

RESEARCH TITLE

A curriculum design framework for alternative access programmes that supports student success in graphic design

Name: Dr Yolandi Burger
Supervisors: Dr S.P. van Tonder
 Dr J.H. van Schoor
Institution: University of the Free State
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ABSTRACT

The South African higher education (HE) landscape has undergone many changes since the country's first democratic election in 1994. Among these changes, is the inclusion of alternative access programmes (AAPs) in the programme mix of higher education institutions (HEIs). One of the purposes of AAPs is to act as a student success mechanism in HE; however, this is not evident from the low graduation rate in South African HE which is way below the ideal rate of 25% for contact education. This may be due to limitations of AAPs noted in the reviewed literature of this study. The research was aimed at investigating features of competencies developed through and/or factors related to successful AAPs for graphic design in order to derive a curriculum design framework that embeds critical elements in AAPs so that it can support student success in graphic design education.

Four research objectives were derived in support of the investigation of the stated problem, the first of which necessitated a literature review and empirical exploration of the constitution/design of existing AAPs and mainstream graphic design programmes, as well as the generic and discipline-specific competencies that are cultivated through these programmes. The second research objective called for the exploration of ways in which AAPs for graphic design might ensure student success, which also required a literature review and an empirical investigation. The third research objective required an empirical analysis of the status of one South African private HEI's existing AAP for graphic design in order to identify the specific AAP's strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results (i.e. a SOAR analysis). The fourth and final research objective involved the comparison, convergence, synthesis and integration of the findings obtained through the investigations pertaining to the first three research objectives in order to compile a curriculum design framework in line with the aim of this study.

The overarching research design for this study was a mixed-methods design with both explanatory and embedded components aimed at research objectives 1, 2 and 3, and which were triangulated to achieve

the fourth and final research objective. Data collection techniques that were employed in this study were a literature review; three self-structured, web-based questionnaire surveys, as well as a paper-based questionnaire survey among the student participants of the specific private HEI. The population sample for the first self-structured web-based questionnaire survey (aimed at achieving research objectives 1 and 2) consisted of 756 HE teachers in AAPs for graphic design, AAPs in general, and mainstream graphic design programmes at HEIs in South Africa. One hundred and fourteen (114) HE teachers and 86 students from eleven of the private HEI's campuses were recruited for the SOAR analysis survey. In accordance with research objective 4, the findings of the literature review, the SOAR analysis survey and the questionnaire survey among HE teachers finally culminated in a preliminary curriculum design framework.

The preliminary curriculum framework subsequently was reviewed and validated by a panel of 10 invited experts in the field of curriculum development/design, AAPs and/or graphic design, who were selected through purposeful and snowball sampling procedures. Only nine of the 10 expert participants eventually completed the expert validation questionnaire in which they were requested to rate the importance of 338 activities included in the preliminary framework, as well as to provide comments and suggestions about the features of the framework. The results of the expert survey eventually led to the addition of eight new activities to the proposed framework, the amendment of six of the originally listed activities in the preliminary framework, as well as the exclusion of 10 activities from the final framework. The goal of the final framework proposed in the last chapter of the thesis is to provide guidance to curriculum/programme designers and/or HE teachers regarding curriculum design for AAPs for graphic design students. Since this curriculum design framework for AAPs also encompasses many generic curriculum design activities for improving student success, it is hoped that it will not only support student success in graphic design, but may ultimately also serve as a starting point for other curriculum designers and HE teachers who wish to improve the AAPs in which they are involved.

Recommendations for future research include similar investigations, but with larger quantitative and qualitative data sets which may result in findings that are even more generalisable and trustworthy; investigations of discipline-specific features and competencies pertaining to other disciplines, and an in-depth investigation of success mechanisms that will support students in any AAP.

Keywords: higher education, curriculum/course/programme design, design framework, alternative access programme, extended programme, bridging programme, competency/competencies, graphic design, (student) access, (student) success, success mechanism

The full thesis can be found at Schoor<http://hdl.handle.net/11660/9273>