

**Centralised versus decentralised administrative resource allocation
in the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State**

MARICA COETSEE

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Bloemfontein

Supervisor: Prof MJ Crous

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DECLARATION

“I declare that the Field Study hereby submitted for the Magister in Business Administration at the UFS Business School, University of the Free State, is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted this work, either as a whole or in part, for a qualification at another university or at another faculty at this university.

I also hereby cede copyright of this work to the University of the Free State.”

NAME: Marica Coetsee

DATE: 16 November 2015

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To my Heavenly Father: Thank you for carrying me when I wanted to give up.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the following people:

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction and background

Originally known as the Grey University College, the University of the Free State (UFS) was founded in 1904, when six students enrolled for a Bachelor of Arts degree (www.sarua.org). These numbers quickly grew over the following century to the student count of nearly 30 000 students in 2014. With this magnitude of expansion, it goes without saying that resources should be allocated efficiently to optimise service-delivery structures and to maximise service delivery by the UFS to its students. From an original centralised administrative system, increasingly more pressure is put on faculties and academic departments to play a bigger role in administrative support functions of the UFS. The addition of two new universities to the tertiary education arena of South Africa and enrolment subsidies dependant on the institution's ability to reach its enrolment targets provided to the Department of Higher Education, also play a role in the administrative support frameworks and resource allocation at the UFS. It is important to note that these changes did not result from one major event. Rather, the process followed incrementally and "silently".

From an administrative perspective, decentralisation can be defined as the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to field agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, area wide, regional or functional authorities, or non-governmental private or voluntary organisations (Rondinelli *et al.* 1989, quoted in Hlalele & Mashele 2012).

Centralisation on the other hand, is "... the retaining of the responsibility for planning, management and financial control at the upper level of government" (Hlalele & Mashele 2012).

Institutions of Higher Learning have traditionally been considered professional bureaucracies, resisting formal direction and control. For the purpose of this study, the term 'university/universities', refers to Institutions of Higher Learning. At present, universities find themselves in an environment of increasing competition for scarce resources in the public sector at large. Being in a competitive environment, universities

might lean towards a centralised management control system (on the one extreme) to improve coordination, monitor quality and reduce costs, but still allowing academic decision-making to take place at departmental level (decentralised on the other extreme). Due to the increasing tension between these polarities, universities tend to opt for a more hybrid option by adapting the best of both practices in order to optimise the allocation of scarce resources. Furthermore, external audits and quality control mechanisms increase the accountability on the universities' side, forcing them to implement transparent resource allocation procedures (Jarzabkowski 2002).

At institutional level, internal resource allocation models are changing, advancing towards more decentralised systems, providing decentralised units with greater autonomy in the management of their budgets to achieve certain goals (López 2006)

Despite the increase in student numbers, the UFS currently operates on a centralised administration system, where a central administrative division is responsible for core functions such as applications and admissions, student records, examinations, graduations and financial aid as well as infrastructure pertaining to physical resources. It is also known that other universities in South Africa, such as the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS), Stellenbosch University (US) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) utilise a decentralised administration system, where most of these core functions are the responsibility of the faculty.

Resource allocation is an important tool for implementing strategy and cannot be considered in isolation, since it is intrinsically related to the strategic directions an organisation takes and the monitoring and control of such directions (Jarzabkowski 2002). This is very much real for the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS, which is currently the largest faculty at the University of the Free State, with 6 758 students registered in 2014. This put the Faculty under pressure to optimise its resources and processes in order to align the Faculty's strategic objectives with those of the UFS.

1.2 Problem statement

The problem facing Faculties of the Humanities is the ability to identify the best form of an administrative framework in order to optimise resource allocation and improve service delivery in academic administration.

1.2.1 Problem questions

- What model is used by the government to allocate funds to universities and how does this model influence the internal mechanisms used by the University to allocate resources to different administrative departments?
- What internal resource allocation systems are currently used by the Faculty of the Humanities?
- Will a centralised or decentralised administrative structure assist the Faculty of the Humanities in improving service delivery in academic administration?

1.3 Research objectives

1.3.1 Primary objective

The primary objective of this study is to propose an administrative framework for Faculties of the Humanities in order to improve service delivery in academic administration.

1.3.2 Secondary objectives

- *To identify the principles of design* underlying an effective administrative system.
- *To investigate the identified principles of design* underlying an effective administrative system.
- *To identify* the optimal level of staff allocation in academic administration.
- *To evaluate* the effectiveness of the current service delivery in the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS.
- *To recommend* guidelines to adjust the current administrative framework in the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS.

1.4 Theoretical framework

As a public higher education institution, a university is an enterprise that relies heavily on state funding, and therefore has seen its support either increase or decline with the boom-and-bust cycle of the economy. Typically, when recessions hit, higher education sees a short-term decline in state funding, followed by periods of reinvestment (Kirwan 2007). López (2006) expands on this by indicating that the way in which a university receives its funding affects its incentive and therefore influences the internal organisational behaviour and the composition of the academic services it provides.

According to Liefner (2003), in traditionally state-coordinated systems, the programmes of teaching and the research offered by universities are strongly managed by government directives, and have the tendency to conserve structures as well as be less innovative and less responsive to changes in demand.

In contrast to this, apart from the decline in state funding, universities also have to manage the increase in enrolment, with many of these students being the first in their family to enter higher education. To add to this unique dilemma, the business community is in need of more well-educated, highly skilled workers. Although a decline in state funding is followed by periods of reinvestment, there is usually a shift in the statutory commitments to elementary and secondary education. These shifts in obligations result in structural deficits (Kirwan 2007). Volk, Slaughter and Thomas (2001) continue by noting that in an era where expansion is no longer the obvious solution, the question of why and how universities allocate resources among departments should become more important and resource constraints have caused widespread restructuring at universities. Volk *et al.* (2001) also admit that although the broad goals of restructuring are to redesign universities to lower costs, achieve greater results, pay more attention to teaching and to contribute to regional economic development, few studies have examined the effect of this on departments.

According to Liefner (2003), public pressure has forced governments to look for ways to meet the society's needs within a limited budget available to do so. One way for governments to respond to this is by linking performance to the allocation of funds. Kirwan (2007) continues by stating that the totality of these changes will urge universities and faculties to reengineer the way in which they operate. Nevertheless,

how does an institution as tradition-bound as a university formulate and implement fundamental change? Once again, this will not only force a faculty to look at the way of doing things, but also change the way in which they think, in order to serve the students in the decades to come. Changes in the behaviour of universities and their internal process of resource allocation also filter down to faculty level and the way in which resources are allocated to administrative support structures (Liefner 2003).

The way in which a university does things and thinks about doing things should be closely aligned with the university's strategic objectives and the direction in which the university wants to move. According to Jarzabkowski (2002), resource allocation models (RAM) are important management tools for implementing strategy and cannot be considered in isolation, since it is closely related to the strategic direction of an institution.

Field and Klingert (2001) also indicate that a RAM is a means by which an institution distributes funds according to pre-set criteria. These pre-set criteria include variables such as students, staff numbers, teaching workload, unit costs, etc. Field and Klingert (2001) continue by stating that several important trends stand out, namely shifting from central control towards decentralisation. Field and Klingert (2001) further state that such models do not necessarily have to be applied to the whole university, but could be applied to individual faculties (such as the Faculty of the Humanities) to cater for their different needs by using different methods. Adding to this, Volk *et al.* (2001) indicate that the resources available to a faculty will influence who is employed, how much and whom they teach, which is in turn affected by the quality of the faculty and work load, which will determine research norms and productivity. Changes in patterns of resource allocation between different departments and units are critical in understanding the shape of knowledge in the twenty-first century.

According to Volk *et al.* (2001), there are two theories that guide researchers who study internal resource allocation among departments. These two theories are rational/political and critical/political.

Rational/political theory highlights the role of a small group of decision makers at the top of the institution and accentuates the functional use of resources to maintain and increase institutional competence and success. Although the focus is on rationality,

this theory is sensitive to political dimensions of internal budgetary processes and allows for bargaining by interest groups. It also acknowledges the individual faculties' ability to access external funds and contracts and realise that external groups can sometimes intervene to influence allocation. Although regarded as an important factor, politics is never seen as determining resource allocation to such an extent point that it would overwhelm institutional economy and productivity.

By contrast, *critical/political* theory places politics and power in the foreground when it comes to resource allocation to departments, arguing that differentials in political economic power among departments explain the variance in resource allocation among departments. This theory claims that institutional resources are concentrated in departments close to federal and corporate research markets as well as high-end private sector markets for professionals. Therefore, institutional resources are loaded into departments with larger numbers of graduate students and fewer undergraduates (Volk *et al.* 2001).

According to the *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report* (2003), centralised resource allocation may be practical and even desirable at smaller institutions, because both direct and indirect cost and revenue flows can be determined with relative ease. However, as an institution expands and moves up on the enrolment and operational budget scale, the argument for a decentralised system of decision-making and resource allocation becomes stronger, since the links between costs, performance, and revenues become more complex. This gave rise to the concept of **responsibility-centred management**, providing universities with a single most effective system available for linking unit budgets with academic priorities. Responsibility-centred management can be defined as “a budget model in which individual units are directly responsible for the revenues and costs generated within their operation”, and has the following three underlying principles:

- All expenses and income attributable to each academic or administrative unit should be allocated to that unit;
- There should be incentives for each unit to increase income and reduce costs in order to reach the university's goals;

- All expenses relating to support units, such as the library or student counselling should be allocated to a separate entity dealing with that specific support function.

The *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report (2003)* continues by pointing out that responsibility-centred management intends to provide incentives for departments to undertake excellent teaching, research and service, which can increase potential income generated while providing information that can lead to significant new efficiencies in university structures and processes. The report points out that accountability and authority are decentralised and faculty involvement in planning and budgeting is increased, which allow for greater flexibility. Under this system of decision-making, it becomes clear which departments are subsidised and to what extent, thus inviting (or actually requiring) justification.

The *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report (2003)* summarises the ten basic concepts of responsibility-centred management as follows:

1. The closer operating decisions are to the point of implementation, the more likely they are to be better.
2. Unit efficiency can only be increased if the balance between decentralisation and centralisation is clearly explained.
3. There is a clear correlation between the organisational size and complexity and the optimal level of decentralisation.
4. Accurate decision-making can only be obtained when full information concerning benefits and consequences is available.
5. Responsibility for resource management should be proportionate to related authority.
6. Excellent managerial performance should be recognised spontaneously and rewarded.
7. Stable internal environments where performance expectations do not change at random facilitate good planning and performance.

8. Resource allocation should clearly reflect the interrelationship of the parts of the community to the whole institution.
9. Senior management should determine the level of services required for the mutual benefit of the institution and then retain adequate resources to ensure that such services are constantly funded.
10. A comprehensive and clearly articulated strategic plan against which each unit and individual's managerial performance can be evaluated is important.

Furthermore, the report states that it is essential for the university's human resources, academic, financial and student affairs databases to be fully integrated and for information to be broadly available to all employees with operational responsibilities, which is also advocated under the main beliefs of "open-book management". On the other hand, the report also sends out a warning with regard to the problems encountered with responsibility-centred management. These warnings are:

- Firstly, collegiality is reduced because cooperation between colleges and schools is diminished.
- Secondly, there is the potential that extreme measures of cost control and revenue enhancement may be encouraged, which may include the expanded use of temporary facility and an increase of fees.
- Thirdly, non-instructional units may be at the mercy of the central administration for the bulk of their resources, and
- Fourthly, given that the level of optional funding available to the central administration tends to be significantly reduced, the danger arises that unprofitable strategic priorities might be underfunded.

University leaders and managers should explore such issues in detail first before implementing responsibility-centred management.

In studies conducted by Gornitzka and Larsen (2004), it was highlighted that there was a growing apprehension with regard to the distribution of resources over the diverse activities within a university. The majority of the concerns resonated with the disproportionate growth of administrative costs. They stated that the increase in

administrative costs was not purely linked to the quantitative increase in university administrative staff, but that a trend in the *professionalisation* of university administration was becoming evident. It was clear that non-academic administrators have taken on a new and different role in universities and that their positions have become more *professional* in nature, rather than just clerical. Their data clearly indicated a rise in the formal status of especially middle-management stratum, due to an increase in the level of formal qualifications required to hold a position as university administrator. This new administrative “class” led to a new interface between academics and administrators. This *professionalisation* of administrative staff also changed the administrative arena from an administrative, rule-orientated culture to a service-orientated one.

Gornitzka and Larsen (2004) validate the fact that there is an increase in the demands on a university as a whole to act collectively and strategically. These demands only affect the academic institutional managers and decision-making entities, but surely also the non-academic managers and administrators, resulting in more general changes in the administrative structures and dimensions of universities. Rutherford (2013), on the other hand, emphasises the fact that disagreements still exist as to what level of administrators will be most efficient for operations and allow for a system of shared governance in organisational decisions. Rutherford (2013) also indicates that the question as to the degree of administrative employees needed for optimal organisational performance and functionality has received increased attention, mainly from policymakers, calling for the minimisation of the need for these employees.

According to Gornitzka and Larsen (2004), administrative restructuring of a university can be brought upon through any one or a combination of the following forces:

- External environmental demands and expectations such as the professionalisation of the workforce in general; external funding; the internationalisation of the working environment; call for quality control in higher education; and changes in the relationship between the government and institutions in higher education;
- Internal changes in universities prompted by information and communication technology (ICT) advancements that put pressure on staff to increase their

skills; changes in student numbers; and the delegation of financial and administrative responsibilities.

Concluding their study, Gornitzka and Larsen (2004) state that the restructuring of non-academic administrative staff is not the result of a single, planned and regulated process. Rather, this increase in the administrator vs. academic ratio happened because of many small decisions taken at different levels. Many of these decisions were voluntary, while others were taken more out of necessity and demand.

1.5 Research design

1.5.1 Methods and methodology

In a complex system such as the administration of a faculty, it will be best to utilise a descriptive model, since it will allow visualisation of numerous variables and relationships. The primary objective of this study is to propose an administrative framework for the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS in order to optimise resource allocation. It is concerned with finding out who, what, where, when, or how much in relation to administrative structures is needed in the Faculty of the Humanities. The study is therefore descriptive by nature.

1.5.2 Sampling and data analysis

By using nonprobability sampling, little attempt will be made to generate a representative sample. Through purposive sampling participants will be selected arbitrarily for their unique characteristics or experiences relating to the focus of the study. Special focus will be placed on targeting respondents in the Faculties of the Humanities and the Registrars of the universities.

The qualitative nature of the research will enable the researcher to apply flexible and explorative methods to gather data and involves only a small sample group. This will enable the researcher to achieve a deeper understanding of what is investigated (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell 2005).

More background on the data collection and analysis instruments will be provided in Chapter 3.

1.6 Demarcating the research area

What:

This study will explore and investigate the possible administrative structures available to the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS, by comparing it to other universities' administrative structures.

Where:

The Faculty of the Humanities at selected South African universities.

Who:

The following universities will be approached to participate in the study:

- University of Pretoria (UP)
- University of the Witwatersrand (WITS)
- Stellenbosch University (US)
- University of Cape Town (UCT)
- Rhodes University
- University of Fort Hare
- University of Johannesburg (UJ)
- University of Venda
- University of KwaZulu-Natal
- Walter Sisulu University
- University of Limpopo
- University of the Western Cape
- Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)
- University of Zululand

- North-West University and
- University of the Free State (UFS)

In addition to the above-mentioned universities, participants at the HEFAF conference and the International NACADA conference will also be approached for participation.

Which field of study?

This study focuses on the business management field.

1.7 Ethical considerations

According to Cooper and Schindler (2011), ethics are “norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationships with others”. The following ethical considerations will apply:

- **Objectivity:**

The researcher aims to avoid bias in experimental design, data analysis and data interpretation of the qualitative data-by-data recordings of all interviews.

- **Voluntary participation:**

Participation in this research will be on a voluntary basis and measures will be taken to ensure that participants are not misled or coerced into participation.

- **Informed consent:**

All participants will be fully informed of the purpose and process of the study, as well as their rights in participating in the research, before proceeding with the study.

- **Confidentiality and respect:**

The researcher will ensure that all participants' responses remain confidential and that their autonomy is respected. Participant confidentiality will be protected by restricting access to participant identification and revealing participant information only with written consent.

- **Data integrity:**

A data management system will be implemented to ensure the ethical protection of participants during and after data collection.

1.8 Lay-out of the study

This study consists of five chapters. Following the introduction and background in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 will focus on the literature review. Chapter 3 will provide an outline of the research design and methodology, followed by a discussion of the findings in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a summary and recommendations.

1.9 Conclusion

With the magnitude of expansion that universities are experiencing, together with increasing competition for scarce resources, it became crucial to allocate available resources efficiently and to put service-delivery structures into place that will optimise service delivery by the UFS to its students. In this study, the researcher will attempt to propose an administrative framework for Faculties of the Humanities in order to improve service delivery in academic administration.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The socioeconomic landscape of South Africa has changed dramatically since the mid-1990s. From a mere six students in 1904 to the current student count of nearly 30 000 students in 2014, the University of the Free State has to start thinking about the way in which their administrative support structures are organised, making use of limited resources to enable all entities to maximise service delivery by the UFS to its students. From an original centralised administrative system, more and more pressure is put on Faculties and academic departments to transform to a system of decentralised administrative support. This will definitely have a direct impact on administrative support frameworks and resource allocation at the UFS.

According to Heaney (2010), the governance structure of universities has been the describing feature of most of them for numerous generations. Looking into the history of university governance, faculties had organised, self-regulating, purposeful bodies outside of the then existing administrative structures, where decisions had been made. However, these decisions were generally subject to subsequent approval by a dean, director, vice-chancellor or chancellor, which frequently left faculties in conflict with administration. With the introduction of shared governance, the intention was to bring faculty, administration and other stakeholders together around the planning table. However, the addition of faculties to centuries-old, time-honoured governance structures of universities was problematic from the start, with authority and responsibility still an issue, even in well-functioning systems. Finding common ground between faculties, administration and establishing best practices is difficult. The success of widespread participation in decision-making requires on-going and timely strategies. Some universities have adopted consultative decision-making models, where the emphasis would be on communication before decisions were made, while there is also little uncertainty that most decisions would be made by administration.

2.2 Alignment with strategic objectives

Heaney (2010) states that faculties and administration have different strategic goals and therefore different viewpoints. These different interests and views can twist their

assessment of how well shared governance is working. It is therefore not surprising that the party making the final decision would believe that shared governance is working. According to Heaney (2010), shared governance is subject to the following:

- *Common dispositions*: participants must have the same goal.
- *Balancing institutional and constituent interests*: it is not only the interests of each separate group that counts, but also the interests of the university as a whole.
- *Procedural justice and the maintenance of trust*: all parties involved in the decision-making process must perceive the process as fair and must trust each other party to take the best decision in the interest of the university as a whole.

The University of the Free State (DIRAP 2015) has identified the following strategic goals and objectives for 2015–2020:

- *Goal 1: Improve academic reputation*. This goal will be reached by increasing student success and improving the UFS's research outputs.
- *Goal 2: Improve equity and diversity of staff and students*. This goal will be reached by focusing on the improvement of staff equity with regard to academic appointments and the improvement of student equity through decreasing the gap between black and white student success rates.
- *Goal 3: Achieve financial sustainability*. This goal will be reached by declining the university's reliance on tuition fees and increasing research outputs to increase research subsidy.

The current strategic goals of the Faculty of the Humanities are (The Humanities 2010):

- Goal 1: Improved faculty governance and management
- Goal 2: Stimulate and sustain a culture of scholarship and research within faculties.
- Goal 3: Increase the quality of student intake per year

- Goal 4: Recruitment, development and retaining of quality academic and administrative staff
- Goal 5: Promote transformation in the Faculty
- Goal 6: Improved branding, positioning and marketing of the Faculty
- Goal 7: Offering relevant qualifications on critical issues in the Humanities
- Goal 8: Optimal positioning of the Arts within the Faculty and the University

2.3 Resource allocation

Schulz and Szekeres (2008) also point out that, over the years, many universities have become large and complex organisations. This largely influenced the way in how universities are organised, and administrators and managers are increasingly interested in processes and structures to exercise control over activities. This control, however, has become difficult to maintain. In addition to size and complexity, Heaney (2010) also highlights the fiscal crises and other pressures that universities also with. All these factors force universities to renew their commitment to strategic planning in order to clarify their institutional missions and visions. This draws attention to how decisions are made and by whom.

It is not only the *how* and the *who* of decision making that matters, but also the *where*. Universities struggle to make sensible decisions about where in the organisation to provide administrative services to students. Some universities have administrative services that are delivered and managed in a central unit with some involvement from faculties and departments, while others deliver administrative services within the faculties, with limited involvement from a central or institutional unit (Schulz & Szekeres 2008). This is the typical differentiation between centralised administrations versus decentralised administration.

Schulz and Szekeres (2008) identify two key questions that need to be answered when a university wants to decide which structural model to follow. These questions are:

- How should decisions be made as to the best location where services should be provided?
- What are the principles that underpin these decisions?

Like in any service-delivery industry, the most serious problem is seen as that being related to structural constraints. This raises the question whether structures for the provision of administrative services in universities per se work for or against quality service delivery. This question can also be expanded to ask if universities consider service quality at all when they decide on structural arrangements (Schulz & Szekeres 2008). Paewai, Meyer and Houston (2007) indicate that it is not only service quality that determines the structural arrangements anymore, but also the demand for accountability and transparency; increasingly diverse student groups; decreasing public funding; a demand for flexible education due to new developments in information technology, and a greater demand from the government for monitoring and data collection. All of these have not only had an impact on the administrative level of a higher education institution, but also on individual, departmental, institutional and central authority level, which in turn led to the aspect of equity in workload management.

According to Paewai *et al.* (2007), an analysis of work requirements shows that many units deal with substantial work demands, with some units endeavouring to do too much. In many cases a perception exists amongst employees that divisions are constantly expected to do more with less resources, and that there is a mismatch between resource distribution and work requirements.

Volk *et al.* (2001) also state that the internal resource allocation model of a university is often underpinned by one of two theories. On the one hand, there is the *rational/political* theory, with the *critical/political* theory on the other hand.

Rational/political theory highlights the role of a small group of decision makers at the top of the institution and accentuates the functional use of resources to maintain and increase institutional competence and success. Although the focus is on rationality, this theory is sensitive to political dimensions of internal budgetary processes and allows for bargaining by interest groups. It also acknowledges the individual faculties' ability to access external funds and contracts and realise that external groups can sometimes intervene to influence allocation. Although regarded as an important factor, politics are never seen as shaping resource allocation to such a point that it would overpower institutional economy and productivity.

Rational/political theorists commonly use the following four variables to measure the rationale behind the decision-making process:

- *Centrality*: How critical or important is the department for the mission of the university, and how central does the department stand to maintaining institutional workflow? For example: an English department teaching large numbers of students will be seen as central, while a small department such as Philosophy will also be regarded as central, since it is commonly argued that no university could exist without a philosophy department.
- *Workflow*: Although a department may not have large numbers of graduate students, the department could still be deemed central to their workflow productivity solely by the large number of students they might service through introductory courses offered to other programmes.
- *Grants and contracts*: In an era of declining government subsidies, any department that is able to secure outside grants and contracts are deemed as rational choices for resource allocations. Resource allocations are regarded as an investment to strengthen the department's abilities to secure grants and contracts. However, it should be realised that not all departments are equally likely to receive external grants.
- *Departmental quality*: A department's quality is linked directly to the number of research outputs, and once again, as in the case with grants and contracts, resource allocations are regarded as an investment to strengthen the department's ability to produce more research outputs.

In contrast to *rational/political* theory, *critical/political* theory places politics and power in the foreground when it comes to resource allocation to departments, arguing that differentials in political economic power among departments explain the variance in resource allocation among departments. Variables that play a role in this theory are *diversity, staff and student resources* and *closeness to market*.

Critical/political theorists believe that variables such as race or gender reflect the economic and power divisions in the wider society, and will therefore define how resources are allocated. Departments with few permanent staff and large numbers of students often find themselves in a position where they have to appoint temporary

staff. This in turn adds more pressure to permanent staff who must take on more supervisory roles and committee obligations, thus reducing their ability to engage in research and activities that could increase their ability to secure external funding or grants.

Closeness to market has the following domino effect on the resources of a department: the greater the demand for a specific type of expertise, the greater the starting salary will be for graduates in those fields. To compete for staff with these skills, universities would have to offer higher entry-level salaries and since salaries constitute the greater part of a department's financial resources, these departments would require more resources to enable them to compete for staff in fields where there is a high demand for the specific skills they need (Volk *et al.* 2001).

2.4 Centralised and decentralised administrative structures defined

According to Kowalski (2003), organisational authority can best be described on a scale ranging from centralised to decentralised.

The debate about centralised versus decentralised administrative structures has been a continuous one at the UFS over the past decade. On the one side of the argument, there are administrative departments who are of the opinion that academic departments and faculties should become more involved in the administrative decisions and operations relating to student academic services. On the other hand, one finds academic departments and faculties that argue that administrative support services should be dealt with at a central point, enabling academic departments to focus on the academic development of students. While both of these arguments have merit, the answer to the question might not be so straightforward. Several aspects to each option have to be made very clear, and which should be understood well before a final decision can be reached.

2.4.1 Centralised administrative structures

It is important to get clarity about the main purposes regarding a so-called centralised administrative structure. These purposes are most commonly listed as:

- Control over application of policies and procedures,

- Objectivity,
- Routine, and
- Consistency.

One of the most negative aspects of centralisation is the demoralising effect it has on employees who often have the knowledge to make decisions, but due to the centralised nature of the structure have to refer all decisions to higher-ranking officials. These higher-ranking officials are often out of touch with the specific situation (Kowalski 2003). However, due to an increase in legislation, more and more organisations opt for centralised structures that would provide them with consistency. Centralised structures are further criticised for their lack of understanding the needs of different populations at different locations. Gradually organisations have started to move their focus away from centralisation to decentralisation (Kowalski 2003).

2.4.2 Decentralised administrative structures

In contrast to centralisation, Kowalski (2003) defines *decentralisation* as the diffusion of authority and functions to separate entities/units in an organisation. The goals of decentralisation are:

- Increasing flexibility: giving individuals in different entities/units more ‘space’ to make their own decisions and respond to emerging needs in their environment more quickly and directly.
- Accountability: people who will be held responsible for decisions will also be able to make the decisions, and
- Inclusion and productivity: allowing each unit to allocate resources in such a way so that the objectives of the unit can be reached.

According to Lunenburg and Ornstein (2011), decentralisation has the following benefits:

- Human resources are optimised,
- The burden on top management is less,
- Staff with technical knowledge can make decisions close to the firing line, and

- Responses to external changes can be prompter.

In the case of the University of South Australia, Schulz and Szekeres (2008) describe a university that is distributed over four campuses, which struggled with the issue of consistency in institutional practices. Instead of one central administrative core, administrative functions were distributed to a specific point on each of the four campuses under the managerial control of faculties on a particular campus. Although each campus had a *central* point for administrative functions, it was still regarded as a decentralised approach, since the faculties on each campus were responsible for the management of the applicable administration point. Although this decentralised system stimulated a sense of ownership and belonging between the service area and the faculties on their respective campuses, it soon became clear that each campus was developing their own sets of processes based on their specific local needs. The various campuses had become *unconnected* from each other and *disconnected* from university-wide activities, which could have been prevented if the administration were managed by a central administrative unit.

In an attempt to correct this, the following measures were put in place:

- Service standards were developed,
- Accountability was clearly defined, and
- Key administrative functions in departments were linked with those in the faculty and university-wide administration.

Also worth noting, is the fact that as heads of departments retired, tenures ended or were replaced by new heads of department, the structure and administrative arrangements in each faculty also changed. The cohesive administrative structure was ultimately lost and each campus only responded to specific local needs. In the end, the University of South Australia moved away from a decentralised administrative structure to a centralised approach. In the centralised administrative structure, each campus's administrative office no longer reported to the faculties on their campus, but instead had to report to the Student and Academic Services (Schulz & Szekeres 2008)

Are administrative decisions a result of historical and circumstantial events, or a logical approach to determine as to how, where and by whom?

2.4.3 Hybrid administrative structures

According to Kowalski (2003), a choice between a centralised administrative structure and a decentralised version is rather difficult. In an attempt to find a compromise, the notion of shared decision-making came into being. Shared decision-making can also be seen as a hybrid administrative structure. This structure also has its own challenges, for example:

- Large numbers of people in the decision-making process do not imply better decisions, since members often form factions and end up competing for power.
- Councils often turn out to become rubber stamps for high-ranking officials.
- Allowing separate units too much autonomy could lead to inequity, which could result in legitimate questions about equal access to educational opportunities to all students.
- The development of councils is regarded as purely cosmetic, and the decisions they make are disjointed and unrelated to a shared vision. Decisions are often based on self-interest and personal bias and not on research and best practices.

Heaney (2010) indicates that the structures of shared governance vary from one institution to the next, where each institution's mission and values will determine which organisational structure it will adopt and agree on. Nonetheless, there are still structural characteristics that are common amongst institutions. Organisational structures can take on one of the following forms:

- *Loosely coupled system:* the emphasis does not fall on tightening the system, but rather on a loosely coupled system where there is a clear understanding between all parties of the core values of the Faculty and the university, and where these values are not only preserved, but also advanced. Communication between all parties, rather than rigid structures, is more important.

- *Retaining separate interest groups:* clarity is pursued as to which decisions relate to the entire university and which decisions are best left to the Faculty. Each constituency is allowed to articulate its interests, while a forum is provided where the interests of all constituencies are integrated in the interest of the larger university community.

In shared decision-making, there is constant tension between the need to respond quickly and purposeful involvement. On the one hand, shared decision-making implies full participation by all constituencies, while on the other hand, deliberate speed and flexibility remain desirable. However, the key lies in finding a balance with a clear understanding of and reverence for the various roles and duties of each role player (Heaney 2010).

2.5 Critical considerations regarding centralised versus decentralised

2.5.1 Principles that influence the decision

Schulz and Szekeres (2008) state that if one thinks about student services and the important role it plays in a student's life, some simple principles come to mind. These principles are influenced by a number of constraints such as legislation, budgets and physical constraints, but are not always taken into account. These constraints, however, will always influence how the principles can be applied. Principles will provide a framework for making decisions while keeping decision makers' focus on the broader goals of service delivery. Schulz and Szekeres (2008) suggest the following principles:

- Start with the students in mind and consider their needs.
- Ensure data integrity by minimising data entry points. This will lead to minimum resources required for training and control.
- By making optimal use of self-service with the right information and intelligent systems, students will be capable of taking responsibility for their own enrolment and data.
- Consistency and integrity of administrative services are important. This can be achieved by matching accountability with responsibility at a single service point.

- Proximity with regard to service points and where decisions are made.
- Limit the number of people involved in processes and reduce double handling.
- Be unambiguous about the required outcome of any service.
- Streamline policies and processes to enable responsiveness.
- Make all information easily accessible to facilitate in democratic organisational decision-making.

2.5.2 Key stages in the student administration lifecycle

In a study of the higher education sector in Australia and New Zealand, Schulz and Szekeres (2008) have identified key stages in the student administration lifecycle that would influence a university's decision on the administrative structure it will follow:

- *Admissions:* Across the sector, admissions appear to be handled in a centralised manner (with a bit of input from faculties) with services being provided in the same area where decisions are taken and data are entered (Schulz & Szekeres 2008).
- *Enrolment:* Although there has been a shift towards online enrolment, students still required advice or assistance, in which case faculties are regarded as the main point of contact for students. Research also indicates that the level of decentralisation is dependent on the level of web enablement. The more web-enabled the enrolment process, the more centralised it will be with less involvement required from faculties and departments. This leads to an interesting paradox where online enrolment has the ideal of minimising administrative tasks and involvement from faculties, but due to the difficulty of providing accurate advice to students in an online environment, it actually results in reworking to rectify incorrect enrolments (Schulz & Szekeres 2008).
- *Review of progress:* While enquiries are dealt with at a central unit level with inputs from faculty and departmental level (thus more of a hybrid structure), data entry is done mainly at a central level (Schulz & Szekeres 2008).
- *Eligibility to graduate:* At both large and small institutions, there seems to be a disparity between where decisions are made and where data are entered onto

the system. Decisions are mainly taken at faculty level, while data entry takes place at central units.

2.5.3 Aspects influencing governance structures

Findings in Schulz & Szekeres' (2008) research suggest that although service quality should be the driver for decisions about organisational structure, more often than not legislative requirements are the driving force behind decisions to move away from decentralised administrative structures back to more centralised administrative structures, particularly in relation to the management of student records.

With regard to shared governance, Heaney (2010) points out the following important aspects:

- *Authority and responsibility:* if a person is held accountable for the consequences of a decision, that person should also have the authority to make the decision.
- *Power issues:* although more are people involved in the decision-making process, only a few will have the ultimate power to make a final decision. The inclusion of all stakeholders is still important to enable the president to make an informed decision. However, stakeholders in the lowest “ranks” such as students might feel that they are not really empowered by being included in shared governance structures, but merely better informed about the whole process.
- *Decision-making versus advisory roles:* Faculty members do not want to feel that they merely have advisory roles. Instead, they want executive authority to be able to make something happen. This would encourage the participation of leading faculty members.
- *Administration and faculty power:* few decisions are the prerogative of only one party. By including administration in the planning processes of faculties, much “push-back” from administration can be avoided and less time will be wasted when plans are finally put forward to administration.

2.5.4 The basic dimensions of organisational structure

Lunenburg and Ornstein (2011) have identified seven concepts of organisational structure that provide a basis for vertical control and horizontal coordination. These seven basic concepts are:

- *Job specialisation*: Job specialisation occurs by dividing any work into specialised tasks and organising them into distinct units. This specialisation can be seen in universities, for example, a unit that would specialise in giving academic advice, another for the administration of student class fees, one for applications, etc.
- *Departmentalisation*: The division of work within a unit into distinct components and the coordination of those component parts will enable the organisation to reach the benefits of job specialisation optimally.
- *Chain of command*: The flow of authority and responsibility is linked to two underlying principles. The first is *unity of command*, and the second is the *scalar principle*. Unity of command implies that a subordinate is held responsible by only one superior. The scalar principle means that authority and accountability should flow in a vertical line from the top down to the lowest level, thus creating a hierarchical structure.
- *Authority and responsibility*: Having the right to make a decision (authority) on how to carry out a job should always be linked to the responsibility for the execution of the work.
- *Centralisation and decentralisation*: Centralisation and decentralisation can be regarded as the two opposite ends on a continuum, determined by the degree of delegated authority. Decentralisation occurs where more and more authority and responsibility are delegated to lower levels in the organisation and subordinates have more influence on the overall operations of the organisation. Centralisation, on the other hand, happens when authority is retained at higher levels, while subordinates only implement decisions taken by top management.
- *Line and staff authority*: Line authority indicates the authority of a manager to delegate tasks and responsibilities to subordinates and relates to the chain of command, while staff authority is advisory in nature. Personnel with staff

authority are usually an assistant to a personnel member who has line authority, and do not have the legal authority to implement the advice themselves.

- *Span of management:* The span of management refers to the number of subordinates who report directly to a single superior. Since the lower level of staff in an organisation typically performs routine activities, the span of management can be larger. As one moves up in the different levels of an organisation, the activities become more specialised, thus creating a narrower span of management.

2.6 Conclusion

One view that is supported by several researchers such as Schulz and Szekeres (2008) is that there is no clear indication as to which structural model is best, or why one model might be better than another one is. The magnitude of aspects that influence these decisions is just too comprehensive. Kowalski (2003) also highlights this point, saying that very few institutions find themselves on one side of the continuum only. Instead, in order to reach meaningful reform, institutions opt for a balance (hybrid system) between centralisation and decentralisation.

Deciding on a suitable administrative system is not a decision that should be taken lightly. There are many factors at play to consider carefully before an appropriate administrative system can be decided on and implemented. Not only internal factors such as the institutional goals and budgets play a role, but also external factors such as legislation and the economic climate of a country. While considering all the different factors, the main purpose of the administrative system should always be one of service delivery to its client – the student.

Chapter 3

Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

The collection of data will be designed, based on the background to this study and the structure that was formed in the first two chapters. That will enable the researcher to answer the problem questions and to identify solutions to the research objectives.

In this chapter, the sources regarding data collection will be described in detail and information will be provided on the methodology, sampling design, ethical considerations and the possible limitations of the study.

3.2 Research design

This study will explore and investigate the possible administrative structures available to the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS by comparing it to the administrative structures of Humanities faculties at other universities. The recent restructuring of academic support structures in the office of the Dean in the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS will also be analysed in an attempt to identify further optimisation of service delivery to students. The primary objective of this study is to propose an administrative framework for the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS in order to optimise resource allocation. Through interviews with the respondents, the researcher will attempt to get an 'insider view' into the administrative procedures of the different universities and understand the significance of numerous variables and their relationships with each other. By collecting a variety of data such as documents on the websites of the different universities and interviews with different staff at each of these universities the researcher will follow a holistic approach. Internal data obtained from the human resources department at the UFS will also be taken into consideration.

3.2.1 Methodology

The researcher attempts to understand the significance and interaction between different entities such as top management, faculties and centralised student academic services regarding administrative processes. Data will therefore be subjective, since it is produced in the minds of the participants. This qualitative research design will focus

on the constraints of the day-to-day administrative events of these entities and results will be based on the daily events and behaviour of people. According to Welman *et al.* (2005:8), the word 'qualitative' suggests an emphasis on practices and significances that are not rigorously inspected or measured in terms of number, amount, intensity or rate of recurrence.

As indicated in the literature review, the administration of a faculty could be a complex system. In such a complex system, it will be best to utilise a descriptive model, since it will allow visualisation of numerous variables and relationships. The study is also concerned with determining who, what, where, when, or how much in relation to administrative structures is needed in terms of administrative structures in the Humanities at the UFS. The study is based on what the researcher observes and describes in words, and is therefore descriptive by nature (Brynard & Hanekom 2006:80). By conducting a descriptive research, the researcher has two goals in mind (Welman *et al.* 2005):

- Firstly, the researcher will try to understand the way things are.
- Secondly, the possibility might arise to predict behaviour in order to change or control it.

3.2.2 Sampling and data analysis

According to Cooper & Schindler (2011), the research population can be defined as "the total collection of elements about which we wish to make some inferences". For the purpose of this study, the population consists of all the universities in South Africa with a Humanities faculty. Since it is not practical to include all Faculties of Humanities in South Africa in the study, a sample will be taken from the available population. Universities of various sizes with regard to student numbers will be approached with the request for an interview and those available and willing to participate will be included in the sample.

Cooper and Schindler (2011) and Welman *et al.* (2005) highlight the following reasons for sampling:

- Decreased costs,

- Increase in accuracy of results,
- Collecting data at a faster pace, and
- Accessibility of respondents in the population.

Data will be collected from the sample Humanities faculties in a systematic and directed manner to ensure that all data collected are relevant to the research problem.

For this study, data will be collected by means of a variety of data collection instruments and will include the following:

- *Semi-structured interviews*: Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher will attempt to gain a better understanding of the interaction between the different entities. These interviews would ideally be with the Registrar of each university involved in the study as well as the Faculty Managers at Faculties of the Humanities at the participating universities. Any available related texts from each of the universities included in the sample will also be used for data collection on these universities' administrative structures. In preparation for the interview, the research problem will be analysed to get a clear understanding of the information that must be obtained during the interview. The questions that will be asked during the interview will be tested internally at the UFS prior to conducting the interviews with the participating universities. The interview will be conducted according to an interview guide with questions that will be compared with the research problem. Interviewees will be approached and the purpose of the study explained by providing them with a short problem statement and the type of information that will be required from them.
- *Informal interviews*: Knowledge obtained during the semi-structured interviews was used as a basis for the informal interviews at both the HEFAF and NACADA conferences. Participants for these informal interviews will be selected for their knowledge and grasp of the issue, rather than their representativity of the target population. Although all the interviewees will come from a university background, and extra effort will be made to select members from Humanities faculties, not all of them will necessarily come from the faculties of the Humanities.

- *Focus-group observation*: To perceive first-hand what participants experience in the administrative setting, participant observation in focus groups will be used to enable the researcher to obtain a better general background on the topic and to draw her own insights in the administrative processes of the UFS. These focus groups are involved in the re-engineering of the 12 core academic administrative processes of the UFS.
- *Texts and electronic resources*: Any available related texts from each of these universities will also be used for data collection on these universities' administrative structures.

At the data analysis stage, written or recorded material will be used to analyse the administrative functions of each university. This material will predominantly consist of the annual reports of the universities and data obtained from the Human Resources division of the UFS. Through process and activity analysis, the recent restructuring of academic administrative processes in the Dean's Office in the Faculty of the Humanities will be used as a basis for possible adjustments and improvements in order to identify the optimal administrative structure.

3.3 Ethical considerations

According to Cooper and Schindler (2011), ethics are "norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationships with others". The following ethical considerations apply:

- **Objectivity:**

The researcher aims to avoid bias in experimental design, data analysis and data interpretation of the qualitative data by data recordings of all interviews.

- **Voluntary participation:**

Participation in this research will be on a voluntary basis and measures will be taken to ensure participants are not misled or coerced into participation.

- **Informed consent:**

All participants will be fully informed of the purpose and process of the study, as well as their rights in participating in the research, before proceeding with

the study. Participants will be asked to sign a consent form in which they indicate their understanding of the process and their acceptance thereof.

- **Confidentiality and respect:**

Since issues such as human resources and finances will be discussed, the researcher will ensure that all participants' responses remain confidential and that their autonomy is respected. Participant confidentiality will be protected by restricting access to participant identification and revealing participant information only with written consent.

- **Data integrity:**

A data management system will be implemented to ensure the ethical protection of participants during and after data collection.

3.4 Possible limitations

Since nonprobability sampling will be used, the representativeness of the sample could be questioned and the generalisability could be limited. There could be limited certainty and confidence about the accuracy of the results as opposed to results that would have been obtained through probability sampling.

The research will deal with subjective data and results will be based on the daily events and behaviour of people. This makes the responses of interviewees vulnerable to prejudice towards a preferred system of centralisation or decentralisation.

The classification of different staff components at each university and the terminology used for each of them may influence the natural transferability to other university systems.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the sources where the data will be collected were described in broader detail. More information was provided on the methodology, sampling design, data collection methods, ethical considerations and the possible limitations of the study.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

In an attempt to find answers to the research question, a variety of qualitative research methods was utilised to obtain the required information. These methods included focus-group observations, semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, text and electronic resources as well as process and activity analyses. These findings will be discussed in this chapter.

4.2 Academic administration at the UFS and systems re-engineering

The UFS currently operates a centralised academic administration, with a central administrative division that is responsible for the management of various core functions, and a subsequent decentralised execution of functions by faculties. Due to numerous internal as well as external influences, this system was revisited by order of the Rectorate and under the leadership of the Vice-Rector: Academic, to determine an optimal administrative system. The focus of the revisiting process is standardisation, rationalisation and simplification, and is rolled out in the following four phases:

Phase 1: Contextualisation: All the relevant and applicable academic administrative processes were identified, together with the problems experienced within each.

Phase 2: An 'as-is' analysis was conducted in respect of each academic administrative process to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Phase 3: Optimisation and consultation: Through consultation with all applicable stakeholders each academic administrative process was restructured and optimised.

Phase 4: Cross-functional Integration: The integration of each of the core academic administrative processes into the University of the Free State over the next 18 months.

4.2.1 Phase 1: Contextualisation

During the contextualisation phase, the following 11 core academic administration processes on institutional level were identified. Based on the process owners of each process, they can be clustered as follows:

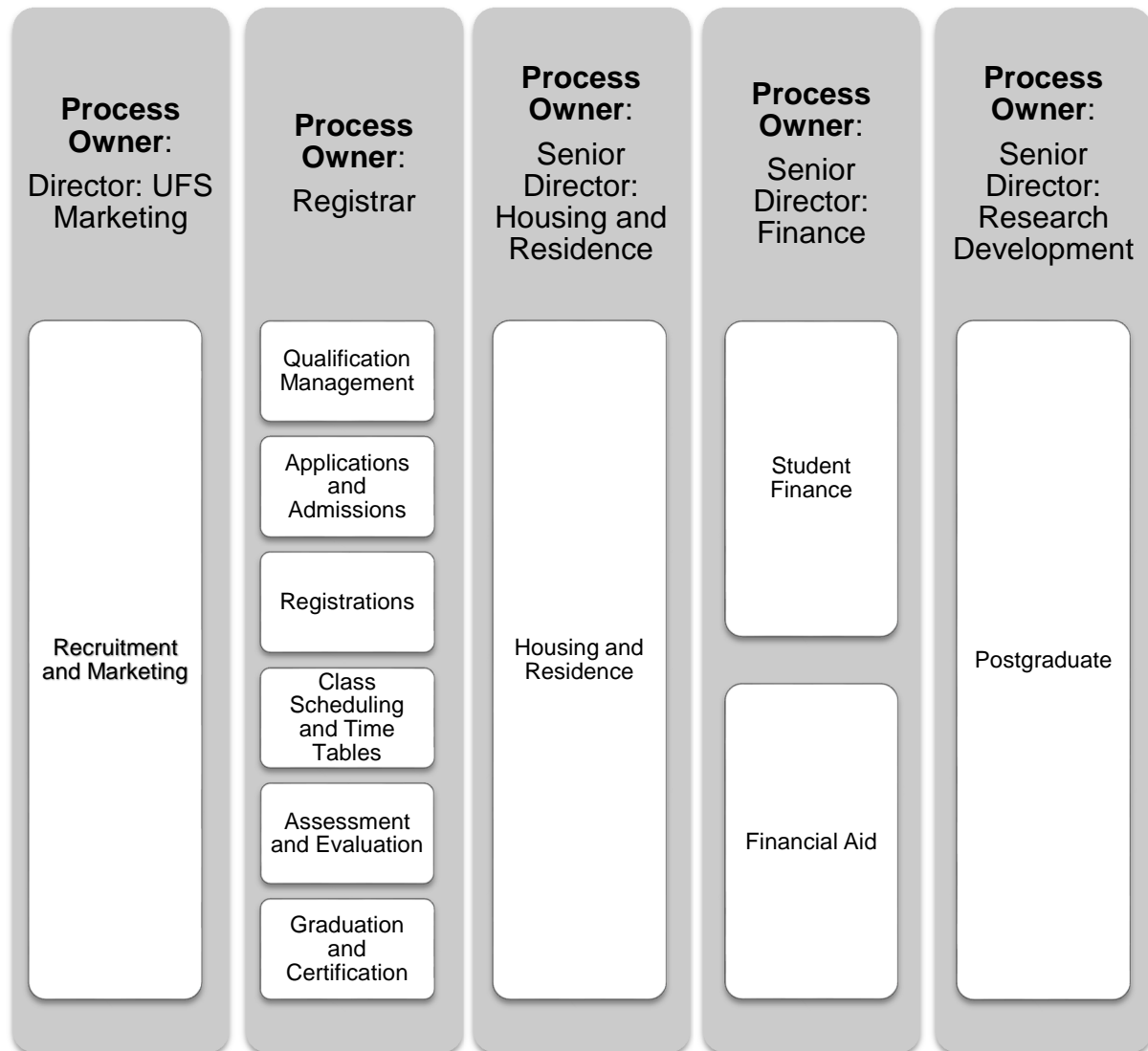


Figure 4.1: Clusters of academic administration processes on institutional level (M Coetsee 2015)

4.2.2 Phases 2 and 3: 'As is'-Analysis and Optimisation

During the 'as-is' analysis phase, each of the 11 core processes was analysed in detail to create a clear understanding as to the flow of the process as it currently happens at the UFS, as well as to identify the different role players, risks and problem areas in the process. These key problems and risks were the focus of the optimisation process that

took place in phase three. For the purpose of this study, only those core processes that link directly with and influence the activities in the faculty will be described. They are:

- *Recruitment and marketing:*
 - The gap between the recruitment and admission of an applicant into the successful registration as a student poses a serious risk to the enrolment targets of the university. A new system will be put in place to target and follow up on those applicants who were admitted, but who did not register successfully.
 - The inability to synchronise the internal publication process of updated, timeous marketing material with the approval and accreditation of qualifications at external governing bodies such as the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA), poses a serious reputational risk to the university. In future, the printing of marketing material will be aligned with the qualification management process to ensure that only approved and accredited qualifications are marketed by the Recruitment and Marketing Office.
 - Currently the Recruitment and Marketing Office has no fully functional instrument to track prospective students through their application process. A new electronic tracking system will be developed to enable the Recruitment and Marketing Office to keep track of prospective students as their applications progress. This will empower the Marketing Office to intervene in time in cases where applicants experience any problems.
- *Qualification management:*
 - Faculty Rule Books are currently compiled in a decentralised system in faculties, with each faculty using its own format and layout. Rule Books are also not 100% aligned with the General Institutional Rules and the approval and accreditation of qualifications with the CHE and SAQA. This poses both a legal and reputational risk to the university. After optimisation, all Faculty Rule Books will be system generated through a centrally managed process at DIRAP.

- At present DIRAP is responsible for the management of current as well as new qualifications and modules, together with the admittance directive of the UFS. Their domain will be expanded to include the maintenance of general information in Faculty Rule Books, management of curricula for online registrations, pre-emptive qualification planning, qualification creation, and Rule Book management.
- *Applications and Admissions:*
 - Currently the most frequent complaint received from applicants is the lack of communication on the reception and progress of their applications and notification of acceptance. As part of optimisation, a comprehensive tracking and communication system will be designed and implemented to communicate the applicant's application and admission status at frequent milestones in the process.
 - Once applicants are admitted, no further tracking and follow up takes place to ensure that the student is indeed going to register. This shortfall, together with the lack of communication to the applicants described above, results in the loss of quality students to other universities. Due to this gap between admission and registration, the proper monitoring of the enrolment plan and the timeous implementation of mitigating action plans and strategies are virtually impossible. In the optimised process, applicants will receive a firm offer on which they will have to indicate their acceptance or rejection of the offer. This data will then be used by a committee to monitor the admission targets and the overall enrolment plan of the university and to implement mitigating action plans in cases where there is a high risk of not reaching the enrolment targets. The principle of over-admitting in a specific academic programme will also be used to mitigate the possibility of students not showing up for registrations.
 - The variety of application forms currently in use at the UFS creates confusion among applicants and leads to the duplication of information. A single application form will be developed to incorporate all types of applications for qualifications on campus. This single-form format will also

be extended to the online application system to ensure that the two platforms are in line with each other.

- *Registrations:*

- Currently there is a disconnect between academic advice given to students with regard to specific modules the student should register for in that year and the actual modules for which the student registers. As part of the optimisation, academic advice will become mandatory for students in their final year of registration for a qualification. Academic advice will be provided through an online platform on PeopleSoft, which will provide both the university and the student with the necessary proof of academic advice.
- During registrations, faculties experience bottlenecks due to the large number of students who seek academic advice in the short registration period of three weeks. Moving to an online academic advice platform will enable faculties to provide students with academic advice even before the end of an academic year for the next academic year. Any special permission can also be attended to at this stage, and the outcome captured on PeopleSoft. Once the student has paid the required registration fee for the year and accepted the academic advice online, it will be transferred into a full registration for the year. This same online academic advice platform will be used for the cancellation and addition of modules to a student's registration.

- *Class Scheduling and Time Tables:*

- The inability to create a class timetable without clashes is a serious concern. This is mainly due to curricula with too many elective choices. Through an intensive re-curriculation process and more structured curricula, this will be limited in future.
- Venue bookings and timetables are currently distributed between various divisions on campus. The Class and Venue Timetable section is responsible for the class and venue timetable as well as the examination timetable. Other ad hoc venue bookings are the responsibility of a different section on campus, while the timetable for invigilators is the responsibility of the examinations division. In future, all timetables, ad hoc venue bookings and

timetables for invigilators will be centralised under the responsibility of the Class and Venue Timetable section.

- *Assessment and Evaluation:*

- The assessment and evaluation of students consist of two sub-processes, namely semester marks and examinations. The inconsistency between departments on the gradebook configuration for semester marks and examination marks creates problems with the calculation of the correct marks. As part of the optimisation of the process, faculties will not be responsible for the configuration of the gradebook in future. This functionality will be managed through DIRAP, in consultation with the Teaching and Learning Manager as the point of contact in each faculty.

- *Academic Certification and Graduation:*

- The responsibility of the awarding of degrees currently resides with the Student Records and Registration division. Each year there are cases of students whose qualifications were not awarded, or not awarded with distinction where necessary. This is a reputational risk to the university and exposes the UFS to lawsuits. In the optimised form of systems re-engineering, this responsibility will be moved to the Graduation and Certification office. The Graduation and Certification office will be responsible for the identification of all possible graduates in the year prior to graduation, as well as the verification of the student's personal details for certificate purposes.

- *Postgraduate:*

- The most prominent problem identified during the 'as-is' analysis phase was the total lack of a standardised process between faculties as far as the administration of postgraduate student records are concerned. For the optimisation of this core process, six sub-processes have been identified. They are recruitment, academic advice, appointment of assessors or arbitrators, research assessment, student research tracking, and title registration and ethical clearance.

- The optimisation of the postgraduate core process will include the following changes: the Postgraduate School will become the one-stop shop for all postgraduate students, and will be able to provide faculties and departments with an up-to-date tracking of all postgraduate students. An online approach will be followed, with the digital flow of information. All appointments of assessors will only take place six months before a student submits his research, and not when the initial title registration takes place. The capturing of final marks will also take place on faculty level and not at the examinations division any more.

4.2.3 Phase 4: Cross functional integration

While some of these 11 core processes can be implemented simultaneously, others have to be implemented sequentially. The optimisation and implementation of the curriculum management process will take place first, with recruitment and marketing as well as applications and admissions following simultaneously after curriculum management. After this, registrations and class scheduling and time tables, together with the postgraduate process will follow. Assessment and evaluation, together with graduation and certification will take place last. It is anticipated that the integration process will take place over a period of 18 to 24 months, starting in January 2016.

4.3 Office of the Dean: Faculty of the Humanities, UFS

The central academic administration of the UFS was described under point 4.2 above, with the 11 core processes involved. As explained, not all 11 core processes link directly with the Faculty. On faculty level, the academic administrative processes are divided between the Faculty Manager and the Teaching and Learning Manager. The clusters on faculty level can be illustrated as follows:

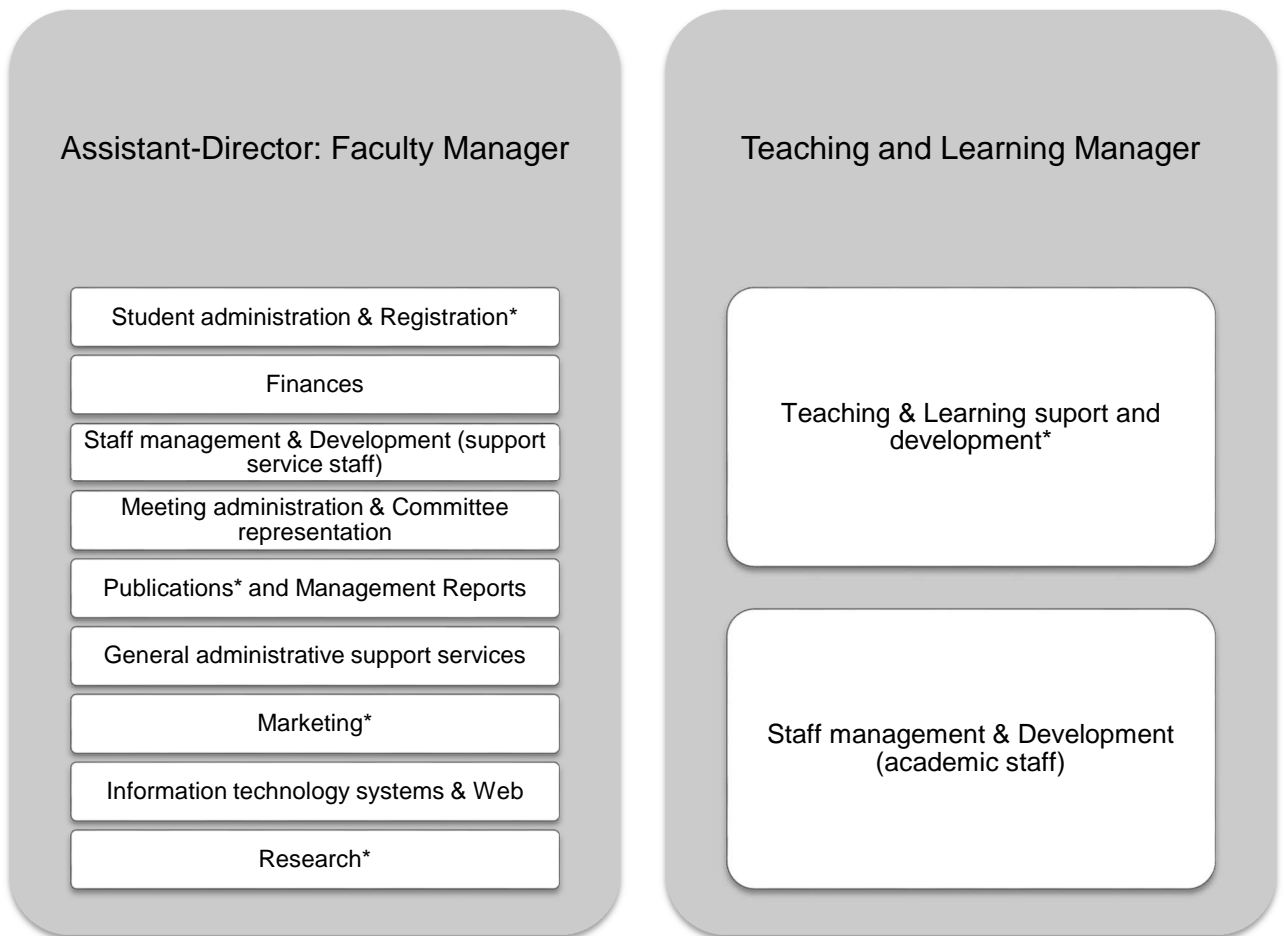


Figure 4.2: Clusters of academic administration on faculty level (*Faculty administrative processes that link with central academic administration of the UFS) (Figure created by M Coetsee 2015)

Since the academic administration on UFS level is not duplicated 100% on faculty level, the Faculty constantly has to optimise its own procedures and processes in such a way to accommodate and support the UFS core processes optimally and to provide a better service to the students.

One of the faculty processes that received intensive attention over the past two years was the student administration and registration process within the Faculty. The aspects that lead to the first and second restructuring of the Faculty registration process are described below.

4.3.1 The 2013 registration process and registration review

After an institutionally wide somewhat unsuccessful registration process for the UFS at the beginning of 2013, the Faculty of the Humanities decided that resource allocation and processes within the Faculty would need to be revisited in order to design a better academic administration support system and to provide a better service to both the students and the academic staff. This gave rise to the first restructuring within the Faculty, which was implemented during the 2014 registrations. In turn, the review of the 2014 registrations gave rise to the second restructuring within the Faculty, which was then implemented during the 2015 registrations. The second restructuring will be discussed under 4.3.2 and 4.3.3

Review of the 2013 registrations

Observations in the Faculty during and after the registrations in 2013, and the triggers for the first restructuring were:

- *Insufficiently trained academic advisors:* In the Faculty, academic programme directors are appointed for a term of three years. These academic programme directors, together with their assistants are usually responsible for providing academic advice to students during registration. At the end of 2012, many of the academic programme directors' terms ended, leading to the Faculty experiencing a sudden increase in newly appointed academic programme directors. These newly appointed academic programme directors did not have the necessary knowledge regarding their respective academic programmes and how these programmes had changed over the years. Their lack of knowledge on the curricula was exacerbated by their equally poor knowledge of general institutional rules, as well as how these rules integrated with the curriculum and the subsequent advice given to students. This situation was further hampered by the appointment of new student assistants by the academic programme directors to assist them with academic advice during the registration process. These assistants faced the same barriers regarding knowledge on curricula and general institutional matters.

- *Frustration with the registration process:* Students generally complained about the lack of proper academic advice and a seemingly disorganised registration process.
- *Limited physical resources and infrastructure:* While the core process was managed centrally, the execution of the registration still had to be done on faculty level. The Faculty experienced a lack of access to one central venue that could provide a comprehensive service to students. The Faculty could only utilise a central venue for two days during each week of the registrations. For the rest of the registration period, advice was given at the programme directors' offices. These offices were not suited to accommodating large numbers of students, causing long queues with no place for students to wait.
- *Lack of human resources:* The Faculty did not have enough administrative staff to assist with the registration of extended curriculum programme students. Students had to register themselves after receiving academic advice and often deviated on their registration from the advice they received. This increased the number of incorrect registrations that had to be corrected afterwards.
- *Service indicators:* Only one person in the Faculty had access on PeopleSoft to release service indicators on student records, which created a bottleneck in the process flow and subsequent feedback to the student. Service indicators were sometimes not released in time for the student to complete his/her registration, resulting in an increase of registrations in retrospect.
- *Process flow of appeals between relevant stakeholders and feedback to students:* The physical distribution of programme directors across the campus also caused a delay, and sometimes even the loss of documents. This had a negative impact on the turnaround time for feedback to students. This constant disorganised process flow also had a negative impact on the release of service indicators on student records.
- *Increased focus on adherence to institutional rules and procedures:* more pressure was put on faculties to integrate academic advice with the general institutional rules and to focus on adherence to these rules.

4.3.2 The 2014 registration process: implementation of the first restructuring

In preparation for and during the 2014 registrations, the following aspects from the 2013 observations were addressed with the implementation of the first restructuring:

- *Limited physical resources, infrastructure and student frustrations:* A central venue was utilised for the total duration of the registration period where academic advice was provided to students. The venue provided ample space for academic advisors as well as for the students.
- *Lack of human resources for registration of extended curriculum programme students:* All extended curriculum programme students' registrations were blocked with a service indicator, preventing those students from registering themselves and subsequently forcing them to visit the academic advisors before registration. Temporary staff was appointed to register all extended curriculum programme students immediately after they had received academic advice. The temporary staff members were situated in the same central venue as the academic advisors.
- *Release of service indicators on student records:* Access to release service indicators on the system was expanded to three other permanent administrative staff members in the Dean's office, alleviating the bottleneck and improving the process flow of requests.
- *Process flow of appeals between relevant stakeholders and feedback to students:* All appeals were handed in at the central venue where academic advice was given to students. The Faculty Manager and the three additional permanent administrative staff members attended to all appeals and prepared the documentation before it was submitted to the Dean and/or Registrar for approval. After approval, these four staff members would do the necessary processing of the appeals and provide feedback to students.

The aspects of poorly trained academic advisors, frustration with the registration process and the increased focus on adherence to institutional rules and procedures were not addressed directly in the planning and execution of the 2014 registrations.

Review of the 2014 registrations

Observations in the Faculty during and after the registrations in 2014 and triggers for the second restructuring were as follows:

- *Decrease in the number of registration mistakes:* The use of temporary staff to register all extended curriculum programme students in the same venue as where they received academic advice decreased the number of incorrect registrations.
- *Insufficiently trained academic advisors and an increase in the number of mistakes during academic advice:* As was the case during the 2013 registration process, there were a few new academic programme directors in some of the larger academic programmes, together with newly appointed student assistants, resulting in problems. This did not alleviate the situation of insufficiently trained academic advisors that was identified during the 2013 registrations. There also appeared to be an increase in the number of mistakes regarding academic advice that was picked up afterwards.
- *Students' satisfaction with the registration process:* The increased access on the system to assist with the processing of appeals increased the turnaround time on the processing of all appeals and contributed to a faster, more successful registration for students. The proximity of the venue in relation to the other central venues for registrations made it easier for students to follow the normal flow of registrations and eased the students' perceptions of a previously disorganised process.
- *Credit overload on students' academic records:* The newly appointed programme directors and student assistants' inability to incorporate and adhere to institutional rules and curriculum requirements in their academic advice resulted in a sharp increase from 69 students in 2013 to 115 students in 2014 who had a credit load exceeding 200 credits for the year (DIRAP).

4.3.3. The 2015 registration process: implementation and review of the second restructuring

From the observations during the 2013 and 2014 registration processes and the partial restructuring during the 2014 registration, it was decided that a permanent restructuring of academic administration was required in the Faculty of the Humanities. The following major changes were introduced:

- Two new permanent administrative officers were appointed in the Dean's Office. Under the leadership and guidance of the Faculty Manager, these two new administrative officers, together with an additional two current staff members formed the new permanent Academic Advisory team in the Faculty. This team would be the central point in the Faculty where students would receive academic advice and where all other academic administrative procedures would be linked to the central institutional administration.
- During peak periods such as registrations, the Teaching and Learning Manager and her team of assistants would constitute part of the registration team to provide additional academic advice and administrative support in the system.
- Academic Programme Directors would no longer be responsible for academic advice. Their focus would rest with programme development and quality assurance of the academic integrity of programmes. Academic Programme Directors would only join the registration team during registrations in January each year for additional support.
- The use of temporary staff was discontinued due to the risk of incorrect registrations.
- The permanent registration team, consisting of the Faculty Manager and her team of administrative officers, together with the Teaching and Learning Manager and her team of assistants, underwent in-depth training on the curricula as well as the general institutional rules and institutional administrative processes. Additional generic academic advice training was provided by the Centre for Teaching and Learning.

- Academic advice templates were introduced to use during academic advice to students. Academic advisors were clustered together, with each cluster responsible for a certain set of qualifications. This assisted the advisors to gain even more in-depth knowledge on their specific group of qualifications and thus provided advice that was more expert.

Review of the 2015 registrations

The Faculty received the following feedback on the 2015 registrations (Centre for Teaching and Learning 2015):

- Based on a questionnaire that was sent out to all registered students in the Faculty, 52% of the respondents replied that they had experienced their registrations as good, with 40,4% describing their registration experience as excellent.
- Comparing their level of academic advice to the advice received in 2014, 42,7% indicated that it had been better, with 20,9% saying that it had been the same, and 30,2% indicating that they had not received academic advice in 2014.
- 52% of students indicated that the academic advisor had also given them career advice, with 46% indicating that they had received no career advice.
- 59% of students indicated that they had not been referred to other on-campus services where needed, while 38% of students had been referred to other relevant on-campus services.

4.4 Registration numbers and human resource allocation

With any higher education institutional resource allocation model, staff numbers, student numbers and ratios are crucial pieces of information that need to be considered. For the purpose of this study, the ratio of registered students to academic administration staff was calculated in an attempt to determine if the current number of staff allocated to the Humanities is sufficient to provide a proper administrative support service to the students. Data used in the calculation of ratios can be defined as follows:

- **Registered students** refer to all the students registered for a particular academic year, including occasional studies as well as both undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Faculty.
- **Academic support staff**, also referred to as academic administration, was split into two categories, namely
 - **Professional academic support staff**, which included all executive administrative, professional management, and professional support staff; and
 - **Non-professional administration**

Service workers and technical support staff as well as academic staff were excluded from this study.

4.4.1 Student enrolments at the UFS: 2004 to 2014

Student enrolments at the University of the Free State from 2004 to 2014 were as follows:

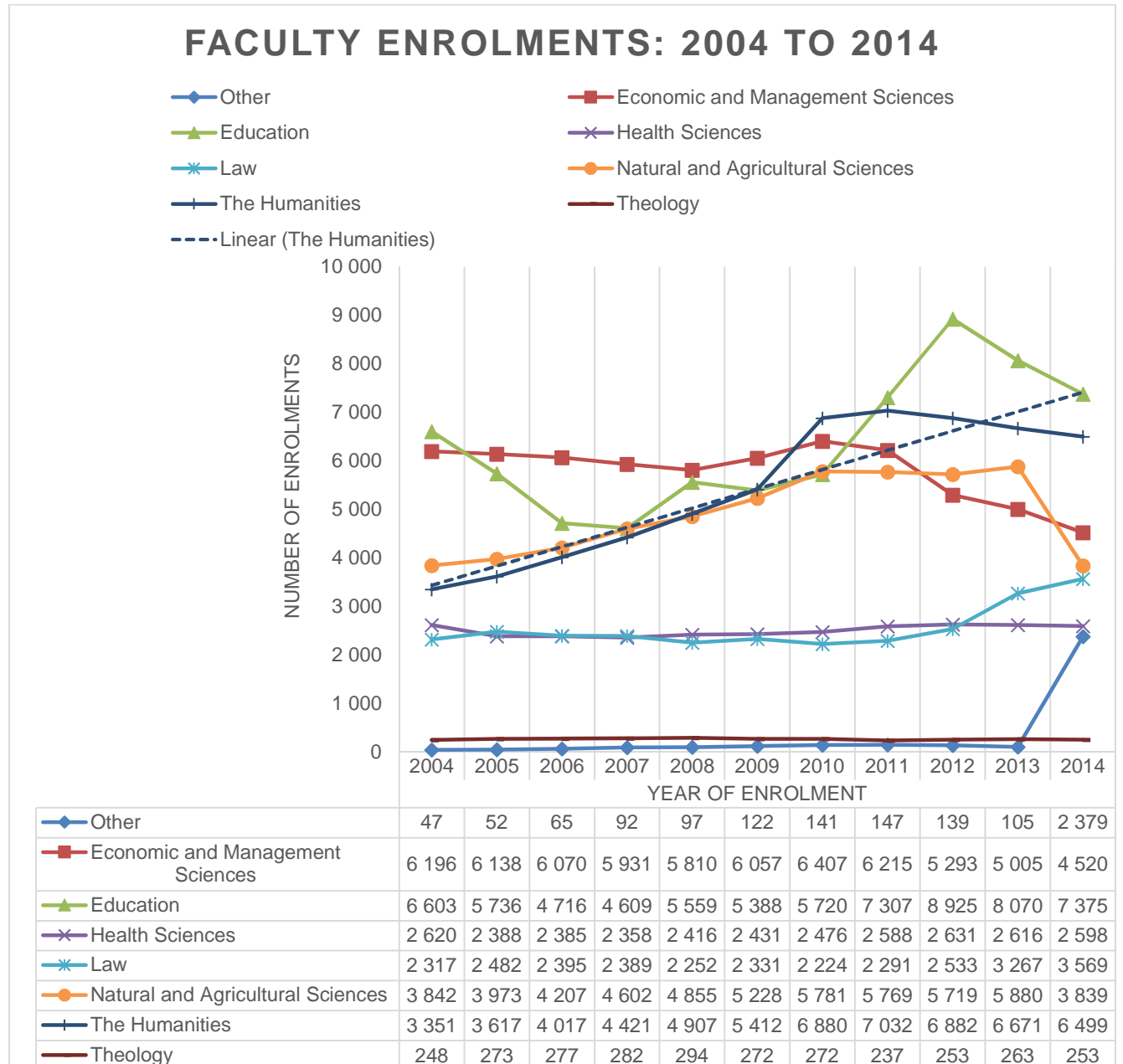


Figure 4.3: UFS Enrolment numbers per Faculty: 2004 to 2014.

From being the fourth-largest faculty in 2004 with 3 351 enrolments, the Faculty of the Humanities had a constant linear growth in student enrolments to become the second-largest faculty in 2014 with 6 499 students, almost doubling its enrolments over a ten-year period.

Apart from the growth in student numbers, the number of academic support staff at the university also increased between 2004 and 2014.

4.4.2 Support staff in faculties at the UFS: 2004 – 2014

The growth of professional academic support staff and the growth of non-professional academic support staff are indicated in Graphs 2 and 3 below:

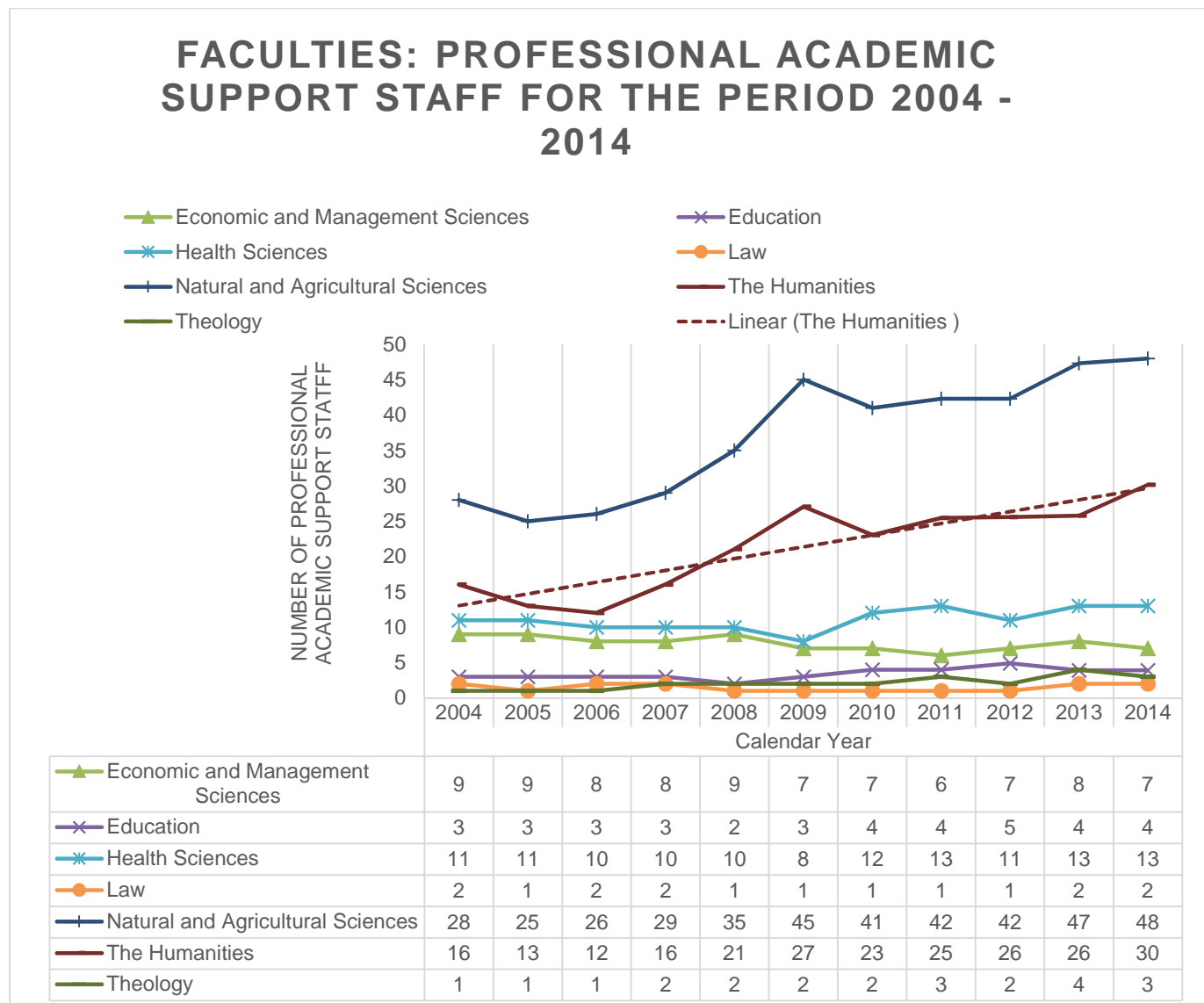


Figure 4.4: Faculties: Professional academic support staff for the period 2004 to 2014.

FACULTIES: NON-PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC SUPPORT STAFF FOR THE PERIOD 2004 - 2014

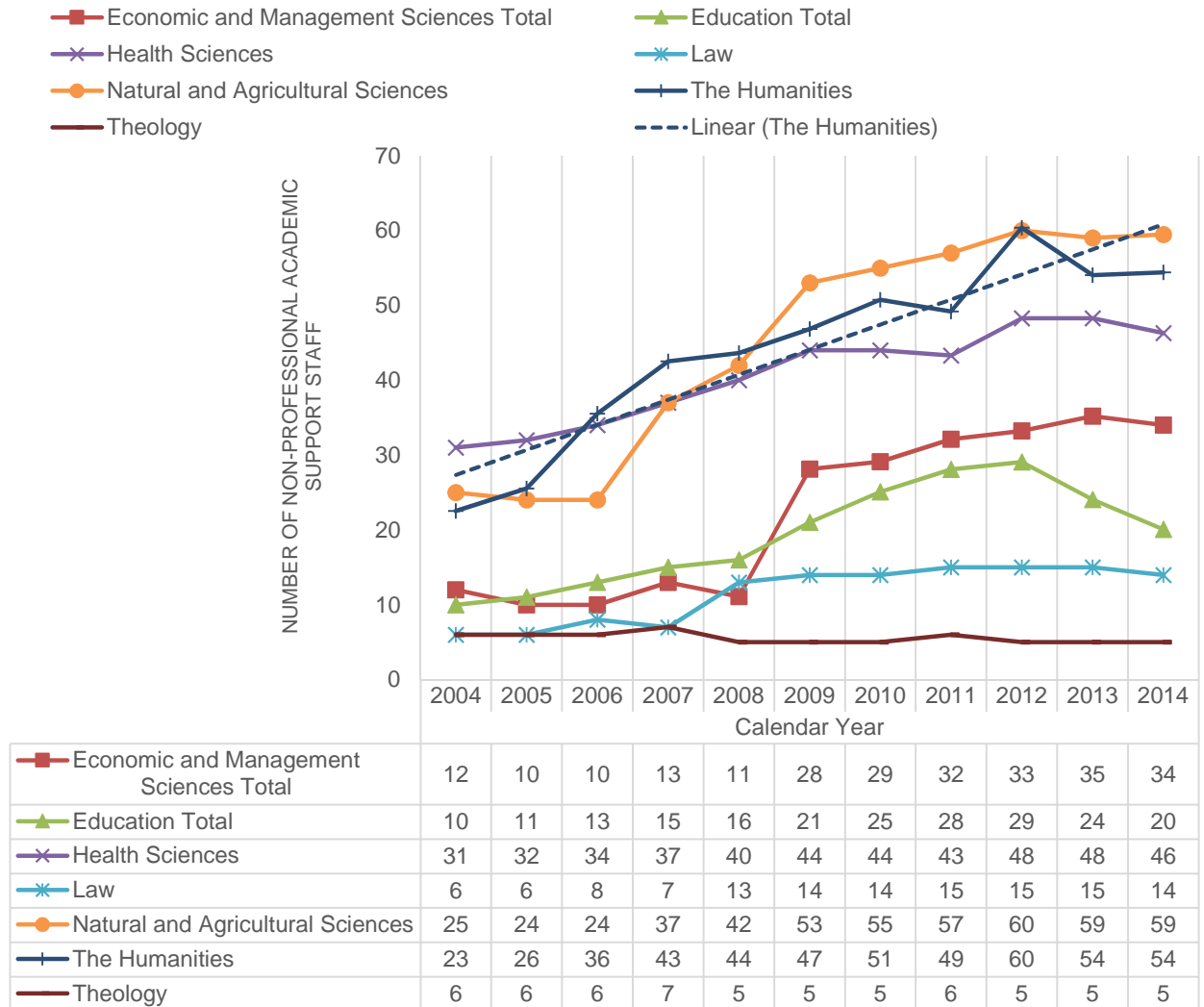


Figure 4.5: Faculties: Non-professional academic support staff for the period 2004 to 2014.

For both the professional as well as the non-professional academic support staff, the Faculty of the Humanities had a constant linear increase in the number of academic support staff over the past ten years. In both cohorts, the Faculty ranked second amongst the faculties.

4.4.3 Integrated ratio of registered students to academic support staff at the UFS: 2004 – 2014

The following graph illustrates the integrated ratio of registered students to academic support staff for all the faculties at the UFS from 2004 to 2014.

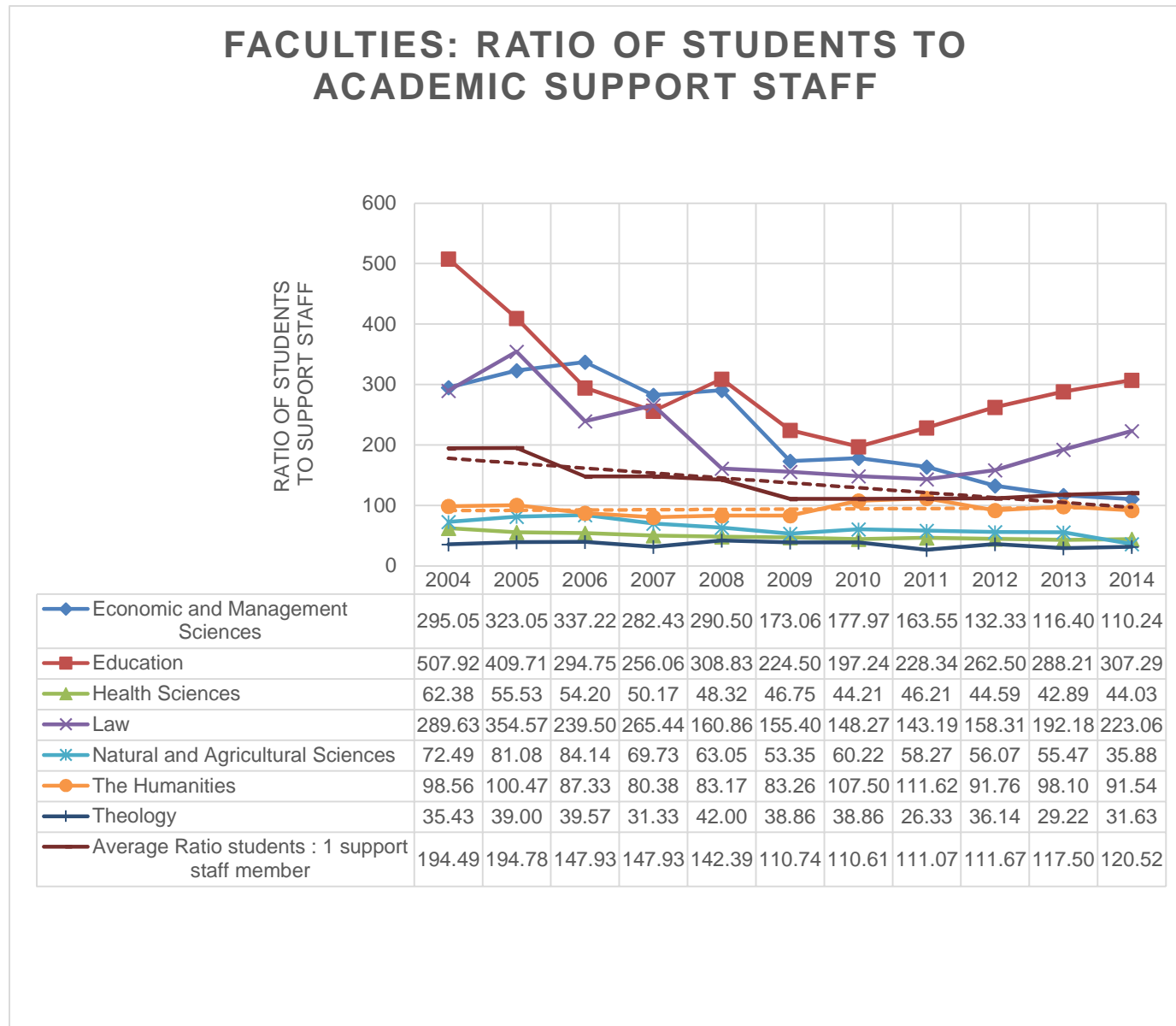


Figure 4.6: Ratio of students to academic support staff, UFS

The data in Graph 4 above indicate that the average overall ratio of students to academic support staff has declined over the past ten years, from 194,49 in 2004 to 120,52 in 2014. In the Faculty of the Humanities the ratio fluctuated over the past ten

years, with no significant linear growth, but remaining below the average of the university.

4.5 Findings from semi-structured interviews, informal interviews and electronic data sources

From decentralised to centralised:

In 2001, the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS), with a student count of over 30 000 students, underwent a restructuring process where the nine faculties became five faculties. At the same time, they moved away from a decentralised administrative system to a central administration. This new centralised administration came into being largely to the fact that there were too much duplication of services and replication of effort and efficiency. From this process, they established a centralised student enrolment centre to handle all student applications. Although the student enrolment centre handles the applications and admissions, the decisions about who is admitted still lies with the relevant faculty. At the same time, the HR and Finance functions were decentralised to each faculty where the Business Manager would attend to the HR functions and the Finance Manager would deal with the finances. However, a central HR and Finance office remain as well. Each faculty has a Registrar with his/her staff that would attend to the academic administration of the specific faculty. This Faculty Registrar ultimately reports to the Dean of the Faculty, but also has a dotted line reporting to the university Registrar. The university also has a central examinations and graduations office, which liaises closely with the faculties. Student fees and financial aid and scholarships are also operated from a central office.

As one of the smaller universities in South Africa, Rhodes University, with a student count of 7 485 students in 2013 (Rhodes University 2014), operates mainly on a centralised system, but did experience a lot of resistance from the bigger faculties. This forced them into a somewhat more hybrid model between a centralised and faculty-based administration. Recruitment, admissions, registration, student records, examinations, academic warnings and graduations are all administered centrally. Although the admissions process is administered centrally, the decisions on who is admitted still rests with the Deans in the faculties. In some faculties, the Dean's office

deals with curriculum issues. In the Humanities, the Student Bureau is regarded as the “one-stop shop” which also deals with curriculum issues.

Other universities in South Africa that operate predominantly based on centralised management with a decentralised operation of functions in faculties include the North-West University (NWU), University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Through informal discussions with staff at higher education institutions abroad, such as the University of Melbourne, Virginia Tech and Western Oregon University, it was clear that these large institutions also operated based on centralised management with the decentralised operation of functions.

The role of consultation in decision-making processes:

One of the commonalities between the larger universities such as NWU, UJ, UKZN and WITS is the problem regarding communication between central offices and the faculties. Although there is a constant effort from the central office to consult with and convey information to the faculties, the same cannot be said from the faculties’ side towards the central administration. This causes different offices to operate in silos, neglecting other offices or divisions that should also be involved in a decision. This causes the breakdown of communication processes, resulting in each office adopting their own processes and practices. Although the finer nuances of each faculty are acknowledged, a lack of consultation has a negative impact on the consistency across the institution.

At a small university such as Rhodes, consultation plays a significant role in the decision-making process at the institution. Regular meetings take place with the deans through the Dean’s Forum with the whole committee system structured in such a manner that any changes are discussed through the relevant channels, all the way up to Senate. As both delivering and managing of administrative services takes place in the Registrar’s office, constant communication between the Registrar’s office and faculties always takes place. Curriculum approval is delivered by the faculty representatives during registrations, but is still managed by the Registrar’s office in order to provide a central point of service delivery for students.

Factors that influence structures to provide service delivery:

Factors such as increasingly diverse student groups, decreased public funding, new developments in information technology, and a greater demand from government for monitoring and data collection all influence service delivery at WITS. Although they do not have a direct impact on the structures that are put in place, they definitely play a role in making sure that the university appoints skilled staff and trains them to manage service and be able to address students from different backgrounds. It is not necessarily the structures that are in place, but rather the people and their skills sets that are employed to provide the required service delivery to students. The university definitely experiences a huge mismatch between resource distributions on the one hand and work requirements on the other hand. This has forced the university to go through the process of a staff audit, resulting in some staff being redeployed to other units/divisions where there was a lack of available staff. Obviously, this was not done without resistance.

At a small university such as Rhodes, these same factors lead to an increased workload with regard to the diversity of functions, but the institution's small size counteracts that. The small number of students actually provides for an environment where quality can be stepped up, which is reflected in the university's good pass rate and throughput rate. Bigger is not always better. Economically it does not make sense to have a decentralised system. Being in a smaller environment it enables the institution to look at things holistically, for example admissions that are completely finished by the time registrations start, since they have no walk-ins for admissions during registrations. This enables the admissions team also to assist with the registrations. Similarly, the records section's personnel assist the exams division with designing the exam timetable and running of the exams. It enables the university to deploy staff in different sections throughout the normal student cycle. All staff is therefore knowledgeable about every aspect of the student administrative cycle. They make use of the 80/20 principle, where all staff is able to deal with 80% of the normal enquiries, and the 20% that are regarded as complicated are then referred to the specialist of that specific area. With a rather flat senior administration management structure, considerable demands are placed on senior management and

administrators, where they must address strategy as well as to a much greater extent operational matters (Rhodes University 2014).

Models used for the allocation of funds:

At WITS, full-time equivalent (FTE) subsidy forms the basis of the distribution model for funds. Other factors such as laboratories or other resources required to operate the faculty also play a role. Third-stream income forms a big part of some faculties' income. A big reality at all universities is the aspect of cross-subsidisation that are always part of the picture, while there are some departments that are considered 'cash-cows'. The ultimate decision on funds distribution lies with the Senate. Each faculty has its own model on how to distribute funds. It is the responsibility of the Finance Manager and the Dean, together with Heads of Schools, to decide on the model to be used in the Faculty.

The North-West University makes use of a centralised allocation of funds, with a decentralised management thereof. Their transparent and equitable allocation is aligned with the institutional plan. Monthly engagements between management and faculties provide a platform where variances in the budgets can be identified and managed in a more pro-active manner (North-West University 2014).

The allocation of funds at Rhodes is based on FTE and research and the Institutional Planning Committee will evaluate the requests for new programmes based on criteria such as the viability of the programme and the desirability of such a programme. The financial sustainability of a programme is also investigated. Since cross-subsidisation is used on institutional level and not necessarily on departmental level within a faculty, a programme that might not be 100% financially viable might still be approved if it is regarded as adding value to the institution. Due to the size of the university (small student numbers), budgets are dealt with at a central level in the Registrar's office. However, the process is still inclusive, incorporating faculties into the decision-making process of the Budgetary Committee. Salaries are dealt with on a central level through HR, while each faculty still receives its own small operational budget to manage, as it seems fit. Once funds are allocated to a specific department/unit, the head of the department will take responsibility for deciding on how those funds will be used. The institutional Budget Executive Committee convenes once a month to monitor the entire

budget of the University and expenditure of funds in all entities and to investigate cases of under/over-expenditure. Although cross-subsidisation between faculties is a common phenomenon, with Natural Sciences being hugely productive with regard to research in contrast to other faculties, there are a huge acceptance and understanding of that between faculties. Researchers receive no incentives for any of the research outputs they generate. All research income goes directly into the central budget. Still, Rhodes is the third top research university in the country. Income generated from short learning programmes is the only income that goes to the department involved.

Challenges experienced:

At WITS, the biggest challenges lie in the lack of clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities. Where does my job stop and where does your job start? Where does my responsibility and accountability start and stop? In some departments, this works well and in some departments this does not work well at all. This comes down to the fact that people do not have a clear understanding as to what their roles and responsibilities are – especially in areas where the lines got blurred and knowledge did not get transferred from one to the other. Communication remains a challenge and is always a crucial consideration.

Internally, Rhodes experiences consistency as the biggest challenge. New staff needs to be trained on how the particular systems work. However, this does not happen without great resistance, since new appointees constantly attempt to keep their autonomy. On the external front, this institution's biggest challenge lies with funding from NSFAS and the declining subsidy.

4.6 Conclusion

Throughout the discussions with the different universities, the duplication of services and replication of efforts seemed to be a source of great concern. In an effort to prevent this, universities adopted administrative structures where there are centralised management with decentralised operation of functions. Although the duplication of services could be minimised through this, communication and consultation remained a problem in larger universities, resulting in Faculties operating in silos. Factors such as diverse student groups, decreased funding, IT improvements, legislation on data collection and reporting, will always have a strong influence on administrative

structures, and the staff employed in these structures. Staff development remains a focus point within these structures to provide a professional and effective service to all students.

In this chapter, the findings and information obtained through focus group observations, semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, text and electronic resources as well as process and activity analysis were documented. In Chapter 5, these findings will be analysed and recommendations will be made.

Chapter 5

Summary and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

With the significant increase in student enrolments in the Faculty of the Humanities, the administrative structures of the Faculty were placed under great pressure to adapt in order to provide an effective and efficient service to both the students and the academic staff.

In an attempt to determine if a centralised or decentralised administrative system would be best for the Faculty, the researcher attempted to identify and investigate the underlying principles of an effective administrative system. The optimal level of staff allocation in academic administration and the effectiveness of the current service delivery in the Faculty of the Humanities were also examined.

In this chapter, the findings will be evaluated and recommendations will be made in order to propose an administrative framework for the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State.

5.2 The forces of change and the overriding concern

Just like any other organisation, the University of the Free State is influenced by external factors, forcing the university, and thus the Faculty of the Humanities, to adapt in order to provide their students with the best possible service.

One such external factor is *demographic change*. Locally, the university's main source of students comes from the poorer rural areas of the Free State and the Northern Cape. On the international front, there has also been an increased focus on recruiting international students from neighbouring African countries, as well as exchange programmes with universities from abroad. These demographic changes will urge the university to adapt its way of thinking about issues such as residential arrangements, the scope of the curriculum, their assistance to non-native students, and the recruitment of staff from other cultures and national origins. On national level, all tertiary institutions have received instructions from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to re-register their qualifications. This provided the

Faculty of the Humanities with the perfect opportunity to re-curriculate all its qualifications and to adapt the curricula to serve the needs of the new student population. The appointment of academic staff from other cultures and origins has also received attention. The Faculty currently has seven senior staff members in various departments who come from abroad or who have extensive international exposure and stature in their field of study due to their research.

A second external force of change that had an influence the Faculty is the *rapid advance of digital technology*. Over the past decade, the use of technology has changed the academic administration of the university and that of the faculty significantly. With the implementation of PeopleSoft in 2004 as the electronic platform for student administration, the administrative functions started to shift. Faculties became more involved in the academic administration and had to adjust their own systems to incorporate and capitalise on the new technology. In the Faculty of the Humanities, the officers involved in academic advising make use of PeopleSoft and some of its various applications and functionalities as the primary electronic platform. Upon registering at the UFS for the first time, each student automatically receives his or her own **ufs4life** email address. This email address is used by the Faculty and the academic advisors as the primary communication channel with students.

The third external force of change is the *political atmosphere*, and relates to the changing role of Government in the support, financing and control of the country's universities. In both 2014 and 2015, the UFS could not reach its reported enrolment targets. This has a direct impact on the subsidy funding that the UFS, and ultimately the Faculty of the Humanities, will receive from the government. These shortfalls are usually bridged through the increase in class fees each year, but with the current *#feesmustfall* campaign across the entire tertiary education sector, together with the President's announcement of a 0% increase in fees for 2016, universities' ability to think 'out of the box' and to come with viable alternatives will be tested to the limits. Furthermore, the issues of transformation and access to higher education are constantly under the spotlight as well, with the language policy of the UFS and other various universities in South Africa as the current focus point.

The trend of *professionalisation* of university administration has also influenced the administrative structures in universities. Non-academic administrators have taken on

a new and different role in universities and their positions have become more *professional* by nature, rather than just clerical. This changed the administrative arena from an administrative, rule-orientated culture to a service-orientated one.

With the current socio-political environment, the most troublesome task for anyone associated with higher education management is how to pay the bills. Within the Faculty, the challenge of adequate human resources is complicated further with the constant underlying tension of costs incurred for administrative staff versus academic staff.

5.3 The status quo of service delivery in the Faculty of the Humanities

In general, the Faculty of the Humanities received positive feedback on a questionnaire sent to students after the registrations in 2015, with 52% of respondents indicating that they had experienced the registration as 'good' and 40,4% indicating that they had experienced it as 'excellent'. However, there are still a few points of concern that need attention. As far as the level of academic advice in 2015 can be compared with advice received in 2014, almost 21% indicated that the advice had been the same, with 46% of the respondents indicating that they had received no career advice and 59% of the respondents indicating that they had not been referred to other on-campus services where needed. This is somewhat disheartening, since an added effort was made to train academic advisors. Crucial opportunities to identify problems and the referral of students to the appropriate support services to assist in addressing these problems were lost.

Over the past ten years, student enrolments in the Faculty of the Humanities have shown a linear growth from 3 351 students in 2004 to 6 499 students in 2014 (refer to Graph 1). Over the same period, professional academic support staff in the Faculty has grown from 16 in 2004 to 30 in 2014 (refer to Graph 2). As indicated in Graph 4, the data show that the average overall ratio of students to academic support staff declined over the past ten years from 194:1 in 2004 to 120:1 in 2014. In the Faculty of the Humanities, the ratio remained below the average of the university. This emphasises the fact that the tension between funding spent on academic support staff versus academic staff are most likely not unfound.

The Faculty should therefore focus on ways to utilise the available resources more efficiently, rather than the procurement of more administrative resources.

5.4 Principles and concepts of design underlying an effective administrative system

During the study, the following principles and concepts of design underlying an effective administrative system were identified:

- *Authority and responsibility:* In a decentralised perspective, the responsibility for planning, management and the raising and allocation of resources is distributed amongst the various entities and departments. On the other side of the spectrum, in a centralised system, the responsibility for planning, management and financial control is retained at the top level of management. Authority is also linked to accountability. If a person will be held accountable for the consequences of a decision, that person should also have the authority to make the decision. Not only the teaching and learning must be assessed in the Faculty, but also the services produced by the administrative support unit in the Faculty. Through the re-engineering process currently underway at the UFS, more attention was given to clarifying the roles and responsibilities between different units on campus involved in the core administrative processes.
- *Autonomy:* With a decentralised system, autonomy is also increased. With increased autonomy, units can be held accountable for their performance by setting specific goals and objectives and reporting on these. However, allowing separate units too much autonomy could lead to inequity in access to opportunities and resources. Setting clear goals and guidelines for procedures and policies at a central level will mitigate the risk of too much autonomy.
- *Structures for service delivery:* Although the focus of the university is that of service delivery towards students, the most serious problem is seen as that related to structural constraints. The structures for the provision of administrative services in universities can work either for or against quality service delivery. The mismatch between the structures that are put in place and the people and their skills sets employed to provide the required service delivery to students also poses a serious threat.

- *Efficiency:* As described in the ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report (2003), unit efficiency can only be increased if the balance between decentralisation and centralisation is clearly explained. Recently, one of the larger universities in South Africa moved away from a decentralised administrative system to a central administration, largely because there were too much duplication of services and replication of effort and efficiency in the decentralised system.
- *Responsiveness:* Policies and procedures should be developed and implemented in such a way that the administrative system in the Faculty is responsive to the needs of the students as well as the institution. Responsiveness to external demands such as financial sustainability is also crucial. A diversified funding base will allow the Faculty to be more responsive towards external financial demands.
- *Collaboration:* The inter-connectedness of core administrative functions requires a clear understanding of the importance of collaboration. The Faculty cannot operate in isolation in matters such as recruitment, applications, admissions, registration, class scheduling, postgraduate studies and qualification management. In any of these aspects, close collaboration with other units on campus is required to provide a full service to the student.
- *Flexibility:* In contrast to centralisation, a decentralised system allows for more flexibility, giving units more space to make their own decisions and respond to emerging needs in a way suitable to their specific structure.
- *Recognition, response and resolution:* In a service-delivery environment, it is important to have qualified professional staff members who are not only able to recognise the needs and difficulties of the student, but will also have the skills set to respond to the problem and resolve it in a satisfactory manner.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings in the previous chapters, the following recommendations are made:

- Although the Faculty has a dedicated team of administrators to attend to the needs of students, the focus of this division falls on undergraduate students in general.

The Faculty should consider the restructuring of its current administration in order to establish a dedicated administrative office to attend to postgraduate and international students.

- Digital technology has advanced significantly and the Faculty has not yet capitalised this in full as far as the efficiency of the academic administration is concerned. The introduction of BlackBoard as a virtual classroom holds several possibilities that the academic administration can use with great success in their academic advisory process, and should be explored further.
- Even though PeopleSoft is currently the main electronic platform used, there are functionalities that could make the academic advisory process more efficient. These functionalities include the electronic academic advising of students and the early warning system to identify 'at-risk' students, as well as follow-up on students with low marks in their first test. This early detection of 'at-risk' students will provide a crucial link for collaboration between the offices of the Faculty Manager and the Teaching and Learning Manager within the Faculty. 'At-risk' students can be identified relatively early in the semester and strategies can be developed to assist these students in the classroom and through proper academic advice.
- Currently the academic advisors identify all students who do not comply with various institutional rules by hand. This practice is not efficient and allows for too many opportunities where human errors could occur. These students should be identified electronically and blocked automatically by using the functionalities on PeopleSoft. These platforms should be investigated and, where possible, incorporated into the administrative structures of the Faculty.
- Continuous assessment and the professional development of current academic support staff are necessary. The skills set of staff should complement the administrative structures in order to optimise the efficiency of the structures and service delivery to students. Academic advisors in the Office of the Dean must be exposed to more training opportunities to strengthen their skills in academic advising.

From the findings obtained through the semi-structured interviews, informal interviews and electronic data sources, the following future research can be recommended:

- The risk of duplication of services and replication of effort and efficiency in systems of centralised management with a decentralised operation of functions.
- Communication between the central office and those in the faculties, as well as the impact of consultation in the communication process on the consistency across an institution.
- In the light of the professionalisation of administrative staff over the past decade, the mismatch between resource distributions on the one hand and work requirements on the other hand will require universities to do a staff audit. This will assist universities to place staff in units, based on their competencies. In doing this, optimal service delivery to students will be obtained.
- Defining clear roles and responsibilities in systems of centralised management with a decentralised operation of functions.

5.6 Conclusions

In conclusion, it is advised that the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS adopt a hybrid administrative framework, capitalising on the strengths of both the centralised and the decentralised models. On a central level, clear guidelines through policies and procedures will provide a solid framework as reference for the Faculty to build its processes around. In turn, this will provide the Faculty with the necessary room for flexibility on a decentralised platform to make its own decisions and to respond more promptly to any external changes that might have an impact on the Faculty. The professionalisation of administrative support staff will also strengthen the Faculty's technical knowledge base with staff close to the firing line being able to respond quickly to any sudden changes. This will also relieve the burden on top management. Through a hybrid administrative system, collaboration between the Faculty and the central administration will be emphasised and the isolation of any of the two units from the

institutional goals will be prevented. Both the Faculty and the University will be able to meet the challenges that higher education are facing.

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Field Study Abstract

At present, universities find themselves in an environment of increasing competition for scarce resources in the public sector at large. Being in a competitive environment, universities might lean towards a centralised management control system (on the one extreme) to improve coordination, monitor quality and reduce costs, but still allowing academic decision-making to take place at departmental level (decentralised on the other extreme). Due to the increasing tension between these polarities, universities tend to opt for a more hybrid option by adapting the best of both practices in order to optimise the allocation of scarce resources. Furthermore, external audits and quality control mechanisms increase the accountability on the universities' side, forcing them to implement transparent resource allocation procedures. The problem facing Faculties of the Humanities is the ability to identify the best form of an administrative framework in order to optimise resource allocation and improve service delivery in academic administration. The primary objective of this study is to propose an administrative framework for Faculties of the Humanities in order to improve service delivery in academic administration.

Various qualitative research methods were used to gather data. These included the investigation of possible administrative structures available to the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS by comparing it to the administrative structures of Humanities faculties at other universities. The recent restructuring of academic support structures in the office of the Dean in the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS will also be analysed in an attempt to identify further optimisation of service delivery to students.

Data collection took place through semi-structured interviews; informal interviews; focus-group observation and texts and electronic resources. Through process and activity analysis, the recent restructuring of academic administrative processes in the Dean's Office in the Faculty of the Humanities was used as a basis for possible adjustments and improvements in order to identify the optimal administrative structure.

Demographic change; rapid advance of digital technology; political atmosphere, and the professionalisation of university administration are all factors forcing the university and the Faculty, to adapt in order to provide their students with the best possible

service. Within the Faculty, the challenge of adequate human resources is complicated further with the constant underlying tension of costs incurred for administrative staff versus academic staff.

In conclusion, it is advised that the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS adopt a hybrid administrative framework, capitalising on the strengths of both the centralised and the decentralised models. On a central level, clear guidelines through policies and procedures will provide a solid framework as reference for the Faculty to build its processes around. In turn, this will provide the Faculty with the necessary room for flexibility on a decentralised platform to make its own decisions and to respond more promptly to any external changes that might have an impact on the Faculty. Through a hybrid administrative system, collaboration between the Faculty and the central administration will be emphasised and the isolation of any of the two units from the institutional goals will be prevented.

Key terms

Resources; centralized management; decentralised management; hybrid; administrative framework; academic administration; qualitative research methods; semi-structured interviews; focus-group observation; university administration.