



# 6th International Conference on Future of Teaching and Education

Prague, Czech Republic

14- 16 October 2022

## A Re-Imagined Institutional Student Retention and Success Framework to Enhance Holistic Student Support

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### Abstract

The focus on student retention and success is a core concern at higher education institutions world-wide. In the South African higher education system the widening of access, high attrition, low through-put and low completion rates highlights the vast disparities with students entering university. Student diversity with regard to prior contexts influence the way students engage in the higher education environment. In addition, many South African universities are equally not prepared to cater for their students' diverse needs. This paper highlights the development and implementation of a holistic institutional student retention and success framework. The framework places the student as the central focus and the institution as a key role player in supporting student retention and success. The framework highlights key indicators that connect the students' engagement with the institution from pre-entry through to graduation within two interrelated environments on campus: the learning and teaching and the social supportive environments at the institution. The elements within these environments connect with university staff and students at different stages to provide holistic support. The article is underpinned by Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory, which brings into focus the significance of the interdependence and inter-relatedness of systems, and structures which influence each other directly or indirectly. In the framework the phenomenon of student success is viewed holistically as a set of elements interacting with one another within the university as a system. The paper argues that each element within the framework has an important role to play in providing holistic student support, engagement and success.

**Keywords:** engagement, diversity, higher-education, systems theory