



**SASSE**

*South African Survey of Student Engagement*

# Introduction to Student Engagement

**CHE-UFS Student engagement and success workshop  
26-27 March 2009**



Studente Ontwikkeling en Sukses • Student Development and Success

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# Overview

- The student success puzzle
- What is student engagement and why is it important for student success?
  - Is it relevant to the South African context?
  - What are the theoretical foundations of student engagement?
  - The student engagement trinity
- What are the institutional conditions that matter to student engagement and success?
- What are the drivers of student engagement and success?
- What have we learned from using the SASSE?





# The student success puzzle

- Major theoretical perspectives
  - **Sociological perspectives:** Tinto's interactionist theory -successful academic and social integration into university cultures.
  - **Organisational perspectives:** That focus on institutional size, selectivity, resources and student-staff ratio's
  - **Psychological perspectives:** Constructs that have been related to student success include, internal locus of control, expectancy theory, self-efficacy theory, motivational theory to name a few.





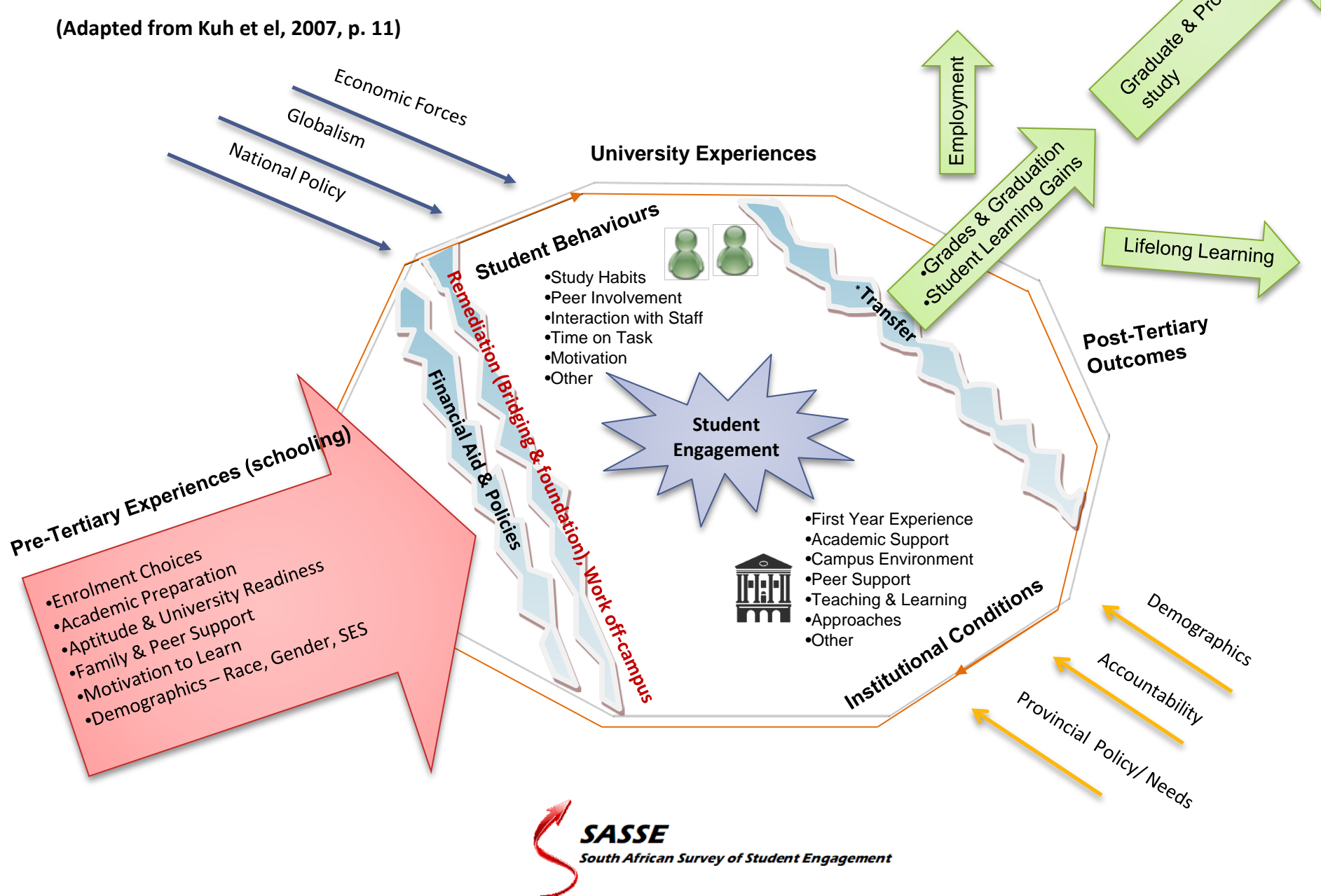
# The student success puzzle

- Major theoretical perspectives
  - **Cultural perspectives:** Indicate that historically underrepresented groups encounter challenges that make it difficult for them to access resources needed for the personal and learning development of student.
  - **Economic perspectives:** The costs and benefits associated with participation in higher education
  - **Higher education/ student development perspectives:** Tinto's Longitudinal model of Institutional Departure (1993), Pascarellas's general causal model for assessing the effects of differential environments on student learning and cognitive development (1985), Weidman's- Conceptual model of undergraduate socialization (1989) and more recently Tinto and Pusser's - Model of Institutional Action for Student Success (2006)



# What Matters to Student Success: A student engagement framework

(Adapted from Kuh et al, 2007, p. 11)





# What is student engagement and why is it important for student success?

- **Predictors of student success**
  - Academic preparation
  - Motivation
    - Institutions increase selectivity and focus on recruiting the “best and the brightest”
    - Only a few institutions can do this
  - **Student engagement**
    - Principle: What students do matters to their persistence and success
      - Amount of time and effort students spend on academic activities and other activities that enhance their success
      - Allocation of resources and organisation of learning opportunities and services to encourage students to participate

(Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005 & Kuh et al., 2005)





# **What is student engagement and why is it important for student success?**

- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
  - Conceived in 1998
  - In 2008 the NSSE study included more than 1.4 million students from 774 institutions (including, 47 Canadian universities) in North America.
  - Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) which was conducted for the first time in 2007 in 25 institutions in Australia and New Zealand.
  - South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) under development for the last 3 years





# What is student engagement and why is it important for student success?

## Is it relevant to the South African context?

**TABLE 1: CHALLENGES FACING HIGHER EDUCATION**

| United States of America   | South Africa   |
|--|--|
| Low pass rates (around 50%)  | Very low pass rates (around 15% graduate in time)  |
| Low enrolment of minority group students   | Participation rates of previously excluded Black African students around 12%   |
| Lower pass rates amongst low income, minority group students   | One in three Black African students pass in time, less than 5% of this cohort obtains a degree   |
| Students not adequately prepared in high school  | Students not adequately prepared in FET schools or colleges  |
| Increased demand for graduates in the knowledge economy results in a rapidly expanding student body with unprecedented levels of diversity and large numbers of first generation students. | Widening access and an increased demand for graduates in the knowledge economy lead to unprecedented levels of diversity and many first generation students. |





**What is student engagement and why is it important for student success?**

**What are the theoretical foundations of student engagement?**

- Time on Task (Tyler, 1930s)
- Quality of effort (Pace, 1960-70s)
- Student Involvement (Astin, 1984)
- Social and academic integration (Tinto, 1987, 1993)
- Good practices in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987)
- College impact (Pascarella, 1985)
- Student engagement (Kuh, 1991, 2005)

(Kuh, 2007)





**What is student engagement and why is it important for student success?**

## **The Student Engagement Trinity**

- In summary
  - What student **do** – time and energy devoted to educational purposeful activities
  - What institutions **do** – using effective educational practice to induce student to do the right things
  - Educationally effective institutions channel student energy towards **activities that matter.**

(Kuh, 2007)





# What are the institutional conditions that matter to student engagement and success?

**Conditions** necessary for student engagement & success

1. A “Living” Mission and “Lived” Educational Philosophy
2. An Unshakeable Focus on Student Learning
3. Environments Adapted for Education Enrichment
4. Clear Pathways to Student Success
5. An Improvement-Orientated Ethos
6. Shared Responsibility for Educational Quality and Student Success





# What are the drivers of student engagement and success?

- **Drivers** of student engagement & success
  - Also referred to as the Benchmarks of effective education practice
    - Measured by 42 SASSE items
  - Level of Academic Challenge
  - Active and Collaborative Learning
  - Enriching Educational Experiences
  - Student-Staff Interaction
  - Supportive Campus Environment





# What are the drivers of student engagement and success?

## 1. Level of academic challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and high quality higher education experiences. Universities promote high levels of student achievement by setting high expectations for student performance and holding students accountable for performing at such levels (Kuh, et al., 2005)

- Academic challenge is represented by the amount of time students devote to:
  - Studying and other academic work
  - Preparing for classes
  - Reading assigned and other books and
  - Writing reports and papers
  - Extent to which student engage in activities that require analyzing, synthesizing, applying theories and making judgements as well as setting standards that compel students to work harder.





# What are the drivers of student engagement and success?

## 2. Active and collaborative learning

Students learn when they are intensely involved in their education and have opportunities to think and apply what they are learning in different settings. Furthermore, when students collaborate with others to solve problems and master difficult material, they acquire valuable skills to address situations and problems they encounter during and after university. (Kuh, et al., 2005). The Survey of Student Engagement asks questions on:

- Asking questions in class and contributing to class discussions
- Making class presentations
- Working with other students on class projects inside and outside of class
- Participating in community-based projects as part of a course
- Discussing ideas from readings with other students, staff outside the class





# What are the drivers of student engagement and success?

## 3. Student-staff interaction

Students learn firsthand to think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside classrooms. Through interaction with students, faculty become role models, mentors and guides for continuous, lifelong learning (Kuh, et al., 2005). In the Survey of Student Engagement this is measured by enquiring whether students:

- Talk to staff about their career plans
- Discuss ideas and readings with staff outside class
- Receive prompt feedback from staff
- Work with staff members on research project on undergraduate level





# What are the drivers of student engagement and success?

## 4. Enriching Educational Experiences

Complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom augment the academic program. Experiencing diversity teaches students valuable lessons about themselves and other cultures. Used appropriately, computer technologies, collaborative projects, service learning can help student to synthesise, integrate and apply knowledge. Such experiences help what students know to become part of who they are (Kuh, et al., 2005). On the survey examples of these types of activities are:

- Having serious conversations with students from different race and ethnic background or with students from different religious beliefs, political opinions and values.
- Using electronic technology to complete assignments
- Participating in internships, service learning
- Participating in co curricular activities (i.e. student life)







# What are the drivers of student engagement and success?

## 5. Supportive campus environments

Students perform better and are more satisfied at universities that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus than at universities that do not. (Kuh, et al., 2005). A supportive campus environment is measured in the survey by:

- Assessing the extent to which institutions provide support for student academic and social success
- Positive working relationships between students, academic and administrative staff
- Helping students cope with non-academic responsibilities
- Examples of students support programmes are orientation programmes, advising networks, peer support, such as tutorials





# What have we learned from using the SASSE?

- SASSE is psychometrically stable
  - Reliability compares well with NSSE
- Produces powerful results that stimulate evidence based reflection on education practice.
  - Examples of selected results





**SASSE**

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# Thank you



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