



## **South** African Survey of Student Engagement

# Commuter Lounges: *A case study of evidence-based change*

**Dr. Francois Strydom**  
**5 March 2010**



Studente Ontwikkeling en Sukses • Student Development and Success

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

Tel (051) 401 3000 • E-mail: [info@ufs.ac.za](mailto:info@ufs.ac.za) • [www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)

# Introduction



How can evidence from the SASSE data serve as a catalyst for change?

- Lessons on converting results into action
- Commuter lounge case study



# Lessons on converting results into action



## Jillian Kinzie's – 6 lessons on taking action on results

- Find relevancy, and entice with results
- Continuously disseminate the data in small doses
- Appoint SASSE ambassadors
- Connect Student Engagement results to the study of real campus problems
- Infuse the data into continuous improvement process
- Dig deeper into results



# Commuter lounge case study



## Background

- University of the Free State
  - 27 000 student across 3 campuses
  - 13% of students are in residence
  - 87% commute
- 2008 events focused attention on the nature and structure of student life at the UFS



# Commuter lounge case study

## Applying the lessons on taking action



### Find relevancy, and entice with results

- Stakeholders value and use assessment data when it answers meaningful questions and insights to relevant concerns.
- In this context SASSE data showed that:
  - A lower level of engagement at the university by commuting students in general
  - 68% of commuter students indicated that the UFS put only some or very little emphasis on the attendance of campus activities.



# Commuter lounge case study

## Applying the lessons on taking action



### Dig deeper into results

- Importance of combining engagement data with other forms of data and investigation.
  - Focus group discussion with SRC members, Primaria and Heads of city residences highlighted the alienation of student on campus as summarized in the following quotation:

**“They have a don’t care attitude, because they feel nobody does things for them to involve them in campus activities and the information/posters doesn’t attract them. We can market the events and city residences better and tell them about the benefits that it has.”**
  - Proposals
    - Electronic Notice Board Network (ENBN) of 30 LCD plasma screens
    - Exploration of the possibility of creating commuter lounges



# Commuter lounge case study

## Applying the lessons on taking action



### Continuously disseminate the data in small doses

- Continuous sharing of data about the student engagement of different groups at various levels - top management reports, faculty specific reports, presentation to student affairs department and academic departments.
- Aim was to connect the data to what stakeholders are doing, and at the same time showing and sharing examples of how problems could be addressed.

### Appointing SASSE ambassadors

- The presentation and reports for various stakeholders has created a lot of buy-in – some ambassadors.
- International expertise of Prof George Kuh



# Commuter lounge case study

## Applying the lessons on taking action



Connect Student Engagement results to the study of real campus problems

- Connections have started to form
  - One of our faculties used low Student Engagement levels as a rationale for instituting compulsory class attendance in some programmes to increase Student Engagement.
- Plight of the commuter students kept resurfacing





# Commuter lounge case study

## Applying the lessons on taking action



### The project

- Approached Department of Architecture with 3 strategic aims:
  - **Generating designs** that could help the UFS imagine these kinds of activities that a physical environmental will help to facilitate.
  - Providing architectural students with the opportunity to design a facility for students would **increase their own engagement** as it would simulate a more “real” scenario where we would serve as the clients for whom they had to design.
  - Creating an example of how **student affairs** (the line in which we were reporting) needed to look at ways of **partnering with the academic core** to improve student engagement in learning.



# Commuter lounge case study

## Applying the lessons on taking action



### The rationale put to 3<sup>rd</sup> year architecture students

- Research indicates that commuter students at the UFS would like to be more involved on campus. To get students more involved or engaged on campus you need physical environments that respond to the needs of these students. We know from higher education research that students have a greater chance of success in their studies when they are more engaged on campus in venues that enable them to:
  - study,
  - or have group discussions,
  - or tutorials,
  - or to participate in small association meetings,
  - or just a place to work
- The main focus of such a lounge should be placed on academics – hence it will not be a replacement of city hostels, but rather for students who wish to effectively spend their time on campus concentrating on their academic activities.



# Commuter lounge case study

## Applying the lessons on taking action



### Results

- Very good support from the two architecture lecturers
- The work of the students blew us away.
  - 48 designs developed by students in 3 days
  - Top 3 were chosen and taken forward as final year project.
    - Student developed budgets
    - In recognition we helped to organize a presentation at the end of 2009 to top management.
  - The combination of data and the work in the project has resulted in the university allocating funds for the development of commuter lounges at the UFS.
  - Examples: Victor Salzman, Pieter Mocke









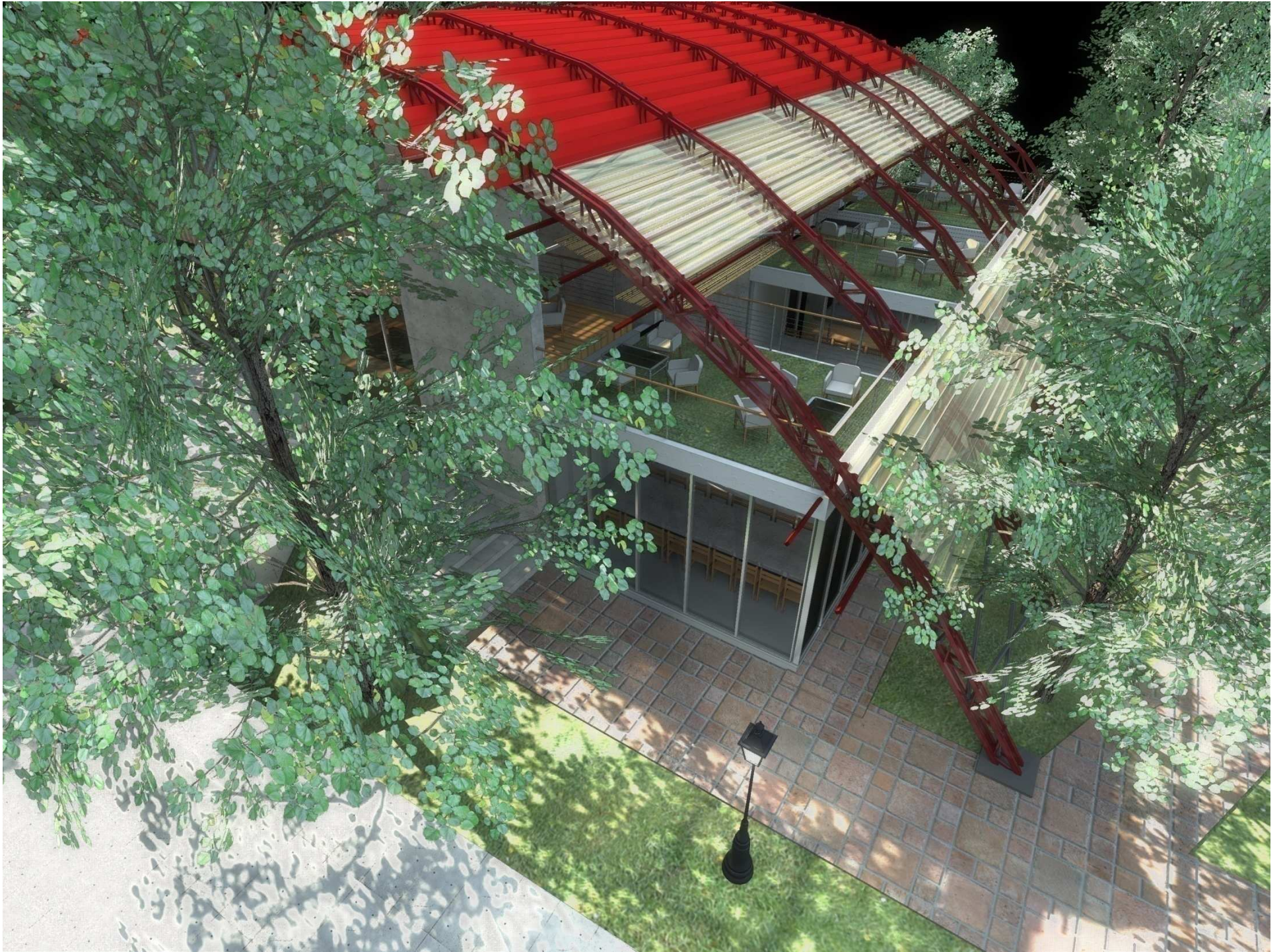


# COMMUTER LOUNGE PROPOSAL









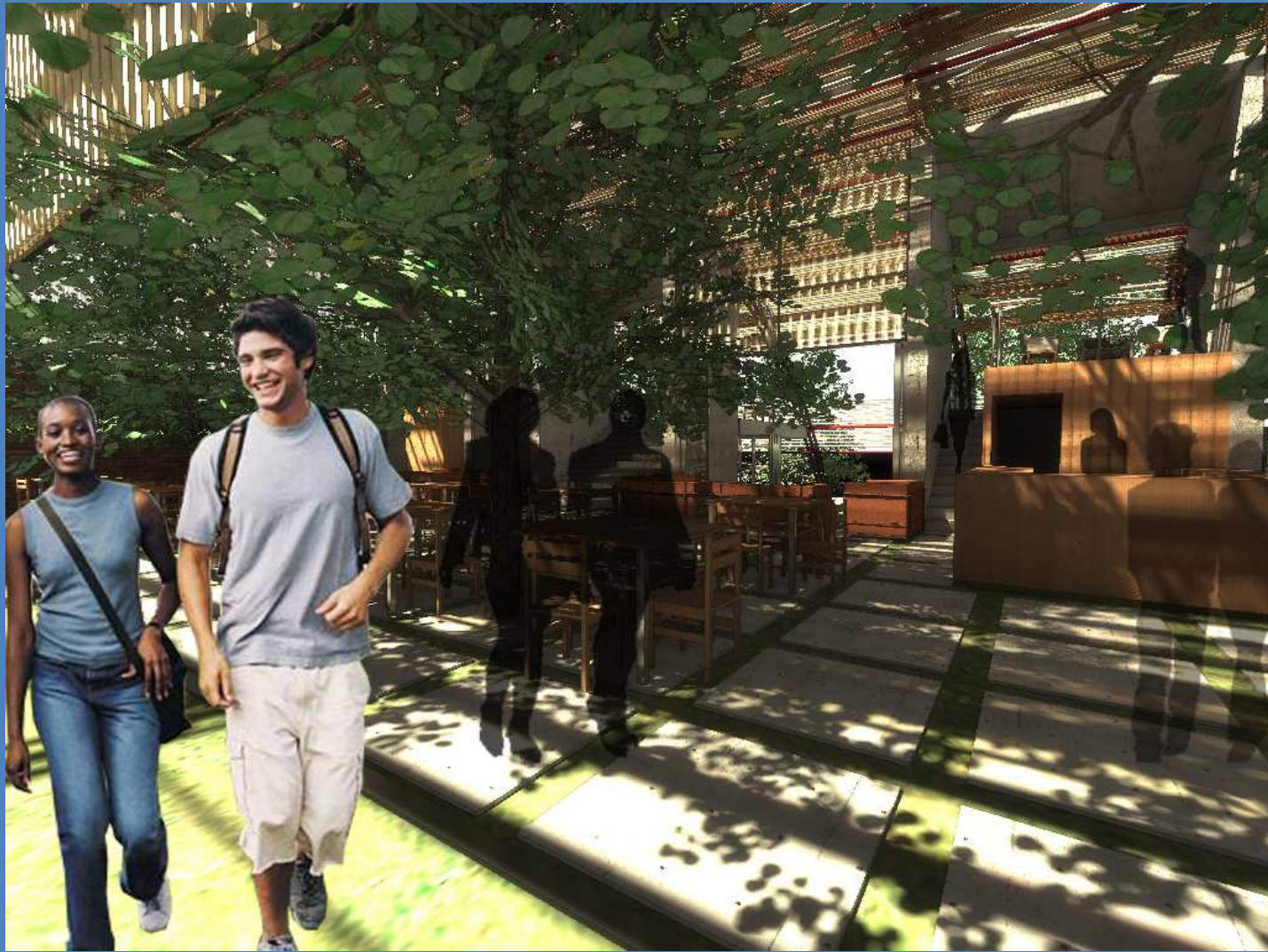








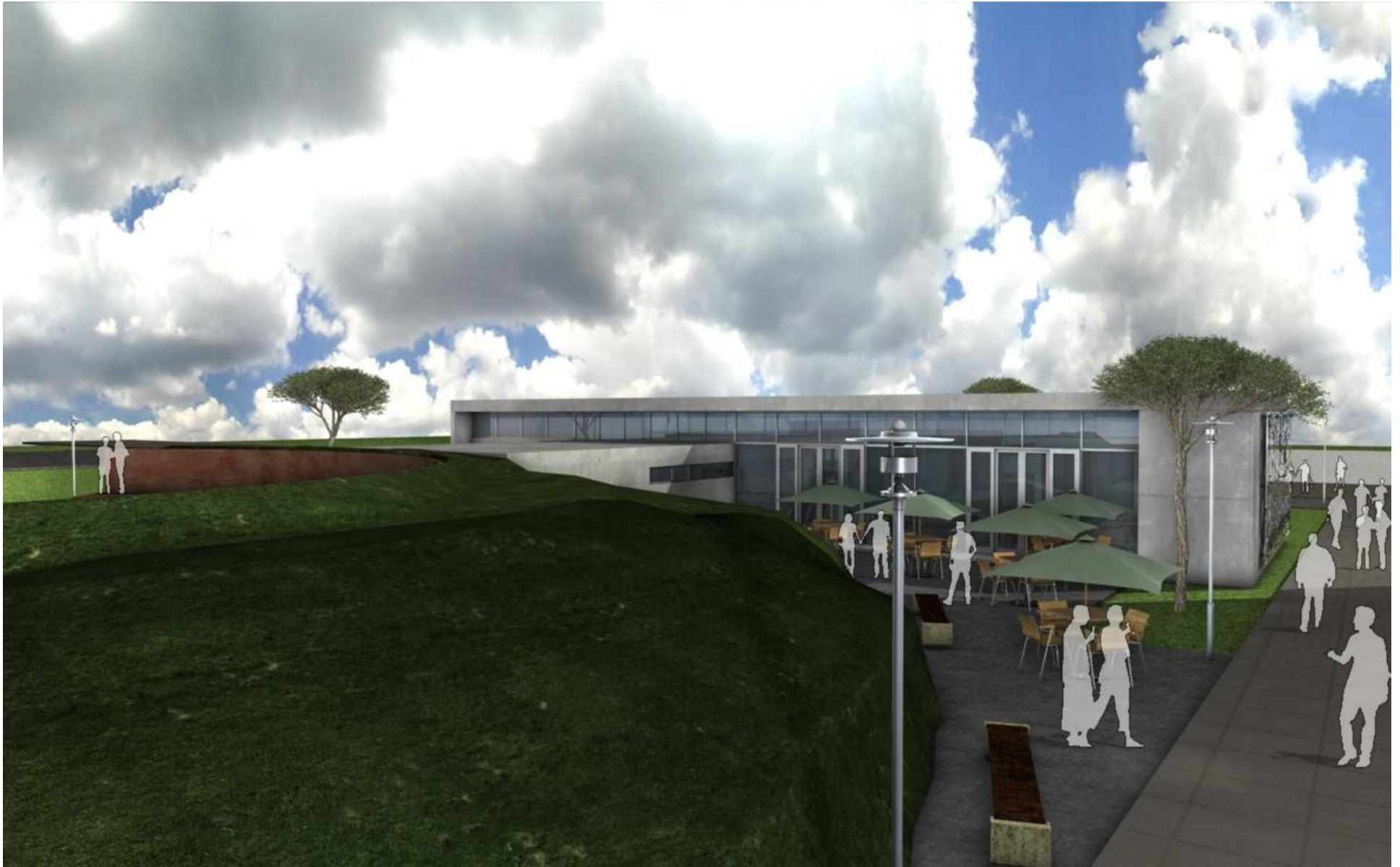






Student Lounge





Student Lounge



Student Lounge

# Commuter lounge case study

## Applying the lessons on taking action



### Infusing data into continuous improvement processes

- Project emphasized that “positive relentlessness” is essential and means:
  - Talking about what works well and
  - Talking about what needs to be fixed
  - Monitoring information system
  - Maintaining momentum towards positive change.
- This requires continuous and strategic sharing of Student Engagement and other data that does have the capacity to create powerful change.





Thank you



Studente Ontwikkeling en Sukses • Student Development and Success

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

Tel (051) 401 3000 • E-mail: [info@ufs.ac.za](mailto:info@ufs.ac.za) • [www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)