 historically disadvantaged technikons had been designated for black students. Parallel to that, there were 10 historically white, advantaged universities and 7 technikons, which were intended for the development of white South Africans (Bunting 2004).

The differentiation policy had some negative consequences for the society, as explained by Cloete (2004). The participation of black students in universities was lower compared to that of white students. While in 1993 African students constituted 77% of the population, they contributed 40% of the total enrolments, in contrast to white students who made up 48% of the total enrolment but represented 11% of the total population in the same year (Badat 2011). The post-1994 democratic government inherited these inequalities, and they continue to pose a challenge in transformation towards an equal and just society.

However, the post-1994 period saw a radical shift in direction from apartheid to transforming the society through the South African constitution of 1996 and policy in higher education. Driven by the constitution that sought to protect human dignity, equality, freedom, non-racism, non-sexism, and the right to basic education to all citizens, higher education foregrounded principles of 'equity and redress' in its transformation policy (Bitzer 2009). The Education Act of 1997 that declared the need to form 'a single coordinated higher education system,' and to reform the 'programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs' of South Africa, guided this. Equally relevant is the Education Act of 1997 that spelt out the need to redress 'past discrimination,' as well as to ensure 'representivity and equal access' of the country's citizens. These values were embedded in the Education

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[10] In the 1950s and 1960s University of Zululand was established to cater for Zulu and Swazi speakers, University of the North was created for the Tswana, Sotho, Venda and Tsonga, and University of the Western Cape and Durbanville for the coloured people. More universities were later established in the ethnic regions of people in the 1970s and 1980s in Transkei, Bophuthatswana, and Venda Bantustans.

[11] These include the five Afrikaans universities (Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Potchefstroom, Orange Free State and Rand) and four English universities (Cape Town, Witwatersrand, Natal and Rhodes). Port Elizabeth and University of South Africa were bi-lingual.

White Paper 3 1997 that stipulated the need 'to meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes throughout their lives.' It also sought to address the economic needs of the country so that the national economy is positioned competitively in the global era and to create individuals with '…competencies and expertise [which are] necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy'. Furthermore, Education White Paper 3 of 1997 aimed to produce graduates who contribute socially as critical thinkers and responsible citizens. Its final goal is the 'creation, sharing and evaluation of knowledge' through research, learning, and teaching. This reveals the policy's determination in transforming the society and higher education through redressing past inequalities and responding to the needs of the people in the new social and global economic order. These policy reforms also illustrate the challenges faced by policy as the imperative to produce graduates that have had their own capacities developed to that of full human beings was recognised, which has implications for student (dis)advantage.

In transforming higher education, policy frequently uses historical 'disadvantage' in its interventions specifically designed to support the black population who were previously excluded. Among other provisions, the policy identifies financial support as an important dimension for students to access higher education. Section 2.2. 6 (c) of the Education White Paper 3 of 1997 states that '[t]he relative proportion of public funding used to support academically able but disadvantaged students must be increased' (Department of Education 1997). This resulted in the provision of student funding through National Student Financial Aid Services (NSFAS)[12]. Apart from that, the White Paper 3 of 1997 also uses 'disadvantage' as the basis for addressing the academic needs of the students who entered universities without adequate preparation, e.g. section 3.2.5 (e), which observes 'the policies and mechanisms for student support and academic development throughout the system and in particular for assisting educationally disadvantaged students to begin and complete programmes' (DoE 1997). In this way, 'disadvantage' appears to refer to both financial disadvantage and educational disadvantage – although this is not spelt out explicitly.

Another area that policy sought to transform was the fragmentation of the education system. It did this through merging universities. Even though these universities were classified officially

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[12] The White Paper (1997) set the provision of student funding through the NSFAS in promoting deserving students from poor families to access higher education together with supporting of underprepared students.

into research-intensive universities, comprehensive universities, and universities of technology, the apartheid legacy is still visible in the way that universities are commonly referred to as Historically Disadvantaged Universities (HDUs) and Historically Advantaged Universities (HAUs). The mergers, which took place in the early 2000s, attempted to break down the division between HDUs and HAUs. This was done by merging HDUs and HAUs (as in the case of the merging of University of Natal, the University of Durban Westville and Edgewood Teacher Training College to form the University of KwaZulu-Natal). Merging was also achieved through breaking up universities with more than one campus and incorporating the different campuses into different new, whole universities (as in the UFS acquiring the Qwaqwa campus which was a former campus of Turfloop and Vista University). Many universities and campuses have nevertheless retained their overall flavour of being 'historically advantaged' or 'historically disadvantaged' and there is relative disadvantage. The HAUs continue to advantage students in most facets while the HDUs disadvantage them. Reddy (2004) explains that these differences persist as a result of state funding with the HAUs being allotted more resources than the HDUs ones, based on them producing more research outputs[13]. Unlike the HAUs, the HDUs enrol large numbers of low income black students from poor quality schools but have fewer experienced white lecturers. They also receive little support from business partners compared to HAUs. Regardless of them having diversified their students, the HAUs' institutional cultures and practices alienate the low-income black students while advantaging middle-class white students who tend to share the same values with these institutions (Reddy 2004).

Notwithstanding the achievements made, desired levels of enrolment have not been reached, as the overall participation rate of black students is still low. Admission of students in public universities increased from 500 000 in 1994 to 985 212 in 2016 (IRR 2018). But, while these figures show an absolute increase in enrolments, overall participation only rose from 17% in 1996 to 18% in 2016, alongside a rise in the population from about 40.5 million to almost 55 million (Council on Higher Education 2018). Although much higher than the 6% average participation rate in sub-Saharan African countries, participation is still low compared to high income countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) with approximately 50% participation (World Economic Forum 2010). Yet more highly educated people are crucial given the country's need for skilled workforce members to expand the economy and improve its global

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[13] This is based on the funding formulae to the public universities that prioritise research.

competitiveness. Combining sophisticated production processes with research and high-skilled labour is necessary for South Africa's economic growth. Another concern revealed in the statistics is the lower participation of African students at 16% of the total enrolments, against 50% of white students in 2016 (CHE 2018). This suggests that accessing higher education is still a challenge for some black students, and also implies that the goal of decreasing the access gap between the previously advantaged and previously disadvantaged groups has not been realised.

Moreover, the South African higher education landscape is characterised by low completion amongst students and can be described as one of 'low participation', and 'high attrition' (Fisher & Scott 2011:01). Cohort studies from 2005 and 2006 suggest that black students coming from low income backgrounds face difficulties in accessing higher education, and when they do, they struggle to adjust to the complexities of university demands (CHE 2013a). Based on a cohort study, it is estimated that only 35% of the students graduate in three to four year degree programmes within five years and 55% will never graduate (CHE 2013a). Of concern are the disparities in the success of students that are skewed by race. Throughput rates stood at 55% for African and 65% for white students in the three year degree programmes (excluding University of South Africa) in 2016 (CHE 2018). Structural barriers within the university environments are thought to be responsible for low graduation rates among historically disadvantaged groups (Jones et al. 2008; CHE 2013a). Given low participation and persistent inequalities, we can query the effectiveness of policy in addressing the needs of the marginalised students through its use of 'disadvantage', which has not been clearly defined.

Lack of academic preparedness appears to be a key factor for the low completion rates of black students. This is related to the poor quality of schooling received by these students in the poorly -resourced formerly black public schools (Scott, Yeld & Hendry 2007; Sayed 2007). While white schools maintained high standards, the Bantu Education system separated schools for black people and these were underfunded, with only a third of teachers being qualified (Clark & Worger 2004). Transformation saw the schooling system being classified into five quintiles under the Department of Basic Education. Quintiles 1 to 3 are the formerly black schools, which mostly do not charge any fees, and quintiles 4 and 5 are the formerly white schools that require students to pay. Although all these schools receive funding from the government, the allocation of the funding depends on the socio-economic status of the neighbourhood in which

the school is situated. While each student was allocated R1 175 per annum in Quintile 1 to 3 schools, the amount allotted in 2016 for Quintile 4 and 5 schools were R588 and R203 per annum respectively[14] (Dass & Rinquest 2017:143). Besides financial issues, what makes these schools different is accountability, competence of administrative staff, learning culture, teachers' knowledge and skills, teachers' attendance, coverage of curriculum and homework, as well as dropout and performance on national tests (Spaull 2012). This structure of schools has implications for (dis)advantage as most of the formerly black schools have remained dominated by black learners, whereas most of the historically white schools have become mixed. In addition to that, more white families send their children to expensive private schools that are inaccessible to most black students.

Most black leaners from low income backgrounds access poorly resourced schools where their chances to succeed and proceed to universities are limited. Whereas 80% of the university entrants come from 20% of the schools (mainly formerly white and private, in quintiles 4 and 5), the other 80% of the schools contribute 20% of university entrants (Badat 2010). These statistics show that success is tilted towards white students but African learners who attend the well-resourced schools also tend to perform well, suggesting that the education system follows an elitist model (IRR 2018). The system promotes a few to succeed in higher education but also produces more youth who are unable to participate in the economy as illustrated by the NEETs (Bhorat & Westhuizen 2010; Cloete 2014). With the need for widening participation into higher education, universities admit some students who do not meet the minimum entry requirements through academic development programmes[15]. Even when they have reached the entry requirements for university, it seems some students struggle to cope with university education. Academic underpreparedness, inability to speak the language of instruction fluently and lacking confidence in the environment that is unfamiliar to them are some of the factors contributing to their poor performance (Wilson-Strydom 2015). What is crucial to mention is that most black students have been disadvantaged through the schooling system by the time that they enter into university.

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[14] Although Quintile 4 and 5 schools receive less funding from the government than others, these receive their funding from other sources including tuition.
[15] Academic Development Programmes were set up to help students who have potential but underprepared for their degree programmes. Its curriculum aims to improve students' skills so that they can cope with the degree programme they enrol for. Through that, the underprepared students undergo an additional year to the mainstream programme.

As stated before, the White Paper (1997) set the provision of student funding through the NSFAS in supporting deserving students from low income families to access higher education. Though NSFAS has made a substantial contribution through helping black students from poor backgrounds to access higher education, it faces challenges in meeting its mandate due to declining government funding, increasing student enrolment, and high cost per student[16] (DHET 2013; DHET 2015; NSFAS 2015). NSFAS views disadvantaged students as those coming from low income families, although it fails to fund all deserving students adequately, partly due to maladministration[17] and the reasons cited above. Its funding criteria excludes black students from middle-class backgrounds whose income levels are above the maximum threshold but still cannot afford university education (NSFAS 2015:13; Wangenge-Ouma 2010). However, these maximum thresholds changed with the introduction of the fee-free higher education policy 2018[18].

Again, financial assistance is inadequate. Lack of accommodation, poor living conditions, and inadequate finances for proper meals, stationery, toiletries, and adequate clothing are significant problems faced by students (Calitz 2015, 2018; DHET 2013). For instance, at least 60% of the students at UFS experience food insecurity (Van den Berg, Abera & Walsh 2014). This shows that poor finances is a dimension which students are disadvantaged. While policy assumes that all students access and participate equally due to student funding, the financial aspect is only one of many issues faced by students, even when the economic side is addressed, e.g. social inclusion. Institutional cultures that resemble western knowledge systems and middleclass and white ways of living alienate black students and may limit their success in universities (see Badat 2009; Jansen 2009). Other research has pointed to racism and gender inequality as constraining students' freedoms to achieve the goals they have a reason to value in universities (Walker 2005:16; Loots & Walker 2015). This suggests that disadvantage affects students in various ways.

The Education White Paper 3 has been criticised for, among other things, lacking a method of implementation (Odhav 2009). This contributes to the difficulties experienced in designing,

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[16] Challenges facing NSFAS will be elaborated more in Chapter 2.
[17] Maladministration also negatively affects the disbursement of funds resulting in students not receiving their finances in time, and some deserving students being excluded from funding.
[18] The maximum threshold was reviewed when the free fee higher education policy was introduced in 2018. Instead of giving loans to students, NSFAS shifted from providing loans to offering bursaries to students whose family income did not exceed R350 000. However, students who were enrolled already do not benefit under this new funding system.

executing, and evaluating interventions as 'disadvantage' is not clearly defined and is therefore open for interpretation. For example, institutions and faculties have adopted different definitions of the term (Dhunpath & Vithal 2012; Leibowitz & Bozalek 2015). Concerning the academic development programmes, policy noted that funding was allotted to 'improve success and graduation rates particularly among disadvantaged students' (DoE 2006). The term was not defined in circulars that informed universities about the funds. Leibowitz and Bozalek (2015) explain that in this case 'disadvantage' is easily interpreted as 'black' students, which includes Africans, Indians, and Coloured, even though the department had not instructed the interventions to benefit black students only. However, for this academic support intervention 'disadvantage' meant first-generation group entrants who had been admitted to the university even though their qualifications did not meet the requirements of that specific programme (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2015). What this illustrates is lack of specificity by policy on the group targeted by the intervention, hence the (mis)interpretation, which might not bring about the desired changes. Furthermore, this makes evaluation difficult, especially when the target group is defined differently by institutions, and when the methods of implementation are not the same.

There appears to be a failure to understand what disadvantage means by administrators in some institutions, and their conceptualisation is often different from how policy understands it. Leibowitz and Bozalek (2014) found that failure by policy to clarify disadvantage was problematic for some universities when designing fine-tuned strategies to widen particpation. They observe that in some cases institutions and faculties do not agree on the criteria for measuring disadvantage, and on the strategies to make the institutions more inclusive beyond the middle-class. Some historically advantaged universities were still contemplating whether they were to widen participation for black students only, and grappling with determining more nuanced criteria for measuring disadvantage. In their study, Leibowitz and Bozalek (2014) reveal that the University of Cape Town's attempts to widen participation by admitting large numbers of black students were resisted by the white community that traditionally feeds the university, although the institution later agreed on more nuanced criteria extending beyond race. In some cases, the universities did not cater for low income black students from the provinces in which they are situated. Other historically white institutions enrolled white students who were not from low income backgrounds for Extended Degree programmes[19]. This

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[19] Extended degree programmes are a form of academic intervention meant to improve the academic skills of the students who enrol into university with inadequate preparation. An additional year is added to the main stream degree programme.

is probably the result of administrators' failure to understand the needs of the low income black students, an inclination to favour the dominant white classes, or simply their lack of care for historically disadvantaged students (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2014). This highlights some of the challenges faced by practitioners and institutions stemming from lack of clarity on what disadvantage means when implementing interventions to redress inequality.

Moreover, although race and class are central to disadvantage in South African universities, ignoring how these and other factors intersect prevents educational analysts and administrators from developing strategic criteria for addressing inequalities and social injustices in universities (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2014). While the DHET Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET 2012) addresses equality in terms of race, gender and disability, it does not discuss the strategic indicators of class and poverty. For instance, the University of KwaZulu-Natal uses race and socioeconomic background of students, which in Waetjen's view (2006) is limiting because the 'African' race category does not identify other patterned disadvantages amongst black students, including the effects of mortality and morbidity due to HIV. The UFS views disadvantage from socioeconomic and race perspectives through its 'No Student Hungry programme'[20] (NSH) (UFS 2018c) as well as its Leadership[21] Change programmes (UFS 2018d) respectively. Although these interventions are helpful in reducing the marginalisation of black students, the definitions tend to be one-dimensional and contribute little to address multiple disadvantages. What this suggests is the need to examine how the different forms of exclusion interplay in disadvantaging students.

1.4 Situating the study: University of the Free State

This study is situated at the University of the Free State (UFS), a historically advantaged university that previously enrolled white Afrikaans- language students but currently enrols students from diverse backgrounds. The UFS was founded in 1904 as Grey College School before being renamed Grey University College in 1906. Its name was changed to the University of the Orange Free State in 1950, and to the University of the Free State in 2001. As a result of the merger policy explained in the preceding sections, the Qwaqwa campus, which was a historically black university, was incorporated into the UFS in 2003, followed by the

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[20] The NSH programmes helps some black students to access food through subsidies from the university and donations from the public.
[21] The intervention was aimed to reduce racism through exposing students of mixed races to diverse environments worldwide. Students who participated in the programme could lead at the university in denouncing racism at the university.

incorporation of the South Campus in 2004. The UFS's vision is to be a 'research-led, student-centred and regionally-engaged university that contributes to development and social justice through the production of globally competitive graduates and knowledge' (UFS 2018a).

In its Integrated Transformation Plan, the university aims towards 'dismantling [of] the legacy of apartheid and colonialism at political, social, economic, and intellectual levels to adopt new practices, modes of organisation, and values capable of delivering social justice' (UFS 2017). Addressing curriculum issues, methodologies and practices to improve student success, research and engagement with society are some of the things the university seeks to achieve in its transformation. Though UFS claims to have equal learning conditions for diverse students through having a non-divided community, the institution is conservative in many ways (Walker 2016), with incidents of racism taking place periodically. For example, the Reitz incident[22] brought to the fore issues of racism. This was followed by some more recent incidents occurring at a rugby match in February 2016, when violence erupted between groups of white and black students during the match.[23] These racist acts suggest that the university may not be offering an equal environment for all students to flourish. Nonetheless, changes have also taken place at the university since 2009, resulting in a more integrated university, e.g. the implementation of the Leadership for Change programme[24], or the implementation of mixed race residences.

In its strategic plan approved for 2018-2022, the UFS aims to 'pursue the delivery of excellent quality graduates and knowledge through academic excellence, diversity, and inclusivity and through innovative and transformative thought, for the region, the continent, and the globe' (UFS 2017). This indicates the university's aspiration to create a socially just higher education institution. From a total enrolment of 40 491 students enrolled at the UFS in 2016, 68% are African, 24% white, 6% coloured and 2% Asian/Indian (UFS 2016a). Like other universities in the country, the UFS has low throughput rates. The university's degree completion rate was 21.8% for 2015 (UFS 2016a), which is slightly above the country's average at 17.3% in 2013

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[22] The Reitz incident took place in 2008 at UFS. A video that showed racist acts went viral and was condemned world over for racism (UFS, 2012).

[23] The incident took place in February 2016 when violence erupted between white and black students during a rugby match. The incident was followed by an anti-racist student protest by black students resulting in the temporary closure of the university.

[24] The Leadership for Change programme exposes some first year students to multi-cultural contexts in international universities before they come back and steer programmes that promote respect and tolerance among students at the campus.

(DHET 2013). The university has seven faculties, namely Humanities, Education, Law, Theology and Religion, Health Sciences, Natural and Agricultural Sciences, and Economic and Management Sciences. Before 2018 all students were required to pay tuition fees for their studies and the amount depends on the degree programme. For example, in 2016 students studying Education paid approximately R26 875 per annum, BA Politics and Governance R26 760, Agricultural Economics R39 440, and Bachelor of Commerce R26 855[25] (UFS 2016b). This means that most students struggled to pay the university costs considering their low income backgrounds indicated earlier.

1.5 Research problem, aim and questions

Is policy sensitive to the complexities of disadvantage when it uses race in its interventions for widening participation? It is against this background that I explore (dis)advantage in the context of higher education. Situated within a social justice and human development paradigm, this study aims to explore students' perceptions and experiences of (dis)advantage from the perspective of the diverse student body at the UFS. In doing so, it also aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of (dis)advantage than only the use of race to inform decision making in institutions and interventions designed to achieve social justice in higher education.

In achieving this aim, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do students understand advantage and disadvantage?
2. What are students' concrete experiences of advantage and disadvantage in relation to their histories, lives and higher education specifically?
3. What are students' effective opportunities for success at university?
4. What are the implications of these findings for promoting an equal and just university environment, fairer outcomes for students, and wider and deeper student capability sets?

1.6 Justification of the study

If the definition of disadvantage remains 'crude', 'the course of policy implementation may quite easily – and to a greater or lesser extent, run counter to planned intentions' (CHE 2004:37). Therefore, redefining what being disadvantaged means in the context of higher education is crucial in establishing whether there are other underlying factors that need to be

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[25] These figures exclude other costs such as accommodation, food, airtime and transport. Although there are changes, the university charged these fees for the specific degree programmes when the study began.

considered besides race (Soudien 2010a) and essential to determine how these factors interact together. At the same time, Bozalek and Boughey (2012:698) contend that blaming universities for failing to cater for the needs of the students they enrol, without taking the necessary steps to understand how students are disadvantaged (e.g. through social class and how this intersects with the schooling system), is another way that policy 'misframes' higher education. This 'misframing' diverts our attention from questioning the effectiveness of policy in redressing inequality and social injustices. Thus it is necessary to understand students' views and their lived experiences to bring a nuanced understanding to the notion of (dis)advantage. This is fundamental as increased enrolment without corresponding success rates is not only an economic concern but a moral issue that needs to be addressed (CHE 2013a; Hay & Monnapula-Mapesela 2009). Bringing a more nuanced understanding of the term 'disadvantage' can better inform interventions, and this can contribute to equal access, participation and success amongst students in universities, and the overall reduction of inequalities in the South African population.

Moreover, although helpful in revealing a picture of the inequalities in higher education, the statistics relating to access and throughput of students do not explain the intricacies in which (dis)advantage occurs. Put differently, they do not show us the personal, social and teaching conditions that marginalise students. Yet, little has been done to interrogate '(dis)advantage' to provide a rich understanding of the needs of students in South Africa. This implies the need for a more complex approach in assessing how students experience and understand their own disadvantage when addressing inequalities and social injustices in universities (Harper 2007).

1.7 Significance of the study

The significance of this thesis is inherent in the use of the capability approach in defining disadvantage using students' voices. From that, the thesis develops 'capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage' for university students which is integral for interventions. This can inform policymakers on how students are disadvantaged i.e. the manner in which various disadvantages work together in marginalising students' lives. Through that, the thesis has potential to influence higher education policy from a human development and equity perspective, to promote social justice at university and national levels. This study is also significant in that it encourages an ongoing conversation in literature to achieve equal access, participation and achievements of students in South African higher education institutions. This may assist in creating university environments that offer equity in participation and outcomes

amongst all students. Though studies have delved into inequality in access, experiences, and achievements of undergraduate students in the country (Wilson-Strydom 2015; Calitz 2015), there is little focus on dismantling (dis)advantage based on students' voices. Given the high investments made and the unequal participation of students in higher education (Cloete 2014), the thesis has the potential to contribute in finding ways of promoting equal participation in universities and improving success among all groups of students.

1.8 Theoretical framework

The study uses the capabilities approach developed by Amartya Sen (1992; 1999) and advanced by Martha Nussbaum (2000; 2002a; 2004) as an analytical framework in assessing student (dis)advantage. The capability approach begins from the premise that wellbeing is an outcome of what people are effectively able to achieve, but that depends on the freedoms they have. The achievements that individuals are able to accomplish reflects their quality of life. The capability approach offers us two platforms to assess (dis)advantage: the freedoms one has, and the achievements one makes (Robeyns 2017). Freedoms are the genuine opportunities individuals have to achieve things that are of interest and value to them. While freedoms also involve the ability of individuals to make choices, achievements are what people have effectively accomplished. Another aspect foregrounded in the capability approach is agency, which represents the power individuals have to attain their goals and to influence their environment (Sen 1999). The argument presented in this study is that the more freedoms and agency students have, the more achievements they can make, and this advantages them, while limited freedoms and lower achievements are reflective of their disadvantage. This flexible definition of disadvantage enables us to ask questions about student experiences beyond just race, financial and academic (dis)advantage.

The capability approach also recognises the role of 'conversion factors' as influencing the extent to which individuals have freedoms and agency, to turn resources into real achievement. Conversion factors include personal, social, and institutional factors that are enabling or constraining to students in achieving the things they have a reason to value (Robeyns 2017). Moreover, identifying conversion factors helps us to establish how the various forms of (dis)advantage are connected to each other such that they have clustered, or cumulative effects on individuals. They also form a source of information when identifying areas of interventions to help the formation or expansion of peoples' freedoms and agency. This is significant considering the need for informing interventions that are effective in addressing inequality in

universities. The capability approach is thus a relevant framework in assessing student (dis)advantage.

1.9 Methodology

The research draws on a qualitative case study at the UFS. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 students selected from five departments within the faculties of Economic and Management Sciences, Natural and Agricultural Sciences, The Humanities, and Education. Additional interviews were also held with the Student Representative Council (SRC) members responsible for student affairs, transformation, and finances. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with university staff members responsible for academic affairs, student affairs, and one departmental head. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the gathering of detailed data from the students as they gave their perceptions of (dis)advantage, and reflected on their experiences of choosing the university, getting on at university and their aspirations.

1.10 Brief explanation of the relevant terms

Widening participation: This is a globally used term in the discourse of redressing inequalities in access to higher education. Underpinning this term is also the notion that universities should admit more students and produce graduates with skills needed for economic growth in the modern economies which are becoming complex. In South Africa, widening participation involves increasing enrolment of previously excluded groups into higher education to produce the human resources required for economic growth and for redressing the social injustices that originate from the past apartheid system.

Diverse students: These are students from different backgrounds based on their identities e.g. race, ethnicity, language, schooling. The term also represents the different social classes which students are from and the level of preparedness they have when they are admitted into university. Considering that increasing enrolment has resulted in more black students who were previously underrepresented in universities, the term is a significant one as it enriches our understanding of (dis)advantage.

Social justice: Underpinning this are notions of fair distribution of resources and opportunities, and redressing inequalities left behind by the apartheid system. Social justice means increasing opportunities for previously excluded black students to access, participate and succeed in

universities so that they can improve the quality of their lives and contribute meaningfully in their societies. An elaborate conception of the term is given in Chapter 3.

Student success: This means the proportion of students awarded degrees as compared to those who enrolled for that year. The success rate is calculated as the ratio of those who graduate [Full Time Equivalent degree credits] to those who entered for the degree (Full Time Equivalent enrolments). Although success is visible through student graduation, this definition is limiting. I use student success in a broader way in this thesis to refer to all the achievements students make as a result of attending university, which may not necessarily be limited to graduation e.g. students' preparedness to access employment opportunities after attending universities.

1.11 Positionality of the researcher in the study

I studied my undergraduate degree programme at the University of Zimbabwe at a time of transition from free higher education to students funding themselves through government loans. Although a funding facility for university education was arranged for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, not all students were able to access the funding. While I was fortunate to receive funding, the living allowance that was allocated to individuals was insufficient to cover university expenses. The problem was exacerbated by the unfortunate economic situation experienced in the country when high inflation rates eroded my allowances in the first month of the semester. These hardships negatively affected my studies as I could not afford accommodation, transport, and food (during some months of the semester I survived on one meal per day). I also witnessed similar challenges when I worked with orphans and vulnerable children on their access to education in rural Zimbabwe. Long walking distances of about 20 kilometres to secondary schools, and the absence of family structures for social and financial support were some of the constraints experienced by these learners. This marginalised them in qualifying for post-secondary education. Due to these experiences, I developed an interest in student disadvantage and in finding ways to improve young people's lives in the South African context.

1.12 Thesis outline

There are ten chapters in this study. Chapter 2 commences by presenting global literature on the conceptualisation of disadvantage in higher education, specifically in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia. This gives a global overview of how disadvantage

is conceptualised. The literature shows social class, ethnicity/race, gender and lack of aspirations as the main dimensions of student disadvantage. Afterwards, the chapter reviews the literature on Africa, revealing that insufficient funding in some countries is a major factor in disadvantaging students. Gender inequality and HIV infections were additional forms of marginalisation experienced by the students. The focus of the chapter is then narrowed down to the context of South Africa, where transformation issues are presented, i.e. factors related to institutional culture, race, social class (poverty), gender, and curriculum.

Chapter 3 presents the conceptual framework used in this study. The chapter argues that social justice can be achieved through adopting a human development approach that places people's wellbeing at the forefront when exploring disadvantage. Having presented the core concepts of the capability approach, and how they are employed in this study, I identify the benefits and limitations of using this framework.

Chapter 4 explains the methodology of the study and justifies the qualitative research design, the case study strategy, and the research tools used. In this chapter I present the practical issues of how participants were chosen, and the interviewing process. I also explain the data analysis process, using NVivo (a qualitative research software programme), and the analytical decisions that were made in coming up with themes. This analysis was complemented with summarised reports of each participants' socioeconomic background, university experiences and perceptions of (dis)advantage.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 present the study's empirical findings from diverse students on their access, participation, and success at the university. Chapter 5 commences by introducing results relating to the experiences of black students from low income backgrounds, and Chapter 6 shows the experiences of middle-class students. These chapters illustrate that student disadvantage is manifested in their lacking freedoms to make choices about universities and the degree programmes they enrol for, inadequate finances, limited social capital, poor schooling, and failure to adjust to the university environment. On the other hand, where students had these freedoms, this provided them greater advantage. Furthermore, racism, gender unfairness, unfriendly teaching practices and inability to speak and understand the language of instruction were some of the disadvantages reported by most of the black students. The argument presented in these chapters is that when students have opportunities and agency to attain more educational achievements, they are likely to be advantaged, and the converse is

also true. Chapter 7 compares the experiences of two students, one white male student with a middle-class background, and a black female student from a low income background. This comparison is meant to illustrate how the capability approach illuminates our understanding of student (dis)advantage. It demonstrates how (dis)advantage plays out amongst students at the individual level, and how their lives improve or worsen.

Chapter 8 presents findings from the university staff and members of the Student Representative Council (SRC). It expands the evaluative space by providing a partial university perspective on what it views as students (dis)advantage. The chapter compares perceptions from the two groups and discusses the implications of these findings to elucidate our understanding of (dis)advantage.

Chapter 9 consolidates the findings reported in the empirical chapters (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8). The chapter explains the findings from the empirical chapters and sketches the implications from a human development perspective compared to other approaches, e.g. the utilitarian or resource-based approaches. It commences by presenting conversion factors and how these intersect in (dis)advantaging students. It illustrates how the capability approach can provide us with a sophisticated understanding of disadvantage through highlighting that income alone cannot fully explain student disadvantage. The chapter identifies the dimensions that matter most in students (dis)advantage.

Chapter 10 concludes the study by giving a summary of all the chapters and recommends policy considerations. I now turn to the next chapter, where I review literature and situate the study.

Chapter 2: What do we know about (dis)advantage in higher education?

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews international and South African literature on the (dis)advantage of students in higher education. Questions addressed include the following: a) how does research on students' experiences in higher education conceptualise (dis)advantage in endeavours to promote social justice in higher education? b) what are the gaps in knowledge empirically and conceptually in studies that explore (dis)advantage amongst students in higher education? This review of literature demonstrates the need for an understanding of (dis)advantage that considers complex interconnectedness between race, ethnicity, class and gender as social categories within which individual students identify themselves. The literature review advances the argument that if we understand (dis)advantage in a multi-dimensional way based on students' diverse experiences, we will come closer to designing appropriate interventions in universities that provide equal, effective opportunities for all students to succeed.

The chapter is organised into three broad sections. The first section presents how (dis)advantage is defined in the global north higher education literature. This is followed by a discussion of literature from the global south, with specific reference to African and South African higher education (see Figure 1 for a summary). Following that is an attempt towards providing a working definition of disadvantage.

Figure 1: Summary of literature review
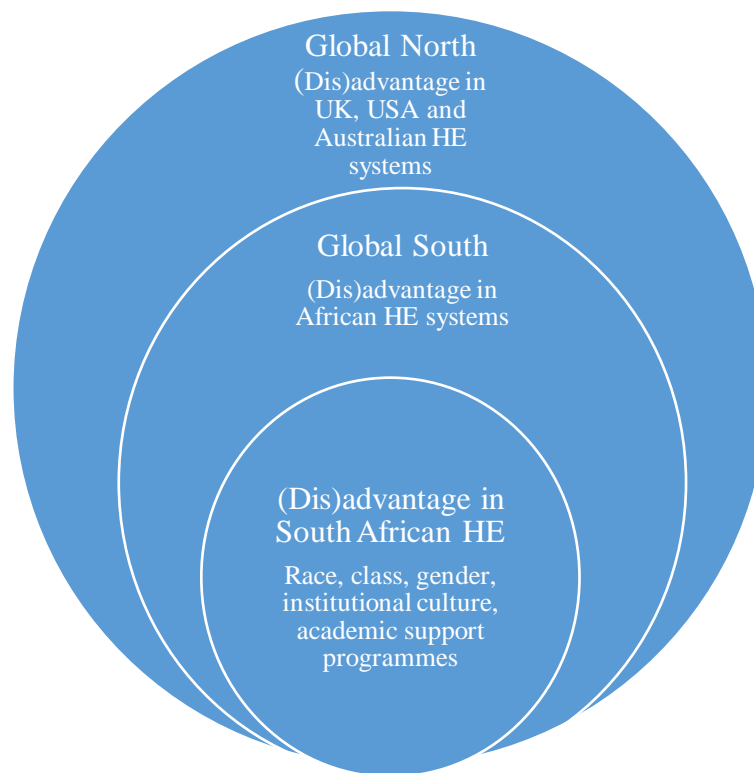
2.2 Disadvantage in higher education: a global North perspective

This section presents and evaluates international literature on (dis)advantage in higher education from the global North. More particularly there is a focus on research carried out in countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA) and Australia because these are amongst those that have implemented widening participation policies to create the human capital needed for the growth of their economies.

2.2.1 Conceptualising disadvantage in UK higher education

Despite the great progress made in widening participation in the UK, higher education has been criticised for failing to bring about social mobility within the population as (dis)advantage tends to be passed from one generation to another, with success skewed in favour of the middle class (Department of Business 2009; Chien, Montjourides & Van Der Pol 2017). Since the 1960s, policy has sought to widen participation in higher education for excluded groups, together with the working class and ethnic minorities, to achieve the country's targets of increasing its human capital to compete in the global economy, and to promote social mobility amongst working class and ethnic minority groups (Dearing Report 1997; Leathwood & Archer 2004). In

absolute terms, interventions for widening participation have managed to increase participation of diverse groups, including the most disadvantaged, but in relative terms the participation of different social groups has not changed. Though there has been remarkable progress in widening participation, equality and fair participation have not yet been reached as the system seems unable to provide equal opportunities to all students to succeed in both universities and in the job market (David 2010). In higher education institutions, the representation of women has surpassed that of men, ethnic minorities form the highest representation (exceeding that of the dominant white group), and slow progress has been witnessed in the enrolment of mature[26] students (Croll & Attwood 2013). Students from low income groups, however, continue to be underrepresented in comparison to their counterparts from the middle class. This is attributed to poor school-level qualifications (Gorard 2008; Tight 2012). Thus, (dis)advantage in educational attainment is seen to manifest early in the lives of students. Concerning these inequalities Hayton & Paczuska (2002:24) comment that:

> Somewhat ironically, then, greater inclusion and widening participation may merely serve to ratchet up (relative) patterns of exclusion and reinforce the binds of elitism in society, while working to legitimate claims for a meritocratic society.

In response to these inequalities, research has therefore sought to address questions on why non-traditional students[27] have lower educational achievements compared to middle-class students. Scholars have argued that 50% participation is meaningful only if non-traditional students constitute the majority in the student body, and when the structural arrangements perpetuating inequalities have been dismantled (see Reay 1999; Archer, Leathwood & Hutchings 2002; Perry & Francis 2010). Unrepresentative participation in universities points to the fact that non-traditional students are disadvantaged in accessing higher education.

A wide body of literature suggests that inequality in higher education in the UK manifests in various forms that interact with each other, i.e. class, gender and race/ethnicity (see Archer & Francis 2007; Finnegan, Merril & Thunborg 2014; Kabeer 2014 ; Nash 2008; Crenshaw 1989; Salmi & Bussett 2014; Cole 2009; Archer & Leathwood 2003; Crozier et al. 2008;

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[26] Mature students are those who enrol in university without conventional qualifications and study a sub-degree undergraduate programmes on a part-time basis. These students are mostly working class (Fuller 2002).

[27] In widening participation, policy uses the term 'non-traditional' students to refer to the underrepresented groups and those being negatively affected by structural factors including the working class students, ethnic minority groups, first-generation students, mature students and those who are geographically disadvantaged in accessing and participating in higher education (Finnegan et al. 2014).

Chankseliani 2013). These studies show that students have multiple identities that ought to be considered in relation to how they conflate with each other and (dis)advantage individual students. Crenshaw (1989) reveals that black women in the USA experience multiple discriminations as they have been subjugated through racism, gender inequality and poverty. Similar observations have been made in the context of the UK. Archer and Francis (2007:38-39) elaborate that gender can overlap with other factors and become 'racialised' or 'classed', resulting in references to gender as 'classed, racialised masculinities', 'gendered, classed ethnicities' or ' racialised, gendered class identities.' In discussing various forms of inequality in this review, attention is given to how class, gender and ethnicity/race intersect with each other. This literature highlights the intersectionality of identities with disadvantage effects for students in universities.

Although universities in the UK define social class in their admission policies using income, geography and parental level of education, these admission criteria have limitations in understanding, addressing and evaluating disadvantage among non-traditional students in universities. Social class is perceived as a proxy of (dis)advantage as it is used in the equity discourse to promote the access of diverse groups into universities. Since 'social class' is a fluid concept, I will briefly explore how researchers have used it within the equity spaces in higher education in order to illuminate how they understand (dis)advantage. In their definition of social class, universities in the UK use family income, geographical location and parental educational level when admitting students (Thomas & Quinn 2007). A number of scholars have criticised this income-based definition of social class for homogenising students through assuming that all students who are categorised in the same socio-economic group are the same (e.g. Thomas & Quinn 2007; Walkerdine, Lecey & Melody 1999; Archer 2003b; Hayton & Paczuska 2002). Instead, these scholars remind us that we should be cognisant of race and gender when defining class. Archer (2003b), for example, observes that since inequalities are not static and are multi-dimensional, they cannot be disrupted using class alone. This suggests the need to view class in relation to multiple factors that intersect with it to increase or diminish individual student (dis)advantage. On the other hand, Perry and Francis (2010) view the use of socio-economic class for admission purposes as problematic in that it ignores the internal exclusions[28] that take place once lower class students are enrolled into universities.

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[28] I use 'internal exclusion' to refer to processes that disadvantage students after their enrolment into universities and 'external exclusion' to define disadvantages associated with accessing higher education.

Interventions that address financial disadvantages without recognising other structural inequalities within universities seem to be less helpful in disrupting inequalities. Using geographical location or determining where students stay as an indicator for social class in university admission procedures can be misleading because where people stay is sometimes determined by choice, and not income. With regards to parental level of education, Thomas and Quinn (2007) argue that understanding class through looking at the educational attainment of students' parents automatically assumes that first-generation students have low capital, and that this obscures the different types of capital these students have upon enrolling in universities. This reflects that the use of social class only may over-simplify disadvantage through failing to articulate the various forms of exclusion that students have during and after enrolment.

While social class is inadequate in explaining disadvantage, it has attracted attention in policy interventions due to lower participation and attainment of the working class students. A review of literature shows that although student achievement is affected by gender and ethnicity, class remains the most salient factor (see Archer 2003b; Bathmaker 2015, 2016; Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller 2013; Cooke et al. 2004; Croll & Attwood 2013; Crozier et al. 2008; Goldthorpe 2007; Moreau & Leathwood 2006; Reay, Ball & David 2002; Reay, Crozier & Clayton 2009; Skeggs 1997; Tolley & Rundle 2006; Tight 2012; Thomas & Quinn 2007; Cahalan & Perna 2013; Hauschildt et al. 2015; Thiele et al. 2017; OFFA 2016). These studies note that working class students have tended to enrol into post-1992 universities[29] that are closer to their homes geographically and that they have also shown a tendency to stay at home during their studies. Also, working class students usually have limited opportunities to enrol into more expensive and highly ranked universities. In these low status universities, working class students are likely to choose two-year degree programmes which they study on a part-time basis and these qualifications give them fewer advantages in the job market[30]. The disadvantage of the working class students in higher education originates from the poor schools they attend and the lower qualifications they have when entering university (Croll & Attwood 2013; Goldthorpe 2007; Tight 2012). It is clear from the literature that, amongst other things, social class is a major category of disadvantage in the UK higher education system.

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[29] The post-1992 universities include universities that were formed after the Higher Education Act 1992 in the UK that allowed poly-technical colleges to offer degree programmes e.g. University of East London, University of Derby, Coventry University, Birmingham City University.

[30] Employers tend to give preference to students from high status university.

Whereas literature highlights the privileges experienced by students from the middle class that advantage their attainments in higher education, it also shows that working class students are limited through lacking information and financial resources. Unlike students from the working class with lower social and financial capital, middle-class students are advantaged with information and financial resources they have from their parents to choose degree programmes granting them a greater chance of employment and high economic returns (see Archer, Halsall & Mendick 2005; Chiao-ling, Montjourides & Van Der Pol 2017; Reay, David & Ball 2005; Thomas & Jones 2003; Reay et al. 2009; Thomas & Quinn 2007; Perry & Francis 2010; Reay 2003). These scholars also show that students from the middle class have more options to choose high status universities within the country and abroad. Examples of high status universities that admit middle-class students include the Russell Group of universities or the Oxbridge colleges (David 2010; Reay et al. 2005; Shavit, Arum & Gamoran 2007). That only some students access elite universities is a matter of unfairness in access.

Scholarship shows that working class students, who are often first-generation students, lack adequate and appropriate information on the cost, funding and economic benefits of the degree programmes they choose (see Ball, Reay & David 2002; Ball & Vincent 1998; Connor & Dewson 2001; Hutchings 2003; Reay 1998; Thomas & Quinn 2007; Hutchings & Archer 2001; Keen & Higgins 1990, 1992). This lack of information is attributed to the absence of family members who have accessed university, inadequate information supplied by schools and the complexity of the information required about university education. Whereas enrolling into university seems to be a natural process for the middle class with parents also having been to university, working class parents tend to support students regardless of the choices they make (Connor & Dewson 2001). The discourse on inadequate information from parents has been referred to in literature as the 'child as an expert' scenario (Reay & Ball 1998), meaning that decisions on choice of university and degree programme are made by the student, based on information that the student has gathered without the help or advice of a parent. Ball and Vincent (1998) theorise how students access information and show that working class students mostly depend on 'cold' sources of information (e.g a university brochure). Ball and Vincent (1998:380) further explain that 'hot' information is motivated by personal interest and is socially embedded and unevenly distributed since the information is gathered from social networks of who have studied at the university. The above listed studies suggest that

(dis)advantage is therefore dependent on, among other things, availability of information, whether 'hot' or 'cold'.

My reading of the literature on inequality in higher education shows that the different capitals students have (including access to information and finances discussed earlier on) contribute to their (dis)advantage in higher education. Research suggests that students who have better educated parents have a greater chance of accessing an elite university and of studying a degree that has more value in the job market, hence offering them greater earnings (Triventi 2013). Although these debates are not new (Bourdieu 1984, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bowls & Gintis 1976), scholarship has attempted to address the question of why the working class has lower attainments in higher education (see Bathmaker et al. 2013; Bathmaker 2015; Crozier et al. 2008; Reay, Ball & David 2001, 2009; Ball, Maguire & Macrae 2000; Maguire, Ball & Macrae 1999; Reay, Davies, David & Ball 2001; Reay 1999; Shiner & Noden 2015). Early research by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) theorised social reproduction in educational institutions and used concepts such as 'social capital', 'cultural capital', and 'financial capital' to explain how students from the lower class are disadvantaged compared to the middle class. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that students from the lower class often feel out of place once they enter universities because they lack the social and cultural capital that is needed to thrive in higher education institutions. In contrast, students from the middle class are advantaged as they are able to fit in due to their appropriate cultural capital provided by family, friends, schooling and their familiarity with university expectations, even before their enrolment in universities (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). Recent research has further explored how education systems disadvantage non-traditional students. Using Bourdieu's notion of 'playing the game', Bathmaker et al. (2013) explore student experiences in vocational colleges in understanding how they were able to accumulate different capitals during their studies. Findings from this study show that class-based inequalities existed in the capital gained by students. Whereas middle-class students were able to gain more capital through extracurricula activities and internships during their studies at university; working class students drew little benefit due to limited opportunities. They reveal that employers prefer recruiting middle-class students for internships (which consequently gives them a competitive advantage to secure high paying jobs). In another study, Bathmaker (2015) uses Bourdieu's notion of the 'field' to investigate the opportunities of graduates who attained a two-year degree from vocational colleges. The study shows that graduates from vocational colleges face challenges in the job market as their two-year degree qualification had lower economic returns.

These studies highlight the stratification in education systems and how (dis)advantage is reproduced amongst students of different social classes.

In an attempt to better understand higher education inequalities, research has also explored reasons for non-traditional students dropping out of universities (see Archer 2003b; Quinn 2004; Bowl 2003; Yorke 1997; Richardson 2008; Yorke et al. 1997; Archer & Leathwood 2003; Reay 2001, 2009; Archer et al. 2005). This was in response to the observation that increasing enrolment tends not to automatically bring forward social justice, since a significant number of students fail to complete their studies. Much of the dropout is found in the post-1992 universities and due to low retention in these universities, dropping out has generally been perceived as a working class problem (Archer 2003b; Quinn 2004). Some studies have attributed student dropout to internalised messages by students that they will not succeed (see Reay 2001; Perry & Francis 2010) and feelings of alienation that students experience within universities (see Archer et al. 2005; Perry & Francis 2010). A study by Archer (2003b) explored the reasons young and mature students from the working class drop out of their studies. Archer's study uncovers that young students were underprepared, lacked commitment, and did not have the social, cultural and academic capital required in universities as they were first-generation students. It also reveals that inadequate finances forced these students out of universities. In another study, Bowl (2003) found that students experience unequal power relations with teachers, which discourages them from approaching teachers for help or support. Findings from the same study indicate that mature students blamed themselves for poor performance and experienced financial difficulties as they had families to look after. Bowl's (2003) findings corroborate Reay et al.'s (2002) assertions that most mature students who enrol at universities are burdened by household responsibilities due to them being caregivers. Additionally, Bowl's (2003) study shows that mature women are also excluded by the curriculum and pedagogy as they felt that the contents of their studies were detached from their daily lives. Moreover, mature students felt that they were expected to assimilate a lot of information and were expected to demonstrate strong writing skills in using the English language within a short space of time (Bowl 2003). An important point to draw from these studies is that while middle-class students are less likely to drop out, the working class students experience several conflating disadvantages, which all contribute to the non-completion of their studies.

Widening participation without targeting specific groups often contributes to less effective interventions, suggesting the need to use an approach where defined groups are targeted, according to whether or not they are first generation, low income, male or female, or minority students. The education system appears to be offering 'equal' opportunities, which tends to marginalise non-traditional students. Thomas and Quinn (2007) have attributed this to a lack of clarity by policy when addressing the needs of non-traditional students. In these interventions policy tends to use the umbrella term 'non-traditional student' which includes mature individuals, women, ethnic minorities and working class students (Gorard, Smith & May 2006). By using 'non-traditional students' various forms of exclusion specific to each group are obscured, resulting in interventions not producing the desired results. In view of this, Thomas and Quinn (2007:23) contend that:

> It is by examining different definitions that assumptions about barriers to success become apparent, and these in turn shape the subsequent policy prescriptions and interventions. Equally some categories omit key issues which inhibit retention and success, and this helps to explain lower rates of success in tertiary education.

A study by Stevenson and Willott (2007) investigated experiences of teenage refugees in the UK higher education system. Their study uncovered that this group experiences several challenges that include disturbances in their education, trauma, and English language barriers. Through this study, Stevenson and Willott (2007) argue for the need to have targeted interventions to cater for the needs of diverse students.

Even though research reveals that ethnicity impacts on gender and social class, resulting in ethnicity being one of the important factors in influencing educational achievement, policy seems to trivialise its influences in educational achievement. Policy also tended to underestimate racism, until the Swan Report in 1985, which revealed evidence of racism as affecting achievement amongst ethnic minority groups (Gilborn 2001; Majors 2001). Following that enquiry, research has addressed race and ethnicity in higher education (see Archer 2001, 2003a; Archer & Francis 2005, 2007; Finnegan et al. 2014; Thomas & Quinn 2007; David et al. 2010; Bowl 2003; Cotton et al. 2016; Martin 2010). In the wake of higher representations of ethnic minorities in universities than that of traditional white middle-class students, these studies revealed that ethnic minority groups in the UK have nonetheless remained marginalised. Central to these studies is that disadvantage amongst these groups is associated with their ethnicity or race, inability to use the English language proficiently, and belonging to low income families (which contributes to their under-preparedness as they attend

poorer schools). Martin (2010) investigated experiences of bilingual ethnic minorities who used English as their second language in higher education. The study revealed that the use of another language (other than English) resulted in racism and exclusion. It also revealed that students struggled in their studies when using the English language.

As indicated earlier, concerns have been raised on how race and ethnicity are pathologised in widening participation policies in the UK. Archer and Francis (2007) suggest that focusing on race and ethnicity threatens the privileges of white middle and upper classes who constitute the majority of lawmakers. This has resulted in a shift in policy from race to gender, which is perceived as less sensitive since it affects everyone in the population regardless of class and race. Although gender equality is important in higher education, Stevenson and Clegg (2012) argue that there is a need to go beyond gender to identify the ethnicity and race of the marginalised gender. Through trivialising race and ethnicity, interventions often ignore changing the social structure[31] in which inequalities are embedded, hence persistence of (dis)advantage in higher education.

Another problem in the ethnic minority discourse in the UK concerns how policy ignores other forms of exclusion in higher education when defining the group, which again demonstrates a one-dimensional approach to addressing disadvantage. In defining the group, policy foregrounds the ethnic background of students. While this is the case, this understanding of disadvantage does not cater for variations, for example those who have recently arrived in the UK, those who have lived in the UK for generations, and those who use English as their first language (Thomas & Quinn 2007). By emphasising the ethnic background of students, the definition does little to uncover other forms of exclusion embedded in the intersectionalities of ethnicity and class. Yet, a large body of literature shows that ethnic minority groups experience similar forms of exclusion with working class students, such as lacking financial resources, social networks, and academic preparedness (e.g. Bowl 2003; Crozier et al. 2008; Richardson 2010; Stevenson 2012; Mirza 2006). All these forms of exclusion are not evident in the definition of ethnic minority groups, implying that a more nuanced definition is required for easy identification and support of this group of students. Furthermore, the definitions seem to neglect how gender conflates with race or ethnicity, yet, as indicated earlier on, gender is

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[31] The group of people that has power in society at a given time institutes and protects certain values in the population. Thus policy makers who are mainly white middles class tends to trivialize racism with preference to addressing gender inequality.

another social category that also marginalises women in higher education including those from ethnic minority groups. I will now discuss how gender inequality disadvantages women in higher education.

Even though parity has been reached in terms of the representation of men and women in the UK's higher education system, evidence still shows that women are excluded within universities (see Merril 1999, 2014; Quinn 2003; Reay 2003; Reay et al. 2005; Moss 2004; Mehta, Keener & Shrier 2013; Bathmaker 2009; Moreau & Leathwood 2006; Leathwood & Read 2009; Burke & Crozier 2014). The exclusion of women in higher education perpetuates partly because most of the studies on gender equality have predominantly been statistical and this masks the hidden daily experiences of women in universities. Reviews show that women are disadvantaged through the following processes: i) knowledge construction and distribution (Welch 2006); ii) less inclusive pedagogical practices in universities (Sandler, Silverberg & Hall 1996); and iii) sexual violence (Townsley & Geist 2000). Additionally, universities promote the exclusion of women by sanctioning certain kinds of knowledge as being masculine or feminine. For example, Leathwood and Read (2009) show that women are less frequently represented in science degree programmes such as physics, chemistry, mathematics and computer studies, whilst they are expected to take subjects such as biology and social science. As a result of the lower value often ascribed to these degrees, women are often employed in lower class jobs and frequently on a contract basis (Moreau & Leathwood 2006). More evidence shows that women who are mature entrants to university are negatively affected by their age, as their confidence may be compromised due to them being older than their peers (Merril 2014; Quinn 2003). Moreover, women are further marginalised because gender intersects with class and ethnicity. This literature suggests the need to shift the focus from the enrolment aggregations of women to their experiences once enrolled, as there are hidden practices of discrimination in universities that diminish women's opportunities to flourish in higher education in ways they have reason to value.

2.2.2. Conceptualising disadvantage in USA higher education
Whilst class appears to be the dominant factor disadvantaging non-traditional students in the UK, literature shows that race could be the main factor marginalising ethnic and low income groups in higher education in the USA, because the system is racially stratified (see Mettler 2014; Richardson 2008; Stevens 2009; Milner 2012; Reisel & Brekke 2010; Tierney 2015; Piketty 2014). As a result of this, minority students such as the Black/African-American, Latino

and American-Asian ethnic groups are underrepresented and have lower attainment in higher education compared to white middle-class students (Richardson 2008). Because these ethnic minorities fall under low income groups, they mainly access poor public schools and two-year university programmes. In contrast, white middle-class students are admitted into elite private colleges and good public schools where they attain better qualifications with greater economic returns (Stevens 2009; Tierney 2015). This hierarchical nature of the education system is attributed to the manner in which US institutions are less centralised, resulting in them having varying admission requirements and charging tuition differently. In describing the US education system Mettler (2014:08) correctly observes that:

> Many needy students are sequestered into separate and inferior institutions, including the for-profits, from which they are likely to emerge without degrees and too often with crashing level of debt. In short, our system of higher education contributes, increasingly, to rising inequality, as it stratifies Americans by income group rather than providing them with ladders of opportunity.

While Piketty (2014) perceives higher education and technology as key drivers of disrupting inequality in the US, he observes the unlikelihood of having social mobility now due to the poor not being able to access higher education. Thus, the above context of the US education system reflects a stratified society with a hierarchical education system which has race and class as a predominant form of (dis)advantage.

As ethnic minority groups come mainly from poor backgrounds, their choice of schools is restricted because of the poor public schools, where they are enrolled into low track[32] classes. Even though tracking is intended to improve the performance of vulnerable students, studies show that the practise has resulted in further marginalisation of ethnic minority and low income groups (Gumport 2007; Welner, Heubert & Powers 2010). The relationship between the disadvantage of ethnic minority and working class students during their post-secondary education as a result of initial poor schooling has been established (see Gillies & Robinson 2012; Hallam 2002; Strand 2012; Gumport 2007; Richardson 2008; Rollock 2007; William & Bartholomew 2004; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper 1988; Gandara 2002; McDonough 1994; Oakes et al. 2002; Jellison 2002; Noguera 2001; Stich 2012). These studies indicate that ethnic

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[32] In the US, tracking is a system that groups students according to their abilities and family background with the aim of providing them with targeted interventions so that they catch up with others who are in the high track classes. Low income and ethnic minority students are further marginalised by their teachers who often discriminate against them, which results in their low achievements.

minorities are excluded in schools, by teachers, on the basis of class. While teachers have lower expectations from low income students in schools, they also discriminate against these students in classrooms, contributing to them having low grades for entry into colleges. Similar to the UK, literature also shows that ethnic and working class students in the USA enrol into colleges where they attain qualifications that have a lower standing in the job market (Stich 2012). Although such colleges are financially, geographically, and academically convenient pathways for ethnic minorities and lower income groups, a study by Cohen and Brawer (2003) reveals that after enrolling in them, opportunities for success and completion of their degree programmes are limited for these groups.

After recognising that widening participation has not reached the expected outcomes on social mobility in the USA, research sought to investigate reasons for lower attainment among ethnic minorities and the working class. In doing so, studies specifically explored the relationship between poverty and lower achievements amongst students (see Abedi 2015; Berliner 2009; Milner 2012; Murray et al. 2007; Steele 2010; Wilson 2008). The central notion in these studies is that black students were disadvantaged through poverty and a history of discrimination. Milner (2012) investigated the effect of poverty on students of colour,[33] exploring the reasons why they live in poverty, investigating factors outside school that impact on students' performance, and ways in which pedagogy can address students' needs within school settings. The study concluded that it is important to include both in-school and out-of-school factors in understanding poverty. The same findings were obtained in Berliner's (2009) study, which established that policies such as No Child Left Behind[34] were usually ineffective in reducing underachievement among racial and ethnic minority groups. Berliner's (2009) study further discloses that out-of-school factors such as student poverty and parental level of education work alongside school factors, including discrimination against low income students by teachers contributing to lower educational attainment amongst these groups. Yet a study by Howard (2013) shows that approximately a third of black families who live in suburban areas send their children to middle-class schools, but that the students underperform in these better schools. Howard's findings suggest that race and racism are at work in marginalising black

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[33] The classification 'people of colour' in the USA is used to denote people who are not white. This classification is used to understand race beyond the 'black' and 'white' binary.
[34] In 2007 Obama's administration passed the No Child Left Behind Act to ensure inclusion of students in poor schools through creating an equal environment for them to succeed. The original Act was passed in 2002 under George W. Bush administration.

students in the US education system. This literature demonstrates that in the USA, class works together with race to disadvantage ethnic minority students.

Scholarship shows that (dis)advantage in the US education system is also embedded in the curriculum. What students learn varies based on class (see Bok 2006; Stephens et al. 2012; Donoghue 2008; Khan 2011; Stich 2012; Goyette & Mullen 2006). This is vital to highlight because some kinds of knowledge are more valuable than others. Students from elite institutions access more valuable knowledge compared to the working class (Bourdieu 1977). Stich (2012:49) distinguishes between 'mental' and 'manual' knowledge, and argues that whilst manual knowledge in the form of vocational courses is accessed by the working class, the liberal arts are mainly accessed by elite students. In his study of privileged students at an elite school, Khan (2011:154) concluded that middle-class students are nurtured by the humanities curriculum with the:

> developmental skills related to rigorous classroom discussion of course content, scholarly research, and critical research and reading.

In supporting this assertion, Stich (2012) explains that prestigious programmes are confined within elite colleges that can (usually) only be accessed by the middle class. For example, in liberal arts universities, students are trained in leadership and critical thinking through disciplines such as law, medicine, politics and science. While advantage is evident in what the elite students learn, this literature argues that (dis)advantage is manifested in the limited forms of knowledge accessed by ethnic and low income groups.

Disadvantage is also promoted through unequal distribution of resources in the US (higher) education system. Although the assumption is that middle-class students pay more for their studies in elite colleges, evidence indicates that in real terms their families make smaller contributions to their university studies. This is through them being awarded more bursaries. Mettler's (2014) study reveals that while government grants to both private and public colleges reduced from 80% in 1972 to 31% in 2012/13, bursaries for students in elite colleges increased from \$100 000 to \$180 000 per annum, meaning that elite students drew greater benefit. Moreover, the amount working class students pay for their education is more than the expenditure allotted to them by the local authorities in favour of the middle-class and elite students. This means that in real terms part of what the working class pay to local authorities is allocated to the middle class and elite students (see Burd 2013; Mettler 2014; Baker & Welner 2010). Burd (2013) observes that students enrolled in the top ten ranked universities

only pay 25 cents per dollar (as the local authorities allocate more funds to them) as compared to those from poor universities who pay 78 cents for every dollar (who are allocated less funding by local authorities). In light of these contradiction, Piketty et al. (2016) blame the US government for not fully investing in higher education or fairly distributing government expenditure as the demand for tuition by universities has limited low income groups from accessing and succeeding in higher education. While for Piketty, participation of the poor in the wage economy is a tool for reducing inequalities in the US society, the education system seems to be failing to assist given the structural factors that sustain disadvantage.

2.2.3 Policy framing youth as lacking aspirations in the United Kingdom and Australia

Although scholars have different interpretations of aspirations (see Watts & Bridges 2004; Hart 2012; Appadurai 2004; Ibrahim 2011; Ray 2003), they agree that aspirations involve individuals having hopes of the doings and beings they want in the future. Central to policy on aspirations is the assumption that students are able to improve their economic wellbeing through securing high income jobs after attending higher education (see Ashby & Schoon 2010; Khattab 2015; Schoon & Parsons 2002; Croll 2008). In Australia, however, there is low representation of low income students in higher education due to youth valuing different trajectories for their lives. The UK policy defines aspirations in terms of educational achievements and employment (see Watts 2006; Watts & Bridges 2004; Hart 2012; HEFCE 2003, 2005, 2012), thereby excluding the beings and doings that youth value about the role their education will play in their futures (see Hart 2012; Hoskins & Barker 2014). Youth who have other aspirations which are not educational are viewed as having 'confusion' (Hart 2016) and this gives the impression that policy has a one-directional understanding of aspirations by policymakers.

This literature on aspirations seems to show that policy interventions aimed at raising aspirations blames and 'pathologises' the working class for lacking aspirations and ability. It also demonstrates a policy shift from addressing the structural inequalities that constrain lower class students from accessing higher education to raising their aspirations (see Gale 2015; Gale & Parker 2015; Skeggs 2005; Unterhalter, Ladwig & Jeffrey 2014; Reay 1998; Reay et al. 2005; Gale et al. 2013). In their study, Wilks and Wilson (2012) reveal that young people from rural areas did not aspire to enrol into higher education due to poverty, absence of a family member with higher education qualifications or professional job, and their remoteness to universities. In this case, it looks as if policy is not considerate of the lower schooling level

qualifications and/or experiences of poor results that lower class students usually have during their schooling, which renders the pursuit of higher education undesirable to them. There is a greater chance for working class students to get lower paying jobs after graduation than those from the middle class (see Brennan & Shah 2003; Lloyd & Payne 2003; Watts & Bridges 2006a, 2006b). This limits the prospects for social mobility among working class graduates, hence persistence of inequality. Hart (2012) criticises the policy for devaluing aspirations by ranking those related to higher education as 'high' and those that are not as 'low'. She argues that whereas individuals can rank their aspirations depending on the importance of those aspirations to themselves, it was unfair for other people to rank an individuals' aspirations. Similarly, Watts and Bridges (2006a) investigated the aspirations of youth from marginalised communities who were not participating in higher education. In their study, they reveal that some youth from low income communities value attaining employment after schooling and were unlikely to have aspirations related to higher education. As opposed to viewing their aspirations as low, they argue for the need to also consider these people's pathways as important.

Overall, what emerges from this literature review (concerning the UK and the USA) is that these studies largely depend on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and culture in understanding student disadvantage (see Bathmaker 2015; Bowl 2003; Reay et al. 2005; Reay et al. 2009; Reay 1998; Khan 2011; Stich 2012). Although using Bourdieu theory is helpful in understanding how educational institutions perpetuate inequalities, these studies seem to give limited attention to students' agency. Universities are transitional spaces where students exercise their agency, and students' identities are formed and transformed through the knowledge and experience acquired (Finnegan et al. 2014). Furthermore, studies using Bourdieu's theory tend to homogenise groups, for instance students from the working class, yet within the working class there are groups of students with different ethnicities, races, nationalities, genders, ages, etc. For example, feminists argue that Bourdieu's emphasis on culture tends to be gender neutral through assuming that both men and women possess and can use the same cultural capital from their originating families and communities (see Bathmaker 2015; Lovell 2000; McCall 1992; Reay 1997, 2004; Skeggs 1997).

Issues emerging from this review include the fact that class appears to be the dominant factor in student (dis)advantage though it works together with ethnicity and gender in the United Kingdom (UK); a lack of targeted definitions in addressing disadvantage in higher education

in the UK; policy mis-framing youth disadvantage as 'lack of aspirations' in Australia and the UK; and race as a more salient factor in student (dis)advantage in the USA's higher education system. Having presented literature from the global North perspective, the next section presents and discusses literature from the global South.

2.3 Disadvantage in higher education: a global South perspective
There is a limited literature with a specific focus on (dis)advantage in higher education in Africa. For example, a search in the Compare Journal using the key words: 'inequality,' 'marginalisation,' 'disadvantage' and 'higher education' for articles published between 2008 and 2018 yields five out of 452 articles focused on (dis)advantage in higher education in Africa excluding South Africa (see Molla & Cuthbert 2014; Morley 2010; Pridmore & Jere 2011; Tuwor & Sossou 2008; Ilie & Rose 2018). Another search in the Journal of Higher Education in Africa confirms the same since only one article (of those written in English) out of a total of 133, specifically investigated (dis)advantage in higher education (excluding South Africa) (see Essack 2012). I chose the Compare Journal and the Journal of Higher Education in Africa for this review because they concentrate on education internationally and Africa respectively.

A review of studies of African universities reveals that women are disadvantaged through gender inequality. This is in the context of African countries having implemented massification policies in higher education with the aim of precipitating development in their countries. Gender equality was mainstreamed by increasing women's enrolment in universities and this resulted in a great increase in the number of female students. These enrolment measurements give the impression that gender equality has been reached as they do not unpack the qualitative experiences of sexual violence in universities (see Molla & Cuthbert 2014; Morley 2010; Tuwor & Sossou 2008). A study by Morley (2010) shows that gender mainstreaming policies did not result in real transformation at universities in Tanzania and Ghana since the concentration was on numerical representation. The study determined that sexism and sexual harassment were persistent in these institutions through the denigration of women, e.g. their success was viewed to be a result of them having transactional sex with their lecturers. Although female students were believed to have sexual relationships with tutors and lectures in exchange for good marks in Ghana (Molla & Cuthbert 2014), sexual harassment perpetrated by male lecturers was prevalent among female students at Makerere University in Uganda (BBC News, 08 March 2018). Despite the equal representation of women and men in science subjects, Morley's (2010) study revealed that low income and mature women were

underrepresented in the Engineering department as young middle-class women tended to dominate. In the case of Ethiopia, Molla and Cuthbert (2014) found that women were also marginalised through the intersectionality of ethnicity, social class and residence in rural areas. These studies demonstrate that universities in these countries are male dominated and they provide a hostile environment to female students. They also suggest that focus should go beyond numbers to interrogate universities' institutional practices, asking which women are represented in the specific faculties in universities. This supports the assertion that in their transformation efforts, universities in Africa tend to ignore the institutional structures in which power imbalances are embedded (Mama 2003).

Public spending on (higher) education is another dimension that emerged from the reviews as disadvantaging some students in accessing and completing their studies in Africa. Ilie and Rose (2018) compare access into higher education between Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. While one in five young people access higher education in South Asia, progress in widening participation in Sub-Saharan Africa is slow with one in 10 accessing higher education. Low participation in these countries is partly blamed on the public expenditure that allocates more resources to the rich. The research discloses that countries with fewer young people accessing higher education tended to have pro-rich funding models e.g. in Ghana the richest 10% of the population received the same allocation of public spending as the poorer part of the population (45%) (Ilie & Rose 2018:636). It also reveals that in Malawi, which has the lowest access rates into higher education, the wealthiest people (10%) receive the same amount of funding as those from low socio-economic backgrounds (80%). This is unlike some Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Namibia and Comoros that spend an average 50% of public expenditure on the poor. The study further explains that when primary education is not free for the poor in a country, the number of students accessing higher education tends to lessen. Mwaikokesya's (2018) study on participation and inclusion in Tanzanian higher education found that students were disadvantaged financially. Students from poor families had limited access to loans and grants due to the changing higher education system that shifted to privatisation and cost sharing, and this negatively affected participation and inclusion. The point to make from this study is that sufficient income resources (as a result of unfair distribution of resources) disadvantages students from accessing universities in most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Within the context of high HIV prevalence, disadvantage amongst HIV infected and HIV orphaned students is seen beyond economic deprivation after the death of parents who are

breadwinners, to disruption of learning due to persistent sickness by the infected students and changes in the living arrangements that might take place after their parents' death. Pridmore and Jere (2011) evaluated interventions meant to disrupt inequality in schools within the high HIV prevalence areas in Malawi. They found that household changes and disruption of lessons disadvantaged orphaned students, which contributed to them falling behind and dropping out. In addition to increasing family and community support, Pridmore and Jere (2011) reveal that these disadvantages can be reduced through school-based interventions, i.e. using a flexible curriculum that promotes interactive learning and self-study. What can be drawn from this study is that HIV infections present yet another dimension of disadvantage that results in unequal attainments amongst students in areas with high HIV prevalence.

After recognising that diverse students require additional support, universities in Africa have made pre- and post-admission interventions with the aim of improving their attainments. Essack's (2012) study describes the strategies that have been implemented by universities in an attempt to improve success amongst disadvantaged groups. The study identifies interventions in areas such as selection, curriculum, pedagogy, and student monitoring and support services, which include peer mentoring and student welfare services. The selection process considers a flexible entry qualification, previous academic qualifications, admission and alternative tests, and use of previous leadership experiences as part of the entry requirements. To improve students' cognitive, communication and study skills, curriculum interventions were made in universities in the form of holistic and integrated programmes, bridging courses, semi-integrated and foundational programmes. Central to the pedagogical interventions is a collaborative learning approach that underpins students' responsibility and involvement in the learning process, e.g. Peer Led Team Learning and Problem Based Learning. These interventions were supported by psycho-social services to assist students when they needed counselling. This literature reflects an intervention model that caters for diverse students in the context of addressing disadvantage.

Overall there seem to be fewer studies that delve into (dis)advantage in higher education in Africa. A review of the literature also reveals that class and gender inequality appears to be the predominant form of disadvantage as compared to other categories of disadvantage such as that found in race and ethnicity. The next section focuses on findings from a review of the South African literature on student (dis)advantage.

2.3.1 A brief history of how (dis)advantage is conceptualised in South African higher education

One cannot discuss disadvantage in South African higher education without looking at the issue of race. A focus on race is necessary because of South Africa's history of apartheid and how this has resulted in it being one of the countries with the highest inequalities in the world, as explained in Chapter 1. Though there are other factors involved such as class and gender, the common assumption in South Africa is that race is the main factor disadvantaging black students in accessing and thriving in higher education (see Leibowitz & Bozalek 2015; Bozalek & Leibowitz 2012; Soudien 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Walker 2016). Racism refers to the use of people's physical characteristics or their sharing of the same culture, language or ethnicity to determine superiority or inferiority over others (Mekao 2011). Although the country has claimed to embrace values of a non-racial society since 1994, racial categories continue to be used for classification and registration of South Africans according to the Population Registration Act 30 of 1950. Together with that, they are still being used in public policy for evaluating the progress being made in redressing social injustices (Featherman et al. 2010). Race has also been a focus of recent student protests through the #FeesMustFall[35] and #RhodesMustFall[36] movements.

A review of studies in South Africa shows that race is a form of (dis)advantage amongst students in universities. Although policy has sought to transform the higher education landscape by deracialising universities, the apartheid legacy still negatively affects black students in universities, which contributes to high dropout and low graduation rates. Statistics indicate that 5% of black students who enter school end up graduating from universities as compared to 60% of white students (Soudien 2010b:886). A large body of literature shows that racism still perseveres in higher education institutions in South Africa (see Bhana 2013, 2014; Munro, Vithal & Murrat 2015; Soudien 2010b; Vally & Dalambo 1999; Ramphele 2008; Morad 2010) and black students underperform due to both structural and ideological racism (see Cloete & Bunting 2000; Walker 2016; Walker 2005; Cooper & Subotzky 2001; Jawitz 2012). These studies reveal that white students still enjoy privileges in universities whilst black

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[35] #FeesMustFall were a countrywide student protests that began in October 2015 against universities raising tuition fees for 2016. These protests resulted in no tuition increases for 2016. The protests however resumed in 2016 after an announcement by the Minister of Higher Education that universities could increase tuition by up to 8%.

[36] #RhodesMustFall movement was a protest in March 2015 against Rhodes' statue at the University of Cape Town. The movement attracted international attention stimulating debates on 'decolonising' South African universities.

students are disadvantaged, and this is mirrored in student success, which is skewed according to race in favour of white students. This literature shows that although efforts have been made to transform the higher education landscape, there are still structural barriers to black students' fair participation and success. Walker (2015) reveals evidence of transformation at the University of the Free State (UFS) as both white and black students who participated in the Leadership for Change programme were willing to undertake leadership and steer change in the university. However, she found that inequalities based on race are still persistent in South African universities. In another study by Munro et al. (2015), race also emerged as being influential in students' performance at university. From their study, students who had high attainments in university would have performed well in their schooling and experienced social and economic privileges, and these were mostly white students.

Although race seems to be a dominant factor in influencing (dis)advantage, it appears to operate in classed systems. A number of research have demonstrated that class-based (dis)advantage begins early in the type of schooling students had access to (Soudien 2008, 2011; Wangenge-Ouma 2013; Wilson-Strydom 2015; Pattman 2010; Rogan & Reynolds 2016; Branson, Leibbrandt & Zuze 2009). These studies explain that children from the middle class access better quality education in good schools, which usually require very high fees. These schools usually provide advantages to middle-class students including better scores for entry into university, and information on the choice of degree programmes, granting them a stronger chance of employment (Rogan & Reynolds 2016). In contrast, low income students access poorly resourced schools and complete their schooling with little readiness for university education, as already indicated in Chapter 1. Although this is the case, more evidence (see Walker 2016) has revealed that black students are outperformed by their white counterparts in middle-class schools, suggesting that race could be at play. While this is true, there are also intra-race divisions according to class and gender in universities as students tend to interact with those who they identify themselves with based on their economic status (Soudien 2008; Pattman 2010). Given the literature presented here, disadvantage in South African higher education can be best understood by studying students' experiences in institutions of higher learning, paying careful attention to race, but also class and gender, and how these factors intersect to multiply or diminish effective opportunities to thrive in life and work.

Scholarship on South African higher education suggests a link between race and student poverty. Central to the student welfare discourse is that poor students, mostly black, are not sufficiently funded to successfully complete their studies, consequently dropping out (see Calitz 2018; Dominguez-Whitehead 2015; Machika & Johnson 2015; Johns et al. 2008; Van den Berg & Raubenheimer 2015; Wangenge-Ouma 2010; Walker & Mkwananzi 2015; Styan 2014). A common factor found in these investigations is that student underachievement and their dropping out from universities is partly associated with inadequate finances to sustain their livelihoods. Although there are multiple factors influencing success such as schooling background, personal factors, motivation, social and institutional factors, high dropout rates can also be attributed to student poverty. Inadequate finances is responsible for approximately 50% of the student dropouts in South African universities (Styan 2014). Poor students are impoverished through lack of food, accommodation, transport fees, books, clothing; resulting in reduced performance (Johns et al. 2008; Machika & Johnson 2015; Calitz 2018; Sabi et al. 2018). In their food security study at the UFS for example, Van den Berg and Raubenheimer (2015) found that two thirds of students experience food insecurity. They explain that the majority of students who experience food insecurity are black students, which has a negative impact on their performance. Another study by Calitz (2018) at the same institution pays attention to student poverty as aggravating inequality within the classroom.

Poverty amongst black students in South African universities reflects a race-based, intergenerational deprivation in the country's population. Scholarship has demonstrated that (dis)advantage in higher education is associated with intergenerational wealth or poverty as most white students come from better resourced families than their black counterparts (see Nimubona & Vencatachellum 2007; Pirano 2014; Southall 2016). Although NSFAS funded students (mostly black) from poor economic backgrounds, the funding was often insufficient to cover their needs (CHE 2008; Letseka et al. 2009; DHET 2011; Lewin & Mawoyo 2014). More significantly, NSFAS' strict terms and conditions have excluded some deserving students from accessing the fund (Sader & Gabela 2017). This has therefore resulted in most black students being disadvantaged financially during their studies, causing them either to drop out or have lower attainments. Furthermore, student poverty has implications for social mobility, for instance Nimubona and Vencatachellum (2007) observe lower chances of intergenerational education mobility for blacks as compared to whites largely due to limited access to credits and good schools. This is particularity true for students whose parents were disadvantaged by apartheid before 1994 (Pirano 2014). Pirano (2014) further explains that in a country where a

small population (10% white people) of the population owns about 40% of the intergenerational wealth, patterns of inequality are likely to persevere. Despite these concerns, a study by Southall (2016) uncovers an emerging black middle class in the country that seems to have drawn benefit from the widened opportunities in the post-1994 era, and having bought houses in the middle-class suburbs and sending their children to better schools. Even though the group has high earnings, concerns have been raised over its high consumption patterns and its vulnerability to debt. Southall explains that this might limit the transfer of wealth from this group to the next generation. These studies reflect how student poverty is associated with the presence or absence of intergenerational wealth amongst members of the population, and how this subsequently (dis)advantages students in universities.

Related to student poverty, is the #FeesMustFall movement that focused renewed interest on higher education funding. The South African government instituted Free Higher Education (FHE) for students whose families earned below R350 000 per annum in 2018. This was a shift from the previous funding policy that provided loans to low income students through NSFAS, which did not fund all the deserving students sufficiently as outlined in Chapter 1. While FHE is aimed at removing financial barriers for low income students to access universities, there has been debate concerning whether to offer free higher education (see DHET 2008; Letseka et al. 2009; Calitz & Fourie 2016; Cloete 2016a, 2016b; Wangenge-Ouma 2012; Wangenge-Ouma & Cloete 2008). Relative to other African countries, the South African government spends the least on higher education, that is, approximately 0.78% of its Gross Domestic Product in 2012 (CHE 2016). South African higher education used a cost-sharing model for its funding in higher education, which required all students to pay tuition. Some poor students (mostly black) accessed loans from NSFAS so that they could pay their tuition fees. Despite the provision of student funding through NSFAS, attempts by universities to increase tuition fees were met with student protests, such as seen in the #FeesMustFall movement in 2015 and 2016 (see Davids & Waghid, Mail&Guardian, 2016). This resistance to tuition pressurised the South African government to introduce FHE. However, the new funding criteria exclude some low income students who were registered before 2018, meaning that these students continue to be disadvantaged financially. Funding continues to be a relevant issue in this study given that the research was carried out during the time when low income students received financial loans from NSFAS.

Debates on FHE are centred on the argument that widening participation in South Africa concerns the issue of redressing historical social injustices, implying that historically disadvantaged poor black students should have access to free university education. Recognising that tuition increases are a barrier to widening participation in the country due to high student dropout (e.g. 70% of the students who dropped out from universities in 2004 were categorised as black and low income, and their families earned an average of R1600 per month [Letseka & Maile 2008:06]), scholars such as Wangenge-Ouma (2012) suggest that the higher education sector should consider offering FHE. Although higher education system supports students through loans, Barr (2004) argues that loans are not a good option for student funding in developing countries, even after their graduation, since most students become even more disadvantaged when they start repaying the debt. Whilst these arguments are presented in favour of FHE, concerns have also been raised over the notion of offering higher education that is free. Some scholars (see Cloete 2016b; Wangenge-Ouma 2010, 2012) believe that implementing FHE policy puts pressure on the countries' resources. Based on evidence from other countries that previously implemented FHE policy, Wangenge-Ouma (2012) posits that policy tends not to benefit the poor, especially in South Africa with its patterns of inequality. Furthermore, problems of unemployment will continue despite universities producing a large number of graduates (Muller 2018). Instead, Wangenge-Ouma (2012) argues, FHE has the potential to reproduce inequalities as schools and universities are not evenly accessed, distributed and resourced in the country. The #FeesMustFall debates demonstrate the dilemma of either maintaining a cost-sharing funding model (which was resisted by students) and the new FHE with its own demerits. Whilst some students benefit from financial assistance, the financial aspect is only one of many issues faced by students. Many students continue to face challenges even when the financial side of their education is addressed, for example social inclusion.

In general, universities still struggle to mitigate the effects of the apartheid legacy entrenched in institutional cultures[37] of their organisations, which exclude poor black students. This was met with the #RhodesMustFall movement that renewed debates on 'decolonising' education in South Africa. The decolonisation discourse raises questions about how universities continue using the dominant Western forms of knowledge while suppressing alternatives, e.g. those

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[37] Institutional culture are assumptions, beliefs and behaviours that are dominant at a university. The institutional cultures that resemble Western values are usually dominant in historically white universities.

centred on African values and practices. It also questions the relevance of the curriculum to the South African context (see Leibowitz 2016; Mbembe 2016; Le Grange 2016). Mbembe (2016:32) points out that universities are 'Westernised' partly through their syllabi that were designed to meet the needs of the apartheid dispensation and colonialism. While the colonial model of education seems to be disconnected from the needs of the black people, Mbembe argues, this has not been addressed. Black students are expected to adapt Western values, attitudes and practices as the norm in universities, which contributes to their alienation and low attainments. At the same time, Le Grange (2016) believes that higher education institutions have sustained the colonial legacy through the staff demographics that remain predominantly white. This reveals a relationship between academic staff composition and what is taught in disadvantaging black students.

What can be stressed from the de-colonisation literature is the need to change higher education content, teaching methods and academic staff. Curriculum and teaching arrangements should therefore be sensitive to the needs of diverse students. However, this does not call for the complete removal of 'Western' knowledge, but challenges their dominance and the exclusion of other forms of knowledge in the curriculum. A decolonised university would be one that is responsive to the problems of our society and seeks to resolve them rather than reinforce them. Put differently, it advantages all students to participate meaningfully and succeed during their studies and lives beyond university.

Transforming institutional cultures is another challenge universities are grappling with in creating equal spaces for diverse students to graduate. Common to the literature on transforming institutional cultures is the notion that most black students fail to adjust to institutional cultures that are male dominated and resemble whiteness. Pym and Kapp (2013) argue that race and gender are forms of disadvantage embedded in institutional culture; and that these together with cultural literacies[38] can foster dependency and passivity amongst black students, consequently reducing their agency. For example, the use of English as the language of instruction excludes students who do not speak the language as their mother language. Using UCT as an example, Kapp and Bangeni (2011) show how black students struggled to negotiate new discourses, their identities between home and the university, and how some managed to

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[38] Cultural literacies refer to expected ways and languages of learning that give prominence to whiteness or Western values.

re-negotiate their voices in writing. The study demonstrates how black students who have attended poor rural and urban schools where they did not speak English and were not taught how to write well, are alienated in their first year at the university. Thus, through transformation of institutional culture, universities in South Africa have sought to research and teach to produce critical citizens that conform with the societies they come from in addition to advancing Africanisation[39].

The transformation of institutional cultures has been slow, however, as universities tended to focus more on demographic transformation without much change of the culture (Soudien 2010). Much debate was triggered by the Reitz incident at UFS[40], which led to the establishment of a National Ministerial Committee to investigate and address all forms of discrimination, particularly racism. The report observed that none of the 26 South African universities have sufficiently engaged with transformation (DoE 2008). The dissatisfaction of students with the manner in which transformation was progressing was also expressed by students in the #RhodesMustFall movement. Research has investigated institutional culture in universities (see Higgins 2007; Badat 2009; Jansen 2009; Steyn & Van Zyl 2001; Hames 2007; De Beer 2006; Hill 2016; Favish & Hendry 2010; Walton, Bowman & Osman 2015; Pattman 2010; Paphitis & Kelland 2016), and not surprisingly, these studies perceive black students as being disadvantaged through unfriendly institutional cultures that privilege white students. At a HAU (Afrikaans), Jansen (2009) uncovers how the institutional culture excluded black students. He explains that the physical, academic and social aspects of the institution (i.e. architecture, names of the buildings, residence practices, leadership, monuments and religious practices) resembled Afrikaans culture and that this alienates some black students. Furthermore, it was found that institutional culture promoted the discrimination of black students based on race in class and extra-curricular activities. Suransky and Van Der Merwe (2016) undertook a study at UFS after the Reitz incident where they interviewed the university staff who handled the incident. In their study, Suranksy and Van Der Merwe uncovered that the Reitz dormitories were regarded as private spaces for the Afrikaans students, which they felt they were not supposed to share. Although staff and students from the halls of residence

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[39] I use Africanisation to mean transformation in universities that is supportive of the needs, situations and aspirations of Africans e.g. the curriculum.

[40] The Reitz incident occurred in 2007 at UFS. The incident involved a video that went viral showing white students from the Reitz residence carrying out an 'initiation ceremony' meant for the first years through having some of the residence staff participating in a humiliating way. The video also shows the residence staff eating the concoction which one of the white students has urinated into (Suranksy & van der Merwe 2016).

were not directly involved with apartheid, the study reveals that they identified themselves with the army culture and masculinity of the former apartheid regime. A salient point that can be drawn from this literature is that universities appear to be insufficiently transformed in the face of persistent institutional cultures that disadvantage most black students.

Whilst gender inequality is another dimension disadvantaging students, there has been less focus on women's experiences in South African higher education. The South African higher education system is arguably paternalistic, for instance through the formal and informal curriculum that advances and reproduces stereotypes of femininity and masculinity (Marshall 2000). Although statistics show that women also outnumber men in enrolment as they constituted 58% of the total enrolments in universities in 2016 (CHE 2018), these numerical presentations tend to hide gender inequalities within institutions (Walker 2007; Loots & Walker 2015). This underscores Chauraya's (2012:257) assertion that:

> higher education policies and programmes in Africa have remained gender neutral, gender blind, or gender insensitive, thus failing to change the gendered structural status quo in the African context.

Though gender aggregations are useful, Akala and Divala (2016) argue that there should be a shift from merely assessing aggregation to interrogating internal inclusion.

Studies that have investigated women's experiences in higher education share a common theme of the presence of hidden exclusion practices such as sexual harassment and discrimination against women in universities (see Divala 2014; Bhana & Pillay 2012; Adams, Mabusela & Dlamini 2013; Akala & Divala 2016; Soudien 2010; Shanyanana 2013; Loots & Walker 2015; Walker 2005). For example, in her gender study with girls, Walker (2005) shows how identities and race are produced, reproduced and transformed through interactions amongst black and white, male and women university students. Although this literature explains patterns of exclusion by gender, Akala and Divala (2016) bring to the fore varying dimensions of women's marginalisation including socio-economic challenges, which constrain them from thriving in higher education. Yet another study by Chisholm et al. (2007:39) showed that female university students spoke about their university experiences in a gender neutral manner as they regarded gender inequality as 'non-existent' and a 'non-issue'. In their study, Chisholm et al. (2007) argue that relations between diverse students at UCT were mostly determined by class, despite subtle divisions according to race and gender. While their study shows that women appeared to be independent after enrolling at the university, it also revealed that most students regardless

of school background and prior qualifications struggled to integrate into university education, e.g. in handling the workload. Although this is the case, middle-class students find it easier to navigate academically, compared to working class students. Furthermore, interactions amongst students did not suggest the presence of racism although white and black students were reported to interact in separate groups. The above literature on gender inequality demonstrates how gender conflates with social class in disadvantaging women. It also highlight that there is paucity of information on the experiences of women as more prominence is given to statistics, which tend to neglect the hidden experiences of (dis)advantage in universities.

Despite the evidence that some black students are constrained from higher attainments through unfriendly university arrangements, recent research has investigated how some of these students successfully negotiate their studies at university (see Pym & Kapp 2013; Kapp et al. 2014; Janse Van Rensburg & Kapp 2014; Luckett & Luckett 2009; Marshall & Case 2010; Ellery & Baxen 2015). These studies identify agency as a key factor that contributes to the success of disadvantaged students. Luckett and Luckett (2009) conducted a study with beneficiaries of the Masakh'iSizwe Centre for Excellence scholarship programme at UCT. They argue that the dominant learning approaches that emphasise either individual cognition or the learning environment diminish student agency, highlighting the need for alternative approaches. In light of this gap, their study employed a realist approach that develops students' identity and agency, which is useful for students' success in universities. Kapp et al. (2014) undertook a longitudinal study to interrogate how students undergoing an extended degree programme successfully negotiate their schooling and university studies. Findings from their study indicate that although most of these students lacked family support due to them coming from single-parent families and from their grandparents' homes, they were motivated, resilient, and made strategic decisions for their success. The study also uncovered that friendship choices also made a difference since these students chose friends who were similarly committed to succeeding. Janse van Rensburg and Kapp (2014) conducted another longitudinal study and demonstrated with a single participant how the student had engaged in self-evaluation during times of lower performance, repositioned herself afterwards and employed new learning strategies for her to succeed. In addition to that, the study reveals that the student participated in class and approached the lecturers for help to avoid falling behind. Also using a single participant, Marshall and Case (2010) unveil how the student uses his experiences of hardships and academic failure to challenge the difficulties he was facing at university. Although Janse van Rensburg and Kapp (2014) as well as Marshall and Case (2010) interviewed single

participants in their studies, possibly suggesting that the results from these studies are inconclusive, their studies are helpful in that they reflect a paradigm shift from investigating how students are lacking to how they can succeed. What can be emphasised is that these studies demonstrate a shift from perceiving low income black students with deficit lenses (that they are lacking), to what resources they have when they enrol in universities. This also has implications for describing what disadvantage entails.

Emerging issues from the review of South African literature are as follows: race appears to be a dominant factor in (dis)advantaging black students in universities; institutional transformation has been slow as universities continue to offer unfriendly environments to diverse students; gender inequality still persists on university campuses despite the enrolment of women surpassing that of men; and universities find it difficult to deal with the academic needs of diverse students in class.

2.3.2 What we know about student academic support and disadvantage

Student academic development programmes are an intervention by universities to support disadvantaged students in their first year of study with the aim of improving their performance and access into and success in higher education and equipping them with learning skills for the coming university years (Calitz 2018; Wilson-Strydom 2015). In the programmes, underprepared students, mostly black students from poor schools, are admitted with slightly lower qualifications than the university cut-off points before undergoing a one-year academic preparation programme. While universities have been accessing funding for such programmes, there is no clear definition on how these students were categorised as disadvantaged as pointed out in Chapter 1.

Related to this is the debate on the effectiveness of foundation programmes[41] in improving student performance. Leibowitz and Bozalek (2015) argue that foundation programmes have given students who might not have been able to access universities the opportunity to enrol and succeed at university education. More evidence on the impact of foundation programmes points to students improving their performance and confidence, and developing a sense of belonging

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[41] Foundational programmes are another form of academic interventions designed to bridge students who have lower schooling scores so that they can qualify for the desired degree programmes in universities. This however differs with Extended degree programmes where students are enrolled by the university based on their potential i.e. their matric scores which are closer to the university's entry cut-off points.

to the institution (see Andrews & Osman 2015; Dhunpath & Vithal 2012; Loji 2010; Pym & Kapp 2013; Volkwyn et al. 2014). Pym and Kapp (2013) implemented a successful academic development programme that both improves students' agency and their sense of belonging in their community at UCT. Pym and Kapp (2013) illustrate how the faculty has responded to student diversity by having a more flexible programme that allows underprepared students to finish a one-year course within a semester with greater support, thereby allowing the student to focus more time on courses where their chances of success are lower. In their programme, active learning techniques that recognise students' prior learning (such as experiential learning, case studies, etc.) are implemented, together with offering students academic and psycho-social support in an effort to improve their sense of belonging. However, Leibowitz and Bozalek (2015) caution on the efficacy of the programmes due to absence of systematic statistical information to evaluate these programmes, which might mean an overestimation of the effectiveness.

Despite their usefulness, some scholars have criticised academic development interventions (see Dhunpath & Vithal 2012; De Klerk, Van Deventer & Van Schalkwyk 2006; Leibowitz & Bozalek 2015; Boughey & Niven 2012; Tinto 2014; Boughey 2007; Hlalele & Alexander 2012; Gilmour, Christie & Soudien 2012). Whereas academic development programmes have been blamed for advising students to enrol for an extra year, there has been concern about their approaches, which view students as being underprepared. Though separating students might be helpful in improving student academic skills, the strategy is problematic in that it leads to labelling which further marginalises disadvantaged students (see Calitz 2018; Scott 2012; Marshall & Case 2010; Hlalele & Alexander 2002; Leibowitz & Bozalek 2015). Furthermore, this 'divide-and-support' approach is aligned to deficit views on disadvantaged students, which is a form of 'misrecognition' (Fraser 2000). This suggests an integrated mainstream programme that also addresses the needs of underprepared students who might have qualified for the mainstream programme (Wilson-Strydom 2012; CHE 2013a).

Apart from this, academic development programmes tend to homogenise students as having the same problems, and this is not the case (Wilson-Strydom 2015; Calitz 2018). As such, interventions should also target the lecturers so that they are able to articulate the diverse needs of the students. Another concern raised is that some students still perform poorly after undergoing foundation programmes, e.g. some could not read and write well even after undergoing a language support module (Parkinson et al. 2008; Boughey & Niven 2012). Some

scholars have therefore suggested that academic development programmes be continued for the entire duration of the degree programme and not be confined to the first year only (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2015; Pitkethly & Prosser 2001).

A further debate within the academic and support discourse concerns whether foundational programmes work well in the context of supportive institutional environments. A number of studies have raised questions about why the programmes target students instead of changing the institutions in response to the needs of the students (see Calitz 2018; Leibowitz & Bozalek 2015; Ndebele 1995; Volbrecht & Boughey 2004; Ndebele 1995). These studies have argued that instead of universities concentrating on implementing foundation programmes, they should transform their institutions to promote student success. This means universities should address the pedagogical obstacles that constrain individual freedoms to achieve the things students have reason to value whilst responding to diverse students' needs. Similarly, Dhunpath and Vithal (2012) suggest that the focus of academic support programmes should also be on teachers who lack skills to handle the programmes. This is true as most of the foundation programmes are taught by part-time lectures or contract lectures who may have undergone few staff development programmes (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2015).

Overall, a critical analysis of both the global North and global South literature demonstrates that (dis)advantage is a complex concept which has been approached by scholars in different ways, with less attention to intersectional disadvantage. Often, one-dimensional definitions are used to understand disadvantage, e.g. aspirations being viewed simply from a higher education attainment and employment perspective, without considering other beings and doings valued by youth. Interventions on student academic development programmes view disadvantaged students from an under-preparedness lens without considering the role of universities in adjusting to students' needs (Calitz 2018). Furthermore, by using race in its inclusive strategies, higher education policy in South Africa assumes that all white students are advantaged, yet this is not the case. Finally, although there is some recognition of intersectionality between categories of disadvantage (see summary in Table 1 below), the above literature indicates that (dis)advantage is predominantly understood in a simplistic manner, e.g. on the basis of one or two social categories of (dis)advantage.

Table 1: Categories of (dis)advantage in higher education

Global North	Global South (i.e. South African context)
Social class	Social class and poverty
Ethnicity/and race	Race
Gender	Gender
Lack of aspirations	

It looks as if other forms of intersectionality have been omitted in the South African higher education literature. A study by Wilson-Strydom, Strydom and Hen-Boisen (2016) that employed an intersectional analysis in investigating inequality amongst students at UFS, demonstrates the need to go beyond focusing on race, gender and class categories. In their study, they found that students are further marginalised through, for example, being 'first generation', and being 'off-campus' (Wilson-Strydom et al. 2016:273); factors which have not received adequate attention in the above literature.

Despite all the interventions that have been made, inequality still persists in higher education and success is skewed by race. In order to understand how various dimensions of disadvantage can work together in diminishing effective educational opportunities in higher education, an alternative holistic approach that scrutinises (dis)advantage from a multidimensional/intersectional perspective is needed. A more sophisticated way of exploring disadvantage is therefore necessary; one that embraces all social categories that are relevant to (dis)advantage, rather than focusing exclusively on race, class and gender.

2.4 Towards defining (dis)advantage
Based on the above-mentioned literature, where (dis)advantage is perceived in various ways, I attempt to provide a working definition for the term to guide me in examining (dis)advantage. Even though I have shown that different terms are used to refer to (dis)advantage, the concept is also defined in relative and absolute terms. Relative disadvantage implies focusing on a single person or groups of people in relation to others, whilst in its absolute term, the concept can be used to refer to people who are in the extreme situation of poverty (Chiaperro-Martinetti 2013). Whilst mainstream economists use income as a measure of advantage, the concept should rather be multi-dimensional as it incorporates various aspects that constitute a person's wellbeing (Sen 1999). Disadvantage is therefore pluralistic. It is imperative to specify which

aspects of wellbeing a student has or lacks within a specific context and time. Drawing from Chiaperro-Martinetti (2013), disadvantage is taken to be *'lacking the opportunity to achieve one or more aspects of student's valuable wellbeing in higher education'*. Focus has been placed on students' wellbeing as it constitutes the opportunities deemed worthwhile in higher education for them to succeed. For example, having extra financial resources to spend on entertainment every night is not deemed to be a worthwhile aspect of wellbeing in higher education, although some students may value it as such, as opposed to having adequate financial resources for purchasing textbooks. This definition allows us to examine various aspects of what diverse students regard as (dis)advantage in higher education. On the other hand, being advantaged is to have all the aspects of wellbeing that a student values in higher education in order for them to succeed in their studies. Wellbeing is understood and constituted by capabilities and functionings; which respectively mean the real opportunities individuals have to pursue the things they value, and the actual achievements they make (Sen 1999). This definition gives room to consider how students can be disadvantaged in one way but also advantaged in other ways, for instance through having financial security whilst simultaneously being racially excluded.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the findings of studies that are related to (dis)advantage and students' experiences and what they value for equal success in higher education. Drawing from the literature emerging from the global south and global north, I have shown that interventions lack clarity in defining the target group, which contributes to them being less effective in disrupting inequalities in higher education. The literature review informed the argument for the need to have a more nuanced understanding of (dis)advantage from a multidimentional/intersectional perspective, where the focus should go beyond race, ethnicity, class and gender to other forms of intersectionality. Emphasis was also placed on the need for more research into students' agency, considering that the majority of black students in higher education come from marginalised communities, endured poor schooling, and are usually alienated by their university environments. Having identified the gaps in the literature on (dis)advantage, I turn to the study's conceptual framework in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: A capability approach perspective on (dis)advantage

3. 1 Introduction

Despite the use of the notion of 'disadvantage' by policy in interventions in higher education as discussed in Chapter 1, the literature review in Chapter 2 has illustrated that definitions of the term tend to be one-dimensional and has mainly ignored the link between the various dimensions and its inherent complexity. This suggests that a theoretical approach that can adequately address this is required. This chapter presents the conceptual framework for this study. It begins with a brief discussion of what (dis)advantage looks like within this space. This is followed by a section on the capability approach, its core concepts (i.e. capabilities, functionings, wellbeing, agency and conversion factors) and how they are used in this study to enrich our understanding of (dis)advantage. The chapter further discusses concepts such as adaptive preferences, as well as Wolff and De-Shalit (2007)'s notions of secure functionings, and clustering and corrosive disadvantages found by the study. Following that, it turns to aspirations and intersectionality before proposing the capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage. Finally, it provides a critique of the capability approach in evaluating student (dis)advantage.

3.2 The human development approach

The human development paradigm focuses on enhancing people's freedoms to achieve the various things they regard as important. It is mainly concerned with widening people's freedoms and choices, and their active participation in creating an enabling environment for them to have long and flourishing lives (Alkire 2010). The human development paradigm deviates from human capital theory that emphasises that universities should produce graduates for economic growth. Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1997) elaborate that human capital theory views education as a form of investment that should have direct returns to the individual and the economy, with its social benefits being secondary and private. However, economic growth is not an end in itself. Human development sees development as being grounded on the expansion of people's effective freedoms. The paradigm, which underpins the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Reports, seeks to reduce inequalities through evaluating the various aspects of people's lives putting the people at the centre of development. My study adopts a human development perspective to understanding (dis)advantage because of it being human-centered and multi-dimensional.

3.3 Introducing concepts of the capability approach

The capability approach operationalises human development using concepts that together provide an alternative theoretical framework for conceptualizing wellbeing, or in this study (dis)advantage. Sen (1992; 1999) argues that when we measure relative advantage, we do so using the capability space rather than income, resources, and happiness. For example, he explains that 'happiness' may not show us a true picture of relative disadvantage because a student could be happy but lacking the material basics that they need for their university education. On the other hand, the use of primary goods (John Rawls 1971) to measure relative advantage does not consider the difference between individuals and their use of the resources to achieve wellbeing (Sen 1984; 1999). Additionally, using aggregated measurements such as Gross National Product (GNP) to assess citizens' quality of life does not reveal differences in the distributional patterns, thus neglecting the importance of individuals (Sen 1999). Failure to show these differences at the personal level implies that these methods are inappropriate for measuring interpersonal (dis)advantage. The capability approach has thus been adopted for this study because it is multi-dimensional in nature and it allows us to make interpersonal comparisons of dimensions that constitute individuals' wellbeing (as discussed in the next section). The capability approach is a broad normative framework that focuses on 'capabilities,' 'functionings,' 'agency,' and 'conversion factors'; these keystones are presented below.

3.3.1 Wellbeing, capabilities and functionings

Wellbeing is a core concept in the capability approach. It is something which one can achieve and is related to a person's life, that is their success in meeting the 'beings' and 'doings' that they have reason to value (Sen 1984:195). The resources available to a person do not necessarily reflect the quality of life the person has (Sen 1985, 1987). Wellbeing is therefore concerned with different dimensions that enable a person to have a dignified life. When we use wellbeing as the guiding criterium, our focus is on the 'end' that matters most for people to have flourishing lives, and not the resources that are reflective of the 'means.' '(M)eans can only work as fully reliable proxies of people's opportunities to achieve those ends if all people have *the same* capacities or powers to convert those means into equal capability sets' (Robeyns 2017:48) [Italics in the original]. As indicated in the previous sections, students are diverse, and this suggests the need for assessing their opportunities and achievements in accessing, participating and succeeding in their studies. Wolff and De-Shalit (2007:08) refer to these

opportunities and achievements as 'dimensions of wellbeing' as they are indicative of one being advantaged or disadvantaged, e.g. through mental health, income, and social networks. This study identifies these wellbeing dimensions from students' experiences, which I use to assess advantage among individuals.

Other key concepts used in this study are capability and functionings. Capability refers to 'a person's real *freedoms* or o*pportunities* to achieve functionings' (Robeyns 2017:39). The difference between the two is that capabilities refer to what is effectively possible, which means one's freedoms and opportunities to choose from the available options, while functionings are the achievements or what one has realised. Put differently; the former is the potential, and the latter constitute the outcomes (Walker & Unterhalter 2007). Sen (1999:254) observes that:

> …different people can have quite different opportunities for converting income and other primary goods into characteristics of good living and into the kind of freedom valued in human life.

This implies the different effective opportunities students might have to achieve functionings even when they are at the same university. '(F)unctionings are constitutive of human life' (Robeyns 2017:39) and this means that they are the beings and doings that make a good life, e.g. having decent shelter, having transport, and participating in university extra-curricular activities. Hence for us to understand human life we have to understand these functionings. In expanding this view, Carpenter (2009:355) perceives functionings as constituting 'the good life,' that allows people to 'flourish' as human beings and to realise 'personhood.' This indicates that universities should create an environment where students develop capabilities to achieve educational functionings for them to have flourishing lives.

Concerning this matter, Sen introduces the concepts of 'wellbeing freedom' and 'wellbeing achievements' to respectively mean the capabilities and functionings that one has reason to value (Sen 1985). The amount and type of functionings one achieves is determined by the capability set (effective opportunities) one has. For a student to be able to pass their modules (functioning), they should have the opportunity to develop certain academic skills (capability). This is to say that when the university deprives students of some of their capabilities, they are likely to be disadvantaged as they do not have the opportunities to achieve the 'beings' and 'doings' they have reason to value. In this study, I focus on students' wellbeing specifically on their real achievements (functionings or 'beings and doings') and effective opportunities (capabilities) they have a reason to value at the university. What can be stressed here is that

when students lack the capabilities to achieve valued functionings we might consider them as disadvantaged.

3.3.2 Agency

Agency is a concept that is central in the capability approach. It relates to one's power and willingness to influence their environment to have valuable achievements. Thus, for Sen (1999:19), an agent is:

> someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well.

Agency can be 'fleshed out in many different ways' (Robeyns 2017:64), which in this study could mean a students' abilities to make choices, and being proactive in their educational journeys in achieving what they value. What underpins agency is the responsibility of individuals to make decisions and pursue or change their lives in the ways they regard as important. Additionally, agency enables individuals to think of their future and act according to the goal of achieving what they value (Alkire 2002). It is also associated with the exercise of individual rights, questioning unfair systems and injustices, and is normally associated with autonomy and self-determination to change (Cleaver 2007). In the context of higher education, the capability approach views students as having the capacity to make decisions, and to act (or not to act) on the values they want to pursue. For Walker and Unterhalter (2007), however, lacking ability to exercise one's agency is a form of disadvantage. An example of this could be when a student makes decisions and raises their concerns to the university administration through deliberations or protests on matters concerning their lives. University students have demonstrated their agency through engaging in activism through the #FeesMustFall campaign at South African universities in 2015. This example also illustrates the relationship between individual and collective agency.

Sen (1992:57) also refers to 'agency freedom' and 'agency achievements' as factors that are important to consider in measuring relative advantage. 'Agency freedom' describes the effective freedom an individual has to turn their will into action. On the other hand, 'agency achievement' is the accomplishment of that action. I evaluate whether students have the necessary agency freedoms to pursue their educational goals as an indicator of advantage. Therefore students' inability to exercise agency and realise educational achievements can be equated to disadvantage.

3.3.3 Conversion factors

A further core aspect of the capability approach constitutes conversion factors. Conversion factors are personal, social and environmental factors that influence the turning of various commodities (including income) and real opportunities into achievements. Differences in personal attributes, social capital, and institutional elements and the way these relate to each other determine individual ability to turn these commodities into achieved functionings (Sen 1999). By exploring the institutional and social factors, the capability approach is useful in aiding a careful and nuanced understanding of the range of conversion factors affecting individual students' functionings in higher education, as elaborated below:

> it is not sufficient to know the resources a person owns or can use in order to be able to assess the wellbeing that he or she has achieved or could achieve; rather, we need to know much more about the person and the circumstances in which he or she is living (Robeyns 2017:46)

To determine (dis)advantage from diverse students, we need to assess the individual students' characteristics, students' relationships with other students and with lecturers, and the socio-economic and policy environments that affect them. When evaluating educational advantage, we thus need to ask this question:

> Do some people get more opportunities to convert their resources [capitals, talents and agency freedoms] into achievements than others, if so who, how, and why? (Walker & Unterhalter 2007:134)

These are some of the questions I respond to in this study. Personal factors (e.g. gender, talent, and academic skills), social arrangements (e.g. support from peers, family members) and institutional factors (e.g. language issues, teaching arrangements, racism) can promote or constrain an individual's ability to realise certain functionings. The conversion factors affecting capabilities are contextual since each student's opportunities are enabled or constrained differently. Some students are enabled by their conversion factors to have more educational achievements compared to others who are constrained, which contributes to their (dis)advantage. However, conversion factors can be changed by policy to promote students effective participation at the university. By identifying the various conversion factors that disable students from succeeding, we are able to identify areas in need of intervention (Robeyns 2017). Subsequently, we can learn from good practices related to those conversion factors that promote students' success and apply them to those who might need these success-enhancing interventions.

3.4 Incorporating concepts of the capability approach in exploring (dis)advantage in higher education

Although Sen (1992) uses the concepts 'wellbeing freedom,' 'wellbeing achievements,' 'agency freedom' and 'agency achievements,' to evaluate human development, these can be developed into a framework to assess (dis)advantage in higher education (Hart 2012; Vaughan 2007). It is important to note that the term '(dis)advantage' typically promotes deficit-thinking views on students who come from low income backgrounds, especially in the South African context. For the purposes of this study, I do not consider students as inherently advantaged or disadvantaged. Instead, I use the term '(dis)advantage' because of the openess it offers to discuss and frame interpersonal comparisons of valued outcomes.

> '[T]his technical term 'advantage', thus allows us to move the arguments to a higher level of generality or abstraction, since we can focus, for example, on which conditions of interpersonal comparison of advantage [we] need to meet, without having to decide on the exact content of 'advantage'' (Robeyns 2017:25).

Advantage is thus conceptualised as having the opportunities to achieve education goals while having limited opportunities is disadvantage. The implication of the above is that for the diverse students to have more educational achievements (henceforth advantage), universities should provide them with opportunities to do so. In this case, I adopt the framework to evaluate students' experiences at the university, and specifically whether they have flourishing lives as well as the extent to which they are able to succeed. Table 2 presents the framework used in this study.

Table 2: Understanding disadvantage from a capability lens

	Freedoms	Conversion factors	Achievements	(Dis)advantage
Wellbeing	Being able to attend university. Being able to participate in university education e.g. freedoms to aspire, having academic skills, etc.	Personal characteristics e.g. talent, attitude towards schooling. Social factors e.g. family support, schooling, finances. Structural elements e.g. university culture, university teaching, funding policy.	(Educational wellbeing) (e.g. having acquired knowledge and academic skills, passing and graduating, personal development, having social skills).	(*Advantage*) Greater educational wellbeing and increased agency achievements. (*Disadvantage*) Lower educational wellbeing and fewer agency achievements.
Agency	Ability to choose aspects of education valued by the individual. (Ability to make decisions about which university to attend, degree programme, working hard, etc.) .	Family and school background in developing the students' confidence and skills to deal with stressful situations. Pedagogical arrangements in enhancing students' agency. University environment that supports students to actively participate and pursue the things they value e.g. participating in protests.	The contribution of education to valued functionings and capabilities e.g. employment sector, political engagement, helping others.	

Source: Adopted from Vaughan (2007) in Walker and Unterhalter (2007:119)

The framework allows us to focus on the freedoms students possess to attain educational achievements. It also informs us about the conversion factors enabling or constraining students from having freedoms, e.g. the personal characteristics, curriculum, teaching arrangements, gender inequality, and students' special needs as essential areas to focus on when evaluating inequality in education (Unterhalter 2004). When students have increased educational achievements (wellbeing and agency), they are likely to be advantaged. This gives them flourishing lives. The converse is true as fewer educational achievements (wellbeing and agency) contribute to their disadvantage, consequently diminishing the quality of their lives.

Although I use the above framework in evaluating (dis)advantage, a choice had to be made between whether to use either capabilities or functionings, or to make use of both in making interpersonal comparisons to assess (dis)advantage (Hart 2012; Robeyns 2017). This is vital considering that capabilities alone could be less visible when comparing individuals, unlike functionings that reflect what has been achieved. In other words, functionings could be a better evaluative space for individuals' experiences of (dis)advantage as they can be a proxy for the capabilities being measured (Walker & Unterhalter 2007). At the same time, Sen (1992) argues that the use of functionings alone to measure (dis)advantage may yield insufficient information on how resources, opportunities and individual capabilities are distributed. This is considering that students could have achieved the same functioning whilst using a different amount of resources because of personal differences. Using an example of two students who graduated from university, the use of functionings does not give us any information about the resources and real opportunities the two had to achieve the same attainment. It also does not tell us any information about the constraints each one faced during their studies. Because of the need to enrich our understanding of (dis)advantage, I use both capabilities and functionings to evaluate relative (dis)advantage in this study. I compare the functionings that students have, at the same time making an interpersonal comparison of the capabilities extrapolated from their functionings.

3.5 Additional concepts to enrich our understanding of (dis)advantage

Besides the above core capability concepts, I adopt other concepts to complement the above conceptualisation. This improves our definition of (dis)advantage, as these concepts are helpful in exploring how (dis) advantage plays out in students' lives.

3.5.1 Adaptive preferences

Adaptive preferences refer to a psychological state where deprived individuals adjust themselves to restrictive conditions to survive, where they lack the will to challenge the situation, and often think that it is impossible for them to utilise opportunities in future (Sen 1999). The concept is also useful in understanding how women are disadvantaged through gender injustices. Nussbaum gives an example of women who resist developmental interventions, as they are 'happy' with what they have. She remarks that "…it should make us reflect before we conclude that women without options really endorse the lives they lead" (Nussbaum 2000:43). Hence, we should examine whether students are able to exercise agency

in their choices. In this case, the capability approach informs us of how disadvantage is manifested in the lack of student choices resulting in them accepting what they end up doing. For example, a student from a low income family may resort to part-time work so that they can support themselves financially whilst at university even if they are aware that working might consume their much-needed studying time. Thus, students with limited choices and low agency due to adaptive preferences are positioned as disadvantaged, while those with freedoms to make choices could be advantaged.

3.5.2 (In)secure functionings, fertile functionings, clustering of disadvantages and corrosive disadvantage

The study attempts to understand (dis)advantage based on whether students have secure functionings. When assessing (dis)advantage, it is crucial to examine the way in which the achieved functionings are seen as secure, since some students might achieve certain functionings (e.g. psychosocial health) but lose them because of changing circumstances in their lives. This suggests a level of risk inherent to their functionings. Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) explain that individuals are anxious and stressed about the risks to their functionings, thus causing them to disengage from planning their futures. The absence of clear goals reduces personal motivation and this limits their chances of graduating. While insecure functionings could be a disadvantage, those whose functionings are secure are regarded as advantaged.

While 'clustering' and 'corrosive' disadvantage are related in that they can both be persistent and intergenerational, they are distinct. Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) explain that the clustering of disadvantages refers to different levels or forms of disadvantage that come together and worsen an individual's life. Thus, disadvantages can have a cumulative effect on students' lives, which diminishes their opportunities to graduate. On the other hand, 'corrosive' disadvantage is when the causes of the disadvantage are connected to each other and often persist over generations (Wolff & De-Shalit 2007). Both concepts are relevant in interrogating (dis)advantage in the context of South Africa where black students experience intergenerational disadvantage that is linked to former apartheid policies. Southall (2016) explains that although the end of apartheid brought opportunities to some black families, the emerging black middle class is still fragile compared to the white middle class. Even though the black middle class might be able to afford quality schooling for their children, the members of this class struggle

to pay their university expenses[42] (Southall 2016). Clustering and corrosive disadvantages are significant in understanding the different ways that disadvantages are connected, and their multiplier effect on students. On the other hand, the concept illuminates how some students experience advantages that are clustered. In this study, students lacking capabilities and or losing functionings due to either clustered disadvantages or corrosive disadvantages, or both, are viewed as being worse-off. It is, however, the case that most white families' incomes are stable because they have accumulated wealth over generations. Thus, they are able to afford private and former Model C schools[43] and university expenses. Their material resources advantage them to be well prepared for university education, which gives them more opportunities to graduate and access employment. While this is related to Wolff and De-Shalit's concept of 'fertile functioning,' I use the term 'constructive advantage' to refer to the situation where functionings have multiplying effects on advantaging students.

3.5.3 Aspirations

As stated in Chapter 2, aspirations have been conceptualised as playing a central role in (dis)advantaging young people. Appadurai (2004:67) shows the relationship between poverty and the capacity to aspire, and explains that aspirations are created in 'interaction and in the thick of social life.' This implies that individuals have different navigational capacities to realise aspirations as the better-off benefit from social and economic capital, and the experience to dream about their futures (Appadurai 2004). By way of contrast, the aspiration capacities of the poor are thin due to limited social capital and lack of experience. However, increasing the ability to aspire amongst disadvantaged groups is another way of removing the dominant perception that students are in some way deficient. Through raising their access to social, economic and cultural goods, aspirations have a distributive effect, hence they contribute to reducing disadvantage. While Appadurai theorised that the poor have weaker aspiration capacities, Bok (2010) and Atkins (2010) found that poor students have high ambitions but are constrained from realising these aspirations by the environment.

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[42] At the time of the study, NSFAS policy funded students whose family income was less than R120 000 per annum. This excluded the black middle-class families from accessing the funding because their income exceeded the maximum threshold. However, these families could also not afford tuition and other university expenses as most of their parents are employed as teachers and nurses in the public service.

[43] Former Model C schools are historically white schools. These schools are allowed to charge fees to help fund the school, to pay for additional teachers.

In contributing to this debate, Ray (2003) identifies a dual relationship between poverty and low aspirations as each is a result of the other. In his theorisation of aspirations, Ray (2003:01) claims that through the 'aspiration window' individuals can build their aspirations from those people who they compare themselves to. He uses the 'aspiration gap' to explain that when the aspired lifestyle is further away from the current status of the individual, the aspiration gap is huge, meaning that one is less likely to invest in that aspiration (Ray 2003:03). Furthermore, Ray theorises that individuals from societies supporting social mobility are more likely to aspire since they are motivated by other people prospering within that environment, while those from societies with high levels of inequality aspire less, due to the belief that it is not possible to attain their higher aspirations. Ray's assertions of aspirations gives us an understanding of (dis)advantage in that students whose social networks are composed of people with lower status in society, and those perceiving their hopes as being too far away from their current state and not feasible to achieve, are disadvantaged. This means that in the South African context, where there are persistent inequalities, the raising of students' aspirations is critical for social mobility. The study establishes students' aspirations and the fact that those with high hopes are perceived as being advantaged, while the opposite is true.

Using the capability approach, Hart (2012) conceptualises aspirations as being of key importance in the formation of students' capabilities. She notes that aspirations are a 'meta capability' in the sense that they are essential in the development of future capabilities (Hart 2012:99). Therefore, students who can aspire are positioned at an advantage because they are likely to develop more capabilities and have added agency to realise functionings compared to those who do not. Those who do not have aspirations could be disadvantaged due to not having clear goals on what they want to achieve. This relationship between aspirations, capabilities and achieved functionings is presented in Figure 2 below. Hart further (2012) identifies the link between aspirations and adaptive preferences, and explains that adapted preferences can limit students' capacities to aspire. This is when conversion factors can narrow students' horizons, which in this instance results in low aspirations, limited capabilities, and fewer educational functionings. For example, gender may discourage female students to look forward to occupying higher positions in patriarchal societies such as South Africa.

Figure 2: Relationship between aspirations and (dis)advantage from a capabilities approach perspective
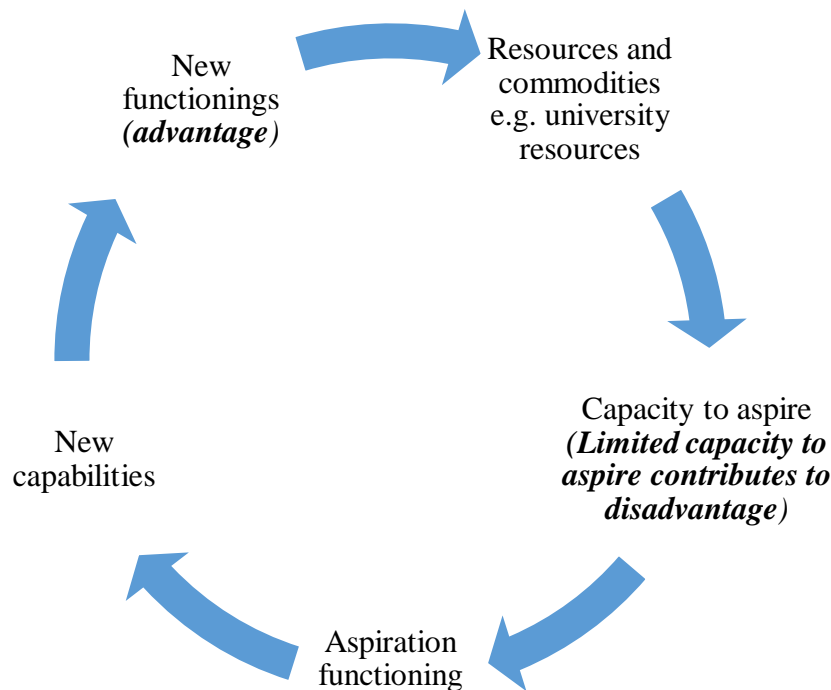
Source: Adapted (Hart 2016:330)

The diagram shows that the aspirational functioning is instrumental in one developing new capabilities and realising more functionings. This is to say that having high aspirations motivates students to utilize the capabilities they have to attain more achievements, which is advantageous to them. However, lacking aspirations could result in students putting little effort into their work (low level of agency) and making fewer achievements hence they become disadvantaged.

3.5.4 Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) introduced the concept of intersectionality from the field of critical race studies where she advocates for the need to consider the multiple oppressions women face. She argues that through power and oppression, black women are subjected to multiple forms of oppression and discrimination in employment, in the home, and through the legal system that fails to recognise the intersectionality of these factors. Although intersectionality was initially used as an advocacy tool, it has been adopted by academics in various fields as an analytical

tool for exploring how people's multiple identities come together in marginalising people. It is through a focus on multiple identities that we are able to establish how people are further disadvantaged as compared to using individual identity (Museus & Griffin 2011). However, Ruiz (2018) is of the view that the concept has been reduced to a social theory of identity by academics, and therefore does not sufficiently help in addressing the multiple forms of oppression caused by colonialism. Although this is the case, she stresses that intersectionality can still offer a robust framework for understanding how individuals experience multiple disadvantages.

Therefore, the present study uses intersectionality to enable us to disassemble the complex and multi-dimensional factors that simultaneously disadvantage students. This is especially important considering the high levels of socio-economic inequality and patriarchy in the country, as indicated in the previous chapters. Investigating how race, class, gender and other social categories come together has the potential to illuminate what (dis)advantage looks like amongst diverse students. This study does so by exploring how the personal, social and institutional conversion factors work together in (dis)advantaging students. Advantage is when conversion factors intersect together in enhancing the formation and expansion of capabilities to achieve an increased number of functionings. On the other hand, these conversion factors can interact to constrain students and form cumulative disadvantages.

The benefit of mainstreaming the intersectionality framework in this study is that it enables us to have an in-depth understanding of (dis)advantage through uncovering the hidden marginalisation that is manifested in students' identities. These nuances might not be revealed using a single axis of identity (Wilson-Strydom et al. 2016). Having discussed the concepts used in this study, and explaining how the different ideas will be used in gaining an understanding of (dis)advantage, the next section proposes certain capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage.

3.6 Capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage

The study proposes certain capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage based on the capability literature in the field of South African higher education space. Robeyns (2003) recommends that a list of such dimensions should be embedded in literature. Though Nussbaum (2000) endorses her list of constitutional guarantees for all people across the world, Sen believes that a list should be context specific through a deliberation process with the

affected groups of people (Sen 1999). This study, therefore, consults diverse students on their experiences of (dis)advantage. Before interviewing students, however, I identified capabilities from various lists: Nussbaum (2000), Walker (2006), Wilson-Strydom (2015), Mutanga and Walker (2015), Calitz (2015), Loots and Walker (2015), and Walker (2016) in developing my own list of capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage (see Appendix A for the various lists). The selection of most of the items on these lists was centred around the focus of student wellbeing. While Nussbaum's list (2000) is philosophical, prescriptive and comprehensive; the other lists are grounded in evidence from student and/or teacher voices, and literature. Based on these lists, this study proposes 'capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage' for university students from theory and from other research findings. These dimensions may have to be adjusted depending on the interview data, and at this stage, the list is a proposed one and not fixed.

3.6.1 Participation and voice

This dimension refers to students having the necessary capabilities to be autonomous, and to make decisions about themselves. Through informed participation, students can fight against unfair university arrangements that may exclude them or are detrimental to them, for example through engaging in protests and speaking out about racism in South Africa (Walker 2016). Without similar environments for participation, some groups can be restricted through these structures, yet women, for example, value equal participation in university activities and having their voices included in the curriculum (Loots & Walker 2015). Regarding pedagogy, there is evidence that participatory teaching methods enhance the learning processes of students who may need to acquire personal learning skills (Seale 2009; Calitz 2015). For example, sessions delivered via a PowerPoint presentation without the lecturer engaging the students may lead to a situation where the lecturer fails to engage their interest. The capability of voice means that individuals are required to participate in developing policies on issues that concern them (Bonvin & Farvaque 2006). This is dependent, however, on individuals' confidence and on whether the environment listens to their voices or not. The voice capability corresponds with Sen's (1999) notions of public deliberations that stress the participation of individuals in the political processes that shape their lives. It is also central to Nussbaum's capability of control over one's environment that recognises individuals as having a voice in the political processes affecting their lives.

Using the participation and voice dimension, student (dis)advantage can be assessed according to whether they have the opportunity to exercise their freedoms to participate in determining policies that shape their futures or not. The participation and voice dimension, therefore, allows us to assess students' opportunities in being able to exercise their agency in bringing about change both in academic and non-academic activities. Moreover, the significance of the emotional health capability (see section 3.6.5) as an aspect of the dimension of participation and voice is that it affects students' agency in pursuing the things they value, including their abilities to learn.

3.6.2 Affiliation

The affiliation dimension includes social relations and respect, dignity, and recognition. This capability constitutes students' ability to form social networks with their lecturers and mentors for support (Walker 2006), especially for the first-generation university students who leave behind former social relationships when they migrate to stay at the university campus (Wilson-Strydom 2015). This corresponds with Nussbaum's affiliation dimension, as the capability of humans to show concern to others and being able to join social groups (Nussbaum 2000). The significance of the dimension of affiliation is also seen in interactions across race, gender and ethnic groups. For example, in her study investigating racism, Walker (2016) shows that both white and black students become thoughtful and aware of other students being different from themselves after undergoing a leadership for change programme. Having a sense of belonging at the university is an essential aspect of affiliation. Nussbaum sums it up that;

> protecting this capability [affiliation] means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation…" (Nussbaum 2000:79).

The dimension of respect, dignity and recognition addresses the ways in which students treat each other and how academic staff perceive them regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, race, and language. This refers to students' valuing of being respected by others and by lecturers (Wilson-Strydom 2015). The capability dimension is relevant in a university where the environment is characterised by remnants of racism, sexism and class differences. For example, discrimination can be worse for black women who are discriminated against based on their gender as well as race (Walker & Loots 2015). Concerning language, most black students come from schools where English is spoken less frequently, yet the opportunity to use the language of instruction proficiently is instrumental for enhancing students' respect and recognition (Wilson-Strydom 2015). The choosing of one's identity is another aspect that falls under this dimension, which is related to the 'critical awareness of race, racism and history

capability' in Walker & Loots (2015) that emphasises students' abilities to understand how they participate in and influence racism in their daily lives (this is related to the intellectual dimension below).

The affiliation dimension is therefore instrumental in assessing students' abilities, social relations and their respect, recognition, and dignity as aspects of their wellbeing. The pivotal role of support systems to negotiate university pathways can be assessed through student opportunities to form friendships. Being respected and recognised by others, regardless of one's race, identity, language, gender, and class, is an important aspect of affiliation that can either promote or inhibit students from progressing equally during their studies.

3.6.3 Intellectual growth

The intellectual dimension incorporates capabilities that are associated with students' freedoms to gain knowledge, their ability to learn and think critically, educational resilience and the way they reason to make decisions on matters that affect their lives before, during and after university. In the higher education context, Walker (2006) suggests that practical reasoning involves students' ability to reflect and build on their lives through critical and reasoned decisions. Wilson-Strydom (2015) also views this capability in the context of opportunities for students to make reasoned decisions as they complete schooling and enter university. However, this capability can be diminished in the face of unequal participation of students through the 'banking system' in education[44] (Calitz 2015). Even though, Nussbaum (2002b; 2010) argues that this capability is instrumental in enhancing students' abilities to critique unequal conditions.

Concerning students' transition into universities, the knowledge capability relates to students being cognitively prepared to gain university knowledge (Wilson-Strydom 2015). Calitz (2015) stresses the role of students in having the necessary knowledge and skills to speak and participate in research. Female students view education as empowering and enabling to get employment opportunities together with the opportunity to bring improvement to their families and their communities (Walker & Loots 2015). This dimension can be used to assess various opportunities students have to access multiple forms of knowledge.

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[44] Freire (2006) [1970] uses the metaphor 'banking system' to describe and critique the traditional models in education that regard students as mere recipients of knowledge. Students are positioned not to contribute actively in their class, which limits their opportunities to effective learning.

Finally, the intellectual dimension also includes learning disposition, which refers to students having the 'curiosity and desire for learning' (Wilson-Strydom 2015:120). There is evidence that students' ability to learn declines when their will to learn is low (Wilson-Strydom 2015). Related to this, is the capability of 'student research,' which stresses the preference and willingness of students to learn through research (Calitz 2015). The intellectual dimension is valuable in that it incorporates various capabilities that will be used to assess students' opportunities to attain different forms of knowledge, the ability of students to make reasoned decisions about their future, having the skills and willingness to learn and to conduct research independently, and to think critically about the knowledge they encounter in classes and in their everyday lives.

3.6.4 Economic stability

The economic capability is valuable due to it enabling the expansion of other capabilities. For example, Sen (1999) and Therbon (2013) identify resources to be critical in the realisation of other capabilities. Though looking at income only is insufficient, having basic financial resources is a vital condition for other capabilities to be realised. Therbon (2013) theorises that an increase in a person's resources to a certain threshold leads to expansion of the existential dimension, which refers to personhood aspects such as respect, confidence, and participation, thus leading to more capabilities. Thus, the absence of the necessary economic capability amongst students leads to disadvantage, while having it together with agency gives students a greater chance to expand other capabilities. Figure 3 below shows this relationship.

Figure 3: Relationship between resources and existential inequality
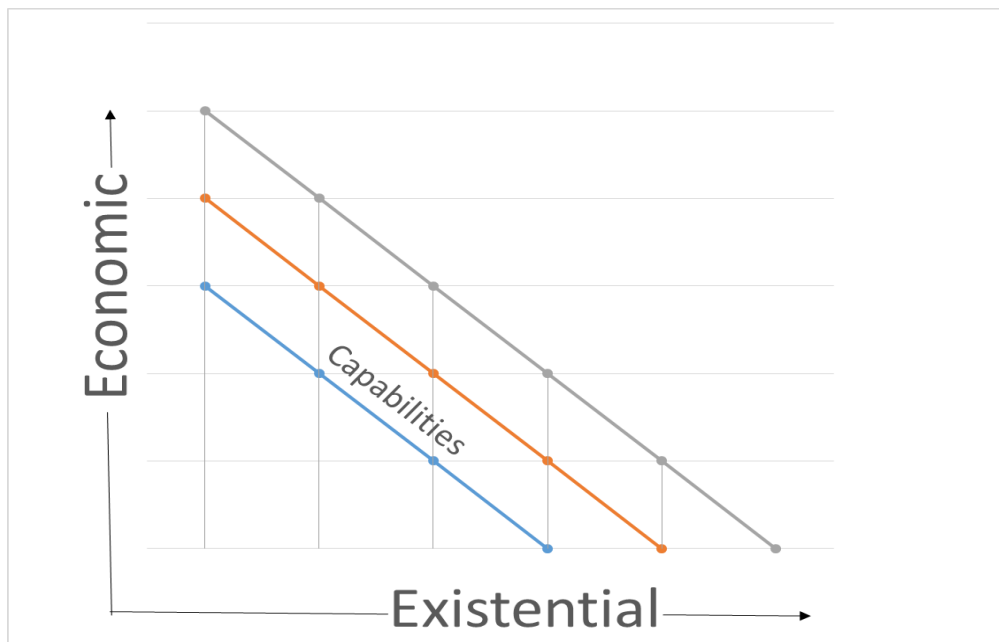
Source: Walker forthcoming.

What can be deduced from the diagram above is that the more income one has to achieve certain threshold and personhood (existential) aspects, the more capabilities one has.

The economic freedom dimension can be viewed in two ways: a) through students' finances; b) by focusing on economic gains students look forward to having after graduation (which is related to aspirations). Unequal participation in higher education has also been attributed to students' socio-economic backgrounds as students worry about how they will be able to afford registration fees and basic commodities. It is essential to consider this capability as lack of it affects the realisation of other functionings by students. Additionally, students value income gains through getting employed after completing their degree programmes (Walker & Fongwa 2017).

3.6.5 Socio-psychological and mental health

The socio-psychological and mental health capability is central in determining individuals' abilities to do things they value (Robeyns 2003; Wilson-Strydom 2015; Calitz 2015). Fear and anxiety diminish students' freedoms to learn and participate in university activities during their first year of university (Wilson-Strydom 2015). Partly as a result of the poor quality of schooling, first-year students often lack confidence, yet this capability is critical for learning to

occur (Wilson-Strydom 2015; Walker 2006). Calitz (2015) illuminates the capability of socio-psychological and mental health as associated with anxieties due to lack of resources for students to maintain their lives at university. The significance of this capability is that the absence of socio-psychological and mental health compromises students' abilities to learn. What the dimension emphasises is students' abilities to have lives that are free from academic, financial, and social pressures. The dimension is significant for assessing whether students have the mental wellbeing and emotional freedoms that enable them to focus on their studies.

3.6.6 Having aspirations

The relevance of the aspiration dimension is that it is instrumental in the formation of capabilities and the ultimate realisation of functionings. This is especially true given that students' motivation to graduate is enhanced through them looking forward to achieving their dreams. Their ability to aspire and change their lives helps students to come up with goals and to determine ways of achieving them. Unlike the belief that students from the working class have low capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004), evidence suggests that low income students have high aspirations. Mutanga and Walker (2015) reveal that students with disabilities wanted to get jobs after graduating, start their families and acquire material assets such as housing. Additionally, although structural factors constrained them, migrant youth looked forward to enrolling in universities as a means of getting better paid jobs (Walker & Mukwananzi 2015). This suggests that youth do indeed have dreams about better futures. Foregrounding aspirations in investigating (dis)advantage is helpful in understanding how students from all backgrounds can aspire and have the agency to work towards attaining their dreams. I view students with aspirations to change their lives as an advantage as this fosters their agency to graduate. Table 3 below summarises these capability- inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage.

Table 3: Proposed capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage and their respective functionings based on literature

Capability-inspired dimension of (dis)advantage	Functioning
Participation and voice	Students participating equally in class
	Students participating in non-academic activities
	Taking leadership roles
	Having gender fairness
	Being emotionally stable
Affiliation	Having friends and belonging to groups
	Belonging to the university
	Being able to communicate with lecturers
	Being respected equally regardless of race, gender and class
	Being able to understand and speak a language of instruction
Intellectual growth	Acquiring valued knowledge from their studies
	Passing the examinations
	Making reasoned decisions in everyday life
	Being open-minded in conversing with diverse knowledge
	Being able to think critically
	Having adapted to the university environment
	Women being empowered as individuals to transform their families and their community
Economic freedom	Being well nourished
	Having safe accommodation
	Accessing other basics goods to live a dignified life
	Securing a job after studies
Aspiration	Thinking about getting a well-paid job in future

3.7 Critique of approaching disadvantage from a capability lens

The preceding sections reveal that the capability approach provides a framework with which to better understand student (dis)advantage for several reasons. Firstly, the approach focuses on individuals as compared to families or communities (Robeyns 2016). Nussbaum (2000) refers to this as ethical individualism, when individuals' freedoms are preserved and respected. Secondly, the approach views people as the 'end' by evaluating their wellbeing, as opposed to the use of income to measure the 'means' of wellbeing. Thirdly, the capabilities approach allows us to understand student diversity in how their identities, e.g. race, gender, and social

class, intersect to form (dis)advantage (Robeyns 2005, 2017). This is through focusing on the full range of capabilities and functionings that individuals have, which affect their capacities to turn resources into achievements. Finally, the capability approach focuses on the above-mentioned conversion factors, hence we are able to assess the barriers that inhibit students from achieving the things they have reason to value in education (Walker & Unterhalter 2007). The approach is flexible in linking individual students with their socio-economic background, their relationships, and structural arrangement. Given the diverse nature of the student body at the university concerning preparedness, social class, and race, the approach offers an illuminating evaluative framework with which to understand student wellbeing multi-dimensionality.

Though the capability approach has great potential for understanding (dis)advantage, it is criticised for not being a complete theory. Because of that, one needs to complement it with other theories to understand the underlying power relations inherent in inequality (Robeyns 2005; Carpenter 2009). Although different approaches can be adopted to complement it, this might be done superficially, consequently failing to uncover the broad drivers of inequality. Additionally, Sen (1999) under-theorised power and inequality structures in a capitalist world and their role in improving the quality of people's lives (Dean 2009; Carpenter 2009). This is relevant considering the role that market expansion plays and how this contributes to oppression of labour (Bagchi 2000). Another critique of the approach is that it has a greater focus on individual liberties while ignoring groups. Through this, it distances individuals from the existing power relations and where their identities and life chances are constituted (Dean 2009). Despite these weaknesses, I operationalise the approach for the reason that it provides a robust framework for understanding student (dis)advantage and because it can expose power imbalances.

3.8 Conclusion: towards social justice in higher education

The starting point of this chapter adopts the stance that diverse students in South African universities are unequally and hence unfairly positioned to have opportunities to access, participate and succeed in universities. A theory of social justice should then focus on the different opportunities these students do indeed have. Although theorists differ on how to operationalise social justice (e.g. John Rawls 1971; Amartya Sen 1999; Martha Nussbaum 2004), they agree on the values and principles of what constitutes social justice. Based on these theories of fairness and equity, inclusion and redistribution of goods and services are some of the aspects of what constitutes social justice. Central to Rawls' theory of justice as fairness

(1971), is the distribution of goods and services to the marginalised people. This has stimulated debates on how to achieve social justice. Sen (1999) criticises Rawls' theory of social justice as it is a utility-based measure of a person's advantage. According to Sen, a theory of social justice should evaluate the freedoms and effective opportunities people have and not the resources, which are the means. Related to this is Nussbaum's (2002a; 2004) conception of social justice that stresses the idea that all people should have a fully human life based on dignity and human needs, this being achieved through their participation in the processes that matter for their lives. This study adopts a human development approach and uses a capability framework as a theory of social justice in evaluating (dis)advantage (as explained in the preceding sections).

Some of the above principles and values of social justice have been enshrined in the South African constitution of 1996 and are reflected in legislation and policies as indicated in Chapter 1. Underpinning policy in higher education are the three primary goals, these being the need to produce skilled graduates for economic growth, personal development, and socially responsible citizens. I thus use these pillars as an adjudicating framework for evaluating (dis)advantage in this study. Bok (2006) explains that one of the goals of higher education is to prepare students for employment by equipping them with knowledge and skills for specific professions. He further observes that universities should produce graduates who are creative, and who have critical thinking and communication skills. However, Walker and McLean (2013) comment that these goals are associated with the instrumental part of higher education that prioritise universities to produce graduates for economic growth. Regarding that, Nussbaum (2010) criticises education models that are based on economic growth models for failing to produce graduates who have the necessary critical thinking skills to participate in the political process in their countries, to recognise and respect citizens, and to think reasonably about life. This means that universities should develop graduates that are empathetic, able to understand diversity and can fit into the global world (Walker 2006; Nussbaum 2002b). Advantage is thus conceptualised as having the opportunities to achieve these education goals, while disadvantage is having limited opportunities to do so. The implication of the above is that for diverse students to attain more educational achievements (henceforth advantage), universities should provide them with the necessary opportunities.

To conclude, this chapter has argued that relative advantage can be assessed through evaluating the wellbeing of students, which is reflective of people's quality of life. This is in contrast to

the use of utility-based approaches that give importance to the use of resources as a measure of advantage. In the next chapter, I explain the methodological process followed in carrying out this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology for this study and the rationale for adopting it. It commences by justifying the selection of the study site, followed by an outline of the qualitative research approach, a case study strategy and the research method (semi-structured interviews). It further goes on to identify the participants and explain how they were selected. The practical steps that were taken in the data collection process and the challenges encountered during the process are also elaborated. This is followed by a presentation of the data analysis process, the limitations of the methodology used in this study, and the steps taken to enhance the validity of the findings. In the process of doing so, I also show how the methodology contributes to producing socially just research in assessing (dis)advantage in higher education.

Before narrowing the discussion down to the methodological aspects, I reiterate the research questions informed by the literature review and the conceptual framework in Chapters 2 and 3, even though an initial outline has already been done in Chapter 1. This study aims to explore diverse students' perceptions and experiences of (dis)advantage at the University of the Free State (UFS). It addresses the following research questions:

1. How do students understand advantage and disadvantage?
2. What are students' concrete experiences of advantage and disadvantage in relation to their histories, lives and higher education specifically?
3. What are students' effective opportunities for success at university?
4. What are the implications of these findings for promoting an equal and just university environment, fairer outcomes for students, and wider and deeper student capability sets?

4.2 Study site

The University of the Free State (UFS) was selected as the study site for pragmatic reasons, on account of the researcher's proximity to the institution, which facilitated easy access to the study participants. The selection of the UFS as the site of study was also influenced by the diverse nature of the student body, as this was vital for capturing different experiences and perceptions of (dis)advantage. This was deemed crucial in being able to provide a nuanced

definition of the term (dis)advantage. Another factor that partly influenced the decision was the evidence of continuing racism at the institution as manifested by the violence that broke out at a rugby match at the university's Shimla Park[45] in 2016. This raised questions about whether the university provides equal learning conditions for all students to complete their studies successfully.

4.3 Qualitative research design

The study employed qualitative research, which seeks to understand people's behaviours, attitudes, and cultures and why these are the way they are. Regarding qualitative methodology, Creswell (2013:32) observes that:

> The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in participants' setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.

What this means is that qualitative methodology gives attention to individuals' meaning in their natural settings. Furthermore, the qualitative research design allows a close relationship between participants and the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln 2011). I used the methodology to examine student (dis)advantage as a way of interrogating students' experiences within their natural setting, namely the UFS.

As this study explored students' experiences of and their perspectives on (dis)advantage, a quantitative study was deemed less appropriate. A qualitative approach is applicable because it enables the construction of meanings from how participants interpret their lives with regard to the notion of (dis)advantage. Within qualitative methodology paradigms, individuals interpret events subjectively, meaning that their multiple viewpoints are valued (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Crotty 1998). Through that, the methodology permits the researcher to be open to different and multiple meanings instead of being limited to only a small spectrum of ideas (Creswell 1998; Creswell 2008; Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Through this methodology I was able to gather students' diverse perspectives of what constitutes (dis)advantage and this contributed to achieving a more nuanced definition of the term.

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[45] The Shimla incident occurred at the UFS during a rugby match when violence erupted between white spectators and black protestors. The incident led to more protests and was marked as racist and led to temporary closure of the university.

Qualitative methodology further allows us to recognise individuals' histories and cultures in the understanding of (dis)advantage. Holliday (2002) is of the view that qualitative research contextualises a study within a setting and this gives the researcher the opportunity to assess all the possible social variables. It allows the connection between students' diverse backgrounds, their university experiences, and the institutional culture. I examined students' experiences of (dis)advantage within their social, economic and schooling backgrounds, and within the university environment. This contributed to gaining a deeper understanding of how (dis)advantage plays out amongst students during their studies.

A qualitative methodology further provides rich and dense accounts of a phenomenon. The methodology incorporates:

> the meanings, the feelings, the sense of the lived that cannot be measured and thus drawn into statistical manipulations (Schostak 2002:80).

These particulars can be obtained more accurately using qualitative research. Thus, Denzin and Lincoln (2000:10) identify some of these benefits as, 'emotionality, personal responsibility, and multi-voice text and dialogues with subjects.' These details enrich understandings of (dis)advantage as the methodology puts into perspective participants' actions, emotions and feelings surrounding their (dis)advantage. As opposed to focusing on objectivity and breadth in quantitative methodology, a qualitative study helps to interrogate the phenomenon under investigation, i.e. (dis)advantage, in depth. By employing questions such as 'what,' 'how' and 'why,' a thick description of a phenomenon can be obtained (Creswell 1998:17). Capturing the subjects' feelings and emotions not only enriches the data collected but also helps in providing a context for interpreting the data, which contributes trustworthy conclusions. Thus, on account of its strengths in gathering detailed accounts of participants' experiences, the qualitative methodology was deemed most appropriate for this study.

This study also adopted a qualitative methodology for the additional reason that limited research has been conducted on the dismantling of '(dis)advantage' in higher education using the capabilities approach. This is supported by Creswell (2013) and Morse (1991) who maintain that a qualitative methodology is most applicable when variables within the topic are less clear, when the subject has not been explored with the target group, and when the theoretical framework has not been used to investigate the topic with regards to the same target group. I investigated student (dis)advantage using a capability framework; a theme which has not received prior research attention. This also helped to determine complex relationships

within a theoretical framework and the area of study, as highlighted by Marshall and Rossman (1995) who observe that sophisticated relationships can be addressed using a qualitative methodology. In this research, I established how the capabilities approach can be employed in evaluating student (dis)advantage.

4.4 A case study strategy

This study adopted a case study approach to understand student (dis)advantage. Stake (1995:xi) defines a case study as a:

> …study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances.

Thus, in a case study attention is given to the study of a single case, which is a bounded system. Another essential feature of a case study is that the phenomenon is examined in its natural setting (Yin 2004), and this implies that it can be used together with a qualitative methodology. This study not only focuses on a single case, which is the university, but also on multiple cases of students within the university to enable interpersonal comparisons of students' experiences of (dis)advantage. Examining (dis)advantage using multiple cases or 'embedded subcases' of students makes this study complex rather than simple (Yin 2012:07).

Although a case has specific boundaries, some cases have no clear boundaries between the case and their context. The case study approach is useful when one intends to include contextual factors in the analysis as they are relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Stake 2000; Yin 2003; Baxter & Jack 2008; Denzin & Lincoln 2011). Concerning this, Stake (1995: xii) explains that:

> The qualitative researcher emphasizes episodes of nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, the wholeness of the individual.

To gain an understanding of intricate relationships within their settings constitutes one of the characteristics of the case study. Thus, the case study approach was helpful in understanding student (dis)advantage considering the absence of a clear distinction between the context in which (dis)advantage was found to occur, that is, the social arrangements within the university, and the broader society.

Another important gain from using a case study approach is that it allows an in-depth investigation of the complex nature of (dis)advantage through conducting a rigorous exploration of the views and experiences of (dis)advantage at the UFS. The approach is used when the 'how' and 'why' questions need to be addressed (Yin 2003; Baxter & Jack 2008), allowing a 'thick description' of the phenomenon (Stake 2000:439). Furthermore, the case study approach enables the building of meanings from how participants interpret their lives through eliciting multiple perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Crotty 1998). Simons (2009:23) sums up that a case study:

> …document(s) multiple perspectives, explore(s) contested viewpoints, demonstrate(s) the influence of key actors and interaction between them in telling a story of the programme or action. It can explain why things have happened.

In this instance, a case study approach was instrumental in obtaining a pluralist and nuanced understanding of student (dis)advantage at the UFS.

Yin (2004:03) is of the view that a case study strategy 'aims to produce a first-hand understanding of people or events,' thus enabling us to explore (dis)advantage conceptually amongst students. This means that the case study strategy has the potential to contribute to providing accurate descriptions of how the capability approach can be operationalised. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) echo this notion through observing that a case study is effective when one needs to operationalise a theory accurately. Since this study sought to operationalise the capabilities approach in understanding (dis)advantage, a case study strategy enabled us to have a strong conceptualisation of (dis)advantage through focusing on a single case university, but multiple student cases (all the students interviewed). In this way, students' opportunities, functionings, their agency role, and the conversion factors promoting or constraining their freedoms were understood in-depth, consequently adding validity to the conceptualisation.

4.5 Participants: sample size and selection criteria

I interviewed 26 honours-level and final-year undergraduate students from four faculties, i.e. Economics and Management Sciences, Agricultural and Natural Sciences, Humanities and Education. These students were selected from the following departments: Agricultural Economics (n=7), Psychology (n=5), Political Studies and Governance (n=5), Commerce (n=5), and the School of Education (n=4). I purposively selected the above departments to

ensure that the sample was aligned according to the students' educational backgrounds, race, and gender. The undergraduate student composition for the Agricultural Economics department stood at approximately 49.8% black and 50.2% white; School of Education (77.6% black and 22.4% white); Psychology (81.7% black and 18.3% white); Political Studies and Governance (95.9% black and 4.1% white), and finally Commerce (79.9% black and 20.1% white) (UFS 2016). While Agricultural Economics had 37.2% female students, the other departments had a majority of female students; Political Studies and Governance 53.9%, Psychology 69.6%, School of Education 68.3%, and Commerce 55.7% (UFS 2016). These statistics show the diversity of students within these departments according to race and gender. The sampling of students from diverse backgrounds benefited the study in that multiple perspectives and experiences were gathered. The demographic characteristics of the sampled students are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Sampled students by department, race and gender

Department	No. of participants	Race			Gender	
		Black	*White*	*Coloured*	*Male*	*Female*
Politics and Governance	5	4	0	1	2	3
Commerce	5	5	0	0	1	4
School of Education	4	5	0	0	2	2
Psychology	5	5	0	0	0	5
Agricultural Economics	7	3	4	0	6	1
	26	21	4	1	11	15

I initially intended to interview honours students only for the reason that they had already completed their undergraduate studies and were thus able to reflect on and provide complete accounts of their undergraduate experiences. Choosing honours students, however, would mean that this group was relatively more successful in that it would have excluded non-completers and dropouts, and this was accounted for during analysis. After not being able to reach the desired sample size from amongst the honours students, I recruited final-year students from the School of Education after discovering that the department did not have campus-based honours students for that year, which thus made them inaccessible to the researcher. I also recruited one final-year student studying Politics and Governance when the sample size could

not be reached from amongst the honours group in that department. Recruiting final-year students from the same departments, however, did not affect the analysis in any way as it improved the amount of the data sources and the diversity of the data collected.

Another challenge that I encountered was to obtain a diverse group based on race, since there were no white students who indicated a willingness to participate in the study. I eventually drew white participants from the department of Agricultural Economics and this resulted in the oversampling of the department (7 students as opposed to the initially planned 5). I did this to improve the representation of the white students from the department. However, these volunteering students were all males, which resulted in the absence of white female students from the sample. These low levels of willingness to participate in the study could have been a result of the perceived sensitivity of the topic, which involved race issues. As is known, 'whom we are' can influence 'who we want to talk to' especially concerning perceived sensitive topics (Farquha & Das 1999:4-5). This is especially true in the context of the UFS where the topic is sensitive given the recurrence of racial incidents. While race could also have been an overall barrier for white students to participate, gender might have also negatively affected the willingness of the white female students to be interviewed. Although Farquha and Das (1999) suggest that matching the researcher's gender and race to those of the participants can improve the sample size, I was not able to employ this strategy as I was the study's sole interviewer.

In addition to interviewing students, I gathered data from seven key informants to understand what they thought student (dis)advantage entailed. These participants were recruited from the university staff and Student Representative Council (SRC). The interviews complemented the data gathered from students on their perspectives and experiences of disadvantage. Interviews were conducted with the following university staff members: a Member responsible for student affairs, a Member responsible for academic affairs, a Member responsible for student welfare, and one Head of Department. On the other hand, the SRC members responsible for student affairs, finance and transformation were also interviewed. These key informants were purposively selected to participate in the study due to their role in student affairs. Concerning the selection of key informants, Given (2008) stresses the notion that participants have different positions within a community, and as such some are more knowledgeable than others on specific issues. Therefore, I chose those who were conversant with student affairs. While the selection of these key informants was primarily purposive, the Head of Department from the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences was conveniently selected from the sampled

departments based on his availability and willingness to participate in this study. This is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Sampled university staff and SRC members

Participant	Position	Total
University Staff	Member responsible for student welfare	1
	Member responsible for academic affairs	1
	Member responsible for student affairs	1
	Head of Department	1
Student Representative Council (SRC)	Head of SRC	1
	Finance portfolio	1
	Transformation portfolio	1
		7

I considered that a sample size of 33 participants (students, university staff, and SRC members) was sufficient for this study. This marked the saturation point when new interviews were no longer adding further insights to the topic under investigation (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Although there is debate on whether it is possible to determine the saturation point based on the interviews collected (Mason 2010), I stopped data collection after realising that the themes obtained from the data were being repeated and were not yielding much new information. This sample size corresponds with findings from a meta-analysis of PhD research studies that revealed that 15 interviews constitutes the minimum number for qualitative enquiries (Bertaux 1981:35; Mason 2010:03). However, other scholars are of the view that the number of interviews to conduct depends on the topic, its scope and the theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Morse 2000). A total of 33 interviews to explore student (dis)advantage was thus deemed an acceptable and practical sample size given the time available to the researcher for collecting data.

4.6 Data collection

4.6.1 Semi-structured interviews

I made use of semi-structured interviews to gather data from participants in this study. An interview is a conversation that is research-related and is aimed at addressing specific research questions (Chardwick, Bahr & Albrecht 1984; Kvale 1996). A semi-structured interview can, therefore, be defined as:

…an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale 1996:05).

Semi-structured interviews have structured, open-ended questions which do not necessarily have to be followed to the letter (Saldana 2009; Kvale 1996). In semi-structured interviews, participants have the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions in the manner they choose (see Appendix B for interview schedules). This means that the research method gives participants the space to determine how they want to respond to the questions depending on what they perceive is important.

Semi-structured interviews involve holding conversations with participants to understand their lives, feelings and what they anticipate in their futures. Thus, they embrace the construction of knowledge through discussions between the interviewer and the interviewee. During conversation, participants not only respond to questions but reflect on their experiences and thoughts in interpreting their world. The process is empowering when the findings are used to improve people's lives (Kvale 1996), which fits well with this study's goal of improving students' lives at the university by expanding their freedoms through and in higher education. After the interviews, some participants indicated that they felt encouraged to pursue their educational goals because of having talked about their lived experiences and the challenges they faced. It can, therefore, be argued that semi-structured interviews are suitable for understanding the social (in)justices that students experience.

As semi-structured interviews involve a conversation between two people, both the interviewer and participant act upon and influence each other. During the interview, the participant might rethink and change their position in the way they understand their lived experiences. Concomitantly, there can be reactions including negative or positive feelings, emotions, curiosity, anxiety, and in some cases 'defence mechanisms' from both the interviewer and the participant (Kvale 1996:11). Kvale (1996) argues that these dynamics are not necessarily sources of bias, but that they should be recognised in the data interpretation through reflexivity as the researcher considers how he or she might have influenced the research process. Thus, through reflexivity, I considered these dynamics as presented in Section 4.9.

Another benefit of using the semi-structured interview format in this study is that it allowed me to gather a dense account of students' experiences of (dis)advantage and this helped to identify their valued capabilities. Semi-structured interviews elicit detailed information about a situation in addition to extensively exploring complex issues (Chadwick et al. 1984). Concerning that, May (1997:108) asserts that qualitative interviews, "…yield rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, aspirations, attitudes and feelings," which is an attribute necessary for the exploration of (dis)advantage. Morse (1999) stresses the need to observe non-verbal cues when carrying out interviews as a way of further understanding the way participants give meaning to their world. Furthermore, due to the structured nature of the questions, the method enables interpersonal comparison of (dis)advantage amongst participants. This was deemed the most appropriate data collection method for this study, where different students' subjective interpretations of (dis)advantage were compared, and where students' voices were understood in relation to each other, and against the institutional perspective of (dis)advantage.

Semi-structured interviews allow participants to narrate their experiences from the way they understand them. Marshall and Case (2010) maintain that through the narrative form, semi-structured interviews constitute the most applicable method in exploring students' experiences of (dis)advantage as they link students' life experiences and their education. They further argue that the method allows participants to narrate their experiences in a story form, which is the best way of understanding human experience. More importantly, the dialogical nature of the semi-structured interview allowed me to probe unclear responses. May (1997) echoes this assertion and highlights that the openness in the semi-structured interviews promotes flexibility. While participants have the freedom to respond in the way they want, I was at liberty to pursue certain leads depending on the participants' responses.

4.6.2 Recruitment of participants, interview process, and ethical considerations

Two pilot interviews were conducted with students to improve the interview schedule through exploring the questions before the actual data collection process. Based on the feedback I got from the participants, I rephrased some questions in order for these to be more sensitive to the different student identities and backgrounds. At the same time I rearranged the sequence of the questions in the interview schedule to ensure the smooth flow of the interview. I also checked for the precision of the questions in relationship to the study's objectives. Estimating the average time the interviews took was another aspect that the pilot interviews assisted me with, in that it was soon established that each interview took approximately one and a half hours to

complete. This was useful for planning purposes, i.e. when I made appointments with students and the university staff members. Equally important, piloting the interview schedule provided an opportunity for me to identify other potential challenges that could be associated with the data collection protocol before the main data collection. For example, I realised the need to spend more time building rapport before the interviews to gain the participants' trust and this contributed to them being comfortable about having their experiences, considering the sensitive nature of the topic.

In recruiting the students, I visited classes for the sampled departments at the end of their lectures, explaining the study to them before inviting them to participate. This was coupled with issuing information sheets to them bearing my contact details. Interested participants contacted me before appointments were made on the agreed date, time and venue. This ensured voluntary and informed participation of respondents in the study. The challenge that I faced through using this strategy was the absence of white students from the pool of students who were willing to participate. This was fundamental in ensuring that diverse participants had their views represented in the study. To address this challenge, I employed a snowballing technique by asking one white student that I had interviewed to reach others from the same class. Edwards (1996) contends that besides our identities (as mentioned in Section 4.5), the way we approach participants does indeed matter. In this case, the snowballing technique helped to build trust on the side of the white male participants who were later interviewed.

Strong research ethics were observed throughout the research process, including the data collection process. Ethics are moral principles guiding research with the interest of protecting participants and ensuring the integrity of the study. The study sought approval from the Economic and Management Sciences Ethics Committee at the UFS and permission to interview the students and university staff was sought from the UFS' authorities (see Appendix C). Ethical considerations were adhered to, firstly through obtaining *voluntary and informed participation.* Each participant was asked to read an information sheet explaining the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study before signing a consent form (see Appendix D for the information and consent forms). Their rights to decline to participate or to discontinue participation in the study were also observed. Secondly, ethical soundness was obtained through committing to preserve subjects' *privacy and confidentiality,* by storing participants' information in a safe place where it was not accessible to other people. Additionally, the

information gathered was not shared with other people. Findings of the study were not linked to specific participants, and this was achieved through the use of pseudonyms during analysis and writing. Finally, the principle of *no harm to participants* was also adhered to in that no harm was brought to participating students and staff members. While this is true, two of the participants wept during the interviews after reflecting on their past experiences. This reveals emotional distress experienced by these participants, which prompted me to temporarily terminate the interviews and refer them to the university social worker for counselling. However, the participants elected to continue with the interview a few minutes after these shows of emotion, presumably since they felt some relief from the stress.

The interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder during data collection. This helped to minimise data loss as whole conversations were captured. Concerning this matter, Simons (2009:52) highlights that the significant strength of recording the interviews is that it 'ensures accuracy of reportage ….' Furthermore, this method gave me the flexibility to capture the nuances of the interview, and the opportunity to probe into responses that were imprecise, which are both central aspects of qualitative methods. The audio-recorded data were transcribed verbatim to minimise loss of information. To ensure accuracy and completeness of the transcription process, the transcripts were read carefully.

4.7 Data analysis procedure

All transcriptions were coded before data analysis using open coding, descriptive and process coding, with this being done separately for each group of participants (students, university staff and SRC members). Open coding involved going through all the transcripts line by line, ascribing meaning to the data. I did this by going through all the transcribed interviews on hard copies, assigning codes and establishing how these were linked. I also merged these codes to identify the emerging themes. This was done to construct more accurate, complex and denser themes, and to link each sub-theme to a theme respectively (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Furthermore, open coding familiarised me with the realities of the participants and gave me the opportunity to feel the concepts in connection with the study's objectives (Gubrium & Holstein 2002). Following open coding, all transcripts were electronically imported into QSR NVivo 11 (Melbourne), which is a software for qualitative data analysis. Descriptive and process coding followed. I used descriptive coding to code various topics and contents within the text, which

helped to arrange the data into chunks (Saldana 2009). I adopted and further developed some of the codes and themes that I had identifed through open coding. At this stage descriptive coding was informed by the capability approach but the emerging codes were not over determined by the theoretical framework. The codes that emerged included the following: academic progress, university teaching, accommodation, basic living needs, change, concern over others, decision-making, family, fitting in/not fitting in, future plans, funding, hard work, opportunity, race, policy, perception of disadvantage, gender, language, leisure at university, personal change, part time, student protests, schooling, social networks, transport etc. Parallel to the open and descriptive coding and analysis processes, I summarised all the student interviews, identified the capabilities that each student had a reason to value, and the conversion factors that enabled and constrained them to complete their studies successfully (see Appendices E and F for synopsis of the summarised interviews). While the NVivo software assisted with a perspective of (dis)advantage from across all the transcripts, summarising the interviews enhanced the rigour of the data analysis through establishing how (dis)advantage plays out at the individual level before building a holistic picture derived from the voices of all the participants.

Data were thematically analysed through identifying common themes from the transcripts. Themes are meaningful chunks of data in response to the research questions, and they reflect a recurring pattern of responses from participants (Braun & Clarke 2006). What followed was the development of categories from text or units made up of topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, and feelings based on the capability approach but not over-determined by the capability approach's ideas. These categories were merged to form sub-themes before combining them to form themes. In choosing these themes, however, I constantly referred back to the theoretical framework, simultaneously making inferences to the interview. I then built a comprehensive story from these themes. To ensure that the findings represented the participants' views of (dis)advantage, I included all the transcripts in the analysis and exhausted their multiple perspectives in building the themes. Treating the data comprehensively addresses the anomalies and inherent bias associated with over-representing deviant cases (Silverman 2006; Mehan 1979). Quoted texts were presented as evidence in the findings (Chapters 5 to 8), and these were selected on the basis of the representativeness of the data gathered from participants.

4.8 Limitations of the methodology

The major limitation of the study is that findings are not generalisable to other populations since the study followed a qualitative- case study approach. This is because of the nature of the case study approach, with its focus on the 'particular.' Although the study was conducted at the UFS, which currently admits diverse students, the university composition might not resemble that of other institutions. This is pertinent considering the inequalities in the higher education terrain in the country, differences in resource allocation by the department of higher education, and the various institutional cultures that are influenced by the country's history (as explained in Chapter 1). However, Simons (2009) argues that the principal aim of the case study is not formal transferability for policy, but to obtain rich data on a single case and to contribute to the creation of knowledge on that topic. Although this is correct, practitioners can decide on which findings to transfer to other contexts that are similar to the case study. While transferability is reliant on the relevance of the attributes to be compared, this also depends on the richness of the study, and on the density and thickness of the descriptions (Kennedy 1979). What can be emphasised here is that the richness in this study produced findings that academics and practioners can use in their institutions with regard to the attributes they find similar to those found at the UFS.

4.9 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which research correctly represents a social phenomenon (Hammersley 1990). Three steps were taken in this study to enhance the validity of the findings. Firstly, through reflexivity and co-construction of the knowledge, together with participants, I ensured that participants were comfortable enough to provide honest responses by sharing my background with them before commencing the interviews. Along with that, I also conducted a pilot study where I engaged participants and reflected on the appropriateness of the interview questions during the development of the interview questions, as mentioned before. Secondly, validity was enhanced through transparency, as I disclosed my positionality in this study. This assisted in reducing the potential biases that I could have brought to the interviews and helped me to be open-minded and cautious during the interpretation of the data, thus ensuring that the results were representative of the participants' views. By going through the data repeatedly, I ensured that the findings were representative of the different kinds of views that the participants expressed (Silverman 2006). Finally, I used a triangulation strategy to compare findings from the different sources. Triangulation is the use of multiple data sources and establishes whether

the findings agree with each other (Patton 2002). I gathered data from students, university staff and SRC members, which provided multiple perspectives on the manifestation of student (dis)advantage. In some cases, however, the findings did not necessarily agree with each other but this was a strength in that it prompted me to conduct deeper investigations in these areas. Yin (1994:78) is of the view that the use of multiple sources presents a 'chain of evidence,' and this corroborates with Denzin and Lincoln's (1998) view that to draw findings from multiple sources improves the rigour, breadth, and depth of any research.

4.10 Conclusion

The chapter presented and elaborated on the methodology of the study. The benefits of employing a qualitative research methodology, the case study approach, and semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool were all explained. The chapter outlined and justified how the research participants were selected. The chapter also explained how the study was conducted in such a way as to ensure the validity of the findings. The drawing of participants from diverse educational and racial backgrounds, the use of the semi-structured interview method to promote co-learning, and the notion of reflexivity were all presented as intentional strategic aspects for yielding socially just research.

The following chapter presents the findings relating to students from low income households. Income was chosen as an indicator to group participants into two categories based on the assumption that it is a significant indicator given the high inequalities and poverty in the country. I also chose income rather than race because I have been critical on the use of disadvantage which is purely racial in the earlier chapters. Using race could therefore perpetuate the status quo. Again, I did not use gender as an indicator to group the students. Enrolment of women into universities that surpasses that of men suggests that gender is not the most important indicator.

Chapter 5: Students from low income households perspectives on (dis)advantage

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings derived from 20 low income student interviews. At the time the interviews were conducted, these students were enrolled in various of the UFS programmes in Education, Commerce, Psychology, Agricultural Economics, as well as Political Studies and Governance (see Appendix E for a synopsis of each student's experiences). In doing so, the chapter addresses the following questions: a) How do students understand (dis)advantage? b) What are their concrete experiences of advantage and disadvantage in relation to their histories, lives and higher education journeys? In addressing these questions, the chapter shows that lack of freedoms, lack of effective opportunities, and reduced agency to turn university resources into real achievements such as personal development, economic skills and social responsibility all amount to disadvantage, while the converse is also true.

The findings presented include discussions around choosing and deciding on a university, being at university, and future prospects for the students. Presented in Table 6 below are the participants' profiles with regard to the following: gender, age, race, type of secondary school attended, language used at home, main language used in secondary school, source of university funding and family income. Reference to students' profiles is made during the presentation to have a better understanding of how their backgrounds have shaped their university experiences of (dis)advantage.

Table 6: Profiles for students from low income backgrounds

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Type of secondary school	Primary home language	Language used in school	Source of university funding	Family income
Botle	F	24	Black	Public non-fee paying	Sesotho	Sesotho	Department of Education	R24 000
Khatleho	M	23	Black	Public non-fee paying	Sesotho	Sesotho	Bursary-Funza Lushaka	R11 000
Thabang	M	23	Black	Public non-fee paying	Sesotho	Sesotho	Bursary-NSFAS	R15 000
Tshidi	F	22	Black	Public non-fee paying	Sesotho	Sesotho	Bursary-Funza Lushaka	R8 400
Ikhona	F	25	Black	Former Model C	IsiXhosa	English	Mother	R190 000
Vanessa	F	24	Black	Former Model C	Sesotho	English	Parents	R140 000
Rufuno	F	23	Black	Former Model C	Tsonga	English	Parents	R250 000
Atang	F	22	Black	Private	Sesotho	English	NSFAS & another bursary	R48 000
Mamelo	F	30	Black	Private	Sesotho	English	Bursary National Manpower & parents	R120 000
Rethabile	F	23	Black	Private	Sesotho	English	Mother	R300 000
Palesa	F	22	Black	Public non-fee paying	Sesotho	English	Mother	R200 000
Siphe	F	23	Black	Private	IsiXhosa	English	NSFAS	R360 000
Mulalo	F	26	Black	Public non-fee paying	TshiVenda	English	Parents	R144 000
Phulani	M	27	Black	Public non-fee paying	IsiXhosa	IsiXhosa	Grandmother	R110 000
Tsepo	M	26	Black	Public non-fee paying	Sesotho	Sesotho	Bursary- Department of Education	R36 000
Lebo	F	22	Black	Former Model C	Afrikaans	Afrikaans	Bursay-NSFAS	R36 000
Joline	F	22	Coloured	Former Model C	English	English	Mother & Merit awards	R219 000
Tebello	M	21	Black	Former Model C	Sesotho	English	Parents	R204 000
Thabiso	M	24	Black	Public non-fee paying	Sesotho	Sesotho	Mother	R150 000
Unarine	F	21	Black	Private	TshiVenda	Sesotho	Relatives & NSFAS	R59 000

5.2 Schooling and family

The interviews revealed that some students received little support from their teachers in school. This was especially true of students who attended poorly resourced public schools. Table 6 above shows that nine of the students had attended free public schools. These students reported low motivation from their teachers, as Palesa explains:

> *The teachers did not care. Some of them would even tell you that they were there to get their salaries at the end of the month. They did not actually motivate us. Teachers were supposed to investigate what was going on and help if a learner was performing lower than others in class, but they did not do that. (Palesa; Honours in Psychology)*

This suggests that Palesa blamed the teachers for not determining and addressing the challenges that learners were facing. Lack of parental involvement in their academic lives worsened the situation. Even before the death of her parents, Tshidi did not receive any help with her homework from them. Yet she expressed having needed that support:

> *My parents were not involved in my schooling matters. They were not educated too. They did not help me with homework. (Tshidi; Bachelor of Education)*

There was a lack of moral guidance for learners from their teachers and families. Thabang accounts how he was distracted from focusing on his schoolwork due to drinking and his involvement in fundraising activities to support his drinking:

> *When our money for drinks ran out in the taverns, we agreed to raise money for the drinks. That is when we started a barbershop and sold sweets at school. We got enough money for drinking during the night until the taverns closed. We drank all weekend. We used to go to Middleway [nearby town] and buy cheap and highly toxic alcohol, so we used to drink each and every day. (Thabang; Bachelor of Education)*

Lack of discipline resulted in some students spending much of their time drinking alcohol. This distracted them from engaging with their school activities, meaning that they did not benefit optimally during schooling. In addition to that, students blamed both the school and their families for their poor schooling:

> *It is practically impossible for one person to give attention to 150 students locked in one room. So the teacher just presents and leaves and it is your fault if you did not understand. [...] Parents are also drunkards so there is no support from home. The only place you [could] get support was the school. But it was also the same at school as teachers were drunkards. (Phumlani; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Large class sizes and low motivation by teachers meant that learners did not receive much support during learning. This implies that students completed their grade 12 with little readiness for university education.

Conversely, it appears that the students who attended former Model C and private schools were better equipped for university education. Table 6 above shows that six students attended former Model C schools and five attended private schools. From these schools, students gained skills such as working independently, leadership and speaking English fluently. Siphe, who attended a private school, reveals:

> *It goes to the fact that you are 30 in a class and the teacher knows you individually. She knows the subjects you are struggling with. There are also more opportunities to learn other things like leadership and peer mediating in class. (Siphe; Honours in Psychology)*

Small class sizes in former Model C schools made it possible for teachers to offer individualised support to learners, meaning that teachers easily identified each learner's weaknesses and provided relevant support. The schools also equipped students with personal skills that were crucial for university education. In these schools, students received information about universities, developed skills to make sound decisions and were taught to work independently. Vanessa's example illuminates this:

> *They ensured that we get all the exposure that was necessary to help us make informed decisions regarding varsity. The school enabled me to grow and to be independent because varsity and school are different environments. In high school, there was someone looking over your shoulder whereas in varsity people are responsible for themselves unless they seek help. (Vanessa; Honours in Commerce)*

Vanessa's account reveals that students gained skills that helped them to adapt to new environments, including the university.

Although students' schooling background is important, their social background was also found to play a key role during their university studies. Lack of family support, due to having been orphaned, and dysfunctional families contributed to students not receiving sufficient support during schooling. Table 6 above shows that 11 students were raised by single mothers and the other three by grandparents. Katleho, who was raised by a single mother after his parents divorced, mentioned that:

> *Not having a fatherly figure is not good because everything you learn, you do so from the street and not everything you bring home is good for you. Because for myself it was*

about hate, these people [parents] they don't like us, they make children suffer. (Katleho; Bachelor of Education)

The extract shows bitterness in Katleho's upbringing because of growing up in a dysfunctional family. Growing up in abusive environments has profound effects on learners, even later in their university lives. After his father threatened to kill him, Thabang bullied other learners, leading to him receiving several warnings from his school. Furthermore, he became unstable psychologically and contemplated suicide:

It was a trauma for me when my parents were always fighting. One day, when he was beating my mom he told me that he wanted to tie me with a rope so that he can kill me. [...] I grew up as a violent person because of that. Whenever someone wronged me at school, I beat him or her. The headmaster from my school gave me several warnings for beating other learners [...]

I remembered I went to a mountain and I wanted to commit suicide [...]. I decided not to. I talked to myself. I asked myself questions, and I answered them and I decided to look for a job so that I pay the university its money. (Thabang; Bachelor of Education)

Botle, who was raised by her grandmother and lived with an uncle following her grandmother's death, reveals the following:

My uncle is not caring at all. He is not like what my grandmother used to do. My grandmother would even give me pocket money to buy food but now she is no longer alive. My uncle doesn't care. It's like [sobs]. My grandmother used to help me when she was alive. (Botle; Bachelor of Education)

The quotes show emotional stress from having grown up in uncaring families. Thabang had attempted to commit suicide and Botle wept during the interview. Even though students admitted that their parents could not have afforded all university expenses, they would have valued family support from both parents.

It is important to highlight that students received varying levels of support from their schooling and families, meaning that they had different bundles of resources when they enrolled at the university - both material and non-material. This implies that they did not start at the same level at university; those who had attended well-resourced former Model C and private schools had more opportunities for academic success at the university compared to those from low quality public schools. The vulnerability of these students was exacerbated by the stress they experienced through having a dysfunctional family life.

5.3 Choosing and deciding on university

Understanding how students made decisions about the degree and university they wanted to study at is important in that it enables us to evaluate agency, that is, the power students have to make genuine choices and pursue the things they have a reason to value. The interviews reveal that students' choice was personal when deciding which degree programme to study. Eight students reported having chosen their degree programmes because they had a passion for the field as in the following extracts:

> *I had always liked to be the smartest guy during my growing up. I used to teach my other peers from grade 7 to matric and from that I developed the love for teaching. One important thing is that teachers were highly respected where I come from. I wanted to be a man of calibre, if I may say so. I wanted to be someone whom anyone regarded highly whether they were my peers or community members. (Katleho; Bachelor of Education)*

> *I saw how nice the agricultural shows were, and how agriculture worked practically. That's when I decided that I have to go to university and study agriculture. (Tsepo; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

> *It's more of a personal reason that I chose Psychology. I chose it based on the environment that I grew up in. I am lesbian and my mom is a very strict person so it was very hard for me to open up to her and discuss with her. I needed advice from an older person and that is when I realised the importance of psychologists. (Palesa; Honours in Psychology)*

The respect that teachers had, exposure to agricultural activities from communities, and (surprisingly) lack of social support facilitated students to be passionate about the field of their chosen degree programmes.

However, this was not the case with some students who ended up studying their degree programmes by default, after not having qualified for the ones they had originally wanted to pursue. Ten students ended up studying at UFS because they did not qualify for the degree programmes they had wanted to follow at other universities:

> *My plan was to study Accounting at University of Pretoria but I did not qualify for it. My matric points[46] were lower than the cut-off points so my brother who was studying*

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[46] In South Africa grade 12 (matric) results are a qualification that are obtained after completing secondary school. Grade 12 mark is used to determine entry into university and into specific degrees.

PhD here [UFS] told me about the Extended Degree programme. I applied and they accepted me for a BCom Management in Marketing. (Rufuno; Honours in Commerce)

Some students studied at the UFS for the reason that it was closer to their homes. In this way studying at UFS was more affordable since they could live at home with their families.

So UFS was much convenient than having to pay extra money to go to the University of Pretoria. I had to pay for transport to travel there. Cost of living is also high in places like Gauteng. Whereas here, I was only worried about transport money to travel to the campus. I did not pay accommodation because I was living at home. (Palesa; Honours in Psychology)

Studying at UFS was more affordable for Palesa as she lived at home with her family without having to incur accommodation costs. Lack of finances also constrained some students in making choices about the degree programmes they had wanted to pursue. Tshidi, who had 34 points, qualified for the Social Work programme that she wanted, but ended up studying BEd at the UFS because the Funza Lushaka[47] bursary she was awarded required her to do so. This was after her teacher brought an application form for her to fill out during her matric year.

I didn't really choose that degree programme. I had to do Education because the bursary funds that degree. (Tshidi; Bachelor of Education)

Tshidi's freedoms to make choices were therefore limited due to insufficient finance and consequently she settled for the degree programme for which she had already secured funding. For Mulalo, however, being far away from home was important to her and motivated her decision to enrol at UFS.

I just got to a point where I said that it was enough for me. I was born and raised in Venda [in the far north of South Africa]. Venda was all what I knew. I wanted a different environment and see how things are out there. I wanted to learn how other people are doing. (Mulalo; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

The need to explore new environments was important for Mulalo in enrolling at UFS. On the other hand, Mamello had inadequate information about the degree programme to study and her friend selected it for her. This resulted in Mamello studying Food Sciences, which she failed, after which she registered for Psychology. She explains how she initially enrolled for Food Sciences:

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[47] Funza Lushaka is a bursary for students studying Bachelor of Education. The bursary covers university tuition, accommodation, food and other expenses. It is not repaid but worked back as a teacher.

My best friend picked it for me. I didn't know what I wanted to study after school so my best friend picked it. [...] I discovered that I was a counsellor at heart and I wanted to pursue something along that pathway. There was nothing interesting for me in the field of hard sciences (Mamello; Honours in Psychology)

Despite her parents being university graduates, Mamello had limited information about careers. While she made a personal decision at that time from her friend's advice, her choice could have been constrained by lack of helpful information as she dropped out from the Food Sciences degree programme after failing to cope. This suggests that she needed information about various degree programmes to help her make a choice of the degree programme that was aligned to her aspirations and personal abilities.

The UFS marketing team was a major source of information for students in choosing to enrol at the university and selecting their degree programmes. The marketing team visited schools to raise awareness amongst learners about the degree programmes on offer. Katleho narrates how he received information and made a decision to enrol at UFS:

The university sent one of its representatives at my school in 2013. Most of the learners at my school were in this university and they also visited us. They addressed us and told us that UFS is a good university. They also told us about the degree programmes that the university offered. Afterwards, we were given application forms together with the NSFAS forms to apply. This is how I came to know about UFS. (Katleho; Bachelor of Education)

After realising that no one was going to provide her with information, Botle visited the UFS on its opening day[48]:

I didn't even know that I can study teaching [laughs] until I got to university on an opening day. I received information and decided to enrol for this degree. I decided to come here because I heard that it was the best university. They said it was easy to get a job after graduating. (Botle; Bachelor of Education)

This illustrates that the university's open days constituted a source of information. Whilst it is true that students received information from the UFS, the university seemed to be an insufficient source of information for students to make wider choices about what and where to

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[48] This is an event arranged by the university for learners to explore the university and get information about degree programmes, accommodation, etc.

study as the information they receive only pertained to UFS. Furthermore, students were not fully informed about the degree programmes they registered for even after they received information from the UFS marketing team. Joline, whose mother is a university graduate, initially registered for Law after having obtained information from the UFS marketing team. She later changed to Political Studies and Governance, and accounts the following:

> *I went to a mock court session and I did not like it. That's when I changed. I was actually supposed to have studied Law but changed in my second year. I changed after realizing that I was actually not suited for law. (Joline; Honours in Political Studies and Governance)*

This suggests that Joline had initially registered for Law even though she was not fully informed about the expectations of the Law profession.

One student indicated that she received information about the UFS from friends. Vanessa, who lives in Bloemfontein, heard about the Bachelor of Commerce degree programme from a friend:

> *So one of my friends who was studying Business Studies that time told me that UFS was a better option because it had the best programme compared to other universities. (Vanessa; Honours in Commerce)*

Friends were useful as they were always source of information about universities. By way of contrast, Thabang's family discouraged him from enrolling for university education despite him having received information from the UFS's marketing department:

> *The message that I got from home and people around me was that I should find a job after finishing matric so that I could provide for my own family. They told me to start my own family and take care of it. There was no motivation for me to study further after matric. (Thabang; Bachelor of Education)*

It is clear from this quote that Thabang lacked useful advice about what to prioritise in his life. This was probably because of his family's low socio-economic status, which required him to raise income for the family as opposed to pursuing university education.

It is particularly relevant to mention that whilst some students made their own personal choice in pursuing a degree programme, others were constrained from doing so because they did not qualify for their desired programme, through lacking information and finances, and in a few cases through having been discouraged by their family members. Those who made personal choices based on sufficient information exercised their agency to pursue their aspirations,

which is a form of advantage. Others, however, were constrained by lack of finances and lower university entry points, resulting in them not being able to make their desired choices, meaning that they lacked agency in decision-making, thus being disadvantaged. What begins to emerge is a complicated picture of advantage and disadvantage, both material and non-material, and how this intersects with individual biographies.

5.4 Funding

Parents and NSFAS loans were cited as the main sources of students' university funds. Table 7 below shows that ten students had their university expenses paid by their families, five through NSFAS, two through Funza Lushaka, two via Free State Department of Education bursaries and one via a National Manpower bursary as well as the support of family.

Table 7: Sources of university funding for low income students

Source of univeristy funding	Number of students
Family	10
NSFAS	5
Funza Lushaka	2
Free State Department of Education	2
National Manpower bursary and parents	1
Total	20

These bursaries covered students' university tuition, accommodation, food and textbooks. However, the money was processed late, especially in their first year, leaving students without funds for several months. Even though she received money from the Funza Lushaka bursary towards the end of the year, Tshidi, who lives with her siblings, explains:

> *I wanted to look good like other students who had smart phones and laptops but I couldn't until I got money from my bursary. I then bought a laptop and a phone. Then I saved some money for registration for the following year and bought groceries for my brother and sister at home. (Tshidi; Bachelor of Education)*

Tshidi's bursary money was therefore adequate for her university expenses as she could buy gadgets for her studies and help her siblings with groceries. However, this was not the case with Katleho, who received R5000 per annum from a NSFAS bursary for food, and reported that this was inadequate:

> *I do not have enough food when I am at the university unlike when I am at home. I have one meal when I am here [at the university]. It's always hard to concentrate on my*

studies when I am hungry. [...] It is always hard every time and the food issue never gives me comfort. It's something that is always troubling me. (Katleho; Bachelor of Education)

The emphasis here falls on the stress associated with food insecurity, contributing to the student not being able to concentrate on his studies.

From my interview data, it appears that students from low income families who did not receive support in the form of a bursary were worse-off financially in accessing and participating in university life. These students deferred their studies after failing to raise registration fees, or they dropped out from their studies even after initially having registered. Botle, who lived with a grandmother, deferred her studies for two years after she had completed her matric:

I struggled. I struggled because there was no money and I applied for bursaries but no luck. Oh well, I applied for university and I was accepted but because I did not have the funds. I couldn't come to university. I had to go and work to raise money for a living. (Botle; Bachelor of Education)

Botle only proceeded to register at the university after getting a NSFAS loan. Thabang added that he struggled to secure a bursary in his first two years at university, resulting in him receiving financial support from a friend's brother. This was before he secured a NSFAS loan in his third year. Although registered[49] partially and attending classes in his first year, he had struggled to get money for transport and food.

My friend's brother from Botsabelo gave me registration fee. Then after registering, I had to struggle for transport on my own. I had to find a job at my church where I cut trees and clean houses so that I get money for transport. I struggled to get food at the South Campus. (Thabang; Bachelor of Education)

In his first year, Thabang dropped out of university, as he owed the university money. After working for a year and paying the debt, he re-registered before securing a NSFAS loan that covered his university expenses. This suggests that students' financial wellbeing improved when they received the NSFAS loan, even though some of the interviewed students reported that the money received was insufficient.

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[49] Partial registration is an arrangement that is made between the UFS and the student so that the student pays a portion of the tuition fees and temporary registration. The arrangement is supposed to allow more time for the student to raise tuition fees.

It was also explained that students whose parents paid their university expenses struggled to afford the basics needed for a decent living at the university. Table 6 above shows that 10 students had their university fees paid by their parents. The students did not qualify for the NSFAS bursary because their parents were employed as civil servants and their income exceeded the cut-off point of R120 000 per annum. From these students, seven reported that they had experienced financial difficulties during their time at university. Joline, whose mother was a senior nurse earning R220 000 annually, explains how she struggled since her mother had the responsibility of taking care of six children.

> *I did mention that I was raised by a single mom and she takes upon everyone in our family. It's hard for us because we cannot get enough things. [...] You know it is a problem to our parent to have six of us in school. [...] Hence I always work, whether at a restaurant, or clothing shop to raise money for my livelihood. I have never stopped working for myself so that I do not have to put pressure on my single parent. (Joline; Honours in Political Studies and Governance)*

Due to her financial difficulties, Joline dropped out from her honours studies, as she owed the university money. Besides the fact that the income she was getting from her mother was inadequate, what emerges from this extract is that students resorted to part-time work to supplement their livelihoods at the university. Consider the following accounts from Mulalo who had three siblings and whose mother earned R144 000, and Rethabile who had two siblings and whose mother earned an estimated annual income of R120 000.

> *Sometimes I would run out of money to make copies. I would be scared to call home and ask for more money. I didn't want to look like a brat because I knew the other kids would also need money. So I would just wait until month end and maybe budget around that. (Mulalo; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

> *The money was not enough for food. It only covered my tuition. I was depending on my mom and we are three of us so she also had other people to support. My dad was not involved with my life and did not contribute anything. Sometimes I would spend two weeks without getting any money, so it was very difficult for me for these past two years. (Rethabile; Honours in Psychology)*

The students did not have adequate money for stationery and food as their parents had other responsibilities. It is crucial to note the absence of fathers who were supposed to contribute to the students' financial wellbeing, but instead had left the students' mothers as the sole breadwinners of the family, hence the limited financial resources.

By way of contrast, students whose parents had paid all their university expenses did not face any financial difficulties. Three students reported that the financial support they received was adequate for their university needs. Rufuno, whose parents earned R250 000 annually, explained:

> *My parents planned for this before, so it wasn't difficult for me to get finances. They had savings, it was not a problem paying the tuition fees, registration and for accommodation. They just paid for everything. My mom used to give me R300, and then my dad would give me about R1000 per month. (Rufuno; Honours in Commerce)*

What is evident is that the students had the financial resources to cater for their university expenses including tuition, accommodation, food and other university expenses. Interesting to note is that all three students who were free from financial challenges were studying Honours in Commerce. This means that they had the financial freedom to lead dignified lives during their studies.

In sum, some students lacked the financial freedoms to access, participate and progress in their studies as they lacked access to adequate food, deferred their studies and dropped out. Those with better financial resources did not experience the same material disadvantage. This suggests that finances are a key resource for equal participation of students at university, implying that material deprivation is a source of disadvantage.

5.5 Getting on at university

This subsection presents students' experiences after enrolling at the university. University teaching, social capital and accommodation are discussed as significant dimensions emerging from the data.

5.5.1 University teaching

I interrogated the pedagogical experiences of the students during the interviews. Here I adopted Walker's (2006) definition of pedagogy in that it refers to the teaching methods, the teacher, what is taught and the classroom context. Underpinning the process, are the power relations involved in the transfer of knowledge from the lecturer to the student (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). The interviews show that students enjoyed interactive learning in class. Activities such as group work and presentations helped them to understand the content better. Tsepo accounts how he enjoyed this form of interactive learning:

> *If you give me an opportunity to interact, you are also giving me the opportunity to share my understanding of the course content with others. Rather than reading on my own, I get different conclusions from my peers when we discuss in class. For me, this is a good process of learning. (Tebello; BA in Political Studies and Governance)*

Students appeared to enjoy lectures that were engaging for the reason that it gave them the opportunity to ask questions and share ideas with their peers. Additionally, students also valued practical sessions because they were able to understand more through application:

> *I feel I don't forget things when a lecturer teaches you and repeats what he had taught practically. I like practical learning where I can apply theory. It is not easy to understand when you just learn in class without knowing how that happens in the everyday life. (Tsepo; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Students were alienated in the learning process when lecturers spoke too quickly to assess whether their audience was following what they were saying or not. The following excerpts illustrate this experience:

> *They blame us from the way they speak. They blame us for not knowing the content beforehand. There are some lecturers who have written books and those ones speak like we are supposed to know everything. They do not feel that students should be taught. The lecturers think that we are at their level. (Tshidi; Bachelor of Education)*
>
> *The lecturers cannot bend down to the students' level. As opposed to someone who says ok, you are meeting this concept for the first time, […], and also making examples that are relevant and not too inside the box because we have different levels of thinking. (Ikhona; Honours in Commerce)*

What is clear from this excerpt is that lecturers failed to understand the students' needs and assumed content proficiency, based perhaps on the assumption that the students had attended former Model C schools. Additionally, the lecturers assumed that all students knew how to learn. This implies that students were treated as a homogenous group that had acquired the same level of knowledge during schooling. This situation was compounded by a lack of practical examples that could have promoted learning amongst students.

Even though they looked forward to graduating, most of the students had failed at least one module in their first year. Students were further marginalised in the learning process when lecturers blamed them for not understanding. Lebo who failed some of her first year modules stated:

Then you get those lecturers that make you feel horrible for not knowing something. I don't like them. I don't have a problem in interacting in class. It just depends on how the lecturer does it. Do you make people feel comfortable in your class? Or, do you try to intimidate them by asking questions and giving negative comments? (Lebo; Honours in Political Sciences)

Evident from the quote is that students were discouraged from participating in class through the manner in which the lecturers handled the class discussions. In cases where lecturers were unfriendly, students did not have freedoms to participate in class. Despite them not having understood the concepts in class, students failed to gain access to the lecturers during their consultation times. Rethabile comments:

She would speak a lot and so fast and sometimes you wonder why she is like that. I had difficulties in listening to her. Too many students surrounded her when I went to see her during consultation time. She would leave without checking if all of us have had a chance to speak to her. (Rethabile: Honours in Psychology)

Students reported feeling alienated by the pedagogical arrangements as they failed to cope with the content and with the pace at which the lecturers spoke, bearing in mind that English was not the students' first language. Besides that, they reported being unable to make use of the consultation time during which they were supposed to receive support from their lecturers. The above shows how pedagogical arrangements constrained students from learning, hence limiting their opportunities to progress and succeed in their university studies. The interviews suggest that lecturers failed to identify the needs of the students and assumed that all students had prior knowledge.

Students felt excluded from the learning process in large classes, especially in their first year. Those who were used to small class sizes during schooling, found the large classes of over 500 students overwhelming:

I just feel overwhelmed by the environment and the number of people that surround me. In high school, the maximum number of learners was 30 students in a class. The university class was 10 times larger than the size of my high school class. […] Then in our Extended programme at South Campus the maximum number of students was 30. I participated, I responded to questions freely. When I came to the main campus, I felt flustered because of the large classes. (Vanessa; Honours in Commerce)

Although she progressed well and graduated with a good class of degree, Vanessa struggled in her honours and repeated some modules. Unarine reaffirmed the notion that small class sizes promote students' participation:

> *I did well in second and third year because our classes got smaller. I could ask some questions to the lecturers. The lecturers were giving us attention as individuals. I felt like they treated us as senior students unlike in the first year when they taught us like kids. I was paying more attention in the later years. (Unarine; Honours in Political Studies and Governance)*

This implies that smaller class sizes fostered student attention, participation in class and enhanced their performance.

It seems that lecturer-student relationships affected students' academic involvement as well as their confidence to seek academic support from lecturers. Furthermore, where lecturers were reported as being unfriendly, students mentioned avoiding class participation and not making use of the stipulated consultation time.

> *To be honest, some lecturers were kind of intimidating to me. They would not really answer when a student asks something in class. They would say as a student you should be knowing those things so he or she won't answer the question. So I would never go for consultation with lecturers like that. But I had a relationship with more friendly and open lecturers, who would even ask me to come for consultation so they can help me. In class they would really motivate us to ask questions. (Palesa; Honours in Psychology)*

This clearly shows that the relationship between the lecturers and students mattered. Students tended to get more support and became active learners when there was a mutual relationship between them and the lecturers. Students criticised the use of Blackboard[50] by lecturers for the reason that it did not promote interaction between themselves and their lecturers:

> *It's a bit tricky and different from what we are used to because you had a lot of questions that you don't get answers for. You are not sure whether you are thinking right. You don't know if what you are doing is what your lecturer is expecting. (Mulalo; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

From this evidence, it appears that students did not have confidence in what they were studying because of the lack of opportunity to interact with the lecturers.

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[50] Blackboard is a learning management system (LMS) used by the university.

Students also experienced personal challenges that constrained their learning. Some felt that the use of PowerPoint slides disconnected them from the learning process. The following excerpts demonstrate this:

> *What I think was bad teaching was when lecturers took slides and went through them word by word. For me, if one understands what they are doing, they should take us through the slides explaining and using different sentences. That way, they help us, breaking down the concepts for us to grasp. (Mamello; Honours in Psychology)*
>
> *If your students do not understand and you do not give them a chance to ask questions that's bad teaching. That's bad teaching when you are in a hurry to teach, finish, and leave the class. (Botle; Bachelor of Education)*

What emerges from the above is that students did not enjoy it when lecturers read through their PowerPoint slides without providing explanations or practical examples. It also shows that lecturers' poor presentation skills prevented students from learning effectively. Nevertheless, some students reported learning more effectively through the use of PowerPoint slides:

> *I prefer slides. It was something amazing since my first year. It was nice. Because the slides are big enough I can see. I can also access them afterwards. As I read them again, I am able to recall what the lecture was saying. (Katleho; Bachelor of Education)*

In the case above the lecturer's PowerPoint slides allowed the student to revise his notes, which helped him to retain the content.

Students' inability to manage time came up as a constraining factor in students' ability to participate and progress with their studies. Students reported that they had a heavy workload and as such were unable to manage their time efficiently:

> *There is so much work to do and there is no time. I am thinking right now that I should be working on my assignment. I could be taking a nap so that I could get refreshed. The content is not that difficult, but the workload is too much. (Atang; Honours in Psychology)*

The excerpt show that students struggled to manage their time for assignments, rest, and the individual modules. It is also clear that they mastered the content but could not effectively manage their time.

This suggests that university teaching was a conversion factor that constrained students' learning effectiveness. This disadvantaged these students as their freedoms to learn effectively were diminished. Through the pedagogical arrangements, students were therefore excluded from

learning effectively as lecturers failed to identify and address their needs. Presumably this failure on the part of the lecturers stemmed from them (the lecturers) assuming that all students had former Model C backgrounds and consequently knew how to learn. Because of the difficulties they experienced in learning, students also struggled to manage their workload, which negatively affected their performance. Students found the classroom environment less conducive for them to participate and the lecturers unapproachable, resulting in them not being able to learn effectively. Lack of academic support, which is important for students' success and retention, particularly in their first year, marginalises students, especially those who are underprepared (Tinto 2012). All these factors suggest that students were disadvantaged through the pedagogical arrangements.

5.5.2 Social capital

Students were asked about their social networks and the support they received from family and friendships when they enrolled at the university. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:99) define social capital as "…the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing durable networks of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." Underpinning their notion of social capital are the power and economic resources that students derive from their families, friends and schools. In Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) view, working class students lack social capital to receive information and support at the university together with securing part-time employment during their studies or full-time employment after their studies. The interviews reveal that students developed social networks with their peers from the same high school. Through these social networks, they received help in securing off-campus accommodation, knowing the routes at the campus, and having access to university information.

> *I met Naomi who was a year ahead of me. We went to the same high school and we stayed in the same street. She was really the person I consulted. She showed me how to use Blackboard and UFS website. She literally took me to all my classes. (Lebo; Honours in Political Studies and Governance)*

Evident from the comment above is that having support from their peers helped students to settle easily at the university. Although they had made friendships with peers from their high school, students also reported establishing friendships with peers from their residences or classes.

> *We met in our off-campus communal residences. She was in her final year of Accounting. She was not studying the same degree programme as mine. I didn't understand what I*

> *was doing in my first year so she taught me how to study….She wasn't out going too, like*
> *me. She was serious in her studies (Siphe; Honours in Psychology)*

What is key here is that students chose friends who were also hardworking. Interesting to mention is that they made friends with people of the same race. Eighteen students presented as black in Table 6 mentioned that their friends were of the same race. Ikhona, who attended a predominantly black public school explains:

> *I made a lot of friends from different black cultures but I did not have friends from other*
> *races. We didn't have White, Coloured and Indian friends. We made friends with Sotho,*
> *Shona and Tsonga because all these are black people. It was easy to understand each*
> *other from someone who has the same background with you. (Ikhona; Honours in*
> *Commerce)*

Black students reported not making friends with people from other race groups for the reason that it was easier for them to associate with those with similar backgrounds. This was with the exception of one black student who indicated that she had made friends with coloured students. Although that was the case, most of the black students consequently did not benefit from friendships with students from other race groups, hence missing opportunities to develop socially and to gain greater diversity awareness.

It is relevant to highlight that students did not have the social capital to help them to adjust easily and fit into a university environment that felt alien to them. While they made friends with other black students, who also had little academic and social capital, they did not gain a lot from social networking. The friendships they made contributed little to improving the quality of their lives, e.g. none of them reported having any connections that could have assisted them to get work experience in preparation for employment after their studies. Moreover, the absence of social networking with students from other races denied them the opportunity to draw benefit from the diversity of students at the UFS, e.g. white students, who could have had different schooling, social and cultural backgrounds.

Related to other forms of supportive practices students reported, religion was mentioned as playing a significant role in building resilience amongst students. This is particularly important when considering the hardships that students from low income backgrounds faced in their university journeys. Two participants indicated that religion played a vital role as it enabled them to persevere until completion of their undergraduate studies. Mamello, who had failed the Food Sciences degree, explained:

It was through the church that I thought of starting again [registering for Psychology]. I discovered from my church that I was a counsellor at heart. I then wanted to pursue something around counselling. I had to start from scratch for me to study Psychology. Something inside me said its fine. I knew that was a calling. I later discovered that I was good in Psychology. (Mamello; Honours in Psychology)

The above account shows how Mamello managed to make a decision to register for Psychology after failing the programme she had initially registered for. Joline's case reaffirms the role of religion in strengthening students' commitment to their studies despite financial stress:

I am a Christian. In God that is where everything is embodied. I found peace in him […] you know there are so many things that I received from God until I completed my degree. My financial problems were resolved. (Joline; Honours in Political Studies and Governance)

Evident from the above extract is that Joline found hope and comfort from her religion throughout studying towards her degree. This implies that students can rely on religion as a resource for persevering in their university studies.

5.5.3 Accommodation and transport

Fifteen students reported having off-campus accommodation as they had failed to secure a place at a university residence or had not applied because they could not afford the financial deposit[51] required by the university. This resulted in them looking for private accommodation located at walkable distances from the main campus. The study environment at the off-campus residences posed a challenge to the students. It was difficult for them to study at the university library until late in the evening due to not having the necessary transport to travel back to their residences safely[52]:

The library closes around 10pm but I can't stay at the library until that time knowing the dangers of staying off-campus. You find your roommate playing music or with their girlfriend when you go back to your residence. You cannot stop them from doing that even though there are rules in the residences. So this explains the limited time I had for studying. (Katleho; Bachelor of Education)

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[51] The university requires full payment per annum for a student to secure accommodation. University residences costs between R900 and R1900 per month.

[52] Safety posed a challenge to students when they walked to and from campus during evenings. Criminal activities such as mugging and gender based violence is common in the area (Mogotsi 2017)

I have to think about leaving at a safe time every time that I have to study. This is especially when I am carrying a bag of books and a laptop that I am worried that they would be stolen. (Rethabile; Honours in Psychology)

Within the private off-campus residences, Tshidi was traumatised by her landlord who had locked her out due to non-payment since her bursary payment had not yet been processed:

The landlord at Unilofts (off-campus residences) could sometimes lock the door for my room because the bursary had not paid. He told me to push our funders to pay because he did not have money to pay water and electricity for us. I had to find a friend to help or somewhere to sleep, or to go home. My books were locked in the residences and I could not access them. (Tshidi; Bachelor of Education)

The excerpt above indicates that accommodation arrangements constrained Tshidi in accessing university resources. For the students whose homes are in the same city as the university, it was cheaper to commute to the campus using public transport. However, inefficient public transport prevented the students from attending their lectures on time. Furthermore, fatigue from inadequate rest made their days unproductive. Tshidi reported commuting from her home located 60 kilometres from the university:

The problem was that I lived at home. I had to take the 5am bus to come to the campus. I failed to wake up early so that I arrived at the university in time because I was very tired. I missed the 7o'clock class in the morning. Even when I got to the university in time I could not concentrate since I was tired. I remember that the 7a.m module was very difficult, and it needed me to give maximum attention but I couldn't. (Tshidi; Bachelor of Education)

Transport arrangements therefore negatively affected Tshidi's performance in class. On the other hand, Botle lived in a university residence where it was convenient for her to access the library, and receive academic and social support from the peers at her residence.

I had tutorials in the residences. I received help from the senior students. I accessed the library and the computer labs anytime I wanted to. […] I got emotional support and health care support. Everything was just fine in the campus residences. (Botle; Bachelor of Education)

What is central from the above excerpt is that students who lived off campus were constrained from accessing academic resources through poor study environments, safety issues and transport.

By way of contrast, students who lived in university residences cited the conveniences they enjoyed through this living arrangement. Rufuno had this to say:

> *When you are in university residences there are rules. There are assigned rules that at this time we need silence and there is more discipline. There are cultural activities or varsity events that one can participate in. (Rufuno; Honours in Commerce)*

Students had the opportunity to participate in university activities and to study due to the strict rules in the residences. Living at a university residence was thus a conversion factor that enabled students to progress and succeed with their university studies. Lebo, who had known about university day residences[53] and had an affiliation with them comments:

> *The day residences helped me in making friends with people who studied the same course as mine, and to participate in varsity sports. […]. This was advantageous to me because I could study the whole night when I had an exam at 7am. (Lebo; Honours in Political Studies and Governance)*

The main issues from this quote reaffirms that university residences are convenient for students as they were able to establish social networks, participate in university extra-curricular activities, and to study.

It is relevant to highlight that students who lived in off-campus accommodation were constrained from accessing academic resources due to the accommodation arrangements that limited their studying time and threatened their safety. This means that transport arrangements constituted a further source of disadvantage to students.

5.6 Aspirations

I also sought to understand what students looked forward to do after completing their educational journeys. This is important as aspirations shape students' retention and progression at the university and in line with their career goals. The interviews revealed that all students had clear plans of the things they wanted to do in future. Students looked forward to being employed after completing their current degree programmes, or to further their education before seeking employment, as revealed by the following extracts:

> *I want to get a job to and get experience about how the industry works. After that, I am hoping to open my own consultancy on marketing in the agriculture business. That way,*

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[53] This is accommodation space offered to students after paying R60 per semester so that they can have a place to rest during the day. Students also have the opportunity to interact with those in residences and participate in university extra curricular programmes.

I can be the intermediary doing some marketing on behalf of others. (Tsepo; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

I will definitely improve financially because the career I have chosen is rewarding. I will be getting more money and create wealth and because I have knowledge on how to use it. (Ikhona; Honours in Commerce)

I would want to further my education whilst serving my contract because its 5 years. I think I can be able to venture into education policy. I am more concerned about policies. (Katleho; Bachelor of Education)

Students therefore reported looking forward to improving their lives through pursuing their career goals. Interesting is that students also aimed to improve the lives of their family members and community.

You need to pay something back to the community so that they can as well improve their lives. So that's where my family comes in. Money is not everything. We need to share. For me, I view success in everything I do. I do not see success in monetary terms only. I want to succeed in everything. (Joline; Honours in Political Studies and Governance)

I want to change lives. I want to help those from disadvantaged families. I am one of those people who was helped by others. I want to help those families to succeed in life, make a living and better the situation at home. (Katleho; Bachelor of Education)

The extracts above indicate that the students hold a wider view of success as they not only value monetary benefits, but also value improving the lives of others.

Also evident is that students aspired to improve their lifestyles through being employed. Students also valued changing the lives of others and looked forward to do that.

5.7 Unfair practices

The study found that the UFS, through unfair practices, provides unequal opportunities for different groups of students to succeed. Discrimination on the basis of language, race and gender were mentioned as unfair practices at the university.

5.7.1 Language as constraining factor

I enquired about whether students were able to competently use the language of instruction or not, and how this affected them in their learning process. Eight students reported having mostly

used Sesotho or IsiXhosa during their schooling[54]. As such, they found it difficult to understand and express themselves using English, which is the university's language of instruction. The following quotes illustrate that students could not understand or express themselves freely using English:

Everything was taught in Sesotho at school but lecturers speak in English here [university]. I found it very difficult to understand because I am not used to English. It is also because of their accent that I cannot hear. Most of my lecturers were white, and I could not understand their accent too. (Thabiso; BA in Political Studies and Governance)

I couldn't trust what I was going to say if it was a true reflection of what I wanted to say. I had problems with expressing my thoughts. I knew the answers most of the times but I kept quiet. I did not have the confidence to speak out. I would say eish… (Katleho; Bachelor of Education)

Lacking confidence to participate in class and failure to understand the lecturer were the main issues mentioned by the students. Students were further alienated in class through the use of Afrikaans in an English class.

The lecturer will continuously speak Afrikaans in an English lecture[55]. But as a black person you can't go to an Afrikaans class and speak in English. (Tsepo; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Whilst Afrikaans speaking students, who were mostly white, were allowed to speak their mother tongue in the English classes, Sesotho speakers did not have the same privilege. This was a form of injustice that was raised by the students. On the other hand, one student revealed having also used Afrikaans during secondary schooling. Lebo, who attended a former Model C school, reported not having faced any language challenges in class:

One advantage that I had was that my Afrikaans and English were more or less the same. […]. I feel like I had an advantage in terms of understanding question papers. I read the paper in English and if I didn't understand that I read it again in Afrikaans. (Lebo; Honours in Political Studies and Governance)

This account shows that understanding both Afrikaans and English enhanced Lebo's learning as she would revert to Afrikaans when she needed clarity. Relevant to note is that students'

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[54] The official language of instruction in schools would have been English but much of the teaching is done on local languages.
[55] The university's language policy allowed English and Afrikaans lectures to be conducted separately. The policy later changed in March 2016 and English became the main language of instruction.

effective opportunities to learn effectively at the university were constrained through language. Students from Education, Politics and Governance as well as Agricultural Economics departments reported unfair language practices which did not take into account varying levels of language competence, and which privileged the Afrikaans students.

5.7.2 Race as a constraining factor

Race emerged as a significant factor affecting equal participation of students at the university. The demographic characteristics presented in Table 6 show that all students are black, suggesting that race could be a salient factor in students' freedoms to participate and succeed at the university. Four students referred to events they thought were racist and these ranged from classes, social gatherings, and sports occasions. Students also reported unfair practices on grounds of race during the enrolment of honours students. They reported that white students who did not qualify for honours studies were thought to be admitted to this postgraduate degree. These students were believed to have lower marks than the cut-off entry requirements for the honours degree programme. Palesa, a black student, explains:

> *We know about a white guy in our class who wasn't performing well in the undergraduate classes. So there is always a question about how did he get to do honours? We as black students had to make sure that we get the highest possible marks in order to be selected for honours. So it's like some white people go there by default. Whereas us, black students, we had to work hard to qualify. (Palesa; Honours in Psychology)*

This extract suggests that black students did not have trust in the university selection process for entry into honours studies because of the campus environment which was racist. Furthermore, racist practices were persistent in classes when clues for tests were unfairly distributed between white and black students. Mamello and Phumlani, both black students, elaborated:

> *We didn't have a scope[56] at that time but white students had the scope. I think it drained me after I heard about it but I realized that I didn't make it this far to where I am right now with people giving me scopes. I worked hard. Disturbing as it was, I decided that it doesn't matter and I continue to work hard. (Mamello; Honours in Psychology)*
> *It's like if I were to tell you to go to Johannesburg without giving you directions. I would just tell you that Johannesburg is just 400km from Bloemfontein but to the other person I will tell them that when you go to Johannesburg you must pass Kroonstad, Sasolburg etc. To them, [Afrikaans class] that's how it's done, to us [English class] we are just told*

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[56] This includes the specific topics covered in the examination and the lecturer's expectations from that.

to go to a specific place and the distance to take but the route we should take is not given. (Phumlani; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Black students claimed that the white students were given more support than they were, and in turn the former group had better opportunities to enhance their performance. In addition to receiving unequal treatment from lecturers, students reported discrimination against black students in class. Tsepo explained as follows:

Black students sit in front and whites at the back in class. Even if you arrive late in class, a white student will make sure that he keeps two seats away from you. When a white person arrives late and there are no seats close to their white colleagues, they can just leave the class because they do not want to sit next to black people. (Tsepo; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

The account above reveals how white students separated themselves according to race through the seating arrangements in class. Students perceived these acts as racist and as constraining their freedom to live with dignity.

During the interviews, eight students made reference to the Shimla Park incident that took place at the university when white spectators physically attacked black protestors during a rugby match:

I just felt that the university is so violent that it doesn't respect black people. I felt that it appreciates a certain race more than the others. (Rethabile; Honours in Psychology)

As evidenced, some black students were of the belief that the university is racialised due to its preferential treatment of white students and the violence that occurred. While racism not only separates students and discourages them from drawing mutual benefit from each other, it also has negative psychological effects on these students. Coupled with low confidence, the victimised black students can be traumatised, distressed, and can experience high levels of anger and hostility (Jackson et al. 2010). This disadvantages them as they are denied the right to live dignified lives at the campus. While black students experienced unfair treatment on account of race, they also reported experiencing other forms of freedom constraint, i.e. lacking finances, poor schooling, etc. That is to say, their freedoms to access, participate and progress at the university are further constrained due to the intersection of these forms of exclusion. Interesting to note is that particularly students from the Psychology, Agricultural Economics and Politics and Governance departments reported racism.

5.7.3 Gender as a constraining factor

Gender inequality was mentioned as a factor that reduced female students' freedoms to effectively learn and succeed in their university studies. Botle mentioned that she was sexually harassed by a male lecturer who had proposed 'love' to her, leading to her feeling uncomfortable in his lectures:

> *I had the experience of this lecturer who called me on my cell phone and proposed love to me. I don't know where he got my number from. He called me to visit him when I came to campus. Jho, I was so scared and I didn't go. I was uncomfortable to such an extent that I wanted to drop that module. I didn't want to see him. Maybe he was doing that to some of my colleagues and they were fine with it but I didn't like it. They should just stay strictly professional. (Botle; Bachelor of Education)*

Although Botle reported feeling uncomfortable, she continued attending the lectures whilst she avoided the lecturer. This consequently diminished her freedoms in class as she was not able to learn like the other students. Botle was already experiencing other forms of marginalisation such as schooling background, financial inadequacies, language barriers, emotional stress, etc., and consequently the sexual harassment she was subjected to worsened her situation. Students reported that the university environment was insensitive to gender inequality. Realising the prevalence of sexual harassment at the campus, Joline led a gender activist organisation named *Embrace a Sister*[57] that represented women at the campus.

> *Security workers on campus would actually look away when we reported that one of the girls at the campus was raped in her residences by a guy who frequently visited her in the residences. It was also swept under the carpet when we found out about that incident. (Joline; Honours in Political Studies and Governance)*

Evident from the quote is the presence of sexual harassment at the campus and insufficient efforts made to ensure gender fairness. What is also apparent is that sexual harassment victims were not reporting it. This excerpt also shows students' agency to improve their environment through having equal gender relationships. It is crucial to state that complaints of sexual harassment only emerged in Education, and Politics and Governance departments. This is not to say that others did not experience sexual harassment, but perhaps they had elected not to mention it or did not see the behaviours as harassment (see Walker 2016). This suggests that female students might not have had a full understanding of gender inequality and consequently did not report possible manifestations of it.

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[57] Embrace a Sister is an organization that represents female students to ensure gender equality at the campus.

5.8 Perceptions of (dis)advantage

A common view that emerged from interviews with the students was that insufficient finances for study at university constitutes disadvantage. Having enough money to study was regarded a key resource enabling one to access good schools, to afford safe and convenient accommodation, and to afford university tuition and other related costs. Katleho's quote illustrates this:

> *I think if I had to look at other disadvantages, they would all be summed in matters of finances because I believe finances offers a level of freedom. Maybe if I had afforded a cab from varsity to where I stay that would also give me an advantage because I could also stay at the library until late. And if I had money to travel to places where my fellow students are, that would be an advantage. This is the most disadvantage but it branches into small other things. (Katleho, Bachelor of Education)*

What can be stressed here is that without adequate financial resources, students could not access and participate meaningfully at the university which is disadvantageous to them. Moreover, not having the necessary finances distracted students from focusing on their studies as they are constantly worried about how they would get their next meal. Sufficient amounts of money would allow them to live a stress-free life. Related to the students' financial backgrounds is the quality of schooling they received. Some students were of the opinion that their attendance of well-resourced schools had helped them to fare well at university, which implied an advantage. This is especially true concerning the four students who had attended private schooling. Atang elaborates:

> *I attended a well resourced school where I had access to internet. I started knowing about Black board and the whole idea of sending things online from my school so I was advantaged. […] We had sessions with educational psychologists to prepare us for varsity in Grade 12 whereas for some people they just come and have to figure it out trying to balance the school work. (Atang, Honours in Psychology)*

It emerged that these private schools provided information to learners concerning university expectations. Besides understanding disadvantage from an economic point of view, students mentioned that the disadvantage results from the lack of a supportive family. This perception was voiced by five students who thought that belonging to a stable family could give them the emotional and social support they needed during their studies.

> *I have my church which is my support system, I have my spiritual father and mom who speak over my life. I still have my parents whom I know for sure they love me so much. I*

have my sister and her husband who emotionally, financially and spiritually support me.
(Mamello; Honours in Psychology)

Although family support was cited as being central to their wellbeing [henceforth advantage], what also became apparent is the important role of religion in helping students to deal with challenging situations. Interestingly, the same participant expressed that she thought that she was advantaged through being hardworking and resilient. She explains that it was through perseverance that she managed to complete her undergraduate studies, even after she had initially dropped out:

The circumstances where I came from advantaged me. It helped me to become a strong person and to work hard. I learnt that without hard work things do not come easily and that I have to fetch them. This took me to the level I am now. (Mamello; Honours in Psychology)

The ability to persevere and to work hard were seen as critical for students to be advantaged. The point to make here is that students viewed disadvantage as being associated with insufficient finances for their schooling, tuition, accommodation, transport, and costs related to their university life. It can also be observed that students did not hold a one-dimensional view of disadvantage since they themselves pointed out how the factors were interconnected. Lack of supportive family and religious support constituted further factors that determined (dis)advantage since the lack of them was construed as disadvantage. While this is correct, the ability of students to work hard and manage difficult situations was an advantage.

5.9 Functionings

As explained in Chapter 2, achieved functionings are the real achievements that individuals experience from converting the university resources. A valued functioning is something that students want to do and be if they could. It may not always be translated into achieved functionings or it may translate into an achieved functioning which are thinner. In the empirical chapters I chose to work with both valuable and achieved functionings because they are observable hence are comparable between the diverse students. In the next empirical chapters (chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8), I identify the functionings students valued and those which they attained, and extrapolate capabilities from them. I present a composite table at the end of this chapter, and chapters 6 and 8, to show the indicative functionings and the capabilities extrapolated from the functionings inorder to assess whether there are differences among students and what the staff/SRC perceived as (dis)advantage.

Students reported that they experienced personal growth due to attending university. This growth took the form of improvement in their writing skills, knowledge of the subject content and having learned to be critical about current issues. Ability to interact with others and engage in meaningful debates was also cited by the interviewed students as a positive change. Important also was their ability to engage multi-culturally:

It has opened my mind to start appreciating and associating with other cultural groups. Also associating with different people has really opened up my mind. (Phumlani; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

The comment above suggests that students became aware and tolerant of diverse cultures and learned to consider different points of view, which is an important attribute considering the diversity of society. Lebo had this to say:

I can now think critically about the world around me. I have learnt how to view things by using different perspectives and analyzing before saying something. I can now apply the knowledge that I learnt in class to practical situations. I learnt how to express myself and to build good relationships with others. (Lebo; Honours in Political Studies and Governance)

This indicates that students developed their ability to think critically about knowledge, they became open-minded, and they learned to apply their knowledge to real-life situations. Personal development such as enhanced communication skills and relationship management were mentioned as additional skills that had been acquired. Furthermore, being more confident, time management and working independently were also reported:

For me, it was personal growth reflected in my study. I became more confident and disciplined. I can now manage my time well. I learnt those things through experiencing them. I also learnt to adjust to change. I grew up rigid when I wanted my things to go following a certain order but I learnt from university that there is no such order in life. The university also opened my mind. For example, we were asked to bring newspapers, or stay tuned on news so that we know what is happening around us. (Ikhona; Honours in Commerce)

The account above illustrates that besides understanding their contemporary world and the research skills they gained, students learnt to be flexible in their lives. Of interest also, is that students mentioned having developed professionally:

The university exposed me to many careers. Let's say I want to be a Market analyst, I would be responsible enough to work hard towards that. (Vanessa; Honours in Commerce)

I have learnt to work with other people, and to be tolerant to them. I am going to be a teacher.[…] You have to keep your class in order but learners are not the same because they come from different cultures and backgrounds so some behave this way, and some that way, so you have to tolerate every one. (Tshidi; Bachelor of Education)

It is clear that through their university studies, students were given improved access to career-related information and consequently demonstrated stronger confidence about their professions. Alongside that, students recognised the importance of helping others. Thabang elaborates:

I think changing lives is the thing that is on my mind now. Studying here at the university actually made me realize the importance of learning, the importance of working and the importance of helping people and changing our country. (Thabang; Bachelor of Education)

As may be seen, students were prepared to tolerate the different kinds of people in society and to change people's lives.

It is important to mention that students converted university resources into personal and professional development and social functionings. These achieved functionings were reported by students from all the departments except the social functionings which did not emerge from students in the Department of Commerce. The achieved functionings that can be extrapolated from the data above are:

- Accessing adequate finances for university tuition, accommodation, transport, clothes, food, etc.
- Being fluent in the language of instruction
- Participating in the learning process
- Participating in extra-curricular activities such as sport and leadership programmes
- Being confident to speak in public, and to approach lecturers and peers
- Being academically literate
- Experiencing personal growth
- Living a stress-free life
- Having safe transport and accommodation
- Being employable after university education
- Involvement in part-time work in fields related to one's aspirations
- Being knowledgeable about their field of study/passing all modules
- Having aspirations to improve their lives
- Having social networks/being part of social groups

- Having improved communication skills

- Having time management skills

- Having personal tenacity and determination

- Being aware of and recognising diversity

- Having concern about others

These achieved functionings are presented in Table 8, which reflects each student's achieved functionings.

Table 8: Functionings from low income students

Achieved functioning	Atang	Butle	Joline	Khatleho	Lebo	Mamelo	Mulalo	Palesa	Phumulani	Rithabile	Rufuno	Siphe	Tebello	Thabang	Thabiso	Ikhona	Tshepo	Tshidi	Unarine	Vanesa
Accessing adequate finances for university tuition, accommodation, transport, clothes, food etc.	✓	□	□	□	✓	✓	□	□	□	□	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	□
Being fluent in the language of instruction	✓	□	□	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	□	□	□	□	✓	✓
Participating in the learning process	□	□	✓	□	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	□	□	□	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	□
Participating in extra-curricular activities	✓	□	✓	□	□	✓	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	✓	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Being confident to speak in public, and to approach lecturers and peers	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	✓	□	□	□	□	□	✓	□
Being academically literate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Having personal growth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	□	✓			✓
Living a stress-free life due to family, social and religious support	✓	□	✓	□	□	✓	□	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	□	✓
Securing safe transport and accommodation as they afforded proper and safe accommodation and drove to campus, being mobile	✓	□	✓	□	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	□	□	✓	□	□	□	✓
Being employable after studies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Involvement in part-time work either in farms or financial institutions.	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	✓	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Being knowledgeable about their field study	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	✓
Having aspirations to improve ones' lives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Having social networks	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Having improved communication skills.	□	□	✓	□	✓	□	✓	□	✓	□	□	□	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	□	✓	□
Having time management skills.	□	□	✓	□	✓	□	✓	□	v	□	□	□	✓	□	□	□	✓	✓	□	□
Having personal tenacity and determination	□	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	□	□	□	✓	□	□	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	□
Concern over others	✓	□	✓	□	✓	□	✓	✓	✓	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	✓	□	□
Being aware of and recognition of diversity	□	□	✓	□	□	✓	□	□	✓	□	□	✓	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

These indicative functionings can be grouped together to form capabilities as shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Emerging capabilities for the low income students

Indicative functioning	Capability extrapolated
Accessing adequate finances for university tuition, accommodation, transport, clothes, food, etc	Economic stability
Participating in extra-curricular activities such as sport and leadership programmes Being confident to speak in public, and to approach lecturers and peers	Participation and voice
Having social networks Belonging to a religious group	Affiliation
Being fluent in the language of instruction Being academically literate Being knowledgeable about one's field of study Passing all modules Experiencing personal growth	Intellectual growth
Living a stress-free life	Socio-psychological and mental health
Having safe transport and accommodation	Safety and mobility
Being employable after university education Being involved in part-time work in fields related to one's aspirations	Employability
Anticipating to improve their socio-economic status Looking forward to help family members and others in the society	Aspirations
Having personal tenacity and determination	Personal tenacity
Having concern about others Being aware of and recognising diversity	Empathy and diversity

5.10 Conclusion

The chapter presented students' accounts of their experience of (dis)advantage at the university. It provided evidence on how students are disadvantaged through their ability to make decisions about their preferred degree programme and university. It also showed that schooling and family backgrounds had a profound effect on the students' freedoms to perform and succeed at the university. It presented that accommodation and safety issues, finances for university life, social networks, and university teaching were significant conversion factors that could constrain

students' success. Black students and female students were noted to be further disadvantaged through an intersection of factors including race and gender respectively. What emerged in the chapter is that, regardless of the difficulties students experience during their university years, they persevered in their educational journey. Most students had the experience of failing some of their modules but through the motivation levels they were able to muster, could bounce back and succeeded in passing their modules until they had graduated or had reached their final year. Having presented the findings from the students from low income households, I turn in the next chapter to presenting the findings of students from high(er) income households.

Chapter 6: Students from high(er) income households perspectives on advantage

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter illustrated that most black students from low income backgrounds were disadvantaged through lacking freedoms to achieve all the things they had reasons to value at the university. Despite limited opportunities, the chapter showed that the students were also advantaged in some ways and this enabled them to graduate. This chapter focuses on the perspectives of six students, whose household incomes were high(er) in comparison (see Appendix F for a synopsis of the interviews) to the 20 students from lower economic backgrounds. A summary of the students' profiles is presented before discussing their schooling and family background, their experiences with making decisions about university education, and their university funding. The chapter also discusses what happens after enrolment, i.e. university teaching, the role of social capital, accommodation and transport, together with unfair practices at the university on the grounds of language and race. Having done that, attention is given to students' views about what the future holds for them, their perceptions of (dis)advantage, and their achieved functionings.

Table 10 summarises participants' backgrounds, including their gender, race, type of school attended, family income etc. The table shows that of the total students, four are white and two are black. Although the selection of these students was based on the valued functionings they had, their estimated family income is higher, compared with the former group, i.e. it ranged from R560 000 to R960 000 per annum, which places their families in the middle class, or emerging middle class (Southall 2016).

Table 10: Profiles for students from high(er) income backgrounds

Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Schooling	Degree studied	Parents' highest level of education	University funding	Family income
Dakalo	M	23	Black	Private school	Honours in Commerce	Master's degree	Parents	R600 000
Hendrik	M	23	White	Former Model C	Honours in Agricultural economics	Bachelor degree	Family Trust & parents	R700 000
Johan	M	22	White	Former Model C	Honours in Agricultural economics	Bachelor degree	Family Trust	R600 000
Gernus	M	22	White	Former Model C	Honours in Agricultural economics	Bachelor degree	Parents & Merit awards	R960 000
Tinus	M	22	White	Home schooling	Honours in Agricultural economics	Matric	Parents & Merit awards	R560 000
Thandaza	F	21	Black	Former Model C	Honours in Commerce	Bachelor degree	Family Trust & bursary	R600 000

6.2 Schooling and family background

As may be seen from Table 10, students who had attended former Model C and private schools, or who had been home-schooled, reported that they had attained the academic skills needed for them to cope with university education. Four students who attended former Model C schools reported having received a wide range of skills during their schooling, all of which prepared them for university education. Consider the following extracts:

> *The schools are competitive in everything you do. That helped me to be mature and to realise that I will not go through life without working harder. And the school really helped me with good skills throughout my two years at that college. The school really helped me to get into university and the skills supported me to get to this level. [...] (Gernus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

> *When we were in grade nine, the school counsellor came and spoke to us about subject choices. In grade nine you get to choose which subjects you want to do. Then I ended up studying Accounting and Business Studies, more on the business stuff but that's when I also realised that I like more of the business but not accounting. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)*

The accounts above stress that students gained skills, knowledge, and experiences that enabled them to pass grade 12 well, and helped them to be mature and hardworking in their university education. Students also received guidance on subjects to choose for grade 10, what to study at the university, and were given information about careers to pursue. Confidence building and improved communication skills were some aspects that students reported having gained from their schooling. Hendrik, who attended a former Model C school confirms:

> *I must say I learnt how to use another language like English. The school helped me with the life skill on how I should not be scared to say what I feel, and how to communicate well. This was really good for me because I was scared to talk to people. I wouldn't have come to you [laughs]. (Hendrik; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

For Hendrik, his schooling developed skills such as the use of English, being confident and communicating effectively. It can be emphasised that with the skills students gained from their schooling, they were able to adjust and fit well into university. Thandaza, who also attended a former Model C school, explains:

> *So a lot of them said that school and university education are very different. It's a big jump between high school and university but I was really prepared for that and to work hard. When I got here, I was really geared because I knew I could do it and that really helped a lot. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)*

Through her schooling, Thandaza experienced a smooth transition implying her readiness for university education. On the other hand, Tinus who was home-schooled, revealed that:

> *I knew how to self-study because there weren't always teachers. My mother did most of the teaching so there weren't any teachers involved. All my schooling experience was self-study. There weren't a lot of guidance, not as much as you would find in a formal school. So when I came to university especially in my first year, I saw a lot of people struggling because they still wanted the guidance that is not given at the university. So I adjusted well in that area. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

A salient point to make is that Tinus had learnt how to study on his own from the experience of having been home-schooled, which was crucial for his success at university. This implies that Tinus had an important skill that some students who attended formal schooling struggled with during their first year. By way of contrast, Dakalo, who had attended a less competitive private school, seemed to be underprepared for university education:

> *Studying in university is a lot different from high school. In high school you get tested on what you remember but here you are tested on if you can use what you remember. I really do feel that in high school we are not equipped for the outside world. We are not necessarily taught that we are going to university, we are just told to cram and pass then you get here and you find a whole different dynamics. (Dakalo; Honours in Commerce)*

What is central to the account above is that Dakalo had learnt how to reproduce knowledge but gained little experience of being analytical and learning to apply knowledge to different contexts. This shows a gap in his schooling that made it difficult for him to manage university education, thereby constraining his freedoms to participate successfully at university. Despite him attending a private school, the quality of education he received from that institution was not competitive as he initially found it hard to cope with university education. However, the point to make is that four of the six students were academically well-prepared for university education through having attended former Model C schools and through having been home-schooled.

6.3 Family and university

Another factor that influenced students' university experiences was their family background. Most of the students received social support from their families during their university studies. Five of the students' parents were university graduates and they were supportive of the students. Dakalo mentions that:

I don't think that I had much family stress but then my dad got sick when I was in my third year and that did take a toll on my studies a little. But I learnt how to deal with it. It was easier for me because I am a vocal person and it was easier for me to communicate with my parents about what was going on with my studies. They gave me the emotional support that I needed and I was able to make it. (Dakalo; Honours in Commerce)

Through initiating discussions with his parents about his problems at the university, Dakalo was able to obtain the support he needed. This was also the case with Thandaza who received support from her sister in her first year.

I wasn't completely alone. I do feel that I also had the support of my sister although I never really saw her much but the fact that she was here always gave me some sort of security. It was easier for me to explore the place with her. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)

Through her sister, Thandaza received social support, which made her feel comfortable at the university and also helped to familiarise her with the university environment. However, after her sister's departure when Thandaza was in her second year, she reported experiencing emotional stress during her studies:

I think the struggles that I had were more emotional and personal struggles not academic struggles. I used to live with my parents before university. My sister who helped me a lot in my first year graduated and left UFS. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)

Despite Thandaza having received social support at the university from her sister, she was stressed as a result of being far away from her parents. What may be deduced is that she was inadequately prepared at an emotional level to live life at university without her sister and family nearby.

Furthermore, most students' opportunities to succeed were enhanced through receiving social support from their parents, indicating that they achieved the valuable functioning of living a stress-free life. Regardless of the majority of the students being advantaged through exhibiting the academic resources needed for university education, it emerges that one of them lacked adequate preparation from her schooling experience in order to be independent after school, resulting in her experiencing emotional constraints. This implies some disadvantage.

6.4 Making decisions

The student interviews revealed that the need for some to be close to their family farms was a reason for choosing the UFS. Three students indicated that enrolling at UFS would allow them easy access to their homes since they wanted to be involved in the family businesses. Johan, whose home is located 150 kilometres from the campus, explains how he decided to study at the UFS:

> *The reason I chose UFS is that our family farm is close to Bloemfontein (where UFS is located). I am close to the farm and I love farming. I enjoy farming so I don't want to go to a university in Potchefstroom for example, which is four to five hours drive from home. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Access to family farming activities was therefore a major reason for Johan to select the UFS. On the other hand, although Tinus had wanted to be closer to his family farm, he chose the UFS, which is about 500 kilometres away from his home, because the university offered the degree programme he wanted:

> *I came to the University of the Free State for the main reason that other universities didn't offer the specific degree that I wanted to study. I live in Klerksdorp close to the Potchefstroom[58] campus. It's a quite well known university but they didn't offer Agricultural Economics at that time but they do now. The University of the Free State is a 6-hour drive from my dad's farm. It's far but I drive there once in every two weeks to help my parents there. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Thus, underlying his decision to choose UFS was the fact that the university offered Tinus the degree programme he wanted to study and that he was still able to have access to the family's farm. Apart from these factors, the reputation of the degree programmes offered by the UFS was important for students. The following extract demonstrates this:

> *I think the Agriculture Faculty here is one of the best faculties in the country. So it was a reasonably easy choice to make. (Gernus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

The above quote reveals that Gernus valued the reputation of the university and the degree programme it offered. Whilst it was the case that students valued the above factors, students also benefitted through the reduced costs by studying at the UFS. This was true for Gernus and Hendrik, whose parents worked in Bloemfontein. Hendrik explains:

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[58] The Potchefstroom campus is part of North West University. After the South African government's efforts to transform higher education in 2004, University of Potchefstroom which was a HAU (Afrikaans) was merged with the University of Bophuthatswana, a HDU, to form North West University.

The other reason is that we are living close to Bloemfontein. So it's financially efficient for me to come here unlike Potchefstroom, or wherever, because it is more expensive with fuel prices and accommodation. I can stay with my mother here in town, and then I can go to the farm whenever I feel like. It is basically more economical and financial reasoning. (Hendrik; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

The need to explore new areas and for personal development were important reasons for some students to enrol at UFS. This was true for Dakalo whose home is in Limpopo Province, which is about 900 kilometres from the UFS, and Thandaza, who lives in KwaZulu-Natal, which is approximately 700 kilometres away. Thandaza elaborates:

I initially wanted to study with University of South Africa instead of coming here. So my mom said it wasn't going to happen. She said I needed to spread my wings, so that I experience different environments that aren't close to home. UFS is very far from KwaZulu-Natal Province. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)

Clearly, the two students' decision to enrol at the UFS was based on the need for the students to live independently although this was not necessarily their own expressed need. It was felt that their experience in adjusting and fitting into the new environment would enhance their personal growth. It is also emphasised that parents were involved in the decision-making process for their children's university education.

It emerged from the interviews that students received information about universities from their parents. The following extracts illuminate this:

My father and mother were here. They graduated here and they told me many things about the UFS. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

This assisted them to make personal decisions about what and where to study. In addition to that, some students received information from their friends who were already at the university. Hendrik observes that:

A lot of my friends who were way older than me were very happy here. I made my final decision that let me come at this university. (Hendrik; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Since the students knew these friends from their previous schools, they enquired from them about what the UFS offered. As these friends were already at the university, students benefitted more having access to the first-hand information they received. Furthermore, students received information about universities from schools:

The school counsellor helped me a lot by giving me the direction because I had no idea what I wanted to do. So she narrowed down my options and showed me that there is so much out there. That helped me to focus on what I can be good at [...] What they had at my high school was that they invited past learners who were at university. They came and talked to the current matric and grade 11 students about the university. So for example, I would go and talk to those in grade 11 and that helped a lot because it gave me insight into what to expect, [...]. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)

Schools employed professional counsellors and invited former learners who were enrolled at universities to improve the current learners' awareness about university expectations. Besides using the information for making decisions, students became knowledgeable about what to expect at university. In addition to that, students cited the university as another source of information:

And then I also came to university on the open day to talk to some of the lecturers, so they helped me. (Gernus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

This means that university open days help students to meet with university staff and other students, and to become familiarised with the university.

Students also reported that they chose the degree programmes because they had a passion for the subject. All the students mentioned that they enjoyed the degree programmes they had enrolled for, as illuminated by Hendrik's account:

The reason is that I love farming. It's for passion that I studied Agricultural Economics. I grew up with it. My grandfather farmed for someone, my uncle also farmed for someone. So this is where it came from. (Hendrik; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

This illustrates that Hendrik's farming background influenced him to choose Agricultural Economics so that he would be able to pursue the career of his choice. Again, a salient point from this extract is the role of parents in helping their children to make decisions as Hendrik's interests in farming were influenced by his upbringing.

Even though the students ultimately exercised their choice of desired university and degree programme, what emerges is that parents were also involved in the decision-making process. Reay et al. (2005) explain that unlike first-generation students who must make decisions on their own, students from the middle class benefit from their parents who have greater experience of choosing universities and the programmes to study. Furthermore, the data shows that decisions made by two of the students were influenced by the need to practise farming and for personal

development. Students' freedoms to make choices were not constrained by financial issues, hence they had the freedoms to choose what they wanted to do with the support from their parents (meaning that they had been advantaged in their choices).

6.5 University funding

University expenses for the students were paid by their parents, trust funds and through awards from the university. The students' sources of money are summarised in Table 11.

Table 11: Source of university funding for students with high(er) household income

Source of funding	Number of students
Parents only	1
Parents & merit bursary	2
Trust Funds & parents	1
Trust Funds	1
Trust Funds & bursary	1

Whereas three of the students' parents were farmers, some operated retail businesses and others were employed in the senior management of banks and in parastatals (as shown in Table 10), this guaranteeing them secure incomes. Two students reported that their university expenses were paid by trust funds established by their grandparents:

> *My uncle passed away and he left some money for us to study so that each one of us gets a degree. That was the first priority of the money. All the children still have to enrol for a degree. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*
>
> *My grandfather has a family trust so that pays for each of our education - tuition, books and stuff. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)*

Since the two students had adequate financial resources that were accrued generations before, they were not worried about money running out, meaning that they had financial security for their university studies. This was different from Hendrik, whose parents had set up a trust fund for his university education:

> *The first two years my daddy paid for me using the trust fund. Because they set up a trust fund about 15 years, 16 years ago, and they paid out using that money for first two years. Afterwards, they used money from their salaries. (Hendrik; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Although Hendrik's parents had a financial plan to cater for his university education, the trust money was insufficient to get him through his university degree. However, more important to

note was that Hendrik had the financial backup from his parents' income that supported him up until his honours-level studies. It was because of these arrangements that the students were able to enjoy financial freedoms during their university education. All the students reported that their finances were adequate for paying their tuition, accommodation, food, clothing and other related expenses. Dakalo explains:

> *I never got to stress about fees because my father just made it his business. I know he paid up the fees. I don't know how he did it and my mom would always be the one who caters for my living arrangements like food and clothing. My dad would pay for my fees and accommodation. (Dakalo; Honours in Commerce)*

Dakalo was therefore not worried about university expenses, indicating that he had financial security.

Even though all the students interviewed reported having financial security, some of them also benefitted from additional sources of income as well. This was the case with four students who received merit awards and bursaries:

> *But every year I decided to work hard for my merit bursaries because that helped out a lot. Each year I got about R15000 from merit bursaries. The annual fee for each year was about R45000 excluding accommodation and other expenses, which is a large amount. So I got at least R15000 back every year. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Because of their excellent performance in class and/or in university extra-curricular activities, students received funding that supplemented their finances.

The above highlights that students experienced financial freedoms during their studies from the financial plans that had been put in place. Due to some students' outstanding achievements in class and in university extra-curricular activities, they received merit awards and bursaries that contributed to their university expenses, further enhancing their financial wellbeing. Having the financial capability and functioning suggests that students were materially advantaged, and that the material basis for their educational wellbeing was secure.

6.6 Getting on with university

This subsection discusses students' experiences after enrolment. It specifically addresses issues related to university teaching, social networks and accommodation arrangements.

6.6.1 University teaching

I investigated whether or not students participated in their learning process during classes as pedagogies of engagement are important for effective learning (Barkley 2009; Barkley, Cross & Major 2005). Pedagogies of engagement constitute, amongst others, collaborative or co-operative learning, problem-based learning, or project-based learning. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) assert that collaborative or co-operative learning promotes effective learning through encouraging students to be involved in their work by requiring each individual to contribute to group tasks. Moreover, the method helps to foster relationships amongst students, which is important for their success. The interview data show that students participated in classes, where most of the learning took place. Johan elaborates:

> *I enjoy working as a group. We are given tasks to work on and everyone gets a chance to input in their ideas. When we work together and pull our ideas together, it helps us to learn from each other and we don't forget. This works for me better than when the lecturer speaks in front of us. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Through participating in group work, Johan felt that he was able to learn more effectively because of the opportunity he had to contribute his ideas and to learn from other students' ideas, thereby improving chances of academic success. These students participated in class as demonstrated by Thandaza's account:

> *I feel confident in answering something if I am sure of the correct response or even when I am confused about something. I definitely raise a hand because I don't want to be left behind. Also my sister sort of helped me to prepare for that because she finished varsity before me. Before I started, she wrote a few things down for me and she said 'remember it's not about other people but for you to pass and if you don't understand something make sure you leave the class understanding'. So every time when I am in class and I don't understand something I raise up my hand and ask for further explanation. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)*

The extract shows that Thandaza participated actively in class discussions. It also highlights the importance of social capital, that is, she received advice about making full use of the lectures. Overall these six students participated in class and this promoted their effective learning, widening opportunities for their academic success.

Besides that, it appears from the interview data that students enjoyed experimental and practical learning. This was true for four students studying Agricultural Economics as they indicated

that practical learning helped them to learn more effectively as they learned to master how certain concepts play out in real-life situations:

> *I really like our practical classes like Crop Sciences. We went out to where they plant grass and they showed us how they plant it. Even here in front of those buildings there are green houses. We did experiments on how to plant, water, and cut grass. Those were interesting. (Gernus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

This means that experiments and observations promote students' learning. Although practical learning was limited due to the nature of their curriculum, students studying Honours in Commerce pointed out that they preferred lecturers that applied theory to real business practices. Dakalo explains:

> *I like practical ways of explaining the work because I can read the theory on my own. A lecturer would come to class and show us the practical way of applying theory into real world situations. He would always make sure that we were updated about what is happening in the economy and the world so that we would be able to link it with the work that we are doing. He would come to class and he would not teach from the book. He would use practical ways and real life situations to explain the work. So that is what I feel is an ideal way of teaching. (Dakalo; Honours in Commerce)*

Lecturers who related to real-life business practices enhanced students' learning as they gave students the opportunity to figure out how things work in the business world. This also enabled students to become familiar with their economic environment and apply theoretical concepts. Besides practical learning, students further pointed out that they liked lecturers that were 'engaging'. Five students revealed that they liked interactive learning through classroom and group discussions with their peers and lecturers. Johan explains:

> *I like it much when there is open speaking about what is happening now, how it could influence what we were doing, and how that interacts with the theory, and that is nice. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Although interactive learning seemed popular with students, Tinus, who underwent home schooling, thought that the method was not appropriate for him:

> *I would enjoy most if they just lecture only using slides on the board. I think I learn most when they stand in front and just teach. As soon as they put things in the group for discussion, things get mixed together. I switch off because I do not like working with people. So in class they teach in front, then at home I go and study what they were saying. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

The different opinions raised during classroom discussions confused Tinus. As he was used to individual learning during his home schooling years, this had not exposed him to public debates and he expressed his dislike of interactive learning. Nevertheless, most students criticised lecturers that were not interactive as they disengaged from the learning process. This transpired mostly when lecturers read their PowerPoint slides without much explanation. Hendrik, who struggled in some of the modules during his first year, comments:

The problem in my first year of university was the PowerPoint method. That was the problem because I'm that kind of person who learns from the book and not the PowerPoint. The PowerPoint is a summary of something. I can't sit in a class and write everything from a PowerPoint. I must do further research on it because it does not work like this. Lectures must give you the module in full and the summary then you must highlight and go further and read a paragraph like that. (Hendrik; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

When there were no explanations accompanying the PowerPoint slides, students failed to understand the modules. Students favoured the lecturers that provided detailed material as opposed to summaries. Students were thus discouraged from attending these lectures as they thought that they did not have much to benefit. Dakalo mentions that:

The lecturers get there, read slides and walk out. That's all they do. I always felt that it was useless for me because I can read slides for myself. So that type of teaching was never ideal for me. That's why I was never actually motivated to go to class. Being the person that I am, I always told myself that pass or fail is my responsibility. I always took it upon myself to make sure that I knew the content. (Dakalo; Honours in Commerce)

At issue here is that although students felt alienated by the teaching methods, resulting in them missing lectures, they nonetheless studied hard so that they were conversant with the content of their modules. This suggests that students had agency as they took it upon themselves to study and pass despite the 'unfriendly' teaching methods. The interviews showed that all the students graduated with a class of degree that qualified them for honours studies[59]. This was enabled by the important academic skills students had acquired, which enabled them to adjust to the requirements of university education, and develop further academically:

I managed my modules, my time, assignments, group work, and tests quite well. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)

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[59] The minimum entry qualifications for an honours degree is 60% on the undergraduate degree.

I think I did better when I got to university level than a guy who had better marks at school. Even though my high school marks were not that high, I performed better because of the skills I picked up at home school. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Students were able to perform well in examinations due to the knowledge and relevant skills they had gained, such as time management skills. Three of the students received merit awards for excellent performance as stated in Section 6.4. On the other hand, Hendrik struggled with adjusting to university education and failed some courses in his first year:

Yoooh, you have school from 8 to 4, now come to the university you have one class a day, a little more freedom. You know spending money and smoking more and drinking more. You are big now. You try to be big. And my first year it was Chemistry, that was the subject I couldn't pass. I failed a lot of subjects because the adjustment you are talking about. I think from the jumping to school you are talking about it's a big step (Hendrik; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Hendrik did not manage his time well as he spent time partying since there was no one to monitor him at the university, unlike during his school years. This suggests that he initially lacked the skills to work independently and to manage his time efficiently.

Furthermore, I also enquired about whether or not students consulted lecturers for academic support during their undergraduate studies. I did this to understand whether students had the confidence to approach lecturers for extra attention. The interviews give the impression that students consulted lecturers for academic support and this was promoted by the open and cordial relationships students developed with their lecturers. Tinus observes that:

So there was always an open door policy to go and speak to lecturers. It was easy to approach them because it was easy to speak with them. […] I wasn't that guy who sat at the back of the class, did my work and never spoke to the lecturer. I always made a point that I would go to the lecturers when I don't understand something or when I want to know more about something. I think I had a very good relationship with the lecturers. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Some (white, Afrikaans) students found it easy to develop relationships with lecturers because they shared the same cultural background. The good relationships that prevailed meant that lecturers were approachable for academic support, which in turn encouraged students to consult them. Central to the account is that students were confident to enquire whenever they were uncertain about issues. Tinus' account demonstrates this:

Most of the lecturers also come from backgrounds same as mine. They are not from towns. They have backgrounds from farming communities and those communities are known for having humble people. [...] I think I am one of those students that always had a good relationship with their lectures as well. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Some students were culturally aligned to their teachers, and that made it easy for them to fit into university education.

Five students found the pedagogical arrangements suitable for them due to the level of preparedness they had acquired from good schools. Students achieved functionings such as adjusting to the university, having the confidence to participate in class, managing time, passing their examinations and establishing good relationships with lecturers, suggesting that they were advantaged. However, some reported struggling with time management and with working independently, with one student mentioning that he lacked the social skills to interact with others in class and to participate in class debates. Whilst the majority of the students found interactive and practical learning appropriate for them, some were uncomfortable (e.g. Tinus, who had been home-schooled). This suggests that teaching methods were a conversion factor that constrained effective learning for some students, and they were thus less advantaged in this dimension. This leads us to ask the question: what are the pedagogical arrangements that allow all students to have equal opportunities for effective learning?

6.6.2 Social capital

As explained in the previous chapter, social capital is an important resource that students bring from their families and schools. It helps students with relevant information, social and academic support, and to access future employment. Through the interviews, most of the students revealed that they also made new friends with peers from class and during sporting activities. Gernus states that:

I like to relate to people who have same mind-set with me. A lot of my friends were my classmates in high school. Some of the people that I made friends with were from rugby but these were not studying here. I met them in the residences where they squatted with other team players [...]. Luckily, we worked together with the friends I had. I think in your first year you really need those people who do not come here to have a good time. You need those guys who want to accomplish their goal and get a degree. (Gernus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Gernus benefitted from the friendships he established during his schooling and sports, and this made it easy for him to adjust to the university environment. Gernus ensured that he associated with those who were as hardworking as he was. Apart from that, students had social networks that helped them to secure part-time employment. This was true for all the white students who indicated that they were involved in part-time work in family farms and banks. The following excerpt elaborates this:

> I do have the opportunity to work for my dad, which is a big privilege but the business is under heavy financial strain now. I applied to various jobs and through the grace of God I got one. Through my daddy's friend, I went for an interview this week and I am starting at First National Bank tomorrow. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

The comments reveal that Tinus worked for the family farm, highlighting the vital role his family played in providing him with part-time employment. Evident also is that Tinus received help to secure a job at the bank through family networks. Students therefore valued part-time work, which meant they had the opportunity to develop skills in preparation for future employment, hence making them more competitive in the working world. However, only one of them did not have such opportunities through her networks.

As discussed earlier in Section 6.3, students were well positioned to receive information from family members and schools about universities and the various degree programmes available, showing the significance of social capital. Another interesting observation is that all the white students had social capital that connected them to practice farming during their studies. Unlike the black students, white students had well established social networks that had existed for generations, which enabled them to access part-time employment easily and which could mean more advantage.

6.6.3 Accommodation and transport

Four students indicated that they made personal choices to live in off-campus residences. Whilst some of these students lived at their family homes, which reduced their university expenses as explained in section 6.4, others secured accommodation in places nearby the campus. This is illustrated below:

> I stayed outside campus, in Langenhovenpark[60] and drove to campus if I needed to. The only reason is that I was in a hostel since 12 years old so I didn't want to get into that

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[60] Langenhovenpark is a residential area located about 5 kilometres from the campus.

again. So I don't want that compulsory thing you have to do rugby, every week you have to do sports etc. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Since Johan had his own car, he drove to and from the campus safely at his convenience, meaning that he was not constrained by transport and safety issues. What students seem to value was the freedom associated with living in off-campus accommodation and the mobility they had. Although this was the case, students who lived in university residences reported benefits such as establishing social networks and undertaking leadership positions. Thandaza, who had lived in university residence since her first year, elaborates:

I stayed in university residences so I made friends easily because we had different activities. It helped that way, which is why my mother didn't want me to go to a college because they don't have residences and you don't get to build these kind of relationships. Also I got leadership positions in residences because you get to meet with other leaders in different residences so it helps. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)

Besides academic activities that were meant to develop students at the university, students also developed personally through the different activities they engaged in. On the other hand, students who lived in off-campus residences were confident that they did not miss much by not living in campus residences. Johan explains:

I don't think I missed much because if I wanted something I always went to the campus. Information is made available so if you want to know something it's easily accessible especially in this day and age of internet. So I felt everything I needed to know was always provided for, as long as I enquired. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Whilst students received information about events at the campus through the internet and enquiring from the university, they felt comfortable with living at their off-campus residences, family homes or farms. Unlike others, these students had financial resources that enabled them to arrange reliable transport to and from the campus, and to access information through the internet in their off-campus residences, meaning that they never faced safety issues nor missed lectures, unlike other students. Through these freedoms students achieved the valuable functionings of having safe transport and proper accommodation, meaning that they were advantaged in this dimension.

6.7 Unfair practices

Student interviews revealed the presence of unfair practices at the university. They reported that the university offered unequal opportunities for students to succeed, through the unfair language policy[61] and racism. The issues of language and race are expanded below.

6.7.1 Language

All of the four white students studying Agricultural Economics had Afrikaans as their mother tongue and main language at school. The students reported that they attended lectures in Afrikaans although they sometimes chose to attend an English one. Johan's experiences illuminate this:

> *Language is not a problem to me. The university offers Afrikaans and English, and in my first year I enjoyed studying in Afrikaans because it helped me but as the years went on, I started learning in English. I discovered that the work is easy in English and I write my exams in English although I also attend lectures in Afrikaans. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Students had a choice to attend English classes and write tests in English. What emerges is that some students had the privilege to attend both classes when they needed a better understanding of a topic. On the other hand, Tinus who was home-schooled, reported having used English since his childhood.

> *Because I was always involved in multi-cultural groups, my English got stimulated from a very young age. So when I got to varsity, I went to Afrikaans classes but I decided from first year that I was going to try and do my things mainly in English because the lecturers give you an option. You have an Afrikaans paper and an English paper, same copy and you can either decide to write Afrikaans or English. You can even combine the two languages in one paper, and this was an advantage for me. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Tinus found it easy to use both Afrikaans and English during lectures and tests and he had the choice of which classes to attend. This implies that students had the privilege to choose and learn using their mother tongue and/or English, meaning that language did not constrain their learning. Similarly, the two black students did not experience any language challenges as they

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[61]Since 2003 the UFS language policy gave provision for lectures to be conducted in Afrikaans and English classes. This reinforced racial tensions as white and black students attending separate classes. Realizing that, the UFS changed the policy and had English as the main language of instruction in 2016.

learnt in English, which was their main language during schooling even though their mother tongue was TshiVenda and Zulu. Thandaza points out that:

> *Back home I used many languages so it was fine when I came here. I grew up speaking English from primary school and we were using the same language in all the lectures from my first year at the university. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)*

Her ability to use English proficiently helped her schooling and enabled Thandaza to learn effectively throughout her university studies. This confirms the role their schools played in developing their English, and that these students had the freedoms to learn effectively using the language of instruction.

The ability to understand and speak the language of instruction was therefore an important functioning, advantaging them in this dimension.

6.7.2 Racism

Racism persists at the campus as reported to me by the students. White students mentioned that they were unwilling to live in the same residences with black students. While white students cited various reasons for choosing to live off-campus as discussed in Section 6.5.3, racism also emerged as an underlying factor for them not wanting to live in university residences. Johan reveals:

> *The university is busy randomly placing students in hostels using a computer. I think they are busy losing white students that way. Because that is a fact, black people want to be with their people in residences, and white people want to be with theirs as well. Few blacks and whites interacted 100 years ago, the same as in the 1700s when people used to kill each other. So it will be like that. For that reason, it would be good to keep people separate. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

The above extract indicates that Johan believed in the separation of black and white students in the university residences. It also shows that the student was conservative as he justified racism on the basis that it had existed for a long period, implying that Johan was intolerant of other races. White students blamed the manner in which they had been socialised for their discriminatory tendencies. Tinus explains:

> *Unfortunately, most of the white people who come to study here are from a farming community. They come with a mind-set that they grew up with, a mind-set that they don't like black people. That's where most white farming communities get raced, unfortunately. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

The interviews went on to unveil that racism persisted in classes through the seating arrangements as students separated themselves according to racial lines. Tinus explains that:

> *In class, you see that the Xhosa sits in front, the Sotho sits at another corner, [...].*
> *Fortunately, they are all blacks but if the Xhosa's were purple, they could also be three*
> *colours in class. But now you see white people sitting this side and the black this side.*
> *(Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

The excerpt stresses that students interacted with others within racial lines. Underlying the statement is that racism was acceptable and was likely to persist in the same manner black students interacted in small ethnic groups. Whilst this happened in class, students pointed out that racism also manifested itself during social events at the university. Gernus had this to say:

> *They are also groups, black guys would be there and then you see most of the white guys*
> *this side. Black guys are friends but they have different cultures and different ways of*
> *doing things. So it's difficult to socialise with them but it doesn't mean that we*
> *discriminate them. Their homes are in different places with us and they have different*
> *ways of doing things. (Gernus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

It is clear from the quote that friendships were established according to racial lines for it was claimed that white and black students had different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, racism was believed to continue amongst the university staff. Dakalo, who was employed by the university for a year after his graduation, points out:

> *I experienced racism when I was working. I saw what was happening behind the scenes,*
> *how a white person will come with no degree and be recruited for a position higher than*
> *a person with a degree who has been working there for over 3 years. That is one of the*
> *reasons I quit, I told myself I can't work in a place where my work is not recognised and*
> *my colour will always come above my accomplishments. Everything I was doing was*
> *questioned because I am black. So I quit. (Dakalo; Honours in Commerce)*

Although this evidence relates to his experiences as an employee, Dakalo's account suggests the presence of institutional racism that privileged white employees. He felt that the opportunities to develop his career were limited. Racism was therefore a conversion factor that constrained him from accessing employment and flourishing at the university.

Although the evidence of race and racism was mentioned, one student expressed that he was multiracial. Tinus who was raised at a farm observes:

> *I got the opportunity in life to grow up with parents who always encouraged multi-racial*
> *relationships. I grew up loving black people all my life and I still do. So it wasn't anything*

weird for me to come to university and sit in a classroom where there are multicultural backgrounds. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

This implies that Tinus embraced diversity unlike some white students who appeared racist and unwilling to change. On the other hand, three white students were of the idea that the funders discriminated against them. The following exemplifies this:

I applied for bursaries from many companies and they told me that they only take black students. I feel it's not fine on that space because most of the black students had much lower marks than mine but their skin colour helped them. (Hendrik; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Even though white students' academic results qualified them for bursaries, they did not access the funding because the companies prioritised awarding bursaries to black students. However, the white students valued the bursaries for increasing their employment opportunities. This is explained below:

I worked hard on my marks at the university for the first two years but I could not get a bursary because of my colour. You think bursaries are for the money only? No, they are for the work opportunities as well. That was the reason I applied for them because I wanted get a job afterwards. When you finish your study, you can work there. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Johan wanted bursaries to supplement his university income and he valued the employment opportunities that the sponsoring companies would offer him. Although this is true, this indicates a limited understanding of the majority of black students who could not afford university education at all without bursaries.

Overall, the data shows that some white students had a limited understanding of the plight of the majority of the black students (CHE 2013a). Therefore, failure to understand diversity and care about others in this case could be considered a form of disadvantage in a majority black society. Furthermore, a salient point to note is that some students missed the opportunity to interact with diverse students at the campus, resulting in them not benefitting from the multi-cultural experiences. However, racism also constrains black students through limiting their freedoms to have flourishing lives as demonstrated by Dakalo's experiences, and therefore it disadvantages them, albeit it in a different way.

6.8 Aspirations

It emerged that students had clear plans about what they wanted to do after completing their studies. All the students looked forward to pursuing careers linked to what they were studying. Students from the Agricultural Economics department pointed out that they wanted to seek employment in the banking or the agricultural sector and/or be farmers. Johan noted that:

> *What I want to do is to look for employment and farm, at the same time I want to do part-time farming at the weekends. Some of the Professors do it that way, they farm and they also work here. I think that's what I want to do when I finish. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

The extracts demonstrate that he wanted to be a farmer and/or to be employed in agribusiness. It is also evident that lecturers who undertook part-time farming influenced the students' aspirations. Students also had ambitions to occupy leadership positions in the business world and to start their own businesses. Dakalo's account affirms this:

> *After qualifying as a Chartered Accountant, I would like to start my own practice. If I can just work for maybe three or five years and learn the skill, then I can actually go out and do it on my own. I am thinking of getting into business and start building wealth. I value family so I feel very closely in building legacies and leaving something behind for family. (Dakalo; Honours in Commerce)*

Dakalo wanted to improve himself and his family, including acquiring wealth for the future generations. This suggests that he had clear aspirations and plans to improve himself in the future.

Interesting to note is that five students from the two departments were involved in part-time work in pursuing their career goals as presented in Section 6.5.2. The majority of the students studying Agricultural Economics were employed on their family's farms. This suggests advantage since most of the students had achieved the functioning of aspiration and were already involved in employment in line with their career goals. This has implications for student (dis)advantage beyond their studies for their effective opportunities in accessing employment.

6.9. Perception of (dis)advantage

Students were asked about their perceptions of (dis)advantage so as to get an understanding of how they viewed themselves. All six students reported that they had adequate financial resources for university education and that they were advantaged. Hendrik states that:

I am privileged to have a mother and a father who are willing to work hard so that my sister and I can go further in life. I think it is from your parents too that one becomes advantaged. My daddy is working; my mom is working as well, yeah. I am advantaged definitely and it's not about skin colour. When I said I want to come to the university they said it was fine you can go. (Hendrik; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Students were thus privileged to have parents who had the financial capital that afforded them access and participation at university without any hardships. The account also indicates that students perceived advantage as an outcome of individual hard work and that in the five out of the six cases, it was connected to intergenerational transfer of wealth. Whereas this was the case with all the white students, Dakalo, who admitted that he was advantaged in several ways, pointed out that he was disadvantaged through race:

I could be sitting here having the same qualification with my white counterpart but he or she will be given first preference over me. So I do feel that I need to work harder, in everything that I do. I need to put in more effort than the white counterpart. (Dakalo; Honours in Commerce)

Since white students have been advantaged because of their race, Dakalo felt that he was disadvantaged in that aspect. As such, he needed to work harder to have the same opportunities as his counterparts, i.e. white students who had the same qualification. The issue of hard work was a recurring one in the interviews. Even though these students came from privileged backgrounds, three of the white students were certain that they were advantaged through hard work. This is illustrated in the following quote:

It's what I took out of life and my determination to work that makes me advantaged. It's about my positive attitude to work. I feel that I am advantaged. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)

Tinus claimed individual will to improve himself. Therefore, students were advantaged due to their ability to exercise agency so that they could improve their lives, and this was supported by their family's resources. Another dimension of advantage brought forward by students was their ability to access information about university education from their family members. Five of the students indicated that their family members had been to universities and as such they were aware of the dynamics at the university. Thandaza states that:

My siblings have also been able to go to varsity, so then I get a lot of information from them. We were allowed to probe, ask more and find out about things when we grew up. So I feel like I am very advantaged. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)

This means that having information is advantageous since students were better prepared for university before enrolment. Thandaza was also socialised to be critical and to have a voice about things that she valued, which is an advantage. Whilst white students indicated that they were advantaged financially, they mentioned that they were disadvantaged because of the discrimination they faced in accessing bursaries, which restricted their employment opportunities. Hendrik had this to say:

> *I applied for bursaries from the government in my first year, Sasol Agriculture in my last year, and I can't really remember the third. It didn't work. One company told me they were only accepting applications from black students. (Hendrik; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

To be disadvantaged in this case meant that students were excluded from accessing bursaries even when they qualified.

Students were in agreement that they were advantaged through the social and economic capital they had. However, a subtle point to make is that white students believed that it was through their individual hard work that they had been advantaged and not through family and white privilege. Black students were also working hard but their success was diminished by their race. Race is therefore an important factor concerning how the students defined themselves regarding (dis)advantage. Individual effort certainly matters but on its own is not enough if conversion factors do not reinforce such effort.

6.10 Functionings

Students reported that they underwent changes through attending university. A change common to all the students was that they became knowledgeable in their field of study. Tinus elaborates how he understood his discipline after his undergraduate studies:

> *I think when you leave school you have a very blocked mind-set about the academic world. So I think I got to understand that there is not only one big block, there are small blocks that form one big block. The university really offers a lot of chances in looking into various blocks of the academic world. So it was a privilege for me to broaden my understanding of economics and agriculture. I would say that it changed my mindset a lot with regards to what the world really has to offer academically. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Thus, through his studies, Tinus gained an in-depth understanding of economics and agricultural issues as he became more aware of the different components that constituted his

discipline. Being critical about knowledge was also a significant skill students gained, as demonstrated by Thandaza:

> *I now think critically definitely. I studied just to pass in my first year. But now it's more of questioning information or seeing information from different perspectives and bringing it together. (Thandaza; Honours in Commerce)*

Due to the knowledge and skills they acquired, students felt that they were more employable on farms, in agribusiness and business in general. This is illustrated below:

> *I think with this degree we can enter the business market as well as the agricultural market. So I am not bound just to agricultural economics but to farming too. So I would say that I really learned what I should be as I enter the agricultural economics market in the world. (Tinus; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Whilst the above evidence demonstrates employability, students also experienced personal growth through improved communication and confidence. The following example shows some of the changes students experienced:

> *That made me able to handle pressure each year. The work does not get less but it gets easier because you would have learnt to handle it. (Johan; Honours in Agricultural Economics)*

Students had developed personal and employability skills by attending university. Learning English, improvement in time management and critical thinking were some of the personal changes students reported. Working independently, the ability to conduct research and write, and improved leadership skills were some of the functionings students mentioned having acquired. Achieving these functionings implies advantage for those students.

Overall, certain achieved functionings could be identified from the data that place students at an advantage. They are:

- Accessing adequate finances for university tuition, accommodation, transport, clothes, food etc.
- Being fluent in the language of instruction
- Participating in the learning process
- Participating in extra-curricular activities such as sport and leadership programmes
- Being confident to speak in public, and to approach lecturers and peers
- Living a stress-free life due to family and other forms of social support

- Having safe transport and accommodation

- Being employable after their studies

- Having social networks

- Being academically literate

- Involvement in part-time work, either on farms or at financial institutions

- Being knowledgeable about their field of study/graduating

- Having aspirations to improve their lives

- Having improved communication skills

- Having time management skills

- Understanding and tolerating diversity

Although these achieved functionings are indicative of personal, economic and social functionings that some or all of the students had, the data shows a complicated picture of (dis)advantage in that none of them was wholly advantaged. Some students had more of the personal and economic functionings but had fewer social functionings such as awareness of diversity. Furthermore, others were underprepared to work independently, had not been involved in part-time work, and lived a stressful life at the university. Table 12 summarises the functionings for each student.

Table 12: Functionings for students from high(er) income backgrounds

Functionings	Dakalo	Gernus	Hendrik	Johan	Tinus	Thandaza
Accessed adequate finances	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Adjusted well to the university environment	☐	✓	☐	✓	✓	✓
Fluent in the language of instruction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participated in class	✓	✓	✓	✓	☐	✓
Participated in extra-curricular activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Being confident	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Being stress-free	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	☐
Having secured safe transport & accommodation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Being employable	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Having social networks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Being academically literate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Involvement in part-time work	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	☐
Having aspirations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Being knowledgeable about their study area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Having improved communication skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	☐	✓
Having time management skills	✓	✓	☐	✓	✓	✓
Working independently	✓	✓	☐	✓	✓	☐
Having leaderships skills	✓	☐	✓	✓	☐	✓
Being aware and tolerant of diversity	✓	☐	☐	☐	✓	✓

Although students exhibited a wide range of achieved personal and economic functionings suggesting advantage, what was noticeably absent from the interviews with some of them was the development of social/citizenship functionings related to concern or caring for others in the society. Even though this subject was not probed via direct questions, attempts were made to elicit relevant information through discussing what the students did during their extra-curricular activities and through talking about their aspirations (as in Chapter 5). The

social/citizen functionings are important in that they constitute one of the aims of higher education, which is to develop responsible and global citizens (Nussbaum 2002b; Walker 2006). Nussbaum (2000:79-80) refers to these capabilities as planning of one's life with concern for others, and imagining the situation of others and having compassion for them. Students can therefore be regarded as disadvantaged in that they were found to lack the social/citizenship functionings, including condoning forms of discrimination such as racism. A more detailed discussion of these achieved functionings and of which capabilities matter most in our understanding of student (dis)advantage, will be presented in Chapter 9. Table 13 extrapolates capabilities from the above functionings.

Table 13: Emerging capabilities from students with high(er) income backgrounds

Indicative functioning	Capability extrapolated
Accessing adequate finances for university tuition, accommodation, transport, clothes, food, etc	Economic stability
Participated in class Participating in extra-curricular activities such as sport and leadership programmes Being confident to speak in public, and to approach lecturers and peers	Participation and voice
Having social networks	Affiliation
Being fluent in the language of instruction Being academically literate Being knowledgeable about one's field of study/passing all modules Experiencing personal growth Working independently Having time management skills Adjusting easily to the university environment	Intellectual growth
Living a stress-free life	Socio-psychological and mental health
Having safe transport and accommodation	Safety and mobility
Being employable after university education Being involved in part-time work related to one's aspirations	Employability
Having aspirations to improve their lives	Aspirations
Being aware of and recognising diversity	Empathy and diversity

6.11 Conclusion

The chapter has shown that students were found to have various freedoms in dimensions such as financial, academic, social, accommodation and safety, language etc., and that they were able to turn university resources into academic, personal and economic functionings. Together with that, it demonstrated that students exercised their agency as they made personal decisions with the help of their parents about their university education and were proactive in improving their lives. However, an intricate image of (dis)advantage appears in that it emerged that some students lacked functionings such as living stress-free lives, involvement in part-time work, awareness of and being tolerant to diversity. Racism also emerged as a significant factor disadvantaging some white students from benefitting from the multi-cultural environment at a majority black campus. On the other hand, race advantaged the white students through giving them more opportunities in their lives (e.g social and economic capital, language, and good quality schooling) compared to black students. Finally, only one of the students emerged as having valued the functioning of citizenship and giving back to the society. The next chapter draws on the experiences of two students to demonstrate how the capability approach offers an effective framework to assess student (dis)advantage.

Chapter 7: A comparison of two students' experiences of (dis)advantage

7.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 investigated the experiences of low income and middle-class students' respectively, looking at their decision-making, entry into the university and their navigation of university life. This chapter presents and discusses the capabilities and functionings that emerged from the student population (as presented in Chapters 5 and 6) through discussing the experiences of two selected students. From a sample of 26, the two students were selected on the basis of them having the highest and lowest levels of income respectively. Income was used as selection criterion due to its significant effect on students' opportunities for access, participation and success at university. This chapter aims to illuminate the complexities inherent to the notion of (dis)advantage through describing the themes that emerged in earlier chapters in an effort to demonstrate how (dis)advantage has played out in more detail in the lives of these two individuals. It does so through presenting the capabilities, i.e. the effective opportunities available to the two students to do and to become that which they have reason to value. The chapter is organised as follows: firstly it presents summaries of the experiences of the two students, namely Tshidi and Gernus. Drawing from that, it presents and discusses the capabilities that the two students reported having reason to value. The results described in this chapter relate to the students' university experiences, and shed light on the correlation between their biographies within the space of the university environment and manifestations of different forms of (dis)advantage.

7.2 Case 1 (Tshidi)

Tshidi is a black female student in the final year of her Bachelor of Education (BEd). She hails from a township and low income background and has an estimated family income of R8400 per annum. Tshidi did not have much choice in pursuing the degree programme she decided on because of the type of bursary she received, since without funding she could not go to university at all. Although she had hoped to study Social Work at the UFS - a programme she qualified for - she enrolled for a BEd because the Funza Lushaka bursary she was awarded only funds BEd degrees. Realising that she was a talented student, her grade 12 teacher had given her a bursary application form and asked her to complete it. Tshidi had little information about universities; her parents had limited formal education and, even though her siblings encouraged

her to further her education, none of them had completed secondary school or had any information about tertiary education. While she was talented,[62] as shown by the high score she had obtained for entry into university (i.e. 34 entry points)[63], Tshidi was poorly prepared, academically, for university on account of her schooling. After enrolling for the BEd programme, she was confident that she would become a teacher since the bursary she was awarded guarantees a job upon successful completion of her studies. In addition to looking forward to securing a job that would meet her economic needs, Tshidi looked forward to helping students from her community.

Tshidi's parents had died (her father when she was in Grade 6, and her mother during Tshidi's grade 12), leaving her with an absence of emotional support at university. She ended up living with her siblings and suffered from emotional stress due to the responsibilities she had. Tshidi paid her university expenses from the bursary she was awarded despite the initial financial challenges she faced when the bursary funds were released late. The bursary covered her tuition, accommodation and textbooks, so she could afford all university-related costs and also take care of her siblings. However, Tshidi's effective opportunities to access academic resources were constrained due to accommodation and transport arrangements. Tshidi applied for, but did not get accommodation on campus[64]. She commuted from her home, located in a small town 60 kilometres from the university campus. This decision was made on the understanding that it was less costly to take care of her siblings whilst living with them at home as compared to securing off-campus accommodation for herself near the campus. After missing some lectures because of lack of transport money, she decided to stay in accommodation near the campus although this also brought problems since the property owner had locked her out because she had trouble paying her rent on time. Faced with these challenges, Tshidi relocated back to her family home where she lived until her final year. Although Tshidi did not face transport fee problems in her second year, she struggled to reach the university early enough to attend the 7 o'clock lectures as it was unsafe for her to leave home[65] before 4/5 a.m.

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[62] I use talent to refer to a student's personal abilities and competences.

[63] Whilst the university minimum entry qualifications for the mainstream degree programmes is 28 points, both students had 34 entry points each meaning that they were talented.

[64] From the approximate 23000 students enrolled at the university, only 5000 are accommodated in the university's campus residences. The rest of the students lease accommodation from private property owners in residential areas surrounding the university.

[65] It takes about an hour and half to travel by public transport from Tshidi's home to the campus because of several stops along the way. There is also little cheap public transport that she could use.

Tshidi's learning was impaired due to language constraints, and she reported believing she could have performed better if she understood, spoke, and knew how to write well in English. Her alienation was exacerbated by some lecturers who taught using Afrikaans in English classes. She was further hindered from learning effectively through the pedagogical arrangements at the university, i.e. the teaching strategies and the dismissiveness of the lecturers regarding the diversity of the student body. Besides that, Tshidi did not take active part in the learning process through engaging with lecturers in class because she lacked the confidence to do so. However, she progressed successfully to her final year and she is likely to graduate, although with low grades. Because of her background, Tshidi was motivated to work hard as she had made it during schooling under difficult circumstances. Thus, the difficulties she went on to face at university were different, but not all together new since she had become accustomed to hard work. When asked about what disadvantage meant to her, Tshidi mentioned lack of family support, as well as stress and inadequate funding.

7.3 Case 2 (Gernus)

Gernus is a white male student studying an honours degree in Agricultural Economics. He is from a middle-class urban background, and his family income is approximately R960 000 per annum. Gernus had knowledge of the degree programmes offered at UFS. Informed by his parents who had been to another university, Gernus chose Agricultural Economics at the UFS because of his 'passion for it'. With his family's farming background, he could be more knowledgeable about food production. His perception that the university had a good agricultural economics programme and his talent for rugby (which was recognised by a UFS rugby coach as early as high school) were cited as the main reasons for choosing the UFS. Gernus was less worried about university expenses since his family was well off. From their professional jobs and assets, including a farm, Gernus' parents were able to afford his university expenses. Regardless of his parents' income, he secured a rugby bursary that contributed about 60% of his tuition costs whilst the remaining 30% was paid through him having earned merit awards[66]. He experienced significantly less financial problems during his studies as expenses such as accommodation, food, and study-related materials were adequately covered by his family. This means that he had the material resources that were necessary for his university studies. Gernus had his own car, which made it convenient for him to access the university and the library safely at any time.

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[66] The university paid a portion of his fees due to his excellent study record.

Despite Afrikaans being his home language and having used it during his schooling, Gernus did not experience any problems at the university because he attended the Afrikaans medium classes. He found experiential and interactive teaching methods stimulating as opposed to when lecturers read from textbooks without engaging students. Even though he had some pressure from a heavy workload and depth of the content, Gernus was able to adjust to this by utilising surrounding resources for his success. Realising the need for academic support, Gernus established social networks that were helpful to him. He also benefitted from the cordial relationships he had with his lecturers and approached them for guidance before completing assignments and writing tests. He had the confidence to seek additional support even when he was performing well, this contributing to him receiving merit awards for excellent performance. His university experiences gave him knowledge of his field and how the various aspects of Agricultural Economics were interrelated. In addition to that, Gernus mentioned that he had developed critical skills through his university studies. He was open to new ideas, and was able to apply knowledge to different life contexts. Furthermore, Gernus believed that he was employable through his university studies. All this points to how university learning contributed positively to his personal development.

Gernus planned to develop his rugby career, since he expressed the desire to play the sport until the age of 35. He intended to find an overseas job in the agriculture sector afterward. Gernus believes that his chance at employment was strong since he had an honours-level qualification. More importantly, he was confident that he would become a professional rugby player as part of the Free State Cheetahs team[67], which is one of the leading provincial teams with which he has an existing contract. Gernus thought that to be advantaged meant the following: to have adequate finances for university, having the ability to adapt to any situation, having a supportive family, having attended a good school, and being fluent in English. Interestingly, Gernus indicated that he was advantaged through his hard work. Gernus believes that his advantage came from hard work and not through being privileged by coming from a middle-class family. On the other hand, he said that to be disadvantaged meant having poor accommodation due to inadequate finances for transport.

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[67] The Free State Cheetahs team is one of the provincial rugby teams. Gernus played for the university but was recruited by the provincial team because of his talent.

7.4 Capability dimensions for equal participation at university

Based on the two students' experiences, the following capability-inspired dimensions can be identified from the data. A brief explanation for each capability-inspired dimension is outlined before discussing the freedoms each of the students had in realising that capability. During the presentation, I discuss both students' capabilities and their functionings to illustrate the opportunities they had to convert the resources into achievements, which contributes to their inherent (dis)advantage.

7.4.1 Economic stability

Being able to pay university expenses such as tuition, accommodation, food and textbooks. Being able to afford safe transport to travel to and from the campus.

Although the two students had access to adequate finances to pay for all their university-related expenses, their capabilities were different. Tshidi paid her university expenses from the bursary that she received, paid for transport, and purchased the gadgets that she needed to support her studies, including a cell phone and a laptop, together with buying groceries for her siblings. However, Tshidi did not enjoy having adequate functioning before her money was released as she struggled with transport money to travel to the university in addition to facing accommodation challenges. This means that her access to university and university resources during that period was fraught with hurdles she had to overcome at the beginning of her studies. On the other hand, Gernus was less worried about university expenses and had a smooth start to his studies since his family is well off. As he explains:

> *I have a home to stay in. We always have money, although not a lot of money. Each month we have enough to get through the month and not struggling to pay stuff. […] Yeah, having food on the table, warm bed every night yeah, place to study and having my studies here at the university. There were times that were tough but we went through.*

Gernus experienced significantly less financial problems at the beginning of and during his studies. They were both advantaged through having material resources to access and participate in university, but Gernus was in a position of greater advantage as he never had to worry or stress about money, provide for his family, or worry about transport.

7.4.2 Being employable

Being employable to improve one's income after graduating.

Both Tshidi and Gernus were confident that they would secure jobs. Tshidi had already gone through teaching practice that exposed her to a teaching career, and her bursary guaranteed her a job after her graduation. On the other hand, Gernus reported that he had become employable through his university studies. He states that:

> *It really increased my chances of getting a job, which is really important. I will have a family one day and it's important to have a job.* (Gernus)

Gernus was already playing rugby and wanted to play professionally until the age of 35. He elaborates:

> *I really see the advantage of having an honours qualification over some people from my rugby team who do not have. I have many opportunities: I can play rugby full time or find employment in agribusiness using my degree.* (Gernus)

Gernus' talent for rugby qualified him to play for the university team before he excelled and secured a contract with the Free State Cheetahs. The two students equally had the capability of employment as demonstrated by the improved opportunities for employment they had after graduation, this conferring advantage upon them both. However, it is clear that Gernus has more options than Tshidi. He has more than one opportunity to pursue a career that he has reason to value. Tshidi essentially has one option. Thus, Gernus is more advantaged because he has more opportunities for employment than Tshidi.

7.4.3 Intellectual growth

Being able to learn and acquire knowledge on the degree programme studied. Being able to think critically and creatively, and apply knowledge to different contexts. Being able to use the language of instruction.

The two students valued the capability for intellectual growth as it enabled them to progress with their studies and graduate. However, for Tshidi, the capability is diminished by her poor schooling and the pedagogical arrangements that were not supportive, unlike for Gernus. Through her schooling, Tshidi had qualified for university but without adequate preparation. Most of her teachers were not supportive and they did little to help learners to think about improving their lives in the future, which is crucial to the formation of learners' aspirations:

> *The problem is with those teachers, who think that because we did not pay school fees, [pause] I don't know how to say it, [pause]. They are not interested in our lives and in our future. They kept on discouraging us that we were not going to make it in life because we were failing tests. They didn't motivate us to work hard and said nothing to encourage*

us to change our lives. No. They just get into class, tell us what they wanted, teach us and then leave. That's how it was like.

Additionally, the large class sizes of up to 64 students made it difficult for teachers to control the classes and to attend to individual learners. Tshidi's freedoms for academic literacy were constrained by her poor schooling that did not adequately prepare her for university education, resulting in her repeating some modules in her first and second years at the university as she struggled to adjust and cope with university learning. By way of contrast, enabled by the well-resourced schools that equipped him with better opportunities for academic success at university, as outlined in Section 6.1, Gernus' intellectual capability was enhanced. The capability made it easy for him to adjust to the academic demands of university education. University teaching disabled Tshidi from learning effectively in the first two years of her university education. Her alienation contributed to her loss of confidence and this negatively affected her sense of agency, as she did not participate in class, nor did she consult her peers and lecturers (as shown in Section 7.4.4).

Whilst that was true in Tshidi's case, Gernus' intellectual capability was supported by the pedagogical arrangements that worked well for him. Gernus found interactive learning interesting, especially when conducted in practical lessons:

> *I like it when there is open speaking about what is happening now, how theory could influence what we are studying, and how it interacts with the real world. That was nice. I really like our practical classes like Crop [sciences], we went out and we were shown how grass is planted. There are greenhouses even here in front of those buildings where we did experiments on how you plant, water, and cut grass.*

Whereas Tshidi struggled to pass her modules in her second and third years, Gernus attained his undergraduate degree with a better class pass. Even though he had some pressure from the workload and depth of the content, Gernus was able to adjust and cope with his workload by utilising surrounding resources for his success. This suggests that the capability of intellectual growth is related to the level of confidence and agency a student has, as well as prior schooling.

Apart from that, the capability manifested differently for the two students due to their varying ability to use the language of instruction.

> *I had the challenge in writing using English in my secondary school because it was a requirement to write examination using that language even when we were learning using Sesotho. I understood a bit of English but I didn't know how to build the sentences. I*

improved at university but I feel that I could have performed better if I understood everything in class and knew how to write well.

More importantly, Tshidi's capability of intellectual growth was reduced when she was alienated through the use of Afrikaans in English classes:

The thing was with language. Sometimes a student would ask a question in Afrikaans. The lecturer would explain everything to her in Afrikaans. He would not respond to her in English nor translate to us what they were discussing. He would never translate that to us, but continue teaching.

This indicates that more opportunities for learning were extended to the Afrikaans students in English classes, yet Tshidi could not ask questions and have them answered in Sesotho. The use of Afrikaans in English classes thus constituted a barrier to effective learning for Tshidi, especially during discussions where she did not understand the conversations between the lecturer and the Afrikaans-speaking students. This suggests poor teaching practices on the part of some lecturers who used a language that was not understood by all of the students. Although both Tshidi and Gernus used English as their second language, Gernus did not experience any problems:

I did most of my assignments in English but I still attended the Afrikaans class to understand better. In first year I did half of my subjects in English and, in the second year, I did my assignments in English and still attended Afrikaans classes to understand better what I have learnt in English.

Learning was easier for Gernus because he had good command of English and Afrikaans. He had the advantage of being able to do well enough in English, but also attended Afrikaans classes to enhance his understanding if he needed to. Tshidi only had one option, but her command of English was not good to begin with, thus reflecting her inherent disadvantage in the matter.

7.4.4 Socio-psychological and mental health

Being able to avoid too much stress that undermine students' ability to learn. Being able to receive social-psychological support for one's mental health.

Tshidi had lost the capability for emotional support when her parents died. This resulted in her having diminished access to non-financial support to help her cope with university education; she was unable to study because of the stress she experienced. This was exacerbated by that she did not have someone to rely on for encouragement, motivation and inspiration:

Sometimes, I get very sad but it doesn't mean that I don't have to work hard because I'm an orphan. I do think about not having parents because this is a reality. I feel things

would have been different if my parents were here. As much as they could not afford most of the things, they could have supported me emotionally. At least, there would be someone to motivate me to do better in life, and to listen to my problems.

Taking care of her siblings exacerbated Tshidi's emotional stress. Her family was a conversion factor that limited her ability to leave a stress-free life at the university. By way of contrast, Gernus lived a stress-free life as he received support from his parents throughout his studies. Additionally, his friends from sport and the on-campus residences with which he associated, offered him social support (see Section 7.4.6).

7.4.5 Safety and mobility

Being able to have decent and secure accommodation with services that promote student learning. Being able to afford safe transport to travel freely to the university and back home.

Even though both Gernus and Tshidi lived off-campus, their safety and mobility capabilities were not the same. Tshidi's effective opportunities to access academic resources were constrained. Her safety and mobility was compromised due to the distance from the campus to her home:

That time I had no laptop. When I needed to type my assignment, I had to come to campus. I had to make sure that I finish before 8 in the evening or I would not get the public transport to my home. But if I was staying in campus I could have accessed the computer labs and walk to my residences any time.

Gernus had none of these challenges:

Well, my parents made sure that I had enough money for fuel. I could come and leave the university anytime; even when we had rugby matches during the evenings.

Through the financial capability (material base) he had, Gernus was positioned at an advantage as he had the mobility freedoms to access the campus when he needed. Gernus had his own car, which made it convenient for him to access the university and the library at any time. Furthermore, his affiliation to the university's day residences meant that he could benefit from the privileges associated with these university residences. It is crucial to highlight that although the two students lived off-campus, their effective opportunities for safety and mobility were rather different.

7.4.6 Affiliation

Being able to interact with other students. Being able to have good relationships with lecturers. Having a sense of appreciation for diversity amongst people.

This capability fosters relationships amongst students and lecturers, and recognises and values diversity in the form of gender, race and religious groups. Facilitated through his participation in sport and his affiliation to on-campus university residences, Gernus developed the capability of affiliation. His social networks helped him to gain information about universities and he had support from family and friends.

> *My friend who was living in Veritas [university hostel] also played rugby with me. So they told me that I can also go to Veritas, which was fairly new, and explore the campus. [They told me that] you can meet new people from different hostels. My friends from rugby referred me to Veritas and introduced me to university environment. […]. So the hostel really helped me because everyone could explain to me what the university looks like, where the buildings are and where to go, and where to find breakfast.*

Being affiliated to the university's day residences is associated with benefits such as students familiarising themselves with the university environment, and participating in cultural activities and programmes meant for building relationships and developing leadership and other skills. Clear from this is that his affiliation capability enabled him to establish social networks that were helpful to him.

Tshidi's capability for affiliation did not develop much as she did little to establish social networks at the campus; she did not spend much time at the university outside of the time she was attending classes (as presented in Section 7.4.5). Nobody told Tshidi about the on-campus day residences. Furthermore, she preferred studying alone and did not seek help from peers or lecturers despite struggling:

> *People have different classes at different times. So I feel it's a waste of time. You have to wait for other people so I prefer to do so on my own at my own. […]. I will never go to a lecturer for help. I felt like they did explain it in class and I didn't understand.*

As can be seen, Tshidi did not utilise the resources available to her, including her peers. This is linked to Tshidi's lack of confidence to seek academic support from her lecturers as she blamed herself for not understanding. Unlike Tshidi, Gernus benefitted from the cordial relationships he had with his lecturers. As such, he approached them for guidance before doing assignments and writing tests, which enhanced performance.

Often, I consulted lecturers especially when I needed information on what to do on the assignments and what to do on the next test. I asked them what they thought were important areas for this subject. They helped me.

Gernus received guidance that helped him to perform well academically, and that contributed to him receiving merit awards as mentioned earlier in Section 7.2. He therefore possessed the capability of affiliation and the agency to seek additional support even when he was performing well.

Although a clearly diminished affiliation capability reduced Tshidi's effective opportunities to learn, she demonstrated care for others. In addition to taking care of her siblings, Tshidi looked forward to changing the lives of other people from the community she came from:

I want to own businesses not because of my income only but to help people. I want to help students through funding them. Even if I help two or three students, that will make a difference and that will make me happy.

This is an aspect of affiliation that was absent in Gernus' experiences. Additionally, Tshidi's capability for affiliation was promoted by the university. She learnt to be aware of and be tolerant to diversity:

There are different learners in a classroom. So one gets to know them and pay attention to those with the least abilities. One has to know that learners are not the same because they come from different cultures and backgrounds so they behave differently so you have to tolerate all of them.

Here Tshidi is reflecting from the perspective of a teacher, which she will become one day. This indicates that her study programme has courses that encourage students to think about, recognise and deal with diversity. The learning of this lesson seemed to be absent in Gernus' reflections who did not report valuing this aspect of the capability from his university education or schooling.

Gernus' capability for affiliation appeared to be more centred around the instrumental value of relationships with people who can provide valuable information and advice about doing well at university. Tshidi is more centred on understanding people's diverse backgrounds and wanting to do work that changes people's lives. From a human perspective in relation to the disposition of developing one's self, while also helping others, Tshidi seems to be at a greater advantage with relations to the higher education aim of fostering citizenship and the public good.

7.4.7 Aspirations

Being able to have hopes about the future and one's career. Being able to look forward to improving one's self, family and community.

The interviews revealed that both students had the freedoms to aspire concerning their future careers.

> *I am going to be a teacher when I am done and then afterwards I am going to study honours in Sesotho. So maybe I can be a lecturer or be in a position at the department of education but I want to start my business on the side. […] It is going to be difficult to obtain money to start a business. That's why I want to work first, get my own money and not be dependent on people asking for money.*

Apart from working as a teacher, Tshidi has ambitions to further her education and occupy higher positions in her field. Another aspect of aspirations that had been highlighted in Section 7.4.6 is that of looking forward to helping others, which she intends doing. On the other hand, Gernus planned to develop his rugby career before finding a job in the overseas agriculture sector.

> *[Coughs] Well, I want to thrive in my career where I would be. I think I have many options in my career life. I am trying to go with rugby as far as I can and make some money there. Afterwards, I use the degree to look for opportunities and do something in banking or going into complete farming.*

It is relevant to note that the capability of aspirations in the form of improving an individual's economic status is common for the two students. However, it emerges differently for Tshidi who expressed looking forward to improving the lives of others.

7.4.8 Personal tenacity

Ability to persist with university studies and achieve personal goals despite encountering hardships.

Since her schooling, Tshidi had been motivated by her circumstance of poverty, which she sought to change. She wanted to improve her family income through succeeding at school and qualifying for university education. She believed that it was through university education that she could eventually have access to a job and income to help support her family.

> *There was no one to support me. I felt that I needed to pass to change the circumstances my family had because we did not have an income. I also wanted to take care of my siblings and help them to prepare their futures.*

Another motivation came from the bursary that she had, which required her to pass so that she continued benefitting from it.

> *I was so excited to have made it to the university. And having a bursary also motivated me to work hard and pass. I knew that if I had failed and lost my bursary, I was going to drop out, and no one could be there to help pay for my studies.*

What underlies Tshidi's success was her background that motivated her to work hard as she knew that nobody else would pay her university expenses if her bursary was withdrawn due to poor performance. Tshidi affirms this position by seeing advantage as having the motivation to work hard:

> *In another way I am advantaged because of my poor background. My motivation had to do more with the pressure I had to change my family. I needed to pass for the bursary to continue paying for me. I never relaxed. I worked hard and harder on my studies and I will be a better person.*

What can be inferred from the above is that to be advantaged is to have the motivation to work hard. This shows that she persevered in her studies and had the agency to work hard and succeed.

7.5 Summative discussion

The capabilities that emerged from having interviewed the two students are as follows: 1), ability to access adequate finances, 2) employability, 3) intellectual growth, 4) socio-psychological and mental health, 5) safety and mobility, 6) affiliation, 7) aspirations, 8) personal tenacity. These capabilities correspond with the capability-inspired dimensions for equal participation that were proposed earlier (see Chapter 3), except for the capabilities relating to motivation and hard work, as well as safety and mobility. Although these capabilities were informed by the capabilities literature in higher education in the South African context, they also appeared from the student data. Students valued safety and mobility, and personal tenacity capabilities which did not emerge from the capabilities literature. Having the experience of being at university ought to result in students gaining capabilities that are reflective of being fully human (Nussbaum 2000). Both students had the capabilities of access to finances, access to employment, intellectual growth and aspirations. However, Tshidi lacked the capabilities of emotional health, and mobility and safety but managed to complete her modules up until the final year. Although Gernus had more capabilities than Tshidi, his capabilities of affiliation and aspiration were only reflective of the instrumental value of higher education. This reflects disadvantage on his side compared to Tshidi who had learnt to help others and appreciate diversity. Overall, achieving the social goals of higher education,

positions Tshidi at a greater advantage compared to Gernus, whose capabilities were aligned to personal growth and the economic goals of higher education.

7.6 Conclusion

If one considers the value of university learning from a utilitarian perspective, it is easy and appropriate to judge Gernus' situation as having been advantaged (he can get everything that he has reason to value from being at university, e.g. securing his chances of employment). However, casting a human development and capabilities lens on the purposes of university learning prompts us to consider varied ways in which students can increase their chances of participating in the economy through employment, but also how they might at the same time become interested in, and seek to advance the capabilities of others. We might then argue that Tshidi is better positioned to function as an agent of human development in society through her future employment, due to the higher value she places on diversity and concern for others (beyond her immediate family) when compared to Gernus. This capabilities-based dimension of being human could be considered a tool we can use for a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a 'disadvantaged student'.

Having presented views from students in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I now turn to focus on the results derived from interviews with university staff and members of the Student Representative Council in the next chapter. I include their views in this study as they give us a partial representation of how the university interprets (dis)advantage.

Chapter 8: Perspectives of student (dis)advantage from university staff and Student Representative Council (SRC) members

8.1 Introduction

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 outlined and discussed how diverse students entered university and demonstrated how their personal factors and socio-economic backgrounds conflated with the university structures in (dis)advantaging them. This chapter draws on the voices of four university staff members responsible for academic and student affairs, and three Student Representative Council (SRC) members interested in student welfare, transformation and finances. The aim of this chapter is to understand the extent to which the perspectives of the SRC and university staff were aligned with findings from the student interviews. It does so by extending the capability approach beyond the perspective of the students to what capabilities the university sees as capabilities that students have reason to value. To reiterate what is presented in Chapter 4, the four university staff members were chosen on the basis of their positions at the university in that these positions made them aware of issues concerning student (dis)advantage. Additionally, the SRC members were interviewed on account of their handling finances, welfare and transformation portfolios, which made them familiar with issues related to disadvantage. Although this chapter reports on interviews with staff member, no claim is being made that the perspective represents that of the entire university. The findings reflect the views from a small group of people who are positioned to have a view of student (dis)advantage. Nonetheless, the findings from these interviews are described here to expand the evaluative space of the capabilities that students have a reason to value related to what the university staff perceive as valuable to students. A common set of capabilities emerged from Chapters 5, 6 and 7 and this was widened with the views from the university lecturers and SRC members.

The chapter is divided into the following sections: students' socio-economic backgrounds and university funding, academic preparedness and university teaching, and accommodation arrangements. It then turns to university transformation issues, specifically those related to race, curriculum, gender, religion and disability. The final section provides a summative discussion of emerging findings.

8.2 Students' socio-economic background and university funding

The university staff claimed that some black students underperformed partly due to limited social capital, while white students received family support from their parents who were involved in their children's university education. The member responsible for student and academic affairs had this to say:

> *White families visit their students here [at the university]. They intervene much more than black parents do. They have a sense of compassion. They feel in place, the university is much more familiar to them than for black people. (Member: Academic Affairs)*

The university staff sees family involvement as advantage. Familiarity with the university environment is an important aspect of social and cultural capital that white students bring to the university, which most of the black students seem not to have. According to the information, white students identified themselves with the university because their parents were attached to it, and were closely involved in university affairs. Like any other historically advantaged and Afrikaans university), Afrikaans people have dominated, even during the post-apartheid period, as a way of conserving the heritage they claim (Jansen 2009). White parents' close involvement in the university means that their children are more knowledgeable about the university from the advice and information received from their parents prior to their enrolment. Because of the informal and formal links they have to the university, the students' sense of belonging is enhanced and this contributes to most of them performing well once enrolled. Although the above view points to the importance of parental involvement, it is relevant to note that close parental involvement might prevent students from making autonomous decisions, consequently contributing to their loss of agency. Furthermore, the perspective seems to view black students from a deficit model in that black students lack family support. This ignores the underlying factors that might have prevented black parents from visiting their children, e.g. finances and the belief that students need to take care of themselves.

Equally important is the view that some black students were excluded academically as a result of inadequate funding, hence failure to register at the beginning of the year. Realising that some of the students were failing to register due to inadequate funding, the university allowed the provision of temporary registration,[68] and admitted some of the students through payment plans. Despite this provision, some of the students failed to raise the full tuition in time:

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[68] Temporary registration allowed students to make payment plans and attend classes with the ideas that full tuition would be paid at an agreed time.

The university had no option except to fund raise externally. It gave bursaries to students and supported those who performed well. Nevertheless, for the ones who are below 50% in terms of the average, we don't have the money but those above 50% we are helping. The number of students to be deregistered declined from 5000 to 159 [after the university's intervention], and remember this was only to allow them to register. (Member: Academic Affairs)

The point is that the university intervened through subsidising some of the students who performed well. Whilst some of the students had managed to register, they were likely to face financial constraints in their restricted access to food, clothing, textbooks, and airtime etc., as shown in Section 5.4. This confirms that access to the capability of finance is significant to students' success as without it, students could not access university resources and flourish in their university life.

At the same time, the SRC mobilised student protests during #FeesMustFall in 2015, where students objected to the increase in tuition and agitated for free university education (presented in Chapter 3). Other student protests followed to demonstrate their objection to student deregistration in 2016 and 2017. The following quote illustrates this:

Another thing is that some people were deregistered and that angered students, and they protested. […] I think there must be free education or there must be some sort of intervention but we will see how it's going to look like. There must be free education. (SRC: Student Affairs)

Also apparent is the students' determination to change the funding policy in pursuit of what they had a reason to value. Put differently, students shared collective agency with their counterparts from other universities, and that subsequently influenced a policy change to free university education from the beginning of 2018.

8.3 Academic preparedness and university teaching

University staff elaborated further on how they thought students from low quality schools had already been significantly disadvantaged by the time they enrolled at the university. An interviewee from the division of student affairs holds this view:

I think students struggle a lot with writing and do not have the ability to write in a structured way to put forward an argument. In the cognitive functional area, I think students have many challenges. They have not developed critical and creative thinking skills, the ability to think in a flexible way, to take principles and apply them to different

scenarios or settings, so they think in a very fragmented way. Even if you put them in an environment with excellent programmes and class, they don't have the mental roots, if I can use that metaphor, to gain from a direct exposure to a [higher] learning environment. (Member: Academic Affairs)

This corroborates findings from previous chapters that poor schooling is a significant conversion factor that disables students from succeeding academically. In an attempt to address these shortfalls, the university established its Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in 2012, which offers academic support programmes to underprepared students. The member responsible for student affairs explains one such intervention, namely the University Preparation Programme (UPP)[69]:

In my experience, students coming from the South Campus are actually better prepared when they move to Bloemfontein Campus. Therefore, I think the support structures in the programme that we have in the South Campus are extremely successful in preparing the students for the rest of higher education time at university. (Member: Student Affairs)

While the above response reveals that students who have followed the UPP were better prepared than those in mainstream programmes, the university was not offering these key features to students enrolled in mainstream programmes. Academic support programmes have the potential to benefit students who might have qualified for mainstream programmes, but who lack some of the foundational skills needed for university education. Nevertheless, academic support programmes might disadvantage students through giving the students the impression that they are somehow deficient given that the programme is targeted and delivered separately to underprepared students (Tema 1985; Smith 2011). This might alienate these students, which suggests that the foundational programme should be embedded in all the degee programmes, mooting the possibility of changing the three-year degree programmes to four (CHE 2016). However, this will result in the well-prepared students also undergoing a support programme that they might not require. In addition to the above, through the CTL the university offers additional training to the lecturers and provides academic support to students at the main campus:

I attended some courses for new lecturers when I arrived at this university last year. The Centre for Teaching and Learning is trying to build capacities for the lecturers. They are also assisting students when it comes to language. There are experts who always engage

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[69] The UPP was implemented to offset the imbalances in the poor schooling system. Students with lower Admission Points (18-24) than required for the mainstream programmes undergo one-year resource based learning before qualifying for an Extended Degree programme, which takes four years at the main UFS Bloemfontein campus.

students on how to write but I don't know whether it's sufficient or not. (Head of Department)

The intervention described above helps to equip teaching staff with additional skills they need to handle the diversity of students. Encouraged by their lecturers, some underprepared students then receive academic support to enhance their performance. This is thus a formal intervention programme to enhance the capability of critical literacy amongst underprepared students. Furthermore, the university staff members reported that the university was supporting some first-generation students in the mainstream programme:

'Harmony' is a first year residence. So we only have first years in those residence but with some senior students to fill in the role of mentors. We train them on mentorship to fulfil a very distinct role in helping the first years. I think that should provide a solution for us in future to provide better support to the first year cohorts but also to take in more first generation students [in residences] in their first year because that is where they are most vulnerable. (Member: Student Affairs)

The quote above makes mention of another less formal academic intervention offered to students by their peers in university residences. While this intervention benefits only a smaller proportion of students who are in university residences (about 3000 students), these are more likely to be advantaged students considering that they met the admission criteria for entry into the residences, namely good grade 12 passes and funding (UFS 2017). Also important to note here is that the university staff sought to expand academic literacy amongst underprepared students in the mainstream programme as a way of expanding students' opportunities. However, what is also clear is that these interventions benefitted only a few of the on-campus first-generation students, whilst excluding the off-campus students.

I also explored the university's perceptions of the pedagogical arrangements as a way of understanding how they enabled or disabled the formation and expansion of students' capabilities. The data shows that although lecturers maintained good relationships with students, there was little utilisation of consultation time. The department head observed that:

I am so approachable. I even make jokes to show them that I am just a human being like them and they should feel free. [...] Maybe from their side, some students are just not confident enough to ask for help but generally, I don't have a problem with them. I always sit with them. The problem is that they will only approach me towards a test or an examination. You will find maybe one or two students asking for help during the course

of the semester even if there are consultation hours. The majority won't come. (Head of Department)

The issue here is that the university staff valued the capability of affiliation, through creating an environment of mutual trust and respect with students. However, some students still lack the confidence to consult the lecturer, which deprives them of academic support they might have needed, especially in their first year. The results from student interviews confirm that most students who underwent poor schooling lacked the confidence to consult lecturers. At the same time, the SRC member responsible for finance reported that there was a plan in place to orient first-generation students about university expectations soon after their enrolment:

So the first generation students will have events on how to deal with academic pressure, how to handle time better, how to approach a lecturer and so forth. (SRC: Finance)

Although the SRC intended to assist first-generation students, most of the first-generation students do not make use of this programme because they do not know about it.

Besides that, it also emerged that whilst the university staff appreciated the use of teaching methods that engaged students, the lecturers were often constrained from using them due to conversion factors such as class sizes and student under-preparedness. The departmental head remarked that:

It always has to revolve around the students in small classes like the honours ones. […] Sometimes you try to organise some videos just to excite them to see that this thing is really happening in the real world. Learning by doing is the best for me but this might not be practical in a big undergraduate classes. From time to time, you give students some case studies just to be more practical but again this is challenging in big classes. I tried to use examples and it is unfortunate that the students are not familiar with those examples and it does not help them. (Head of Department)

Through emphasising pedagogies of engagement, the departmental head motivated students to participate in their learning. This was believed to improve the learning process as explained in preceding chapters. However, the preceding response illustrates the challenges faced by the departmental head in enhancing students' learning.

Funding was also identified as a barrier to effective teaching, as the university did not have the finances needed to recruit more teaching staff in the event that classes were made smaller. The interviewee explains:

I don't think the university will be able to provide staff for the students' diverse needs. […]. We need more money to offer the person [teachers]. We need more money to differentiate the students. We need more money to have a smaller class and a more personalized teaching. All these things happen with funding and I don't think that they are doing such a bad job but they need money to roll out the initiatives they have. (Member: Academic Affairs)

Implicated here are the university's financial resources, which were not matched with the number of students enrolled, meaning that it was difficult for lecturers to attend to diverse students' needs. Financial constraints were therefore a setback for the university in its aim to create an environment that allows the lecturers to give individualised support to these students. Nonetheless, money alone will not suddenly improve teaching and learning as there is also the need to address other conversion factors that disable students, e.g. the institutional culture in student residences, and academic and social spaces that are supportive to white and middle-class students but alienating to black and low incomes students.

Structural conversion factors including insufficient financial resources disabled the university from differentiating and having smaller, manageable class sizes. Nonetheless, realising that some students lacked the necessary readiness for university education, the university implemented formal academic support programmes to enhance the performance of underprepared students to expand their capability of academic literacy. However, this prevented underprepared students who had accessed the mainstream programme from benefitting since the intervention was only targeted at students from the South Campus. Clearly, some students were advantaged through being able to access the academic support programmes that were meant to improve their academic skills. Other students were disadvantaged through university teaching that failed to address their individual needs.

8.4 Accommodation arrangements

Accommodation, transport and safety issues were challenges experienced by off-campus students (as discussed in Chapters 5 and 7). The SRC members observed that students living in off-campus residences were socially excluded from the university. The following quote demonstrates that:

They never know what's going on at campus. They never know about leadership programmes or even the #FeesMustFall. It's assumed they go to class, write the test and

leave and that limits their opportunity to learn, grow and meet people and to expose them
to opportunities. (SRC: Finance)

Lack of information about social events underpinned students' social exclusion from the university. Because they did not always visit the campus, off-campus students missed the opportunity to participate in university social events, which could have enhanced their social development and sense of belonging to the university. Concerning the exclusion of off-campus students from participating in university extra-curricular and social events, the same interviewee mentioned that the university planned to integrate students in the institution through grouping the accredited residences into clusters before offering social services such as sport to each cluster:

> *If we have 10 accredited residences, those residences can add to a cluster and then those*
> *students do not have to come to campus per se. The students from those residences have*
> *to identify the facilities around in their particular clusters, and we provide services there.*
> *(Member: Students' Welfare)*

The university intended to decentralise social services to off-campus student residences through its intervention model.

To ensure decent accommodation the university was implementing an accreditation system[70] by which it will approve the properties of private owners before accommodation is offered to the students. This was intended to improve the living conditions of the off-campus students, as explained below:

> *Now, the accreditation process of private accommodation will be according to certain*
> *standards and criteria. Those criteria touch on all physical aspects of a student house.*
> *For instance, there are bathrooms, kitchen, living room areas, security, and*
> *transportation to and from campus in the light of the distance or proximity of the student*
> *house. (Member: Student Affairs)*

The accreditation system would address the space, security, transport and other students' needs. What this shows is that the university valued the capability of safety and mobility for its students' wellbeing and for them to achieve personal, academic and social functionings in their studies. Since the high cost of the off-campus residences was a recurrent issue mentioned by the students, I also probed into how the system aimed to prevent private landowners from overcharging

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[70] The university engaged with various stakeholders e.g. municipality, property owners and police to agree on a criteria of approving the private residences outside campus. The aim of the accreditation process was to enhance students' quality of life through improving their accommodation, transport and safety arrangements.

students. Although the university staff admitted that it was difficult to control the rates of the privately owned residences, it looked forward to negotiating fair prices for the students:

> *It's very difficult in that context to fix the price but what we are doing is that for those who are accredited then we are able to negotiate. […] Because the private owner is guaranteed that their properties are full and since we have established the relationship over time, we are able to assure them that they can make their money over time as compared to make a large profit in one day. (Member: Students' Welfare)*

The university was confident that engaging with property owners would result in more affordable rates for off-campus students' accommodation.

What we can learn here is that the university intends to develop the capability of affiliation and emotional health through strengthening students' social networks and promoting stress-free lives. Moreover, building these social communities enhances students' confidence especially when they are in their first year of study, meaning that they can help each other to navigate the campus. Developing the capability of affiliation, emotional health and confidence amongst off-campus students according to the interviews implies that students would be advantaged, rather than disadvantaged.

8.5 University transformation issues

Interviews with the university staff and SRC members revealed, according to them, that transformation[71] was taking place in the areas of race, curriculum, language and gender as a way of creating an enabling environment for all students to succeed. Although the university had adopted a new language policy, the SRC raised concern about the slow progress being made with transformation in other areas of the institution.

8.5.1 Race, curriculum and language issues

As a way of eliminating racism, the university staff indicated that the institution had raised awareness amongst students and staff members about the need to tolerate diversity, consistent with the institution's non-discriminatory values. Amongst the interventions were the awareness raising campaigns held in the campus residences:

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[71] Transformation is used to mean the policy changes at the universities so that it becomes more inclusive of diverse students. Concerns were raised on the slow pace transformation was taking place during the time of the study. However, a new transformation policy was later approved by the UFS in June 2018, which sought to protect students and staff members against different forms of discrimination e.g gender, race and religion.

> *We had numerous conversations in the residences about stereotypes, intercultural relations, recognising people as humans and not as skin colour and a lot of initiative to raise awareness. (Member: Academic Affairs)*

Based on the understanding that racism was dehumanising, the university sought to build a non-racist community through challenging racial stereotypes and promoting a multi-cultural environment. Furthermore, it promoted a multi-cultural environment through its accommodation policy:

> *It's important for us that our residences are diversified according to different racial categories. So we don't want a homogeneous group because we believe a diverse environment develops students better than a homogeneous environment. (Member: Student Affairs)*

This illustrates some reforms to transform the university consistent with its diversity values, since motivating students to develop socially as global citizens was one of the stated objectives of the placement policy. Still, what is of concern is the implementation of these policies considering how racism apparently still continues as illustrated by students' experiences in Sections 5.7.2 and 6.7.2. As reported to me by the SRC members, the university was not addressing racism adequately, suggested by its leniency to the perpetrators. The SRC member interested in transformation gave the example of the Shimla Park rugby incident, where little effort was made to restrain the perpetrators:

> *Most of the people haven't even been brought to book. There is a video of the incident [Shimla Park Rugby] and we can identify the culprits. There was an allegation that one of the culprits was a lecturer here and up to today, nothing has been done as he is still teaching here. (SRC: Transformation)*

The SRC member believed that the university did not adequately address this incident in ensuring that such behaviour would not be repeated. Although the university has made progress in acquiring a diverse student body by numbers (as outlined in Chapter 3), it still has a long way to go in achieving a multi-cultural environment that motivates students to respect and treat each other with dignity. Jansen (2009) argues that the challenge is related to Afrikaans culture that promotes the idea of a closed community amongst its people, which then seeks to preserve its heritage in some universities. This suggests that policies on diversification threaten the institutional culture of the university, resulting in little will and dedication from white staff[72]

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[72] From 841 academic permanent staff members at the university, 624 were White, 35 Coloured, 7 Asian and 175 Black. (UFS report 2016).

to implement them. At the same time, the member responsible for student affairs thought that it was difficult to control racism:

> *Is it fair to require from a university to erase racism in its students? Or is it fair to ask the university to be very responsive to incidences of racism and proactive to prevent incidences of racism? [...] But I also think we should be honest to say that racism is a human condition and we must be honest with ourselves to say that collectively we must take responsibility because the university does not function as an island in itself. It's part of a society and what we see on campus often times is a symptom of what happens in society. (Member: Student Affairs)*

At issue is his belief that racism was inevitable and that the university was not (wholly) responsible for preventing racism. While the university was implementing interventions to eliminate racism, the staff member thought that the university was a reflection of the society and community members should play a role in reducing racism. Furthermore, the member responsible for academic affairs who observed that white Afrikaner parents were conservative, reaffirmed this view:

> *There is no empathy from the white Afrikaner parents. White [Afrikaner] parents think that black students are the ones disturbing the academic calendar through protests, you know. So it's a complicated thing because white [Afrikaner] parents here have a lot of influence. So in general, when we have a meeting here with parents of the students, white parents have a disposition against the protests, so in general we are bound to consider their views more than those of black parents who are far away. (Member: Academic Affairs)*

Despite the progress made in addressing racism by the university, the above evidence suggests that some conservative white parents have stalled the transformation process. Because white parents are influential, the university tended to make decisions that were inclined towards their conservative ideas. While it is clear that the university policy valued race fairness for all students to flourish at the campus, the above responses suggest that racism is still present. Hostile campus climates such as those characterised by outbursts of racism contribute to lower attainment of the discriminated-against groups (Hurtado & Carter 1997). Whereas the university values the capabilities of race fairness and diversity amongst its students, these capabilities were less likely to be realised because of unsupportive university structures.

Over and above these accounts, the university planned to implement curriculum changes to create equal opportunities for attainment amongst diverse students. This is in the wake of the

realisation that some content being taught in certain university subjects at the university does not address the needs of black students (see Chapter 3). Embedded in this curriculum is disadvantage for black students, hence the call to 'decolonise' higher education through transforming universities into spaces that are more inclusive. The member responsible for academic affairs stated that plans were in place to implement the following changes:

> *There is a plan and that is across the board, and that is no joke. In some place, the content is specific, in other cases, the content is broad but it's the attitude that needs to change. It's the position of the lecturer in relation with the class. (Member: Academic Affairs)*

A close examination of this response shows that the university is determined to make changes to the university curriculum, which is believed to marginalise some identities, exclude African scholarship and those from the South (see UFS Integrated Institutional Plan 2017). While universities continue to exclude and marginalise the knowledge of colonised people and overvalue Eurocentric knowledge through the curriculum (Mbembe 2016; Le Grange 2016), the 'decolonisation' discourse poses implementation challenges due to the complexity of the language used, e.g. Africanisation of universities, which raises questions about the specific aspects to be changed or maintained. The SRC member explains how the curriculum changes should take place:

> *The best curriculum is one that will be able to speak to all the students and allow for black lecturers and female lecturers to teach so that all students can fully express themselves. This applies to teaching and the material as well. When we don't talk about our heroes like Steve Biko but we talk about white people only, the material that is being taught is not speaking to us. […] Our LLB [law] curriculum is under review, I don't think it reflects everything of us black Africans. (SRC: Transformation)*

Underlying the 'decolonising' process is the inclusion of issues such as African values and ways of living that makes the content more relevant to diverse students. This also includes aligning the content, teachers and teaching methods to the contexts and needs of the diverse students. However, what is important is the question of how the university is going to change teachers' attitudes given that white people dominate its staff, and that most of these lecturers have been in their positions for long periods of time. Diversifying the curriculum, student body and academic body would ensure that the different ways of being and the different forms of knowledge that diverse students and academic staff bring are accommodated and fairly represented, rather than marginalised. These findings did not emerge from students' data suggesting that students might have shifted their focus from the need for curriculum changes

to the immediate need for material resources as expressed in #FeeMustFall in 2016 that came after #RhodesMustFall protests in 2015.

Concomitantly, the university implemented its new language policy that recognises English as the main language of instruction in an attempt to address language and race disparities, which advantaged white students, whilst disadvantaging other groups. As stated earlier the university had a dual language policy that offered parallel Afrikaans and English classes (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). The member responsible for academic affairs explains how that unintentionally had privileged the white students:

> *It might be an advantage but not intentional discrimination. I have very few cases that demonstrate that habit but what happens de facto is that we have a segregated campus that we have students learning in Afrikaans who are mostly white; and the other one in English who are mostly black students. This is not the way the world in which we are operates. (Member: Academic Affairs)*

Because the Afrikaans students, who are mostly white, share the same language as the lecturers, this made it easier for communication. Realising that the concurrent use of Afrikaans and English privileged white students in class and polarised students on the basis of race, the university introduced a new language policy where English was the main language of instruction.

8.5.2 Gender

Although there have been improvements in addressing gender inequality, university staff admitted that the university has not made much progress in ensuring equal participation for female students. The member responsible for academic affairs holds this view:

> *There is a gender policy for the LGBTI community but it's not much of an affirmative gender policy. So if you look at how the structure of the university looks like you will see that all the women occupy lower levels and the men are the professors. And amongst students there has been a very strong movement on the part of women against sexual harassment, patriarchy etc. among the students. This country is very patriarchal and our young revolutionaries can learn from that. So that's the work in progress. (Member: Academic Affairs)*

Although it is here highlighted that the university is patriarchal in its nature, it has not yet put an affirmative gender policy in place to address gender unfairness (at the time of the study). The evidence reveals that female students lack aspects of the affiliation capability, which

restricts their freedoms to participate effectively in their studies. Nonetheless, the above quote reflects collective agency and voice from female students who have lobbied for gender fairness, thus constituting a form of advantage for them. Although the university staff pointed out the presence of a gender policy at the campus, the SRC members reveal that the university system still excludes members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community. This statement is made with specific reference to the university accommodation policy and registration system that were believed to be insensitive to the group:

> *For example, I am lesbian and I go to a female residence. I am told that we have a marriage sort of culture in our residences that assumes that there are only male and females but South African law allows for homosexual marriages. On the student's card, you are forced to indicate that you are either Mrs or Mr even though you are transgender. So I get to write female but really I feel as though I am male but I want to write my true colours. I experience a lot of problems so I am forced to bottle my identity. (SRC: Transformation)*

The SRC member views the accommodation policy as insensitive to the rights of members of the LGBTI community through categorising students into two sexes; men and women, and placing LGBTI at the periphery. Whereas the South African constitution claims rights for the LGBTI community[73], the accommodation policy seems to exclude members of LGBTI. Because of this, it is felt that members of the LGBTI community are unable to express themselves as fully as other students in that they reported experiencing an identity crisis. This implies that the SRC member values the affiliation capability through recognition and respect of students' diverse sexual orientations and identities. Despite this not emerging from the interviews I held with students, it is important for the university to create an environment that promotes the development of this capability amongst the LGBTI students. Related to this is the issue of sexual harassment that affects the off-campus female students. The account below illustrates this:

> *It's like some of the black students from poor backgrounds who are sexually harassed by the landlord. The students is told that 'you can pay R500 and there is not a problem'. However, the landlord wants sexual favours in return. (SRC: Finance)*

As seen above, sexual harassment is advanced through the female students' inability to afford off-campus accommodation. The property owner expects sexual favours, leaving the student with limited choices in that she may be forced to comply. Although we already know about sexual

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[73] The South African constitution gives rights to the LGBT community allowing marriages amongst homosexuals.

harassment as a form of disadvantage from previous chapters, what needs to be pointed out in this case is the intersectionality of race, gender, class and off-campus accommodation, which contributes to further disadvantage for these black women. In addition to coming from low income backgrounds, black women occupying off-campus residences are further disadvantaged through sexual harassment from private property owners.

8.6 Disability and religion as further dimensions of disadvantage

Disability is another dimension of disadvantage that emerged from the interviews with the SRC members but not from students. The SRC member interested in student affairs stated that there were approximately 19 students who were blind and 11 in wheelchairs at the time of the interview, implying that the university needed to pay greater attention to them. Whereas there have been interventions to improve the access of these students to university resources and to promote their learning, the SRC member explains that the university has not responded to some of their needs:

> Disabled students can't access all of the residence because some of the residences don't have ramps and the rooms are on the first floor. So that means they cannot be accommodated easily in generic residences. (SRC: Student Affairs)

This suggests that the university environment does not give the same opportunities for mobility to students with disability as compared to other students. Although this issue did not come up with the students that I interviewed, presumably because of the selection of the participants, it does expand the category of disadvantage and of mobility.

Equally important is the university's unequal recognition of religion on the campus. This dimension of disadvantage did not arise from interviews with the students. As reported to me by the SRC member, the university tended to decline support to minority religious groups at the campus. This is true of the Muslim students as demonstrated below:

> Muslim students don't have prayer facilities. If they do give them a place to pray, it will be some dodgy place with cockroaches. It shows you how the university is very quick to dismiss somebody when they don't form part of the majority. (SRC: Student Affairs)

Whilst this appears to be a spatial issue on the surface, it is important to note that it also constitutes an inclusion issue in that Muslims do not function as equal members of the university. Jansen (2009) explains that there was a close relationship between the Dutch Reformed Church and the HAU (Afrikaans) when the church advanced apartheid through preaching white superiority. At the same time he observes that the Afrikaans universities

ensured efficient transmission of apartheid knowledge to the next generations through their theology faculties. This symbiotic relationship between the university and the church continues to pose a challenge to transformation in the post-apartheid era, as the university does not pay attention to other religions groups such as that of the Muslim faith. Quite visible from the above, is that students from the minority religious groups are deprived of the affiliation capability in that they are unable to exercise their religious freedoms. Consequently, this gives them spirituality-related disadvantages.

8.7 Summative discussion

Being a first-generation student, having attended poor schools, lacking academic preparation and confidence to approach lecturers, not having proper accommodation, and racism were mentioned as disadvantages by the university staff and SRC members. The results suggest that the university might not be able to address some of these disadvantages, e.g. low income and family support. However, what can be stressed is that the university can promote the expansion of students' capabilities through improving its quality of teaching (e.g. through curriculum changes and the use of teaching methods that address the needs of individual students) and through creating enabling environments to develop students' capabilities. The enabling environment can be promoted through preventing racism and through addressing disability, religion and sexuality with a more expansive and inclusive approach.

The above results revealed that most students who underwent the academic support programmes performed better than those from mainstream programmes. This means that the intervention promotes the expansion of the capability of academic literacy. If this is correct, it is then helpful for the programme to be accessible also to students in the mainstream programme. This also promotes the capability to other underprepared students from poor schools who might have qualified for mainstream programmes but with fewer skills to cope with university education. Through this the university could be creating equal opportunities for the success of all students, thus advantaging all students regardless of background.

Other findings also point to the need to transform the curriculum. This is with an understanding that transforming the curriculum creates a university environment that is inclusive of all students. Aspects of the curriculum may diminish black students' capabilities of confidence and participation, which may contribute to their weaker performance. This capability of 'personhood self-formation' is undermined through the disregard of some students' identities or personhoods,

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and this diminishes their confidence for effective learning. The transformation process should therefore enhance the confidence and participation capabilities amongst diverse students, which positions them as equal students in the learning process and attainment, thus advantaging them.

Another observation concerns the lack of mobility freedoms detected amongst the disabled students in their desire to access some of the residences. These results are consistent with Mutanga and Walker (2015), who reveal that the university deprives disabled students of the mobility capability due to the absence of facilities to enhance their mobility in lecture rooms. The absence of the mobility capability disadvantages them as they cannot function equally to other students, e.g. creating social networks in those residences without facilities to enhance their movement. Together with this issue, the interviews found that certain students lacked the religious capability through the university's failure to recognise them as equal students at the campus. Whereas religion emerged as a capability for students to cope with academic and social stress in Chapter 5, students belonging to minority religion groups are deprived of this capability, which disadvantages them through their inability to realise their spiritual wellbeing. These findings imply the need for the university to create enabling environments for all students to succeed in their studies.

Finally, the findings show that students have the capability of participation and voice as they collectively lobbied for gender equality and the scrapping of tuition fees during #FeesMustFall protests. This suggests that students have agency through deciding on and acting to change their environment to include the things they have a reason to value. Having agency is a form of advantage, suggesting that the university can foster students' agency in the area of teaching and help them to develop other capabilities for student success.

Based on the findings from interviews with the university staff and SRC members, the capability-inspired functionings that matter for attaining equal opportunities for students' success are as follows (see Table 14).

Table 14: Student functionings and capabilities as noted by university staff and SRC members

Functionings	Capabilities
Having adequate university funds	Economic stability
Having critical skills Being able to speak the language of instruction	Academic literacy
Consulting lecturers Establishing social networks Being aware and respectful of different genders and races at the campus Being able to choose sexual identity freely. Respect and recognition of different religious groups	Affiliation
Collective protest for free university education and against gender injustices Being able to change the environment to achieve the things one values Having the confidence to approach lecturers for support	Participation and voice
Receiving social and mental support Living stress-free lives	Psycho-social and mental health
Accessed the university resources Having safe transport and decent accommodation	Safety and mobility

8.8 Conclusion

The chapter has extended the evaluative space of the capabilities students had a reason to value to include what the university staff and SRC thought were capabilities students valued. What this chapter includes as elements of student disadvantage (that did not emerge from the student interviews in Chapters 5, 6 and 7), are the diminished affiliation capability through lack of recognition of the LGBTI community, the limited religious capability enjoyed by minority religion groups, and lack of the mobility capability amongst students with disabilities. The chapter has explored how the affiliation capability is eroded through continual racism at the campus despite the university's emphasis on promoting a diverse community. Furthermore, the chapter has identified the university conversion factors that may constrain or enable the expansion of students' capabilities and agency (for example teaching and parental involvement), and the valuable functionings that may emerge. It has demonstrated the need for the university to create an environment that provides students with equal opportunities to

participate successfully. Through its teaching quality, the university could help students to develop and expand their capabilities despite the structural conversion factors that might otherwise prevent them from doing so. On the other hand, there is an alignment with students' perspectives in relation to the value of the six capabilities noted in page 205 (Table 14). There are some differences on the specificity of functionings but by and large staff and SRC perspective confirm what students have a reason to value.

The next chapter theorises the findings derived from interviews with students and university staff using the conceptual framework of the capability approach presented in Chapter 3. It interprets what these findings mean for the notion of (dis)advantage from a human development perspective.

Chapter 9: Towards an understanding of (dis)advantage through a capability lens

9.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the position that universities should provide all students with equal opportunities for them to succeed in higher education. It observes that having the opportunities for achieving the personal, economic and social goals of higher education is an advantage while the reverse is also true. Chapters (5, 6 and 7) presented empirical findings on diverse students' experiences of (dis)advantage. The evaluative space was expanded by including the views of members of the SRC and university staff on student (dis)advantage in Chapter 8. Through extrapolating from the functionings that students attained, the chapters identified the capabilities that students valued. These chapters demonstrated that when students had more capabilities and agency, they attained more educational achievements that worked towards them being more greatly advantaged and they could flourish more. At the same time, when they have high level of agency (even with narrow capability sets), students can be advantaged in their journey to complete their university education.

This chapter draws together findings from the preceding chapters. The first section identifies the key conversion factors that enabled or constrained students' freedoms at the university. Foregrounding an intersectionality framework, I explain how conversion factors connect and intersect with each other to form a complex situation of (dis)advantage. I compare the emerging capabilities from student experiences with those of Wolff and De-Shalit (2007). A discussion of the combined capabilities for flourishing lives that emerged from student experiences, and a revisiting of the capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage (presented in Chapter 3) follows. During these presentations, the chapter also describes the implication of these findings for human development. While the chapter demonstrates that all the emerging capabilities are important for advantage, it identifies the ones that appear to matter most for student (dis)advantage. These are the capabilities that the university can prioritise for its interventions to create enabling spaces for diverse students to participate and for them to have fairer outcomes. Before concluding the chapter, an outline of the typical pedagogical arrangements that advantage diverse students is presented based on the students' experiences.

9.2 Conversion factors

From the research findings, (dis)advantage can be explained through the interaction of conversion factors that constrain or enable individual students in achieving the educational functionings they have reason to value. The findings indicate that conversion factors operate at personal, family and institutional level to give a complex picture of (dis)advantage, specifically with regard to how students can convert resources into opportunities, and opportunities into achieved functionings. Chapter 5 showed the clustering of different conversion factors for individual students, thereby exacerbating their disadvantage. Inadequate finances constrained Botle, a black woman from a low income background, and this limited her freedoms to have a relatively stress-free university life. After her grandmother died, Botle lived with an 'uncaring' uncle who often caused her stress. Her family background and academic underpreparedness clustered together with unfriendly teaching methods, language barriers and experiences of sexual harassment at the university to have a cumulative effect on her disadvantage. This is an example of the effect of multiple conversion factors interacting to worsen a student's life.

These results suggest that disadvantage can be corrosive as there appears to be a relationship between parents' low socio-economic status and the conversion factors that were disabling to students. Some black students from low income backgrounds could not afford good schools, partly because their parents had little to no education and did not earn enough to take care of their families. Inadequate preparation, e.g. low confidence, lack of English proficiency, and poor academic skills, negatively affected their children's performance at university. For instance, Tshidi's disadvantage is corrosive in the sense that the conversion factors that disabled her were persistent and intergenerational: poor academic performance, transport and accommodation problems, and safety concerns at university are connected to her parents' pre-existing low socio-economic status.

However, the conversion factors worked differently for the middle-class students who developed and realised more functionings, which contributed to 'constructive advantage'. Since most of the middle-class students had attended better quality schools and received adequate finances and social support from their parents, they had flourishing lives from the accumulation of advantages. Tinus, a white student, lived in a relatively safe neighbourhood. He travelled to the university conveniently with his car and did not have to worry about food and other costs. He also found it easy to cope with university education. What further enabled him was the home schooling he had received and that taught him how to study independently.

He was further assisted through his family's material resources that gave him the opportunity to work and improve his employment opportunities. As opposed to the alienation that many black students faced, Tinus easily developed a sense of 'belonging' to the university as he shared the same cultural background with most staff and other white students. The cultural and academic capital that he had can explain how he was able to fit in comfortably and can be considered as conversion factors that intersected with Tinus' biography to confer further advantage upon him at university. This is illustrated in Figure 4 below:

The findings clearly show that black students experience multiple disadvantages from the various conversion factors that intersect to have disabling effects on them[74]. For example, being a first-generation student, Botle received scant information about universities through a university open day since her parents knew little about higher education. She also found herself isolated at the university in her first year due to language issues and the unfamiliar new environment she found herself in. Thus, being a first-generation student is an additional conversion factor that disadvantaged her, but it also intersected with her identity of being a black female student from a low income background. These observations concur with what Crenshaw (1989) observes that black females experienced multiple oppressions through race, gender, class, etc., further marginalising them. As mentioned earlier, the results illustrate that conversion factors also intersect to further advantage students. This is evident from the middle-class white and black students in Chapter 6, who experienced fertile functionings to become more advantaged. Figure 4 summarises the key conversion factors that enabled or constrained students' freedoms at the university.

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[74] These students who participated in this study are amongst the 57% who graduate nationwide (CHE, 2016). The rest do not complete their studies due to the interplay of the conversion factors that are disabling. Given that these findings are based on experiences from honours and a few final year students, it means that they represent a thriving group of students that had managed to graduate. In this respect everyone in the group is more advantaged than students who drop out or fail to complete in time.

Figure 4: Conversion factors and how they influence student (dis)advantage (adapted from Robeyns 2017:83)

Structural conversion factors
Socio-economic conditions
Race
University practices, e.g. teaching
Gender practices at university
Funding policy
Schooling
Distance from university (being off-campus and residing in university residences

Social influence on decision-making/preferences
Teachers
Friends
Family members
University outreach (marketing)

Personal history and psychology
Talent
Personality, e.g. motivation to work hard
Schooling

Resources while at the university
Financial resources
Access to learning materials, e.g. library, wifi, textbooks
Food
Transport
Accommodation

Personal conversion factors
Level of preparedness
Having confidence
Talent
Physical, emotional and mental health
Home language

Capabilities
Economic stability
Intellectual growth
Social networks
Aspirations
Safety and mobility
Socio-psychological and mental health
Participation and voice
Tenacity and perseverance
Empathy and diversity
Employability

Personal choices (agency) examples
Which degree programme should I enrol for?
How do I manage my time?
Should I participate in class, social activities and student protests?
Should I use the support learning available?

Functionings (Educational) e.g.
Affording university expenses
Having knowledge of the field of study
Having employment opportunities
Having established social networks
Being recognised and treated fairly based on race, gender and religious affiliation
Participating in university activities
Having a voice to achieve the things one values
Being confident
Being aspirational
Having safe transport, and decent accommodation
Living stress-free lives
Persevering in one's studies
Being concerned over the lives of others

Disadvantage
Fewer educational, social and economic achievements

Advantage
More educational, social and economic achievements

The diagram shows that (dis)advantage is embedded in the institutional, social and personal conversion factors that interact together at different stages, e.g. resources, utilisation of resources, capabilities and the number of functionings that are realised by a student. The personal and structural conversion factors also shape students' choices or freedoms to turn capabilities into educational functionings, which subsequently results in their advantage or disadvantage.

9.3 Putting together all the capabilities emerging from students' experiences

Although the amount and type of these capabilities vary with the individual, the capabilities were evenly distributed across the domains of personal, economic and social goals of higher education for each individual. This was true for all students except those who are white, who demonstrated achievement of a large number of capabilities, but whose capabilities were more strongly focused on their own personal development and employment skills (as discussed later capabilities that students reported valuing for their educational wellbeing. Based on the students' experiences and staff/SRC data, the study extrapolates the following capabilities that students reported valuing for educational wellbeing.

1. Economic stability

2. Intellectual growth- (Having dreams for a better future for oneself. Being able to speak and understand the language of instruction. Having critical thinking in relation to knowledge acquired. Being able to apply knowledge to different contexts. Experiencing personal changes through university attendance, e.g. communication skills).

3. Participation and voice (Being involved in the process of learning. Taking part in extra-curricular activities. Having a voice in achieving what one values. Being involved in activities meant to change one's environment, e.g. student protests. Being confident).

4. Aspirations (Being able to have career dreams for one's future. Being able to think about improving the lives of others in future).

5. Personal tenacity (Being hardworking. Being persistent in achieving one's goals regardless of the challenges).

6. Safety and mobility (Being able to travel to and from the campus safely when one needs to. Having safe and decent accommodation).

7. Socio-psychosocial and mental health (Being able to live lives free from social, economic, academic and psychological pressure. Having emotional health).

8. Affiliation (Being able to have social networks. Being respected and recognised equally with regards to one's religious affiliation, race, and gender. Being aware of diversity).

9. Empathy and diversity (Being able to care about other people from the campus and community. Being aware and tolerant of diversity).

10. Employability (Being able to know one's professional area. Being exposed to employment during the study period. Having the skills for employment).

All listed capabilities appear in my list proposed in Chapter 3 except safety and mobility, and concern over others. The safety and mobility capability emerged as a valuable capability since this study focuses explicitly on interrogating student (dis)advantage. The other reviews that informed my proposed list, however, advocate for individuals' general wellbeing (see Nussbaum 2000), investigated pedagogy (see Walker 2006; Calitz 2015), learner transition from schooling into university (see Wilson-Strydom 2015), and student disability (see Mutanga & Walker 2015).

The data from the preceding chapters reveal that when students had a wider set of capabilities, they tended to be advantaged compared to those with fewer ones. Figure 5 explains this.

Figure 5: Relationship between capabilities and (dis)advantage
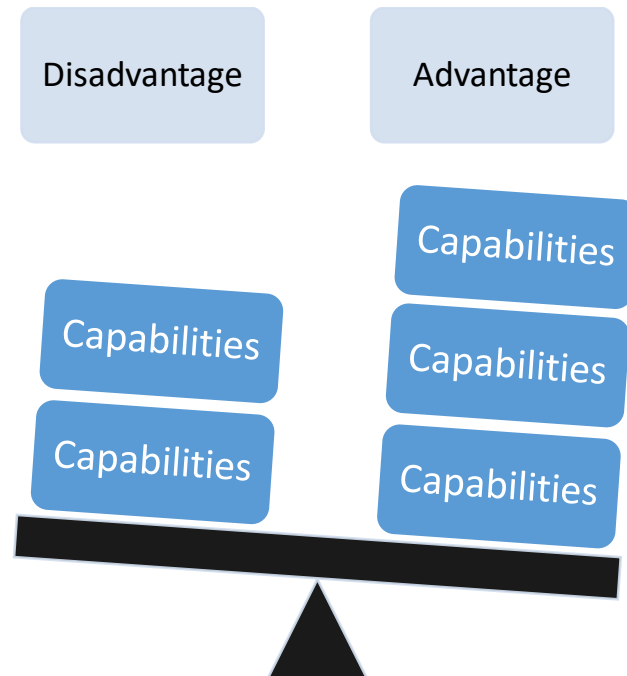
When the seesaw is balanced on both sides there is equality. However, in the diagram when there is unevenness on the capabilities students have, the seesaw is unbalanced; those with weightier set of capabilities are advantaged while those with lighter ones are disadvantaged.

The findings of this study also reveal that none of the students were wholly disadvantaged as they each had capabilities that advantaged them in certain dimensions of wellbeing. It is, however, the case that some students lacked some capabilities more than others, which illustrates their disadvantage in some or other dimensions. For example, despite Tinus having more achievements than other students, he showed little 'concern over others', meaning that he had not achieved the capability of affiliation. On the other hand, inadequate university finances disadvantaged Joline, while she was placed at an advantage through the capability of intellectual growth, participation and voice, as well as affiliation.

The findings in this study also demonstrate that some students had the affiliation capability through establishing social networks while others did not. When viewed simplistically, having this capability could mean that the students were advantaged as they received information, socio-psychological and academic support from their friends. For example, when compared to Gernus, Tshidi did not have friends at the campus. Gernus had many social networks from the university residences, through sport and through contacts he still had from his previous high school. Gernus used these social networks for his personal gain. However, when taken from a human development perspective, Gernus is disadvantaged in that his social networks were mainly used to gain information as well as for his own social and academic support, but not necessarily for the good of others.

When seen from the human capital perspective, one could easily conclude that all the students were advantaged through having the employability capability by attending university and by end having a degree qualification. This is relevent in the South African context where the attainment of higher education gives one a better chance of employment compared to completing secondary schooling as indicated in Chapter 1. The human development perspective is more expansive, however, and goes beyond focusing on instrumental gains in asking whether students had the intrinsic benefits. Taking the example of the white students who had all been involved in employment during their honours degree, it would seem that they were more advantaged because of their improved chance of getting jobs. From a human development perspective, despite the white students having improved employment opportunities, they were disadvantaged in not having demonstrated the certain social capabilities as presented before. This illustrates that the capability approach gives us a deeper understanding of (dis)advantage by not merely equating the instrumental gains of higher education to advantage but going further to interrogate if higher

education equipped students with intrinsic values of importance to making the society go better for all.

Equally significant is the difference between the black and white students with regard to the capability of empathy and diversity. Sen (2004) is concerned about individuals realising their freedoms and for them to take responsibility to help others. He states that, '…since freedoms are important, people have a reason to ask what they should do to help others in defending or promoting their freedoms' (Sen 2004:338), which points to the importance of helping others. Most black students were already involved in activities to improve their communities or in helping others, while this was not a well-pronounced functioning for the white students. Ballet, Dubois and Mahieu (2007:18) explain that having a commitment to the responsibility of others shows strong 'agency,' which in this case means that the black students had decided to secure other people's freedoms so that they become the person they hoped to be. On the other hand, white students demonstrated wanting to have their freedoms first and to become that being, before extending their agency to help others (if doing this at all). This analysis explains the differences between the two groups obligations to others.

Some of the capabilities from this study overlap with those found in Wolff and De-Shalit's (2007) list[75]. Intellectual growth, socio-psychosocial and mental health, participation and voice, affiliation, and empathy and diversity are all reflected in Wolff and De-Shalit's capabilities of: senses, imagination and thought (i.e. practical reason); socio-psychological and mental health; complete independence; affiliation; and doing good to others. However, others such as economic stability, aspirations, personal tenacity, and mobility and safety did not appear on their list, as these are specific to students having flourishing lives in the context of higher education, and not in the general population probed in the study by Wolff and De-Shalit. Table 15 compares these functionings.

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[75] Wolff and De-Shalit used Nussbaum's list to identify capabilities before adding four capabilities to the list. They investigated disadvantage amongst participants in the UK and Israel.

Table 15: A comparison of Wolff and De-Shalit's (2007) capabilities and those derived from student population

Wolff and De Shalit's 2007 capabilities	Capabilities students had
Senses, imagination and thought; Practical reason	Intellectual growth
Emotions	Socio-psychological and mental health
Complete independence	Participation and voice
Affiliation	Affiliation
Doing good for others	Empathy and diversity
Other species	Aspirations
Play	Personal tenacity
Life	Economic stability
Bodily health	Employability
Bodily integrity	Safety and mobility
Practical reason	
Control over one's environment	
Living in law-abiding fashion	
Understanding the law	

More importantly, what emerges as new is the capability of economic stability; an essential constituent of student wellbeing to access and have flourishing lives at the university. This capability confirms what Calitz (2018) found as the importance of a threshold of economic resources. This capability did not appear in Wolff and De-Shalit's list. This points to the need to consider this capability when thinking of student (dis)advantage, as the dimension is critical for students to access the university and afford the necessary expenses for them to lead decent lives. When the capability is absent, students become vulnerable and they risk underperforming and dropping out. For example, Thabang and Joline deregistered and dropped out of the university, while Katleho could not concentrate on his academic work because he could not afford enough food. Moreover, the evidence from the study illustrates that economic stability is crucial to students having transport and accommodation, which enables the safety and mobility capability. Economic stability is therefore vital as it enables students to realise other capabilities.

Despite the significance of the capability of economic stability, it is not a sufficient measure of disadvantage on its own, as there is a need to give attention to other dimensions of students' wellbeing as the capability approach argues. While evidence suggests that economic stability

enables students to access good quality schools and afford university expenses, income alone does not inform us about the quality of life students have. Enabled by his family's financial resources, Gernus had most of the educational capabilities identified in this chapter, namely: employability, intellectual growth, socio-psychological and mental health, safety and mobility, affiliation and aspirations. By way of contrast, Tshidi did not have the emotional health capability as she had nobody to give her the support she needed. She also did not have the capability of mobility and safety due to inadequate finances, but she was taking care of her siblings. While Gernus could be considered more advantaged when judging his situation from a utility and resource-based approach; he is disadvantaged in some respects from a human development perspective.

The preceding chapters point to the idea that the definition of (dis)advantage can be nuanced by applying the capability approach. As stated in Chapter 1, policy uses historical disadvantage to mean black students (e.g. DoE 1997; DoE 2006), which means that the concept is racially defined. Nevertheless, this definition does not reveal the different opportunities in access and participation once students are enrolled at university. It ignores the intricacies of disadvantage in students' experiences. For example, the definition only tells us the number of black students who enrolled at the university and who graduated, but this does not adequately reflect the different opportunities these students had to succeed. As opposed to merely viewing disadvantage as being a term applied to black students, what the capability approach builds is a complicated picture of disadvantage. The capabilities approach, therefore, allows us to go beyond the surface to have a deeper understanding of (dis)advantage and hence offers a more robust and multi-dimensional approach for policy interventions.

The previous chapters showed differences in the security of certain achieved functionings between black low income and the middle-class students. What seems to emerge is that some black students from low income backgrounds could not sustain the functionings they have achieved, and that contributed to their disadvantage. For instance, although Palesa initially had the functioning of participating in class during her first year, she lost this functioning when she felt intimidated by some lecturers. This could be associated with her poor quality schooling, which did not sufficiently build her confidence. In this case, the conversion factors (e.g. schooling background and university teaching) made her vulnerable and led to her consulting only those lecturers who she felt were 'friendly'. This disadvantaged her as she was no longer as involved in the learning process. At issue is that (dis)advantage is not static, since Palesa

was initially advantaged in this dimension but later became less so when the capability diminished. It is the case, however, that middle-class students had greater security of their achieved functionings in that they were able to sustain these functionings until their graduation and into honours level of their university education. Additionally, these students also experienced 'constructive advantage' when the security in their functionings contributed to them achieving more. For instance, three of the six middle-class students received additional funding from bursaries and merit awards due to excellent performance. This means that the functionings associated with the capability of 'intellectual growth' helped them to secure other functionings, such as having access to finances, consequently conferring more advantage on them. The more 'constructive advantage' one has and secure their functionings are, the more they are advantaged.

Although there were no major differences concerning the distribution of capabilities across the degree programmes, there was a variation between Agricultural Economics and other degree programmes with regard to the economic capability aspect of having a part-time job related to students' fields of study and their aspirations. Whereas the white students in Agricultural Economics were engaged in part-time jobs that equipped them with work experience, this functioning did not emerge in the black students studying the same degree programme and those from other departments. This can be explained by the social capital for agriculture students had, that enabled them to access employment opportunities unlike the low income black students in other degree programmes. What also emerged from interviews with students is that those in the departments of Psychology, Politics and Governance, and Education had achieved certain social capabilities through attending university, but these social capabilities seemed not to be well developed in students in the Agricultural Economics and Commerce departments. While this can be explained by the fact that the values related to social responsibility are central to the curricula of Psychology, Politics and Governance and Education degree programmes, further investigations need to be made into why these are less visible in students completing programmes in the fields of Commerce and Agricultural Economics. The implication of this for the university is that it should strive to inculcate social values through the curriculum to advantage all the students in this aspect (see Nussbaum 2010).

9.4 Capabilities that matter most in student (dis)advantage

The above section has presented the capabilities that are important for students to have flourishing lives at university. There has been much debate on whether capabilities should be

weighted or not. However, Nussbaum (2000) argues that the capabilities in her universal list carry equal importance and that they should all be addressed for individuals to have flourishing lives. Other scholars, however, are of the position that a decision needs to be made on which functionings should be prioritised through policy (Wolff & De-Shalit 2007; Robeyns 2017). In the following sections, I present the dimensions that appear to matter most for a more nuanced understanding of (dis)advantage using the adjudicating framework of this study. The functionings that matter most are those whose absence makes disadvantage worse for students and prevents them from achieving the personal, economic and social goals of higher education.

Intellectual growth capability

The findings point to the capability of intellectual growth as one of the most important for understanding student (dis)advantage. When students are not able to acquire critical skills and knowledge during their classes, they do not complete their studies or do not do well. Although some students in this study repeated modules in their first and second years, they developed the capabilities and graduated, but as indicated earlier these findings are based on a fairly successful group at the university on the basis of them having graduated. In the case of Mamello, who struggled and dropped out but enrolled again, we see the profile of the student who drops out when they fail to cope with university education. The member responsible for student affairs explained that the ability of most black students to think creatively and put ideas together in a more flexible manner was diminished as a result of their underpreparedness. This corresponds to the observations that in their first years at the university, 81% of students experience challenges in applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations, while 77% find it challenging to formulate new ideas or advance their understanding by putting together various pieces of information (SASSE 2017). It can be stressed here that through learning, students can have other capabilities including being employable, valuing and caring for others, and those associated with personal development, e.g. communication skills and confidence. Without the capability of intellectual growth, however, students lose the opportunity to develop personally, to learn about being socially responsible citizens and to attain employment-related skills, and this positions the capability as being of core importance to an understanding of (dis)advantage. This capability is arguably foundational to higher education.

Affiliation capability

In addition to the above, affiliation seems to be vital to students' success. The evidence suggests that the capability helps students to develop other capabilities. Students tended to perform better

when they were affiliated with social and religious groups and when they had open relationships with their lecturers. These social interactions created conditions for students to receive academic, and emotional and psychological support, together with enhancing their confidence, e.g. Tinus felt comfortable to approach lecturers and peers, which helped him to perform better in his studies. The point to make here is that when students have social and academic support from family, peers, and lecturers, they are better prepared to overcome the conversion factors that make them vulnerable to poor academic performance and dropping out. Although some students might use the affiliation capability for instrumental gains as discussed in Section 9.3, the capability remains crucial in their learning, consequently positioning it as one of the essential capabilities. As social interactions inherently characterise teaching, universities should foster the development of this capability amongst the students:

> It is the interactional space of curriculum and pedagogical relationships between teachers and students and between student and student that the possibility of developing and appropriating critical knowledge occurs and the possibility of new identities and secure confidence emerges. (Walker 2015:291)

To be lacking in the affiliation capability implies that students cannot achieve the primary goal of attending university, which is to acquire knowledge and develop critical thinking skills. In support of this view, Nussbaum (2002b) asserts that university arrangements should promote this capability since it creates the necessary social conditions for the development of students' intellect, e.g. being knowledgeable and being fairminded. This positions the affiliation capability as architectonic in higher education and in our understanding of (dis)advantage.

Personal tenacity capability

The preceding chapters have demonstrated that most of the low income black students experienced the clustering of disadvantages. What makes the capability critical for (dis)advantage is that these students overcame the difficulties that threatened their opportunities to progress and graduate. Additionally, it matters most because of its emphasis on students' abilities to recover and complete their studies after failing some of their first and second-year modules. This is related to the agency they had, i.e. the self-efficacy and beliefs they had in accomplishing the things thay have a reason to value. Bandura (1994) asserts that individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy are likely to accomplish the things they have a reason to value because they attribute their failure to insufficient effort and lack of knowledge. This results in them working hard as personal accomplishments reduce their stress and contribute to their greater wellbeing. This means that after failing their modules, these students rebounded and worked

harder, resulting in them passing their modules. Bandura (1994) further observes that being resilient is another source of self-efficacy to sustain one's efforts in achieving goals. Through resilience, the low income black students used their past experiences of addressing conversion factors that were disabling (family and schooling backgrounds), and obstacles at the university such as inadequate funding, racism, sexual harassment, and unfriendly teaching methods. This contributed to them completing their studies successfully.

The low income (black) students' success is attributed surprisingly partly to their low income backgrounds, responsibilities to take care of siblings, and the need to improve their situations and future lives. Their determination to succeed can be formidable and is certainly admirable. The capability is closely related to being able to aspire when students envisage better lives in their futures. Bandura (1994) explains this through role modelling, i.e. when one sees other people with similar backgounds succeeding through their efforts. This raised the students' aspirations as they hoped to have better lives after graduating, e.g. Katleho enrolled for the BEd programme because teachers were respected in his community. He believed that it was through working hard and graduating that he would attain the same level of respect as his teachers.

Economic stability capability

The evidence shows that without the capabilities of economic stability, students cannot access and participate effectively in university activities. Botle's case, described in Chapter 5, shows us how disadvantage plays out when students do not have sufficient finances for their studies. Given that the NSFAS bursary was not adequately funding all deserving students at that time, Botle could not access university when she completed her schooling in 2010, and only managed to secure funding[76] two years later. This means that without this capability she would not have accessed the university at all, since her family could not afford to pay for her to attend university. Her case represents that of many black students from low income backgrounds who meet the entry requirements for university but fail to enrol due to a lack of funding. The point to be emphasised here is that without the capability, students cannot access the university environment to develop other capabilities. Most students from low income and the emerging black middle class experienced financial hardships when their parents could not afford basic needs such as accommodation, transport fees, food, clothing, textbooks, airtime and toiletries. During their undergraduate studies, Joline and Thabang dropped out of university because they could not

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[76] She eventually secured funding from The Department of Education in the Free State province in 2013

afford university tuition, meaning that lacking the functioning of adequate finance disadvantages students. Although the new policy on free university education introduced in South Africa in 2018 exempts low income[77] students from paying university tuition, the funding only benefits those who enrolled since the beginning of that year, to the exclusion of those who had already registered. Finally, economic stability is a meta-capability because it also fosters the capability of socio-psychosocial and mental health. The results reveal that students tended to be stress free when the economic capability was present but were often worried during its absence, which diminished their opportunities to succeed. These capabilities are listed in Table 16 below.

Table 16: Capabilities that matter most for student (dis)advantage

Capabilities	Indicative functionings
Intellectual growth	Having critical skills
	Being knowledgeable in the field of study
	Having improved communication skills
	Completing studies/graduating
Affiliation	Having open relationships with lecturers and other students
	Being part of social and religious groups
Personal tenacity	Being able to recover after failing
	Having self-motivation to work hard and achieve one's goals
	Being resilent to difficult circumstances
Economic stability	Being able to afford university tuition
	Having access to money for university

The previous chapters illustrated that when one has more combined capabilities they were advantaged. Nussbaum (2011) observes that combined capabilities are made up of the internal capabilities(e.g intellectual and emotional capacities) and the external circumstances. The findings show that when students had internal capabilities and if the external conditions (e.g income, institutional ethos) were disabling, they were disadvantaged. This suggests that (dis)advantage is found in the combined capabilities each student had and the more combined capabilities one has, the more advantaged they become to live a flourishing life at the university. Table 17 below shows the combined capabilities for flourishing life in higher education and those proposed in literature in Chapter 3.

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[77] The reviewed NSFAS criteria funds students whose family income does not exceed R350 000 per annum.

Table 17: Combined capabilities for flourishing life in higher education

Proposed capabilities based on literature	Combined capabilities for flourishing life (drawn from students' experiences)
Intellectual growth	Intellectual growth
Economic freedoms	Economic stability
Socio-psychological and mental health	Socio-psychological and emotional health
Participation and voice	Participation and voice
Affiliation	Affiliation
Aspirations	Aspirations
	Personal tenacity
	Safety and mobility
	Empathy and diversity
	Employability

Although the capability of empathy and diversity is not in my proposed list in Chapter 3, it does form part of Nussbaum's (2000) capability of affiliation, which advocates for people to show concern over others. Some students valued the capability as they perceive this as being an essential constituent of their wellbeing at the university as mentioned before. The difference between the proposed capabilities drawn from literature and those that emerged from the student data could be explained by that the former were drawn from higher education in South African broadly while the later are specific to the UFS context.

9.5 Pedagogy for advantage

What also emerged from the preceding chapters is that most black students from low income backgrounds were alienated in the classrooms through the pedagogical arrangements. Focusing on the pedagogical arrangements is central to (dis)advantage because university teaching reflects the structural conditions that can help the diverse students to perform well and graduate (see Calitz 2018). Pedagogical arrangements ought to consider teaching methods that promote interactive learning amongst students to enable their active participation and sharing of ideas. Most of the black students from low quality schools lacked the confidence to participate in class, suggesting that lecturers should create a friendly environment for students to take part in their learning. It can be noted that lecturers should value different opinions from students as opposed to making them 'feel horrible.' This non-judgemental classroom climate enhances students' agency and fosters open and critical minds. Some students also reported that they were alienated by the teaching methods when lecturers used PowerPoint presentations without explaining the content to students. What this suggests is that collaborative learning activities

such as assigning more tasks to small groups of students could create conditions for students to learn more effectively. Together with this, students underlined that they value experiential learning as opposed to theory only, which highlights the need for more practical sessions. As language constituted a barrier to most black students during learning, lecturers could use the formal language of instruction, i.e. English, but should also be sensitive to varying levels of English proficiency. Other important findings derived from interviews with both the students and university staff are that some lecturers failed to pay attention to the diverse levels of preparedness, partly because of the large class sizes. The typical pedagogical approaches that promote advantage to diverse students are as follows:

- Encouraging students to have open minds and valuing different views from diverse students, e.g. the classroom climate should enable students of different identities i.e. gender and race, to participate freely;

- Helping students to communicate well;

- Ensuring sensitivity to different levels of preparedness and providing more support to those in need;

- Using language in a way that it can be understood by all students;

- Promoting peer learning and group work amongst diverse students;

- Providing opportunities for students to apply theory and practice;

- Using experiential learning;

- Promoting interactive learning; and

- Giving students the opportunity to write and communicate clearly.

9.6 Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated that the capabilities approach can help us explore subtle disadvantages that obscured students' experiences. The study has revealed how the approach can help interrogate not only the educational outcomes of the students, but also the intricacies embedded in their lived experiences. In this case, the capability approach has allowed us to examine (dis)advantage beneath the surface, and more particularly whether (and to what extent) students' realised opportunities were used for instrumental gains or for the public good. In the case of South Africa, we could argue that being aware of the need to contribute to community and society is a form of good citizenship that is encouarged by society and policy. To be able to do that is an advantage. Failure to understand or being unwilling to contribute to that is arguably

a disadvantage. To flourish therefore ought to mean one's ability to contribute to social development.

I also foregrounded intersectionality in exploring (dis)advantage, which has revealed the different ways that students are further (dis)advantaged because of their identities with regard to gender, class, race, being a first-generation student, and living off-campus or not. I also suggested functionings that appear to matter most for student (dis)advantage using the adjudicating framework of this study, namely the social, economic and personal goals of higher education. Additionally, the capability approach deviates from the deficit approach, which conceptualises students as lacking, through recognising the role of students' agency to make decisions and employ strategies to overcome the clustered disadvantages. The capability approach has also provided us with an in-depth, rich and sophisticated account of (dis)advantage that we cannot get from the resource and utility-based approaches. Again, it goes beyond the deficit model that conceptualise disadvantage as lacking (Smit 2012) and instead illuminates how each student is disadvantaged in one dimension, whilst being advantaged in another. This suggests that we should probably move away from using the concept of (dis)advantage when designing interventions to improve students' attainments in higher education, since the term is much more sophisticated than is often assumed. Although the notion of 'disadvantage' is found in the title of this thesis, what could be more helpful in designing interventions targeted at giving diverse students equal opportunities for access, participation and attainments, is perhaps the foregrounding of the concept of 'flourishing lives' as opposed to the loaded meanings of 'disadvantage'. This enables us to take into consideration the complexities surrounding unequal student opportunities in higher education.

In the final chapter I conclude the study by reflecting on the research questions and the methodological issues inherent to the investigation. Drawing from the empirical findings and theory, I also make recommendations on how universities can address student disadvantage.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

10.1 Summary of the study

The background of the study was presented in Chapter 1 where a history of inequality in South African society and the country's higher education sector was explained, particularly with respect to how apartheid policies entrenched inequalities that skewed access and success within universities according to race. This was evident in the administration of higher education institutions segregated by race, with black students receiving less relevant knowledge in poorly resourced universities set aside exclusively for them. The system resulted in the disproportionate participation of students, not only by race, but also gender. However, the post-1994 era saw a policy shift to widen participation of black students in higher education as a means to redress past injustices and inequalities. In doing so, higher education policy uses the concept 'historic disadvantage' that is racially defined to mean black people who were formerly excluded in higher education and the broader society. Despite the apparent lack of clarity about what the term 'disadvantage' means, policy frequently uses it in the formulation and description of higher education interventions as reflected in the Education White Paper 3 of 1997. However, black students (who are generally referred to as 'disadvantaged') continue to be underrepresented in higher education in relation to the overall South African population, i.e. in 2013 black students constituted 80% of the student population by head count in public HEIs, but black South Africans comprise 80% of the population, while white South Africans comprise 8% of the general population, and 16% of the student population (CHE 2016). Participation rate in universities stood at 16% of the total enrolments for African students against 50% of white in 2016 (CHE 2018). Furthermore, there is also unequal access for black students to HAUs- or HDUs, e.g. Stellenbosch University has a higher number of white students than black students. Of concern is the way in which success rates are skewed on racial lines, with lower throughput revealed amongst the black students.

This continuation of inequality in higher education raises questions about whether policy's use of 'disadvantage' is adequately addressing the needs of students. This question provided the background to the study given that little attempt has been made to explore the meaning of disadvantage as it plays out in the lives of university students or based on students' own perspectives. The study sought to examine the concept of (dis)advantage based on students' and some staff actual perceptions and experiences in relation to their entry into university, their

lives whilst they are at university and their aspirations for the future once they have completed their studies.

A review of international and local literature on higher education and (dis)advantage was provided in Chapter 2. The chapter looked at the conceptualisation of disadvantage in diverse higher education contexts. For instance, the chapter showed that in UK higher education, (dis)advantage is explained on the basis of examining students' socio-economic class, ethnicity, race, and gender identities. Being first-generation entrants to universities, lacking relevant information on universities and what to study, and inadequate funding are among the factors that disadvantage working class students. Comparatively, middle-class UK students have social, economic and cultural capital, which positions them at an advantage. Informed by their parents who are also graduates, and their social networks, the middle-class students enrol into (and are able to afford) elite universities where they fit in with ease. They register for prestigious degree programmes, and their chances to complete their studies and secure jobs are better than those of the working class. While students from ethnic minority groups often face the same forms of marginalisation as the working class, language barriers may prevent them from learning effectively in class. Although women enjoy greater representation at universities than men, gender inequality conflates with class and ethnicity to marginalise women. For example, women are less likely to enrol in science degree programmes, and often enrol as late entrants in universities when they have other social responsibilities. The same inequalities are characteristic of US higher education, where ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in colleges and higher education institutions are (informally) segregated by race and class. Additionally, disadvantage is embedded in the curriculum where ethnic minority and working class students access low-cost public colleges with less prestigious degree programmes, unlike the elite colleges where middle-class students enrol.

The review of aspirations literature in the UK and Australian higher education systems established that policy frames low-income students as lacking aspirations based on their low participation in higher education. While policy sought to raise the youth's hopes in schools, this did not result in the anticipated outcomes and the participation of these groups remained low. Some scholars have criticised policy for 'misframing' young people as lacking aspirations and having lower ambitions if they chose to follow other life trajectories. The chapter also observed that there is scant research in Africa that focuses specifically on disadvantage in higher education. Most of the literature available focuses on gender inequality, the effect of

HIV in education, and academic support programmes. In the South African context, race appears to be the primary factor (dis)advantaging young people. Despite the presence of financial interventions put in place by policy (e.g. NSFAS funding to students whose family income does not exceed R122 000 per annum during the time of the study), access to universities remains out of reach for many academically qualifying black youth. This is partly because affordability problems remain evident (DHET 2015), even if the income threshold is increased to R350 000 and higher education is 'free' for those who come from households who earn below this.

While many studies are clearly concerned with issues related to institutional transformation especially in terms of racism, gender inequality, and cultural practices, the main focus tends to be on enrolment numbers when judging changes. Less attention is given to the intricacies of the forces that shape students' (dis)advantage in their everyday lives. Using gender inequality as an example, most of these studies noted the underrepresentation of women in the medical field and other science subjects, while only a few focused on the qualitative aspects of it, e.g. how female students were disadvantaged through sexual harassment in universities. The literature review showed that many studies are limited in their explanations of the complexity of the (dis)advantage that students experience, which results in them dropping out or from thriving in their studies. Disadvantage is understood in a simplistic way where the focus is on one or two dimensions of it (usually race and gender). The chapter therefore highlighted the need for a more sophisticated and multi-dimensional approach to the conceptualisation of (dis)advantage.

The conceptual framework was presented in Chapter 3 where I argued for a human development approach through a capability framework in investigating (dis)advantage. The approach foregrounds people's wellbeing in evaluating advantage compared to the utility-based approaches that prioritise resources as a measurement of people's advantage (Sen 1992). The argument presented is that having opportunities and agency to achieve greater educational outcomes is an advantage. The benefits of using the capability approach are found in its focus on wellbeing and individuals, and recognising the diversity of the students by linking their unique biographies to the context of the university. Furthermore, the chapter shows that the capability approach offers a sophisticated analysis of (dis)advantage through its multi-dimensional nature. The use of the conversion factors allows us to explain the extent of (dis)advantage by establishing how the various forms of marginalisation are connected to each

other and have cumulative effects on individual students. This is elaborated through the use of Wolff and De-Shalit's (2007) concepts of the 'corrosive' and 'clustering' of disadvantages, as well as 'fertile' functionings. In this chapter, I also explain the role of aspirations in influencing the conversion process of resources into valuable educational achievements, and how this contributes to (dis)advantage. Chapter 3 concluded by proposing capability-inspired dimensions of (dis)advantage.

10.2 Research aims and questions

Chapters 5 to 9 responded to the primary research question and provided empirical data derived from participant interviews. The following subsidiary research questions were addressed in the study:

Research question 1: *How do students understand advantage and disadvantage?*

This research question focused on the nature of student (dis)advantage and how students perceived themselves in relation to the notion of (dis)advantage. Chapters 5 and 6 responded to this research question. The findings reflect that (dis)advantage is manifested in the varying levels of economic, social and academic capital possessed by the students. What emerged as being central to students' perceptions is coming from a low-income background. All the students indicated that disadvantage meant not being able to afford university costs, i.e. transport, decent accommodation, food, tuition, and clothing. Black students from low-income backgrounds in Chapter 5 explained that disadvantage meant not being able to afford good schools, which led to them struggling to cope with university education. This view concurred with that of most students from the middle class in Chapter 6, who positioned themselves as advantaged due to their material resources. These findings confirm that disadvantage is also class-based, rather than being only racially defined.

Students from low-income groups indicated that the absence of family support constituted a disadvantage. At the same time, they were of the view that being affiliated with a religious group helped students to manage their studies. Central to the accounts of both the black and white students in Chapter 5 and 6, was the notion of hard work. Even with resources, the students' views included that one needed to work hard, which points to the critical role of agency in achieving the things students have a reason to value. The low-income students believed that being advantaged entailed having the tenacity to achieve one's goals, even when the journey is littered with obstacles. Nonetheless, some black students felt that despite their hard work, they did not have the same opportunities for employment as their white counterparts

because of racism. On the other hand, white students stated that they felt they were disadvantaged through being excluded from accessing bursaries that would place them in a better position to find employment. The key findings are that students described disadvantage as an outcome of various interconnected factors that are linked to their economic, social, and academic backgrounds, but are also linked to family support and agency.

Chapter 8 also addressed research question 1 through analysing how the university staff and SRC members understood student (dis)advantage, and how they responded to that. Similar to students' understanding of (dis)advantage, the following issues emerged as dimensions disadvantaging black students: inadequate finances, the absence of family support, and being a first-generation student. The university indicated plans to work together with community stakeholders in implementing an accreditation system to improve services to off-campus students living in private residences. Although the staff members highlighted that the university had already attained certain milestones in addressing racism, this contrasted with the perceptions of the SRC members who felt that racism was still prevalent at the university. Another finding was that disadvantage meant gender injustices such as sexual harassment of female students by male lecturers as well as issues around sexuality. They pointed out the absence of a gender policy and clear reporting structures. Both the SRC and university staff members agreed on the need for restructuring some of the content in academic programmes. The university staff also recognised that most of the black students were disadvantaged through the former language policy that had both English and Afrikaans as languages of instruction before English became the primary language of instruction. Finally, the university staff and SRC members saw some students as disadvantaged through disability and lacking the freedoms to practice their religions. They are clearly of the opinion that pedagogy and curriculum can be instruments of disadvantage. The staff and SRC views resonated for the most part with the conceptualisation of disadvantage in the students' perspectives.

Research question 2: *What are students' concrete experiences of advantage and disadvantage in relation to their histories, lives and higher education specifically?*
This research question sought to understand the actual students' experiences as a way of nuancing definitions of (dis)advantage. In addressing it, I explored whether and to what extent students exercised choices in making their decision to enrol at the university. The findings show that while the middle-class students made informed decisions about the universities and the degree programmes they wanted to study, some of the black students were disadvantaged

through limited choices because of inadequate finances, lack of information, and through not qualifying for the degree programme they had wanted. Because they were limited by these circumstances, the students ended up studying in the programmes they had enrolled.

Other significant findings reveal differences in students' opportunities based on the amount of economic, social, cultural and academic capital they had. Partly because of the sufficient resources enjoyed by the middle-class students, they were advantaged through their academic preparedness that enabled them to adjust easily to university education. At the same time, most of the black students struggled in their first and second years. In addition to that, their financial resources prevented them from having flourishing lives, i.e. having safe and convenient transport, decent accommodation and affording university-related costs. Most of the black students experienced unfriendly accommodation arrangements, unsafe transport, and limited social support from family members. Related to that, was their failure to participate in campus extra-curricular activities, thereby limiting their social networks. They also tended to suffer mental and emotional stress.

I also showed how the university environment alienated the low-income black students. Lack of confidence discouraged some of them from participating in class and from approaching lecturers for academic support. Their biographies thus intersected with university teaching, racism, and gender unfairness, to disadvantage them. A different pattern, however, emerged from interviews with the white and two black middle class students, who experienced multiple advantages: having the cultural capital that helped them to fit into the university environment, having been equipped with skills and knowledge on how to learn, and the confidence to seek additional academic support. I also illustrated that all the students had clear aspirations to improve their lives by getting well-paid jobs. This is unlike the view that young people from poor economic backgrounds do not aspire (Appadurai 2004). Nonetheless, the white students seem to be advantaged in accessing employment because of the connections and networks they had. They had made progress in pursuing their aspirations through working on a part-time basis within their fields of study, which added to their advantage.

Research question 3: *What are students' effective opportunities for success at university?*
I explored this research question in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, where I delineated functionings from student experiences. I subsequently use these observable functionings in Chapters 5 and 6 as proxies for the capabilities, or effective opportunities students valued for success. Experiences

of low-income black students in Chapter 5 showed that they achieved fewer functionings than the middle-class students in Chapter 6, reflecting their narrower capability sets. The middle-class students described in Chapter 6 fared quite well at the university as reflected by the merit and bursary awards received by three out of six of them. Their backgrounds enabled them to have greater educational achievements, e.g. having social networks, being active participants in class, having confidence, being proficient in the language used in class, being academically literate, and being emotionally healthy. Some of these functionings were, however, less evident amongst individuals from the low-income black student group.

Describing two student cases in Chapter 7, one white male from a middle-class background, and a black female from a low-income background, I demonstrate how the capabilities approach provides us with an evaluative space to measure interpersonal advantage. In this case, I demonstrate how (dis)advantage can be evaluated using the capability space by comparing the effective opportunities each student had to have educational achievements. I establish that the capability approach provides us with a robust framework through uncovering the hidden intricacies that (dis)advantage students' lives. What seemingly is advantage, at first sight, can be more complicated, when it emerged that the white student might have more capabilities overall but he was disadvantaged through lack of social functionings. Hence, having a more substantial number of capabilities did not necessarily amount to full advantage, as there is a need for capabilities to be equitably distributed across the personal, social and economic goals of higher education. On the other hand, having a limited set of capabilities did not disadvantage by default. Tenacity and resilience enabled the low-income black student to progress and graduate. Her background provided a source of resources, i.e. the knowledge and experience of how to deal with challenging situations such as unfriendly teaching methods, sexual harassment, racism and financial and social difficulties.

Research question 4: *What are the implications of these findings for promoting an equal and just university environment, fairer outcomes for students, and wider and deeper student capability sets?*

Chapters 1 to 9 address the research question above. Chapter 1 highlighted that policy racially defines (dis)advantage in its interventions in higher education. A gap is shown in this understanding of disadvantage: interventions aimed at the widening of university access are not contributing sufficiently in achieving the desired goals of reducing inequality and social injustices. Chapter 2 highlighted the need for a multi-dimensional approach towards

understanding students' (dis)advantage; an approach that shows how the various dimensions of people's lives intersect with each other. It also stresses the need to explore students' agency when teasing out the concept of (dis)advantage, and how student agency can be mobilised. Chapter 3 argued that the capabilities approach offers a helpful framework to dismantle (dis)advantage by expanding students' capability sets, and addressing the conversion factors that enabled or restrict. It emphasises the need to promote student agency for educational achievements. It further asks us to interrogate how disadvantage plays out in the lives of students using multi-dimensional and intersectional approaches.

The empirical findings in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 show that the capability approach provides us with a nuanced understanding of (dis)advantage through revealing the different dimensions that can influence students' interpersonal and comparative advantage in relation to getting into, participating in and succeeding at higher education. I also illustrate in these chapters how (dis)advantage plays out in students' lives when various forms of disadvantage intersect and worsen their lives. Advantage also plays a role in the same way: it is 'constructive' when students achieve more functionings. This explains why most middle-class students succeed. Chapter 9, pulls everything together, arguing that resource-based approaches do not sufficiently help us to understand student (dis)advantage, as they do not reveal the intricacies of (dis)advantage. It illuminates that the capability approach is helpful in examining (dis)advantage in depth with regard to how students access opportunities to achieve the economic gains of higher education but may still be disadvantaged through limited social goals of higher education, which are central to a human development approach. In such cases private benefits from higher education do not also translate into public good benefits. Affiliation, intellectual growth, access to adequate finances, and personal tenacity are the capability-inspired dimensions that emerged as the ones that matter most for student (dis)advantage. The chapter suggests the need to shift our focus from the complex term 'disadvantage' to that of 'flourishing lives', which foregrounds students' wellbeing. In this way we can reach a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how students are marginalised or succeeded at the university.

10.3 Original contribution

The study makes three significant inputs to the literature, theory, as well as policy and practice. It adds to the existing research on inequalities and social justice in higher education in the South African context by closely examining (dis)advantage using student voices and a capabilities

lens. Defining (dis)advantage for policy and interventions in higher education is an under-researched area. That, combined with the use of the capabilities approach, makes this study original. The study illuminates how the capability approach nuances our understanding of disadvantage through its focus on multiple dimensions of people's wellbeing and how students are disadvantaged or advantaged through specific *opportunities* to succeed in their studies. Through the evaluative spaces that the capability approach offers to us, the study observed the intersectionality of the various conversion factors in having a compound effect on individual students' level of (dis)advantage. The thesis has gone beyond conceptualising disadvantage through race, class, and gender, by further extending its focus to other dimensions that constitute students' wellbeing, e.g. social-psychological and emotional health, mobility and safety, and employment opportunities and shows that all dimensions matter. This is important for improving policy and practices in higher education because it sheds light on the blind spots when the dimensions of (dis)advantage are limited to only a few numerical demographic factors.

What is also new in this study is the delineation of capability-inspired dimensions that have a potential to inform policy on redressing student inequalities with regard to access, participation, and success. These policy changes can be effected at national, institutional and faculty levels. The capability-inspired dimensions are also a source of information when deciding where interventions should be targeted in improving conditions for students' success at the university. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of holistic approaches that consider how the different dimensions of student wellbeing are connected when redressing inequality and social injustices. By identifying the dimensions that emerged as the ones that matter most, the study can stimulate debates amongst scholars and contribute to ongoing conversations about reducing inequalities and social injustices in higher education in South Africa.

10.4 Recommendations for policy and practice

I have argued for a more nuanced understanding of (dis)advantage that can better inform interventions in universities to facilitate equal participation of diverse students. I have also identified the different forms of disadvantage students experience in their educational lives. I now recommend the following as a means to improving students' access, participation and success in universities:

- Paying attention to students financial needs. Increasing funding for low-income students helps them to afford university expenses, which enhances their focus on

academic work as opposed to them being stressed about how they are going to raise the necessary finances. This also contributes to students being able to afford decent and safe accommodation and transport, and to have dignified lives.

- Building confidence amongst students from low-income backgrounds who might be facing challenges in adjusting and participating effectively in the university academic and extra-curricular activities. This can be done through on-campus residence activities or in other university activities, to include all the students.

- Recognising and mobilising the resilience low income students bring with them to the university.

- Introducing more programmes to raise awareness of racism. Encouraging diverse students to participate in the campus multi-racial activities (e.g. sporting) to help them to appreciate diversity, can complement this. Additionally, universities can improve on the implementation of policy aimed at eradicating racism by ensuring that university staff are committed to this ideal.

- Developing a gender and sexuality policy, together with having clear reporting structures for incidences of gender unfairness at the campus including pedagogically, to increase female students' freedoms while restraining unfair gender practices respectively.

- Pedagogically, the university should improve its teaching and practices so that all students are advantaged. This can be done through encouraging students to participate in their learning and to take part in peer or group learning. It should encourage its teaching staff to use methods that promote experiential and interactive learning, and it should help students to communicate effectively. Furthermore, the teaching staff should be sensitive to the needs of diverse students including those with language difficulties. Parallel to that, the university should review the curriculum to accommodate the diverse needs of the students. Providing foundational courses to all the students to cater for those who might have accessed mainstream programmes but who are inadequately prepared for university education could help improve students' performance.

- Promoting social citizenship and public values. Through embedding these values in the curriculum of the various degree programmes, the university can inculcate them to all students.

- Having a friendly campus environment that promotes mobility among students with disabilities. This could be done through improving the university's infrastructure (e.g classrooms and residences).

- Recognising and treating diverse students equally based on their religious affiliation and race. The university should provide same support to the different religious groups at the campus. Together with that, it should implement punitive measures against perpetrators of racism as a way of creating a non-racist environment. Social programmes that promote interaction among diverse students could be introduced to help students tolerate and respect each other.

These recommendations should not be implemented in isolation, as there is need to follow a holistic approach that considers the intersectionality of student disadvantage.

10.5 Future research

I identify three major areas that the study could have addressed, which could be interesting for future research. The first of these would be to conduct a follow-up study to determine how (dis)advantage plays out after students have graduated. This could be done by investigating how graduates are faring in employment given the apparent varying levels of opportunity between white and black students revealed in this study. An interrogation of this area can provide us with an in-depth understanding of how (dis)advantage plays out beyond students' university days, to show how diverse students can achieve their aspirations. Secondly, it would be interesting to conduct further research into what resources students from low income backgrounds have and how students use them to overcome the multiple disadvantages they face at the university. Finally, it could also be helpful to conduct new pedagogical research on how universities can promote diverse students' effective participation and success at university. Given that much of the contact students' learning takes place in classrooms (Tinto 2012), this is a crucial area that needs further investigation to help improve attainments among the black students. Observational studies can contribute immensely to the pedagogical conditions that can promote diverse students' learning.

10.6 Limitations of the study

Although the thesis provides rigorous information for thinking about disadvantage and how to redress inequalities and social injustices in universities, a reflection on the methodology of the research reveals certain limitations. The sample size is too small to adequately cater for the

diverse nature of the students considering the complexity of the topic. Although the sample size (n=26 students) is adequate as presented in Chapter 4, a larger sample size could have provided more diverse accounts of student (dis)advantage, which could have enriched our understanding of (dis)advanatge. It was challenging to conduct a large number of interviews within the short space of time available for the study. Nevertheless, the study still provides valuable insights into the concept of (dis)advantage and satisfied the goal of achieving a deeper (as opposed to broader) understanding of the term. The qualitative study could form the basis of a wider capability-based survey of students.

The final limitation concerning the methodology of this study, is related to the use of semi-structured research methods. Despite the usefulness of the research method in gathering data, semi-structured interviews have a limitation in that they do not necessarily have 'narrative capital' for marginalised students. Watts (2008) explains that narrative capital refers to a participant's capacity to articulate their experience in a way that their stories can be recognised and valued. In other words, the research methods could have constrained some participants from clearly articulating their experiences considering their low confidence. On the other hand, the middle-class students enjoyed a stronger capability in expressing themselves. This suggest that the semi-structured method does not provide equal opportunities to participants of diverse backgrounds to account for their experiences. The study could have drawn greater benefit through looking at life histories as a form of research with the potential to empower the marginalised participants to narrate their experiences. Apart from that, narrative histories have the added strength of enabling us to contextualise participants' stories and to interpret their perpectives (Watts 2008).

10.7 Concluding remarks

The thesis has demonstrated that disadvantage can be defined by race as conceptualised by policy. It shows, however, that there are additional dimensions to the notion of disadvantage that can provide a more nuanced definition, e.g. matters relating to affiliation, intellectual growth, personal tenacity, access to employment, psychological and mental health, transport and mobility, and access to finance. It has been argued that these dimensions are interlinked and work together in sophisticated ways in (dis)advantaging students. They are worth discussing in wider fora. The study has revealed that to approach (dis)advantage through a capability framework gives us the space to evaluate complexities, and that this can better inform interventions in higher education. In turn, this can improve students' educational

attainments, reduce inequalities, and promote social justice in universities and in the society as a whole.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Selected capability lists in higher education

Nussbaum (2000)	Walker (2006)	Wilson-Strydom (2015)	Calitz (2016)	Mutanga and Walker (2015)	Walker (2016)	Walker and Loots (2015)
-Practical Reason; -Senses, imagination, and Thought	-Practical reasoning; -Knowledge and imagination; -Learning disposition; -Educational resilience	-Practical Reason; -Knowledge and Imagination; -Learning disposition; -Social; -Language competence and confidence.	-Practical Reason: -Student research; -Critical literacies	-Knowledge and Imagination; -Educational Resilience	-Critical reasoning	-Having access to higher education and to knowledge, gaining a degree
-Affiliation	-Social relations and social networks; -Respect, dignity and recognition	-Relations and social networks; -Respect dignity and recognition;	-Critical affiliation	-Social relations and Social -Networks; -Respect, Dignity and Recognition; -Language; -Identity	-Affiliation; -Critical awareness of race, racism and history	-Not being subject to sexual harassment or violence, being safe; -Being treated as dignified human being, and respected
-Control over one's Environment - Emotions	-Emotional integrity	-Emotional health	-Deliberate participation	-Voice	-To act for change	-Having a voice to speak out and participate
				-Aspiration		
-Bodily Health	-Bodily integrity		-Values of the public good	-Mobility		
-Bodily Integrity				Culture		

-Play				-Religion		
-Other species						253
-Life						

Appendix B: Interviews schedules

(i) Interview schedule for students

Demographic Information

Name and pseudonym of student	
Name of interviewer	
Date of interview	
Location of interview	
Contact details of student	
Interview number for student	
Nationality	
Age	
Gender	
How many siblings Highest level of education of siblings	
Highest level of education of parents or guardian	
'Racial' group	
Primary home language Language most used in secondary school	
Home town/village (from urban, township or rural area?)	
Type of secondary school attended	

Subject and level of university study (eg 3rd year)	
Type of qualification (e.g.B.A.)	
Subject and level (eg 3rd year)	
Type of qualification (B.A.)	
Source/s of funding for university studies Estimated family annual income: below R122 000; between R122 000 and R600 000; above R600 000 Involvement in p/t paid work (eg a tutor)	
Comments on the interview (setting, body language, or anything else that might be relevant). [To be written immediately after the interview]	

Choosing and deciding on higher education and getting in

1. Please tell me about how you came to decide on and choose going to university. [When did you decide? Did someone else decide for you? What helped you and what got in the way of making this choice. What role did your parents/teachers/school/friends/UFS play? What matric grades did you get?]

2. Why did you choose degree X and why UFS? [Would you have chosen a different degree or different university if you could have?]

3. Say a bit about your schooling and your teachers? [Did it/ they prepare you well for university? Do students who have gone to your kind of school get a fair opportunity to go to university?]

4. Was it easy or difficult to sort out the finances for your studies? [In what way, have you had sufficient finances for each year of your studies? Does it give you enough for food, etc? Are there things you would like to buy but you can't?]

Getting on

5. What were your impressions when you first arrived at University? [What support did you get? Who provided this? What kind of support would you have liked and did not get? Say a bit about your accommodation]

6. How have you spent your free time? Did you get involved in student life and activities? [if yes, what did you do. If no, why is this. Is this kind of involvement important or not, in your view?]

7. Who are your friends here? [Close friends? People you like to spend time with? Who don't you make friends with?]

8. Do you feel you belong here? [To what extent do you feel you fit in, belong and are respected? What makes you feel that? (concrete examples of attitudes, actions, conditions)]

9. Have you changed since you have been at university? [How? (More independent?) What role have your academic studies played in any changes in you? Examples of attitude and behaviour. Are you pleased with these changes, or not?]

10. How did you get on with your studies? [How are you enjoying/coping with academic study? What kind of teaching and learning approach works best for you and why? What is the teaching like (egs of good teaching that helps you learn and bad teaching which does not)]

11. Describe your relationships with teaching staff (in and out of class) and with other students in class (Do you work/talk/study together with different students.)

12. What are you learning? [Would you say you can now think critically about knowledge and/or society? How confident are you about your progress (what kind of marks have you been getting)? What is most difficult? What do you most enjoy?

The future

13. What are your aspirations for the future, both for your life and your career? [What do you hope to be and to do and why?]

1. (B)Vignettes

The following are three first year undergraduate students studying a Psychology degree programme at a university.

i. Kim

Kim is a white female student doing her first year in psychology. Kim enjoys her university studies as she finds the lectures and university life comfortable for her. Since her parents have attended university education so they had informed her about university life before she enrolled. Kim also feels that she has the necessary skills needed to cope up with his degree programme which she developed during her schooling. Kim uses English as her first language and this gives her an added advantage in contributing to classroom debates and understanding concepts. As a result, she is confident in whatever she is doing. Despite her strong relationship with her lecturers which have befitted her with extra support, Kim also finds her friends helpful especially when they have group discussions during evenings and weekends. Her friends reside in the same residence with her. Kim looks forward to pursue honours studies after completing her undergraduate degree.

ii. Anna

Anna stays in a high density suburb with her relative as she cannot afford campus accommodation. As Anna cannot afford transport fees to the university, she has decided to only travel to the university on the days when she has lectures. The environment where Anna stays is not conducive for studying as she is constantly disturbed by her neighbors who are partying. This happens during the evenings mostly when she wants to do her assignments. Anna had thought of travelling to the university to study during the night but she cannot not do that as it is unsafe to travel during the night. Furthermore, there are no other students from her neighborhood whom she can engage in group discussions with. Anna struggles to get good marks in her assignments, and at the end of the year, she had passed only half of the courses. As a result of stress, Anna is considering to drop her studies and find a full time job.

iii. Sam

Sam is a black male student who attended a poor school in his rural home. His parents passed away when he was still in school, and since then Sam has been taking care of his two siblings. After completing his schooling, Sam was accepted by the university but he was worried about tuition and finances for his upkeep and for his siblings. Sam did not get a bursary and he sought advice from a local teacher who advised him to approach the university for financial assistance. After doing so, Sam was fortunately granted a bursary. During his studies, Sam failed the initial tests as he found the university education challenging but he did not get worried since he had failed before passing the subsequent tests. Since Sam was determined to pass his courses he made initiatives through approaching his tutor for assistance, joining study groups, and giving more time for studying. This worked Sam for him as he passed all his courses at the need of the year. Now Sam is confident of doing well in future and he looks forward to take care of his siblings and assist the local community.

Understanding advantage and disadvantage

14. Students at this university are very diverse, they come from different schools and cultures, some are well-off, some less well-off. [Please read the vignettes and comment]. Would you say that you are advantaged or disadvantaged, why, and in what ways?

15. Is there anything you think our government should be doing to make university better for all students?

16. Overall what difference has coming to university made in your life and in your future opportunities?

17. Can you say a bit about the ways in which you would consider yourself advantaged or disadvantaged and whether you expect this to change say in the next five years.

(ii) Interview schedule for administrative staff

1. Can you please describe the typical students that you recruit in this university? [Do you admit students who might not have been accepted in other universities? Why is this?]

2. What do you think are the most important challenges that different students face at this university?

3. How has the university responded to these challenges [In what ways is the university addressing students' financial needs e.g. tuition, textbooks, food, etc.? How has the university responded to the #Fees must fall movement? How is the university addressing accommodation issues? What is being done to help incorporate off-campus students to the university?]

4. In your opinion, how far has the university progressed in its institutional transformation? [How is the university addressing racism considering the continuing student protests against racism on the campus? What are your thoughts regarding the new language policy? What is the university's response to the Decolonisation movement?]

5. In what ways is the university addressing gender inequality? Can you comment on the progress made on strategies?

6. How has the university responded to the pedagogical needs of diverse students? [Can you comment on the teaching methods? In your opinion, how helpful have been the extended degree programmes?]

7. What do students learn? [Do you think undergraduate degree programme help diverse students to think critically about knowledge and society? How do diverse students progress in their studies? How would you describe the ideal university graduate?]

8. In your opinion, do diverse graduates from this university succeed equally in the job market? Why?

Understanding advantage and disadvantage
9. Can you describe a (dis)advantaged student?
10. How has student (dis)advantage changed in the last 10 years at this university?
11. What do you think the government can do to change the university to be a better place for all students?

12. Would you like to add anything else not already mentioned regarding this university's contribution to the development of diverse students?

(iii) Interview schedule for the head of department

1. What do you think are the most important issues and challenges that different students face at this university?
2. From your own experiences, how prepared are students for university education when they enrol? [Which group of students? Do schools provide equal opportunities for students to learn? How equipped are they academically for university studies? How easy is it for them to adjust to university life?
3. Based on your experience how do students find learning at this university? [How do diverse students participate during lectures and other university activities?]
4. What teaching methods are used at this university? [How do these methods cater to the needs of different students? Have the teaching approaches changed in any way over the last 10 years? What kinds of teaching approaches help students to learn better?]
5. How would you describe the relationship between lecturers and students at this university? [Can you give examples? Do you think students find lecturers approachable? Why? Are students recognised and respected equally at this university?]
6. To what extent does the undergraduate programme help diverse students to think critically about knowledge and society? How do students progress in their studies? How would you describe the ideal university graduate?
   Is this university producing the kinds of graduates you would like to see?

Understanding advantage and disadvantage

7. Can you describe what student (dis)advantage looks like?
8. How has student (dis)advantage changed in the last 10 years?
9. What do you think the government can do to help the university to be a better place for all students?
10. How is student success affected by factors such as race, gender, social class or staying on or off campus?
11. Do diverse graduates succeed equally in the job market as far as you know? Why?]
12. Would you like to add anything else not already mentioned regarding this university's contribution to the development of diverse students?

(iv) Interview schedule for Student Representative Council members

1. What is the SRC's role and function in assisting diverse students? What support does the SRC offer to different students at the university? What other support is offered e.g accommodation etc? How have you assisted students to adjust to the university environment?]

2. What do you think are the most important challenges faced by students? How are the different groups of students coping financially in terms of fees, accommodation etc? What grievances have you raised with university management recently?

3. Can you describe the relationship or interaction between university management and the SRC? How has the university responded to these issues in the past? e.g #FeesMustFall movement? Where does the SRC stand regarding #FeesMustFall?

4. What kind of students do you represent? How does the SRC identify itself with the group it represents?

5. What differences does the SRC identify regarding experiences of diverse students? Considering the diversity (or lack of it) in the SRC, how does SRC help addressing the needs of different groups?

6. There has been continued student protests at UFS. May you comment on this, and other student protests that are unique to UFS? Which important issues do you think are specific to UFS? Why?

7. In your opinion, do diverse graduates have equal opportunities to succeed in the job market? Why?

Understanding advantage and disadvantage

8. Can you describe student (dis)advantage?

9. In your opinion, how has student (dis)advantage changed in the last 10 years?

10. What do you think the government can do to change the university to be a better place for all students?

11. Would you like to add anything else not already mentioned regarding this university's contribution to the development of diverse students?

Appendix C: Approval forms

(i)   **Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences Ethics approval form**

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

11-Nov-2016

Dear Mr Oliver Gore

Ethics Clearance: **Youth voices on experiences of (dis)advantage: a case study at a South African university**

Principal Investigator: **Mr Oliver Gore**

Department: **Centre for Development Support (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to you application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2016/1283**

This ethical clearance number is valid from **11-Nov-2016** to **13-Nov-2021**. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. Petrus Nel
Chairperson: Ethics Committee Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences

Economics Ethics Committee
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(ii) **Approval from UFS authorities for participation of students/staff in research projects**

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREESTATE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEES

APPROVAL FROM UFS AUTHORITIES
FOR PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS/STAFF IN RESEARCH PROJECTS

Title, Initials, Surname:	MR O T GORE	Staff/Student number	2005269083
Department/Institution:	CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT		
Phone:	0604448657	E-mail address:	gore.olivare@gmail
upervisor(s):	Prof MJ WALKER DR MG WILSON-STRYDOM	Phone:	051-401 7020 051-401 7566

Protocol Title:	Youth voices on experiences of (dis)advantage a case study at a South African university

Who will be involved in the study? (tick ✓)	☑ UFS Personnel	☑ Students

INSTRUCTIONS:

I.   Please attach the following to this form when requesting approval from the signatories:
    a.   A short summary of the study protocol;

II. Kindly note that it is the responsibility of the researcher(s) to ensure that all relevant signatures are obtained before this signed form is attached to your Ethical Clearance Application's Document Checklist on RIMS.

III. Please choose either section A **OR** B below.

IV. Section C is **mandatory** for all research on campus.

A.   FOR RESEARCH ON UFS STUDENTS AND/OR STAFF FROM A SPECIFIC FACULTY, BOTH THE FOLLOWING SIGNATURES MUST BE OBTAINED:

I. DEPARTMENT HEAD (IF APPLICABLE):	☐ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature:	Date:	
Comments:		

II. DEAN OF FACULTY:	☐ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature:	Date:	
Comments:		

OR

B.   FOR RESEARCH ON INTERFACULTY UFS STUDENTS AND/OR STAFF AND/OR STUDENTS IN UFS RESIDENCES, THE FOLLOWING SIGNATURE MUST BE OBTAINED:

I. DEAN: STUDENT AFFAIRS	☒ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature:	Date: 13 — 09 — 2016	
Comments:		

FORM: Approval from UFS Authorities v01
Effective date: June 2016
University of the Free State

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AND

C. ALL RESEARCH ON STUDENTS AND/OR STAFF TO BE APPROVED BY:		
i. VICE-RECTOR: RESEARCH	☐ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature:	Date: 14/09/2016	
Comments:		

Die Universiteit van die Vrystaat
The University of the Free State

2016 -09- 1 4

Prof. R.C. Witthuhn
VISEREKTOR: NAVORSING
VICE RECTOR: RESEARCH

Prof. Corli Witthuhn
Viserektor:Navorsing - Vice Rector:Research
Universiteit van die Vrystaat
University of the Free State
Hoofgebou K81 Tel. 051 - 401 2118

FORM: Approval from UFS Authorities v01
Effective date: June 2016
University of the Free State

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INSTRUCTIONS:

I. Please attach the following to this form when requesting approval from the signatories:
   a. A short summary of the study protocol;

II. Kindly note that it is the responsibility of the researcher(s) to ensure that all relevant signatures are obtained before this signed form is attached to your Ethical Clearance Application's Document Checklist on RIMS.

III. Please choose either section A **OR** B below.

IV. Section C is **mandatory** for all research on campus.

A. FOR RESEARCH ON UFS STUDENTS AND/OR STAFF FROM A SPECIFIC FACULTY, BOTH THE FOLLOWING SIGNATURES MUST BE OBTAINED: AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

I. DEPARTMENT HEAD (IF APPLICABLE)	☒ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature: _[signature]_	Date: 9/9/2016	
HENRY JORDAN		
Comments: I would be interested in seeing the results.		

II. DEAN OF FACULTY:	☒ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature: _[signature]_	Date: 12/09/2016	
Comments:		

B. FOR RESEARCH ON UFS STUDENTS AND/OR STAFF FROM A SPECIFIC FACULTY, BOTH THE FOLLOWING SIGNATURES MUST BE OBTAINED: POLITICAL SCIENCES AND GOVERNANCE

III. DEPARTMENT HEAD (IF APPLICABLE):	☒ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature: _[signature]_ TJ Neothling	Date: 9/9/2016	
Comments:		

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FORM: Approval from UFS Authorities v01
Effective date: June 2016
University of the Free State

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IV.	DEAN OF FACULTY:	☑ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature:		Date:	
	LJS Bates	Dekaan/Dean Geesteswetenskappe/Humanities	
Comments:			

C.	FOR RESEARCH ON UFS STUDENTS AND/OR STAFF FROM A SPECIFIC FACULTY, **BOTH** THE FOLLOWING SIGNATURES MUST BE OBTAINED: Psychology		
V.	DEPARTMENT HEAD (IF APPLICABLE):	☑ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature:		Date: 9. 9. 2016	
	K.G.F. ESTERHUYSE		
Comments:			
	Please contact Ms v. Aardt (vanaardtb@ufs) in this reg		

VI.	DEAN OF FACULTY:	☑ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature:		Date: 9. 9. 2016	
	LJS Bates	Dekaan/Dean Geesteswetenskappe/Humanities	
Comments:			

D.	FOR RESEARCH ON UFS STUDENTS AND/OR STAFF FROM A SPECIFIC FACULTY, **BOTH** THE FOLLOWING SIGNATURES MUST BE OBTAINED:		
VII.	DEPARTMENT HEAD (IF APPLICABLE):	☑ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature:		Date: 12/09/2016	
Comments:			

F. FOR RESEARCH ON UFS STUDENTS AND/OR STAFF FROM A SPECIFIC FACULTY, BOTH THE FOLLOWING SIGNATURES MUST BE OBTAINED:		
	Business Management	
I. DEPARTMENT HEAD (IF APPLICABLE):	☑ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature:	Date: 14/9/216	
Comments:		
II. DEAN OF FACULTY:	☑ Approved	☐ Not Approved
Signature: MLKrouhamp	Date: 14/09/2016	
Comments:		

Appendix D: Information sheets and consent forms for students, university staff and SRC members

(i)   Information sheet for students

Researcher: Oliver T. Gore
Room 114 Benito Khotseng Building
University of the Free State
Telephone 0604448657
Email. gore.oliver@gmail.com

Dear Participant

I am inviting you to participate in this project: ***Students' experiences of and perspectives on (dis)advantage: a case study at a South African university***. I am a doctoral student at the Centre for Research in Higher Education and Development (CRHED) at University of the Free State. The purpose of the study is to understand students' perception of and experiences of (dis)advantage in South African universities. The study seeks to learn from students and university staff on how some students are disadvantaged at the university in order to inform interventions on the ways to promote equal participation and success of all students.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this discussion, and then change your mind afterwards you can still withdraw from the discussion at any given time. There are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate, for example this will not affect your studies. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to respond to questions on your understanding of (dis)advantage, and on what you value for a fairer university success amongst all students. This interview will take about an hour and a half. The interview will be audio recorded so that I do not miss any information that you will provide.

There are no monetary benefits for your taking part this study. The study will benefit university students at this university and nationally through promoting equal conditions in universities for all students to succeed. Your participation in this study is however important. A token of appreciation in form of a lunch will be given to you for spending time with me and if you have travelled to meet me, a reimbursement for your transport costs will be made.

The information you provide will not be shared to anyone except my supervisors at the office and your names will not appear in any of the records or reports. The information you provide will also be kept safely throughout the study. There are no risks anticipated with taking part in this study as no harm will be caused on you. If you do not understand anything, please feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions or if you are not satisfied with anything regarding this study please contact my supervisor Professor Melanie Walker on her number: +27 (0)764348820 or on her email: walkermj@ufs.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Oliver T. Gore

(ii)   Consent form for students

Researcher: Oliver T. Gore
Room 114 Benito Khotseng Building
University of the Free State
Telephone 0604448657
Email. gore.oliver@gmail.com

Dear Participant
Study Title: ***Students' experiences of and perspectives on (dis)advantage: a case study at a South African university***.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to understand students' perception of and experiences of (dis)advantage in South Africa. The aim of the study is to explore the meaning of (dis)advantage from diverse university students and what they value for equal success. This information will be used to inform interventions on equal participation and success of all students.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this study is voluntary, which means that you do not have to participate in this discussion, if you choose not to. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. There are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate, for example this will not affect your studies.

Procedures involved in this study

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to respond to questions on your understanding of and experiences (dis)advantage, and what you value for all students to succeed at the university. This interview will take about an hour and a half. In order for me not to lose any information from our discussion, I will be using a digital recorder to capture the conversation.

Benefits of participating in this study

There are no monetary benefits for your participating in this study. The study will benefit students from this university and nationally through promoting equal conditions in universities for student success. Your participation in this study is however important. A token of

appreciation in form of a lunch will be given to you for spending time with me. If you have travelled to meet me here a reimbursement of your transport fee will be made.

Privacy and confidentiality

The information you will provide will not be shared to anyone except my supervisors at the office. Your name will not appear on the records of the conversation and on the final report of this study. If i decide to publish the findings from this study, your name will also not appear in the publication. The information collected will be kept in a locked drawer in my office and electronic transcripts will be secured through the use of a pass word.

Risks and no harm

There are no risks associated with participating in this study as no physical nor psychological harm will be caused on you. If anything happens however, you will be referred to a professional counsellor for help within the university. Please contact me if you experience some discomfort or unhappiness after the interview so that we can discuss that.

If you do not understand anything, please feel free to ask questions. If you are not satisfied with anything regarding this study please contact my supervisor Professor Melanie Walker on her phone number +27 (0)764348820 or email her on this email address: walkermj@ufs.ac.za

By signing below, I agreeing to the above.

Signature of the participant: ……………………… ……… Date: /…./…./……/
Name of the participant: ……………………… ………….   *day/month/year*

Name of the researcher: ……………………… ………   Date: /…./…./……/
Signature of the researcher: ……………………… ………   *day/month/year*

(iii)   Information sheet for university staff and student representative council members

Researcher: Oliver T. Gore
Room 114 Benito Khotseng Building
University of the Free State
Telephone 0604448657
Email. gore.oliver@gmail.com

Dear Participant

I am inviting you to participate in this project: ***Students' experiences of and perspectives on (dis)advantage: a case study at a South African university***. I am a doctoral student at the Centre for Research in Higher Education and Development (CRHED) at University of the Free State. The purpose of the study is to understand students' perception of and experiences of (dis)advantage in South African universities. The study seeks to learn from students and university staff on how some individuals are disadvantaged at the university in order to inform interventions on the ways to promote equal participation and success of all students.

Participation in this study is voluntary, which means that you are free to participate or not to if you decide so. If you decide to take part in this discussion and then change your mind afterwards, you can still withdraw at any given time without giving a reason. There are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate, for example this will not affect your working here. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to respond to questions on your understanding of students' (dis)advantage, and on they value for equal success in their studies. This interview will take about an hour and a half. The interview will be audio recorded so that I do not miss any information that you will provide.

There are no monetary benefits for your taking part this study. The study will benefit students at this university and nationally through promoting equal conditions in universities for all students to participate equally and have fairer achievements. Your participation in this study is however important. A token of appreciation in form of a lunch will be given to you spending time with me. If you have travelled to meet me, a reimbursement for your transport costs will be made.

The information you provide will not be shared to anyone except my supervisors at the office and your names will not appear in any of the records or reports. The information you provide will also be secured throughout the study. There are no risks anticipated with participating in this study as no harm will be caused on you. If you do not understand anything, please feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions or if you are not satisfied with anything regarding this study please contact my supervisor Professor Melanie Walker on her number: +27 (0)764348820 or on her email: walkermj@ufs.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Oliver T. Gore

(iv)   Consent form for university staff and student representative council members

Researcher: Oliver T. Gore
Room 114 Benito Khotseng Building
University of the Free State
Telephone 0604448657
Email. gore.oliver@gmail.com

Dear Participant
Study Title: ***Students' experiences of and perspectives on (dis)advantage: a case study at a South African university***.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to understand students' perception of and experiences of (dis)advantage in South Africa. The aim of the study is to explore the meaning of (dis)advantage from diverse university students and what they value for equal success. This information will be used to inform interventions on equal participation and success of all students.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this study is voluntary, which means that you do not have to participate in this discussion, if you choose not to. If you agree to take part in this study and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. There are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate, for example this will not affect your working at the university.

Procedures involved in this study

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to respond to questions on your understanding of students' experiences (dis)advantage, and on what they value for equal success among students at the university. This interview will take about an hour and a half. In order for me not to lose any information from our discussion, I will be using a digital recorder to capture the conversation.

Benefits of participating in this study

There are no monetary benefits for your participation in this study. The study will benefit university students at this university and other university across the country through promoting

equal conditions in universities for students' success. Your participation in this study is however important. A token of appreciation in form of a lunch will be given to you for spending time with me. If you have travelled to meet me here a reimbursement of your transport fee will be made.

Privacy and confidentiality

The information you will provide will not be shared to anyone except my supervisors at the office, and will be destroyed afterwards. Your name will not appear on the records of the conversation and on the final report of this study. If i decide to publish the findings from this study, your name will also not appear in the publication. The information collected will kept be kept in a locked drawer in my office and electronic transcripts will be secured through the use of a pass word.

Risks and no harm

There are no risks associated with participating in this study as no physical nor psychological harm will be caused on you. If you do not understand anything, please feel free to ask questions. If you are not satisfied with anything regarding this study please contact my supervisor Professor Melanie Walker on her phone number +27 (0)764348820 or email her on this email address: walkermj@ufs.ac.za

By signing below, I agreeing to the above.

Signature of the participant: ……………………… ……… Date: /…./…./……/

Name of the participant: ……………………… ………….   *day/month/year*

Name of the researcher: ……………………… ………   Date: /…./…./……/

Signature of the researcher: ……………………… ………   *day/month/year*

Appendix E: Synopsis of students from low economic backgrounds

Atang (Interview 09)

Atang is a black female student aged 22 years studying towards an honours degree in Psychology. Her mother raised her at the family's home located in a small township in the Free State province. She does not have any siblings. Atang's mother is educated to matric level and is employed as a cleaner, which gives her an annual income of about R48 000 per annum. Atang speaks Sesotho as her primary home language and used English during her schooling. Her schooling prepared her for university education through the school's emphasis on learners working independently. She also got equipped with computer skills when she started using the Blackboard[78] in her Grade 12 year. Atang's university fees, accommodation, and food are paid by the NSFAS bursary she received. In addition to the NSFAS bursary, a foundation-based bursary gives her R900 pocket money per semester and a portion for registration fees. Regardless of her perception of not having sufficient money, Atang seemed to be financially far better off as compared to other students who relied either on their parents or NSFAS bursaries for their university expenses.

She lived in the university residence since her first year, where she found it safe, easy to study, and to walk to the classes. Atang thought that the university was not accommodating to black students after noticing that racism was still prevalent at the campus. She referred to the Shimla Park incident where white students beat up black students during a protest. Even though she did not directly experience gender discrimination, she felt that it was unfair for her lesbian friend to lose her university accommodation because other female occupants reported feeling uncomfortable with her around. Through that, she felt that she did not belong to the university. Atang did not participate in class generally, and especially when she understood the topic. She also did not take part in extra-curricular activities and instead pointed out that she spent most of her time with her boyfriends. She passed all her modules in her undergraduate studies with an average class degree, but finds her honours degree challenging due to the heavy workload. According to her, university education has helped her with skills to apply knowledge in different contexts, to be able to work independently, to do research, and to be open-minded. After her honours, she looks forward to getting a job and helping her mother financially.

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[78] Blackboard is a form of E-learning where teaching staff teach and receive assignments from their students online.

Botle (Interview 25)

Botle is in her fourth year of studying BEd. She is a black female student whose home is located in a high density township in Bloemfontein. Her grandmother and uncle raised Botle after her biological parents abandoned her when she was still a baby. After the death of her grandmother, Botle remained to live with her uncle, whom she describes as 'uncaring'. She was emotional during the interview and sobbed when describing the hardships she was facing. The family's annual estimated income is R24 000. After passing her matric in 2010 there were no financial arrangements in place for her to enrol at a university. This resulted in her taking a job until she got a bursary from the Department of Education of the Free State Province in 2013. Regardless of this bursary covering tuition fees, accommodation, food and books, Botle struggled to buy clothing, pay for her toiletries and have her hair done with only the R5000 she received as part of her bursary for the whole year. Botle attended a township school where she used her mother tongue, Sesotho. She thinks that the school was good, and teachers provided all the support she needed, but did not provide information on universities. Not having much education, her grandmother could not assist her with her school work but was supportive of her learning.

Botle lived in a campus residence for the first two years of her university education before moving to an off-campus private residence. Botle made this decision to move so that she could experience a different environment, but found her new accommodation less conducive to studying because of the frequent parties held by the other students. This limited her studying time since she could not use the library during evenings as it was unsafe for her to walk back home alone. Botle felt alienated by the university environment when she found that students were speaking in English everywhere and she could not speak it properly. This also reduced her confidence to participate in class and to make presentations. During the Sign Language lecture, she thought that it was unfair that the Afrikaans-speaking students were given earpieces to help with interpreting of the course material when this was not done for those who spoke Sesotho. She also observed these differences when lecturers allowed some students to use Afrikaans during an English lecture, yet she was not allowed to speak in Sesotho. She did not consult her lecturers and instead relied on her friends who gave her academic support. Botle passed all her modules and she is likely to graduate. She also now thinks that because of her university studies her confidence and communication skills have improved. Botle noted that she had been sexually harassed by a male lecturer who had proposed love to her. For her future, Botle looks forward to being a teacher and then to pursue further studies up until PhD level.

Ikhona (Interview 03)

Ikhona is a 25-year old female student studying an honours degree in Commerce specialising in Business Management. Her mother, who is a single parent, raised Ikhona and her other sibling at their home located in a small township in the Eastern Cape province. The family's annual income is R190 000. Her home language is IsiXhosa and she used English at school. Ikhona attended Former Model C schools for her primary and secondary schooling, where she received quality education. Although she spoke IsiXhosa at home, her schooling enhanced her proficiency in English. Her teachers encouraged her to participate in class and gave each learner individual support. Ikhona did not qualify for a NSFAS bursary because her mother was a civil servant. Despite her mother being able to pay her tuition, accommodation fees and cover basic needs such as clothes and food, Ikhona could not afford the social events that she valued.

With assistance from a cousin who was already at the UFS, Ikhona secured a place in an off-campus residence. However, this accommodation which did not provide her with appropriate studying space since the other students made a lot of noise. During her spare time Ikhona interacted with friends from the same communal residence and was not involved in any university extra-curricular activities. Although she found it easy to adjust to the university environment, Ikhona failed some of her modules in her second year, which made her realise that she needed to spend more time on her academic work. That experience contributed to her personal growth as she improved her skills in time management and also became more aware of her multi-cultural environment. She also became confident and open-minded through attending university. Ikhona discovered that some of her lecturers were not well prepared for the lectures they presented as they often made mistakes and used incorrect terms for concepts. Together with that, she felt that lecturers did not adjust themselves to her level. Although she consulted lecturers on rare occasions, she did not participate in study groups with her peers, and also did not attend tutorial groups because she thought that these were unhelpful. Ikhona also believes that her opportunities to secure a paying job increased due to attending university. She also views herself as disadvantaged through not qualifying to receive a NSFAS bursary, and by failing to secure additional money as was the case with other students at the university.

Joline (Interview 01)

Joline is a coloured female student aged 23 years. She is studying towards an honours degree in Political Governance. Her mother raised Joline, together with eight siblings, at their home in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. She used English both at school and at home. Joline's mother is a nurse by profession, and has a degree in nursing. Her family earns an average of R150 000[79] per annum. Joline attended a former Model C school for her primary education before transferring to a rural school when she was in Grade 5. This was after her mother failed to raise the necessary fees for her schooling since she was also taking care of other siblings. During her studies, Joline found it difficult to afford the basics and this prompted her to do part-time work in restaurants, clothing shops and at the university. Regardless of these efforts, Joline owed the university some money and this resulted in her dropping out of the university.

Joline enjoyed her undergraduate studies and because of her excellent performance she received merit awards from the university. She also highlighted that her ability to use English fluently played a role in her strong academic performance since she was able understand and express herself using English. Additionally, she felt that her performance was enhanced through participating in class discussions, attending tutorials, and approaching lecturers who gave her personalised support. Joline enjoyed lectures that were engaging, especially her final-year course that involved working with political leadership in the community. In her first year, Joline participated in the F1 programme where she acquired leadership skills and got exposed to different cultures. She also assumed a leadership position on the on-campus residence committee where she lived before heading up a student gender organisation known as *Embrace a Sister*. Joline also worked as a research assistant for the university's Institute of Reconciliation and Social Justice. Joline looked forward to be employed as an ambassador and she believed that she was on the right path to achievement in that she had already started an internship programme with the German embassy. Besides looking forward to employment, she also intended to help others, which is something she values and had learnt from her mother who took care of the extended family. She is a Christian and believes that her religion helped her to cope during her studies. She sees herself as advantaged by her schooling, but disadvantaged financially.

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[79] The salary as reported to me appears to be lower than the average salary for a nurse with a degree, which is R282 000 per annum.

Katleho (Interview 24)

Katleho is a final-year student completing a BEd, and he majors in English and History. He is 23 years of age and comes from a home headed by a single mother. His home is located in Welkom, which is a small town in the Free State province. Katleho has three siblings and his family earns about R11 000[80] per annum. He attended a township school where teachers were supportive. Not having a father affected Katleho emotionally as he did not have anyone to advise him on issues related to personal growth, e.g. dating, friendships and how to conduct himself in the community. Although he reported being affected by this deficit, he used it as motivation to concentrate on his education in an effort to improve his life. Katleho enrolled for the BEd programme because teachers from his community were respected. Despite securing a Funza Lushaka bursary, Katleho received his bursary money towards the end of the year which made him struggle in her first and part of second semesters. He lived in an off-campus private residence where the noise from his housemates and neighbours prevented him from being able to concentrate on his studies. At the same time, he found it difficult to study in the library during evenings because of poor security when walking back to his accommodation.

Katleho struggled to adjust to the university environment and failed one of the tests. The problem was exacerbated by lecturers who he said were not forthcoming, which contributed to him repeating one of the modules in that year. Moreover, he lost confidence after some of his lecturers appeared to be underprepared for classes. His poor ability to speak English also made him feel uncomfortable to participate in class as he was unsure of what to say. Katleho also believed that lecturers were unfair through their use of Afrikaans in the English lectures, when Sesotho was not allowed. He reported feeling that the university had made him a better person in that he learned to become open-minded, responsible, caring of others, and understanding of diversity, e.g. being tolerant of homosexuality. He also reported learning to understand a person's context before judging them. Katleho looks forward to studying towards a Master's degree and perceives himself as disadvantaged through not having a space that is conducive to studying. On the other hand, having a bursary causes him to see himself as advantaged.

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[80] Mother is a pensioner and receives about a R1000 monthly.

Lebo (Interview 05)

Lebo is a black female student aged 22 years. She is studying an honours degree in Politics and Governance. Lebo's home is located in a township in the North West province where she stays with her mother and four siblings. She used Afrikaans as her home and school language. Her mother is a domestic worker and the family's income is estimated to be R36 000 per annum. Lebo initially wanted to study law but could not register due to lack of funding and this made her sob during the interview. Her NSFAS bursary covered tuition, food, accommodation, books and personal needs. Her mother and step-father gave her money to supplement the R5000 per annum she received from the NSFAS bursary for her personal use. Lebo lived in off-campus private accommodation where she was challenged by the unconducive studying environment. Even though she had considered studying at the university library during the evenings, she could not do so for fear of being mugged or raped on her way home, i.e. security issues. Faced with that problem, she decided to study at the library right through the night but was exhausted, especially when she needed to attend lectures during the day. In her second year, Lebo had an affiliation with the university's day residences where she had the opportunity to develop social networks and participate in university extra-curricular activities. She also participated in other university activities through joining a community organisation known as Enactors.

Lebo attended English classes for her learning and did not face challenges in spite of Afrikaans being her mother tongue and the main language at school. In fact, knowing both languages was an advantage to her since it helped her to interpret questions more accurately given that questions were presented in both languages. Whereas in some lectures Lebo did not participate in class discussions because of the negative comments from other students, she participated in those where students were respectful to different opinions. Furthermore, she utilised the lecturers' consultation hours especially before tests. Personal growth, having a critical mind, being able to apply knowledge learnt from class, and thinking critically about the world were some of the changes Lebo experienced from having attended university. She looked forward to pursue postgraduate studies before working as a lecturer. Because of the bursary she received which gave her the opportunity to study, Lebo views herself as advantaged.

Mamello (Interview 15)

Mamello is a black female student aged 30 years. She is studying an honours degree in Psychology. Her parents raised Mamello together with her two siblings in Maseru, Lesotho. Her father and mother have degrees in mechanics and nursing respectively and both are pensioners. Her elder sister studied medicine at the UFS. Although Mamello used English during her schooling, she used Sesotho as her primary language at home. Her parents' net income is estimated to be R120 000 per annum. Mamello is involved in part-time work where she earns approximately R24 000 per year. Mamello attended public schools for both her primary and secondary education. During her high school years, she was failing some subjects until her parents enrolled her into a private institution. Although Mamello is studying an honours degree in Psychology, she initially registered for the Food Science degree at the UFS, which she dropped out of after failing. She then reregistered for Psychology. While a bursary from the Lesotho government funded her Food Science programme, her parents and sister helped her with money for daily expenses.

Mamello made a choice to live in an apartment in town with her two siblings. Through this arrangement she experienced restrictions in her studies as she could not use the university library for her studies in the evenings because of not having transport. Mamello also participated in the student protests against fee hikes in support of other students who could not afford to pay their fees. She also noted that she is a Christian by religion, and that this had helped her in coping with her studies, especially during her undergraduate Psychology programme and her honours degree. Unlike in the Food Sciences degree for which she was first registered, Mamello enjoyed the good relationships with her lecturers although she was worried about some lecturers' preferences for the white students. Whereas some white students were given the full scope before tests, she did not receive it even though she consulted the lecturer. Due to having studied, Mamello reported feeling that she had developed a critical mind and looked forward to becoming a marriage counsellor; a role she already performs in her church. She believes that she is advantaged through the spiritual and emotional support she receives from church and family, and the bursary she was awarded.

Mulalo (Interview 11)

Mulalo is aged 26 years, and she is studying towards her honours degree in Agricultural Economics. She comes from a rural area in Limpopo Province where she lives with her mother and three siblings. Her parents divorced when she was in primary school. Mulalo uses Tshivenda as her primary home language and English during schooling. She commented that the primary and secondary public schools which she attended were amongst the best in Limpopo since they equipped her with skills for university education, e.g. conducting experiments independently and using computers for her academic research. Before registering at the UFS, Mulalo enrolled at the University of Johannesburg and University of Venda but did not complete her degree programmes. Since her mother was a teacher earning R144 000 per annum, Mulalo did not apply for the NSFAS bursary because her family income was above the minimum earnings required to qualify for the scheme. Her parents separated when she was in high school leaving her mother as the sole provider of the family. While her mother paid tuition and accommodation, there was often little money left for Mulalo to use on textbooks, clothing, and making photocopies. Her financial struggles were worsened by the fact that her mother was also taking care of Mulalo's sibling, who is studying at the North- West university. Since her first year, Mulalo has been living off campus at a private residence. Unlike other students, Mulalo is happy to live off campus because there are restrictive rules in the off-campus private residences.

Although she could speak English fluently and express herself in the language, Mulalo found it unfair when the lecturer used Afrikaans during English lectures. Due to her university studies, Mulalo experienced personal changes such as engaging in public debates and being critical of knowledge. However, she criticised the university teaching for its greater focus on theory and lesser focus on practical work, which she felt was not helpful in sufficiently developing her skills for the working world. After completing her honours studies, Mulalo looks forward to becoming a business person and believes that she took the right path since her honours research project positions her well for getting funding to start a business. During her undergraduate studies, she participated in community engagement work and viewed it as important in that it was a way of helping to change people's lives.

Palesa (Interview 08)

Palesa is a black female student aged 22 years and is studying towards an honours degree in Psychology. Her mother who is a single parent raised her in a township in Bloemfontein. Palesa's mother has a degree in teaching and earns about R200 000 per annum. Palesa attended public schools for her primary and secondary education, where she used both English and Sesotho languages. She revealed that her teachers neither motivated slow learners to perform better nor attempted to understand the reasons for some learners' poor performance. After schooling, Palesa enrolled at the UFS because it was more convenient for her to do that since it allowed her to live at home. She chose psychology for the reason that she wanted to help people whom society viewed as deviants. This was after her mother did not offer an open environment to discuss Palesa's being a lesbian.

Although her mother could afford her university tuition fees and transport money, she could not afford to buy her textbooks, or give her pocket money for food, and a laptop for her academic work. Living at home restricted her from studying in the university library until late since she could not get transport to travel back home. She was worried about safety issues when travelling back home after witnessing several instances of robberies in the evenings. Palesa commuted to the campus daily using public transport until she received a bursary in her honours year that helped her to get residence outside campus. Palesa believes that racism still exists at the UFS as she pointed out that one of the white students was admitted for honours studies when she did not qualify for the programme. She also cited an incident when her friend was suspended from the university for cheating in an exam after a white lecturer accused her of that (although she this was later found to be untrue). Palesa performed well in all her modules and became a member of the Golden Key organisation, a programme that involved her participating in community work. During classes, she found it easy to learn when lecturers gave examples as opposed to reading from their Powerpoint slides. Although a few lecturers were approachable, she indicated that most of them were intimidating and for that reason, she did not consult them. Although this was the case, Palesa's confidence and communication skills improved due to her having studied at the university. After completing her studies, she looks forward to becoming a psychologist. Because she did not receive a bursary, Palesa thinks that she was disadvantaged financially in her undergraduate studies.

Phumlani (Interview 13)

Phumlani is a black male student aged 27 years. He is studying an honours degree in Agricultural Economics. Phumlani is a double orphan and lives with his grandmother and eight siblings at his rural home in the Eastern Cape province. Phumlani used IsiXhosa during his schooling and at home. His family's income is estimated at R110 000 per annum. Phumlani attended rural and poorly resourced public schools where teachers did not offer much support and motivation to him. He criticised his school for reinforcing the message that students were responsible for their failure even if the large class sizes of about 150 learners and unsupportive teachers inhibited effective learning. Phumlani's grandmother is paying for his honours but she had only managed to pay a portion so that he could be provisionally registered. Although this was the case, Phumlani was unsure if he was going to get the remaining portion of the tuition and he expressed a high likelihood of him dropping out. Because he did not have enough money for accommodation, Phumlani shared a room in off-campus accommodation with a friend. Since the friend was not a student and was working in town, Phumlani reported feeling disturbed by his behaviour relating to alcohol and drug addiction. Realising that the environment was not conducive for studying, he decided to move out and stay illegally with another friend in the university residences.

Since his matric qualifications did not meet the admission points for Agricultural Economics, he enrolled for an extended degree programme. As a result of the poor schooling he had received, Phumlani found it difficult to cope with university education and failed some of his modules in his first and second years. He also attributes this to his inability to speak English proficiently, which made it difficult for him to understand some of the jargon lecturers used in class and in his modules. He did not participate in class discussions because he thought that other students would laugh at him if he spoke bad English. He also felt confused and excluded in the learning process when discussions in some of the English classes were conducted in Afrikaans. Phumlani also thought that students from the Afrikaans classes were given better guidance before the exams in comparison to those from the English class, and that was unfair to him. He interpreted this as a form of racism since the Afrikaans class constituted predominantly white students and the English classes were comprised mainly of black students. In spite of all these factors, Phumlani thinks that he benefitted through attending university and that he developed certain skills such as interacting with different kinds of people, being open-minded, and learning to apply knowledge to real-life situations.

Rethabile (Interview 07)

Rethabile is a black female student aged 23 years and is studying honours in Psychology. Her mother raised her together with her two siblings. Her home is located in Kroonstad township in the Free State province. Rethabile's mother is employed as a clerk at a school. The family's income is estimated at R300 000[81] per annum, and Rethabile works as a part-time tutor and earns R16 000 per annum. Her primary home language is Sesotho but she used English in secondary school. After her schooling, Rethabile went for a University Preparation Programme in Welkom so that she could qualify for a degree programme. Since her mother was working for the Department of Education, Rethabile did not qualify for the NSFAS funding. Her mother paid her university tuition fees, accommodation, textbooks and food through bank loans. Her living allowances were inadequate and sometimes she relied on a friend to bring some food. What made her situation worse was that her mother also needed money to take care of the other siblings. Rethabile lived in a more affordable private residence off the university campus where she shared a room with another student, and realised that the accommodation arrangement was not conducive to studying. On the other hand she could not use the university's library during evenings, as it was unsafe for her to walk back home alone. Rethabile was also alienated by the fact that she did not know how to access and use Blackboard. She also felt out of place during her undergraduate studies due to her financial problems. Moreover, she thought that the university was a racialised environment as a result of the Shimla Park incident. She enjoyed classes when the lecturers explained the concepts fully but found it difficult to understand when they rushed through their Powerpoint slides. During classes, she found the workload too much and this was coupled with the fact that the lecturers did not provide students with the scope before tests. She failed some of her courses in her first and second year. In future, she would like to be an industrial psychologist. However, she is unsure about completing her honours degree because she is finding the course challenging. The practical sessions that required her to visit children outside the campus together with the heavy workload is limiting her chances of success. Not acquiring a bursary makes her believe that she is disadvantaged.

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[81] Although the participants reported an annual family income of R300 000, salaries for clerks in the civil service range between R100 000 to R120 000 per annum.

Rufuno (Interview 23)

Rufuno is a black female student aged 23 years and is studying an honours degree in Commerce specialising in marketing. Her parents raised her in Giyani in the Limpopo province. Rufuno has four siblings who have all accessed higher education, and one of her elder brothers graduated with a PhD from the UFS. Her mother has a degree in teaching, and her father a diploma in teaching, and both are employed as teachers. Rufuno speaks Pedi as her primary home language and she used English during her high school. Her parents' income is estimated to be R600 000[82] per annum. Rufuno attended a free primary school located in the rural areas. Following that, she enrolled at a former Model C school. As her parents had saved money for her higher education, Rufuno did not face any financial challenges during her undergraduate studies. The university tuition fee, accommodation and textbooks were all paid in time. Her parents gave her R1300 pocket money each month for food, clothing and other things she needed.

Rufuno chose to stay in a campus residence because it was more secure than off-campus accommodation. Here she received social support from peers, the university and her brother. Despite her preparedness for university education, she also gradually adjusted to university education and became a member of the Golden Key programme, which is composed of the top 15% best performing students at university. In spite of her parents being able to afford her university expenses, she feels that the university is a place for those who are well off, and as such felt that she does not belong there. Although she feels alienated due to her socio-economic class, she reported that all students were treated equally in class except for the fact that those who were outspoken received more attention from lecturers regardless of their race. She had also made friends with people of different races at the campus. Even though Rufuno did not participate in class due to her low self-esteem, she consulted lecturers for academic support. She did not enjoy classes when lecturers read the slides without any interaction with students. Although Rufuno has acquired knowledge on marketing, she is not positive about getting employment in the marketing sector due to her lack of confidence. After graduation, she looks forward to start an accommodation business or work for a financial management company. Because of the financial and emotional support she receives from parents, Rufuno sees herself as advantaged.

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[82] Although the family's income as reported to me is R600 000, each teacher earns a maximum of R230 000 per annum and this gives a combined maximum income of R460 000 annually.

Siphe (Interview 17)

Siphe is a black female student aged 23 years and she is studying towards an honours degree in Psychology. She lives in Tsolo township in the Eastern Cape province with her mother and two siblings. Siphe's twin sister is also studying at the UFS but enrolled a year after Siphe. Her mother is a single parent. She uses IsiXhosa at home as her primary language and used English during high school. Her mother has a Master's degree in teaching and media, and she worked as a teacher before starting her own business. The family's income is R360 000 per annum and Siphe works as a part-time tutor at the university where she earns R18 600 per annum. After attending a public primary school, Siphe attended a private secondary school that helped her with her understanding and speaking of English. Although her mother paid her university expenses, her father also contributed a portion during her first year. She received a NSFAS bursary that paid tuition fees, accommodation and textbooks from her second year onwards, since her mother had resigned from her teaching position. Her mother's resignation temporarily resulted in the family struggling financially, which prompted Siphe to apply for the NSFAS bursary. Siphe lived in off-campus accommodation. Unlike other students who found the off-campus accommodation to be unsuitable for studying, she enjoyed it since there were no strict rules and she did not have problems with her safety as she walked to campus with her twin sister and friends at any time of the day. She revealed experiencing a sense of belonging to the university because her uncle had graduated at the same institution seven years prior.

As she did not know how to study, a friend who was also living at the same communal residences taught her and consequently she passed some of her modules with distinction and graduated with a good class degree. She also reported not liking the Powerpoint slides because they enabled the lecturer to rush through the module without engaging with students to enhance their understanding. Because she thought that consulting lecturers would expose that she did not attend the lectures, she opted to get help from her peers instead of lecturers. She cited appreciating people from different cultures, having knowledge in her areas of study and being able to apply this knowledge to real-life situations as some of the changes she had experienced through her studies. Siphe looks forward to becoming a child clinical psychologist after having obtained her Master's and doctoral degrees. Even though her mother did not give her information about the university, Siphe thinks that she is advantaged by her ability to cope with university studies, having a bursary, assuming leadership positions and her ability to have a choice on what she wants and how to live.

Tebello (Interview 06)

Tebello is a black male student aged 21 years. He is in his final year of a Political Sciences and Governance degree. He lives in Qwaqwa in the Free State province with his mother. Tebello speaks Sesotho as his home language and used English during his schooling. His mother is a teacher and is educated with a degree. The family's income is approximately R204 000. Tebello registered for an extended degree programme and studied Political Sciences and Governance with the UFS. During his schooling, he initially attended a free public primary school before he enrolled at a former Model C school for his secondary education. While the former lacked dedicated teachers and sporting facilities, the latter prepared him for university through instilling in him a studying culture and engaging him in sporting activities. The school also helped him to develop his English and Afrikaans.

His mother paid Tebello's university tuition fees, accommodation and other costs from her savings during his first year and by taking out bank loans from his second year onwards. He applied for several bursaries and was rejected but he never applied for the government funding scheme, NSFAS, since his mother was a civil servant. Throughout his living in university residence he felt safe and was not worried about transport as he would walk to classes and to the nearby malls for his shopping needs. He lived in a predominantly black university residence where he experienced racism. Some white students had thrown rotten eggs at him and called him 'Kaffir' as he was passing through one of the white-dominated residences on the campus. Although he reported this incident to the university authorities, nothing was done as those white students continued to stay in that university residence. Besides his participation in sporting activities, he also assumed leadership positions both in residences and in the SRC. Although he has distinctions in some of his courses, Tebello failed two elective modules which he dropped and replaced with other ones. While he enjoyed interactive learning, Tebello found learning through the use of Blackboard difficult. Through his studies, he is now able to write well and to conduct research when given an assignment. Tebello would like to pursue a higher education degree and be employed as a lecturer. Because of having a mother who has a degree, accessing finances for university, and being multi-lingual, Tebello sees himself as advantaged.

Thabang (Interview 23)

Thabang is a 23-year old black male student who is in his final year of his Bachelor of Education studies majoring in Sesotho, history and geography. He comes from Botshabelo, which is a township located 60 kilometres from the UFS. Thabang has 11 siblings, and their highest level of education is matric. His parents did not receive any formal education. Thabang's mother works as a domestic worker and her annual income is R18000. His father has been receiving a pension since 2002. Thabang initially lived with both parents in Botshabelo until Grade 6, before his father and mother divorced. He was then moved to Trompsburg where he attended a township school until he matriculated. He relocated to Botshabelo soon after matriculation when his maternal grandfather died. Thabang's unstable family has negatively affected him emotionally. As a child he witnessed physical violence that happened between his parents. What traumatises him more is that his father tied him to the roof of their house with a rope and threatened to kill him. He attributes his own bullying behaviour at school to this violent background as he received countless warnings over the bullying of other learners. His emotional instability is demonstrated by his suicidal tendencies when he attempted to kill himself in his first year at university after he was deregistered over failure to pay tuition.

Thabang experienced financial problems since his first year at the university. He was deregistered, after which he found a job that he did for a year. He used the income from his job to pay his debt. He then completed his first year before enrolling at the main campus, where again he was faced with financial challenges. It was only in his third year when his application was accepted by NSFAS, but he could not live near the campus as he needed that money to buy food for his late brother's children who he lives with at home. Thabang participated in class activities and enjoyed it most when the sessions were delivered through Powerpoint presentations, and where lecturers explained what is expected from that module. Thabang participated in the class discussions and study groups, which helped him to get distinctions for some of his modules. After graduating, Thabang looks forward to becoming a teacher before looking for a job at the Department of Education. He appreciates the help he received from other people and as such he looks forward to changing the lives of others, including his late brother's children who he would like to send to school.

Thabiso (Interview 20)

Thabiso is a black male student aged 24 years and is in his final year of a Politics and Governance degree. He lives in Ladybrand in the Free State province with his parents and three siblings. He uses Sesotho as his primary home language and language of instruction at school. His father is a qualified teacher with a diploma in education. His family earns around R150 000 per annum. Thabiso attended free public schools in the township where he lived. Teachers from his primary school were not supportive as they did little to investigate the challenges learners were facing, especially those that performed poorly. Since he had attended a school where everything was taught in Sesotho, he found it difficult to learn and socialise in the university environment because of his inability to speak English fluently. Thabiso matriculated with low entry points to qualify him for university and therefore he could only register for an extended degree programme.

His parents paid his university tuition fees, accommodation, textbooks and other costs. Thabiso did not experience any financial challenges during his university studies as his father paid for his education through the savings he had made. He afforded the university expenses and bought gadgets such as a laptop and a smart phone. He made the choice to live in an off-campus residence to allow him to stay during semester breaks. However, he pointed out that living at the university would have given him more security compared to his off-campus accommodation. While he valued extra-curricular activities, Thabiso did not participate in these activities and blamed his schooling for not exposing him to them. Although he made friends from people of his ethnic group, he indicated that he was aware of diversity and accepted people from different cultures.

After enrolment, Thabiso struggled to adjust to university education since he did not know how to study and manage his time properly. What also troubled him was that he did not understand what the white lecturers were saying because of their accent and how fast they spoke. Because he was ashamed to speak English, he lacked the confidence to ask questions in class. Through his studies, he learnt to express himself in writing, to be aware of current affairs, and to be critical of the political situation in the country. Encouraging his community to participate in the management of their municipality was another skill he acquired in addition to not being judgemental towards individuals. He views himself as having been advantaged due to having access to adequate financial resources that other students do not have.

Tsepo (Interview 25)

Tsepo is a black male student aged 26 years and he is studying an honours degree in Agricultural Economics. He lives together with his maternal aunt and his sibling in a small township outside Bloemfontein in the Free State province. Tsepo used Sesotho at home and as his main language during schooling. While his aunt did not receive any formal education, his sibling has a degree in Chemical Engineering. His aunt's annual income is estimated to be R36 000 and he is not involved in any part-time work. After attending poorly resourced and non-fee paying schools in his township, Tsepo reported that he was not well-prepared to enter university education. There was nobody to help him with his homework since his aunt did not receive any formal education and was away most of the time. The schools had inadequate resources, e.g. sometimes three students had to share a single textbook. He secured off-campus private accommodation after finding out that the university residences were full by the time he registered. Although he had a laptop, he did not have wifi in his residence, resulting in him paying more for this service.

Tsepo feels that the university is not a place for black people because of racism in classes. He mentioned that white students occupied seats that were next to others of the same race. They chose to leave the class because a few seats that were open in the class were beside black students. Unfairness during classes was also manifested in language use. While he was not allowed to study using Sesotho, his mother tongue, white students were allowed to use their first language, i.e. Afrikaans. For him, this gave white students a competitive advantage during learning as they were more likely than him to grasp certain concepts. Whilst Tsepo did not make class contributions or ask questions because he was not confident enough to speak English publicly, he consulted a few lecturers after the sessions. He liked the practical sessions most but did not enjoy the lectures where Powerpoint was used without much explanation from the lecturers. Tsepo failed and repeated some of the modules during his undergraduate studies. He noted that he had acquired knowledge related to market issues through his academic studies. After completing his studies Tsepo looks forward to getting some work experience in the agriculture sector before opening up his own consultancy firm. Based on the knowledge he has about the university, i.e. who to approach and where to go, and the bursary he has, Tsepo sees himself as advantaged.

Tshidi (Interview 26)

See summary in Chapter 7, on page 168

Unarine (Interview 04)

Unarine is a black female student studying towards her honours degree in Politics and Governance. She is 21 years old and was raised by a single mother. Unarine has four siblings and the highest level of education amongst her siblings is matric. Unarine comes from a rural home in the Limpopo province. Her mother was employed as a teacher before she died. Unarine works as a part-time tutor at the university and her estimated income is R59 000 per annum. Unarine attended a former Model C primary school and private high school, which she commented were the best in Limpopo. Her schooling gave her the opportunity to use English more often, which she views built a strong foundation academically. Besides writing competitive Cambridge examinations, Unarine appreciates the experiences she got in studying at a multi-racial high school. In order to pay for her first year university expenses, her mother borrowed money from friends before she died. After her mother's death, her paternal relatives paid Unarine's university expenses. She only got the bursary in her third year and it covered her accommodation, transport and food costs. Before receiving the bursary, Unarine could not afford to pay her rental money in time, buy clothing, pay for hair treatments, or buy a laptop and toiletries.

Since Unarine's mother could not afford to pay the deposit of R7000 needed for campus accommodation, she went to live in an off-campus residence. She was concerned with her safety as she risked being raped or mugged. She also believed that she had missed some information about events at the university by living off campus. Unlike her school where she had been a top learner, Unarine faced stiff competition in her first year at the university. She coped in her university studies using skills that she learnt from her high school, including being proactive and seeking advice before doing assignments. Besides being more confident, Unarine reports that she had developed mentally through thinking outside the box, taking initiatives, and addressing practical needs of the surrounding communities. She noticed that white lecturers discriminated in class through paying more attention to white students compared to other races. While this seemed to discourage her, she did not stop making contributions in classes. Unarine looks forward to working in the security sector or to represent the country internationally. She sees herself as advantaged because of her schooling background, but disadvantaged in that she now has nobody to support her since her mother's death.

Vanessa (Interview 02)

Vanessa is a black female student aged 24 years. She is studying towards an honours degree in Commerce specialising in Accounting. Vanessa is the only child in her family and she lives with her parents in a township in Bloemfontein, which is in the Free State province. Vanessa's parents are educated to certificate level. They are informally employed, and the family's annual income is estimated to be R150 000. Vanessa is employed on a part-time basis at the university where she earns an annual income of R24 000. She attended a former Model C school that enhanced her readiness for university education. This was through learning to speak English fluently and being assertive. After her schooling, she registered for an extended degree programme at the UFS's South Campus[83] since she did not qualify for entry into the mainstream programme. Vanessa did not live in a university residence but stayed home with her parents because it was financially more viable. Her parents paid her university fees as she was unsuccessful in her application for a NSFAS bursary. Unlike other students, Vanessa did not face any challenges in studying from home as the environment was conducive to studying. She did not miss classes as her parents provided her with transport money.

Because of her schooling background, Vanessa reported that she fitted into the university environment even though she thinks that the university is not the right place for her since she believes it is a place for students who are better off. The large class sizes at university alienated her, resulting in her not contributing during class discussions. In her undergraduate studies, Vanessa passed all her modules and graduated with a good degree class. Through her studies, she became independent, disciplined, and more confident to make decisions about what she wanted to do in life. After completing her studies, she wants to work as a Chartered Accountant but she is unsure about if she is sufficiently equipped to do so. She thinks that the curriculum is overly theoretical and that she will find it difficult to adjust to the working environment. Vanessa perceives herself as financially disadvantaged as her parents are informally employed. She views herself as advantage because of having a degree and the motivation to work hard.

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[83] Students who enrol for the extended degree programme study at the south campus for their first year before going to the main campus for their second year, which is seen as their officially first year of higher education.

Appendix F: Synopsis of students from high(er) income backgrounds

Dakalo (Interview 19)

Dakalo is a black male student aged 23 years. He is studying towards an honours degree in Commerce specialising in accounting. His parents live in Polokwane in the Limpopo Province where they raised him together with his six siblings. One of his siblings has a degree in accounting and is a certified Chartered Accountant. While his father has a Master's degree in Business Leadership and works as a senior manager for Eskom, his mother is employed as a clerk for the local municipality. His family provided him with information about universities and career pathways to follow. Dakalo attended private schools for his primary and secondary education in Polokwane but he thinks the schools did not prepare him for university education. His parents gave him enough financial support for his university education. After completing his undergraduate studies, he got a job at the finances department at UFS, where he worked for a year before enrolling for his honours degree.

Although he was offered accommodation by the university, Dakalo chose to live in an off-campus residence because he did not like the strict rules in university residences. Unlike other students, he did not face any security and transport challenges related with living off campus. During his studies, he was involved in several extra-curricular activities including the SRC, church, as well as business and community organisations, all of which he believes developed him personally, e.g. through developing his leadership skills. Dakalo believes that the university is racialised based on his experiences as a staff member. He cited an incident when the university recruited a white employee who neither had a degree nor was experienced for a higher position, when the position could have been filled by an experienced black employee who had already been working at the university for three years. In class, Dakalo finds his lecturers approachable but he had not consulted any and instead reported receiving academic support from friends. Even though he had passed all his modules and graduated, he was stressed due to academic pressure. Due to attending university, Dakalo reports having grown mentally and emotionally, and has become a better leader. He is open minded, analytical, and has problem solving skills. He would want to become a Chartered Accountant since he is now in the final stages of his programme. He intends to work for five years before starting his own business. As a black student Dakalo thinks that he is disadvantaged through his race and

through the fact that he had to work extra hard for him to access opportunities in the working world.

Gernus (Interview 14)

See summary in Chapter 7, on page 170.

Hendrik (Interview 23)

Hendrik is a white male student aged 23 years and is studying a degree programme in Agricultural Economics. His parents raised Hendrik and his sibling in Bloemfontein, where the family's home is located. His father and mother attained university degrees and are employed as an accountant and teacher respectively. The family earns an estimated income of R550 000[84] per annum. Hendrik used Afrikaans as the main language at school and home. The family also owns a farm where Hendrik runs his farming project. His parents and friends who have all been to university helped him with information in making these decisions. Hendrik attended leading schools that equipped him with life and communication skills. Even though this was the case, Hendrik found it difficult to adjust to the university environment as he could not manage his time well.

While his parents took a university loan to pay Hendrik's university expenses, he wanted to secure a bursary from a private company to help him obtain employment in future. In addition to receiving some pocket money from his parents, Hendrik also gets income from his part-time work where he farms cattle and grows some crops. Since he uses his own car to travel to the university and to the farm, he found it safe and convenient to do so at any time. Although he adjusted slowly to university education, Hendrik consulted lecturers for help, resulting in him getting excellent marks in his studies. Hendrik also blames the university strikes for 'stealing' their lecture and studying time. Regarding language, Hendrik finds it easy to learn in Afrikaans and is against the change concerning the use of both Afrikaans and English as languages of instruction. He became mature through his studies as he is now able to make better decisions in everyday life and at the farm. Hendrik intends to expand his farming activities and to employ more people. Because of his hard work and having parents who take care of him, Hendrik thinks that he is advantaged. However, he thinks that he has been disadvantaged though him being discriminated against in that he could not access bursaries because he is white.

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[84] The annual salaries as reported to me seem to be lower. Accountants earn an average of R540 000 and teachers R230 000 per annum, which gives R770 000 per annum.

Johan (Interview 16)

Johan is a white male, aged 22, and studying towards an honours degree in Agricultural Economics. His home is located in Springfontein, which is 160 kilometres from Bloemfontein. His parents raised Johan. His mother runs a small guesthouse while his father is a farmer. Johan has four siblings and his parents have university degrees. The family's income is estimated to be R600 000per annum. His parents had advised him on the degree programme to enrol for so that he would become self-employed. Since his undergraduate studies, Johan was producing sheep, cattle and some cash crops at his parents' farm on a part-time basis. During his schooling years, Johan had also visited UFS which gave him prior knowledge of the university before his enrolment. After attending schooling in an Afrikaans medium high school in Bloemfontein (a leading public school that charges fees), Johan was prepared to study independently. His parents paid his tuition fees in his first year before he inherited money from the estate of his late uncle. He then used this money from his second year onwards, to pay his tuition fees. As such Johan had sufficient money for his university expenses.

His experiences of the university during the first days were characterised excitement at feeling that he was now a 'grown man'. Johan decided to live off campus in a private residence, because he did not like the campus residences due to several compulsory activities together with strict rules. Although this is true, Johan also mentioned that the reason white students (like him) opted to live off campus was the university policy which allocated campus residences randomly without separating students by race. Even though he claims his schooling taught him to appreciate diversity, he believes that white students should live in separate residences from the black students. Unlike other students who are worried about security and transport issues when staying off campus, Johan indicated that his off-campus residence is located in a safe suburb. During his spare time, Johan did not participate in university extra-curricular activities since he did not like sport. Although balancing his academic work and leisure time was initially difficult for him, Johan performed well throughout his undergraduate studies. He reported that lecturers treated everyone equally and were approachable when he needed support. While the workload was too much for him during the first two years, Johan found his honours programme 'easy' since he felt knowledgeable about his study areas but needed to develop his research skills. What made the lectures interesting to him was using the Afrikaans language, which made learning easier. He benefitted most from the university education through becoming proficient in public speaking. Having the opportunity to study at the university caused him to view himself as advantaged.

Thandaza (Interview 21)

Thandaza is a black female student aged 21 years. She is studying towards her honours degree in Commerce specialising in entrepreneurship. Her home is in Durban in KwaZulu-Natal Province where she lives with her parents and two siblings. Her mother has an honours degree in Business Management and her father a Bachelor of Commerce degree. Thandaza speaks Zulu at home and English at school. Her family runs a business which they inherited from her grandparents. The family's annual income is estimated to be R600 000. She found her schooling interesting due to supportive teaching staff. What made her more comfortable was that her parents also served on the school's governing body. Thandaza reported that she did not experience any financial problems as the trust fund paid for her tuition, books, and her upkeep. Before her grandparents passed away, they set up a trust fund for the children's university education. Her financial position further improved after she received a scholarship for excellent performance from Tata Africa. Furthermore, she has received some merit awards from the university resulting in about 10% of her fees being paid by the university. Having attended a former Model C school that was diverse in terms of race and culture, Thandaza found it easy to adapt to the UFS environment where the student body is diverse in nature. Both her sisters and her schooling background nurtured her to become independent, proactive, and confident to speak her mind even when she had questions during lectures.

While she found university education different from school, Thandaza's performance was excellent throughout her studies. She lived in university residence where she reported that the environment was safe and she did not have to worry about transport. Besides her focus on her academic studies, she participated in the extra-curricular activities that included leadership roles in her residence and being a member of the Golden Key executive. She values these programmes as a way of creating social networks with people from different backgrounds. She cited critical thinking, ability to conduct research and having the confidence to speak to lecturers as some of the changes she experienced as a result of being at university. After completing her honours degree, Thandaza looks forward to having a one-year study break and to spend the time visiting places overseas. The break would also give her exposure and ample time to decide on what exactly she wants to do next, even though her general plan is to further pursue her studies. Due to her family being able to afford university expenses and to provide her with information on university and her schooling experience, Thandaza thinks that she is advantaged.

Tinus (Interview 10)

Tinus is a white male student aged 22 years and studying towards an honours degree in Agricultural Economics. His family lives in Klerksdorp in the North West province. His parents raised Tinus together with two siblings. One of his siblings is a university graduate. Tinus' mother is educated up to matric level and his father is a farmer and a retail businessperson. Tinus used Afrikaans as his home language and for schooling. Tinus was home-school and his mother taught him during the primary school years before giving him the option to attend a boarding school. He chose home schooling since he enjoyed farm life, and that allowed him to help his father in farming activities after finishing his daily studies. His experiences of home schooling taught him to be independent as there was little teaching involved and he did most of the work on his own. This prepared him for university education as he was equipped with self-study skills and had learned to be disciplined. As his family is involved in farming and retail business, he wanted to study Agricultural Economics in that it combines farming and marketing aspects. Since his first year, his parents contributed the bulk of his university fees while merit awards covered a proportion of his university tuition. As a way of helping his parents, Tinus applied for several bursaries in his first and second year but his applications were all rejected, which he attributes to racial discrimination. Tinus had been working with his father on a part-time basis since his honours degree before he got a full-time position at FNB bank.

In his first days, Tinus received support from the university and friends, making it easier for him to adjust to the university environment. He did not apply for accommodation at a university residence where there were too many rules since he wanted to live with his girlfriend. Tinus therefore lived in a relatively safe neighbourhood where he drove to campus every day. His involvement in sporting activities on campus made him many friends. He pointed out that his belief in Christ helped him to make friendships and cope with his studies. Tinus mentioned that he attended lectures in Afrikaans where there were white students only, even though he wrote his exams in English. He liked his lecturers because of their humility and the way in which they brought themselves down to the level of students during interactive sessions. Most of the staff from his department knew him by name as he consulted lecturers in class and performed exceptionally well. He has developed academically and reported undergoing changes in the way he views the world. Tinus views the world as complicated and constituting different small units rather than it being a single entity. He looks forward to working in agricultural business

or in the banking sector. Because of his home schooling, Tinus perceives himself to have been disadvantaged, but advantaged through his determination to work hard.