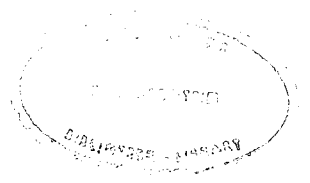


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**THE FUNCTIONING OF THE ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAMME  
AT SELECTED CAMPUSES OF VISTA UNIVERSITY, 1992 - 1996**

by

Linda Elizabeth Forson

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

at the

University of the Orange Free State.

Study leader : Professor Eli Bitzer

Co-study leaders : Professors Leo Barnard and Rassie Pretorius.

July 1998

## SUMMARY.

In summary, the main problem addressed in this study is that the Vista University AS programme has not been properly analysed and evaluated before.

The sub-problems listed below relate to the effective functioning of the programme as it has been implemented between 1992 and 1996. They refer to the difficulties ASP co-ordinators have identified as problems in running the AS programme with its component programmes. The sub - problems to be addressed in this study are those identified by participants in the Vista Department of Student Development: -

- Problem 1: Conceptualising what Academic Development is or reaching a common working definition;
- Problem 2: The direction Academic Development should follow at Vista University;
- Problem 3: What coherence the academic skills programme has in terms of effectively evaluating it. How does the diversity or uniformity of the programme affect its functioning?;
- Problem 4: How the structural, managerial, reporting and communication lines function with regards to ASP co-ordinators, campus management, academic staff , central university management and students;
- Problem 5: What the needs of students and AD staff are in the teaching and learning process and how these impinge upon the functioning of the AS programme.

### Sub - problem 1

refers to a shared mission for Academic Development at Vista University against which the programme can be evaluated. Problem 2 refers to a vision and problems 3 to 4 to the effectivity of the structure, coherent plan and guidelines of the programme against which its functioning can be analysed. Problem 5 relates to the flexibility within the programme to accommodate change and improvement of the programme.

From the literature the following points are important for consideration in planning more effective support:

- Organisational structure and finance are closely linked.
- The type of support offered is a strategy to enhance the quality of education offered, which in turn is linked to the vision of the university.
- Higher education will still be faced with an educational crisis in the near future. Massification and under-preparedness of students will challenge universities. The problem of first year drop outs or students failing second year at Vista University, when they are not supported any longer (Delvare, 1996:49 ) will continue to be a problem until the educational problems of the country has been addressed. The process could take a number of years still. In the meantime students cannot be left unsupported due to financial constraints.
- The diversity of existing programmes which exist in theory and practise is a further challenge for Vista University. Choice of programmes will depend on the aims of the university. Choices will have to be made in order to improve the functioning of these programmes. Evaluation and research is essential and must be planned when choice of programmes are made.
- Programmes that have integrated skills and language into content have been more successful than general programmes.

From the case studies the following points emerged:

- The structure and organisation of ASP needs reviewing;
- Status and effectiveness of co-ordinators needs attention;
- The aim and strategies of the programme needs revision;
- Vista University should invest more funds into academic development and programmes such as SI and Writing Centres which enhance student performance.

## OPSOMMING

Die vernaamste probleem wat in hierdie studie oor die Akademiese Vaardighedsprogram (AVP) ondersoek is en nog nie tevore geanaliseer of geëvalueer is nie, word kortliks uitgelig.

Die meegaande (onderliggende) probleme wat hier onder opgenoem word, hang saam met die effektiewe funksionering van die program soos dit sedert 1992 tot 1996 geïmplimenteer is. Dit hou verband met dié op die lys wat die koördineerders van die AVP tydens die verloop van die program en die komponentprogramme ge-identifiseer het.

Probleem 1 : Konseptualisering van wat akademiese ontwikkeling behels en 'n bepaalde uitvoerbare definisie daarvan;

Probleem 2 : Die riglyne vir 'n Akademiese Ontwikkelingsprogram binne die Universiteit Vista;

Probleem 3: Die riglyne vir effektiewe evaluering van die program en hoe dit deur die uniformiteit of diversiteit beïnvloed word;

Probleem 4 : Of die strukturele, kommunikasie en bestuurskanale, (asook aspekte soos terugvoer en verslaglewering) effektief of minder effektief aangewend word met betrekking tot AVP-koördineerders, kampusbestuur, akademië, sentrale universiteitsbestuur en studente;

Probleem 5 : Die behoeftes of vereistes van studente en akademiese ontwikkelingspersoneel ten opsigte van die leerproses, en die invloed van sodanige persepsies op die funksionering van die Akademiese Vaardighedsprogram.

Die literatuur, wat by hierdie studie geraadpleeg is, dui die volgende aspekte aan wat in ag geneem moet word by die beplanning van meer effektiewe ondersteuningsprogramme:

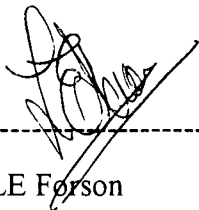
- \* Die organisatoriese strukture en finansies skakel nou met mekaar.
  
- \* Die bepaalde steun wat aangebied is, vorm n strategie ter verwesenliking van die goeie kwaliteit van onderrig wat aangebied word. Hierdie aspek moet op sy beurt ten nouste verbonde wees

aan die visie van die universiteit.

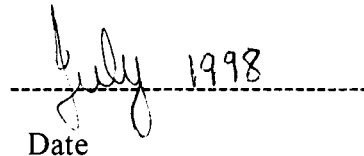
- \* Hoër onderwys staan steeds krisissig in die gesig soos massifikasie en onvoorbereidheid van studente vir die eise van 'n universitêre loopbaan. Alvorens daar nie 'n daadwerklike oplossing gekry word vir Suid-Afrika se opvoedkundige probleme nie sal die groot getal eerstejaarstudente wat kursusse staak, sowel as die hoë driuipsyfer onder tweede jaarstudente (wanneer onvoldoende steun verleen word) problematies bly (Delvare, 1996:49). Hierdie proses kan egter nog 'n hele paar jaar duur en intussen kan studente nie sonder steun aan hul lot oorgelaat word nie. Dit geld veral waar universiteite, sowel as studente, onder finansiële druk verkeer.
  
- \* Die diversiteit van huidige programme wat beide in teorie en praktyk bestaan is 'n verdere uitdaging vir die Universiteit Vista. Die keuse van programme sal by die universiteit se doelstellings (soos aangedui in die missie van die universiteit) afhang. Die regte keuses sal gemaak moet word om die funksionering van programme te verbeter. Daarom is program seleksie en deeglike beplanning, tesame met evaluasie en navorsing, van die allergrootste belang.
  
- \* As sodanig is programme wat taal- en ander vaardighede met die inhoud integreer meer suksesvol as dié wat slegs die algemene vaardighede behandel. Uit die studie van voorbeelde (programme wat as voorbeelde kan dien) het die volgende vorendag gekom en kan die volgende afleidings gemaak word:
  
- \* die struktuur en organisasie (bestuur) van die AVP moet hersien word;
  
- \* die status en effektiewe aanwending en optrede van koördineerders moet aandag geniet;
  
- \* die doel en strategieë van die program moet heroorweeg word;
  
- \* die Universiteit Vista sal fondse moet genereer en beskikbaar stel vir akademiese ontwikkelingsprogramme soos skryflaboratoriums en skryfsentrums vir studente- instrukteurs om die sukses van die studente te verseker.

## STATEMENT.

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted by me for the Master of Education degree at the University of the Orange Free State is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university/faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of the dissertation in favour of the University of the Orange Free State.



-----  
LE Forson



-----  
Date

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the following people for their support. My study leader Professor:- Eli Bitzer for the instructive mentoring from the onset of this study and co study leaders, Professors:- R Pretorius and L Barnard for constructive criticism. The library staff of Vista University, Welkom campus and especially Lizette Storm. Mrs Marie Strydom for assistance with computer graphic skills. Colleagues on the other Vista campuses for their co-operation and input, especially Fay Patel and Pauline Frans. My colleagues, Andrew Jadrijevich, for emotional support and counselling. Tsepo Tlali, and Ratau Khunyeli for encouragement. David Forson for encouragement and support to embark on the study. Martin van Deventer for his patience with his sister's general computer skills. My children Clare, Elizabeth and Helen for patience, love and hope in encouraging the speedy resolution of the study! I hope that the effort that went into this study contributes in a small way to facilitating God's will for His people.

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE STUDY.

AAD	-	Academic Assistance Programme.
AD	-	Academic Development.
AS	-	Academic Skills.
ASP	-	Academic Skills Programme or Academic Support Programme.
AZASCO	-	Azanian Students' Convention.
DET	-	Department of Education and Training.
EPU	-	Education Policy Unit.
HBI	-	Historically Black Institution.
HDI	-	Historically Disadvantaged Institution.
HWI	-	Historically White Institution.
IIED	-	International Institute for Educational Development.
IDT	-	Independent Development Trust.
MEDUNSA	-	Medical University of South Africa.
NCHE	-	National Commission on Higher Education.
NGO	-	Non-governmental organization.
PASO	-	Pan Africanist Students' Organisation.
SA	-	Student Assistant.
SAAAD	-	South African Association of Academic Development.
SAARDHE	-	South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education.
SI	-	Supplemental Instruction programme.

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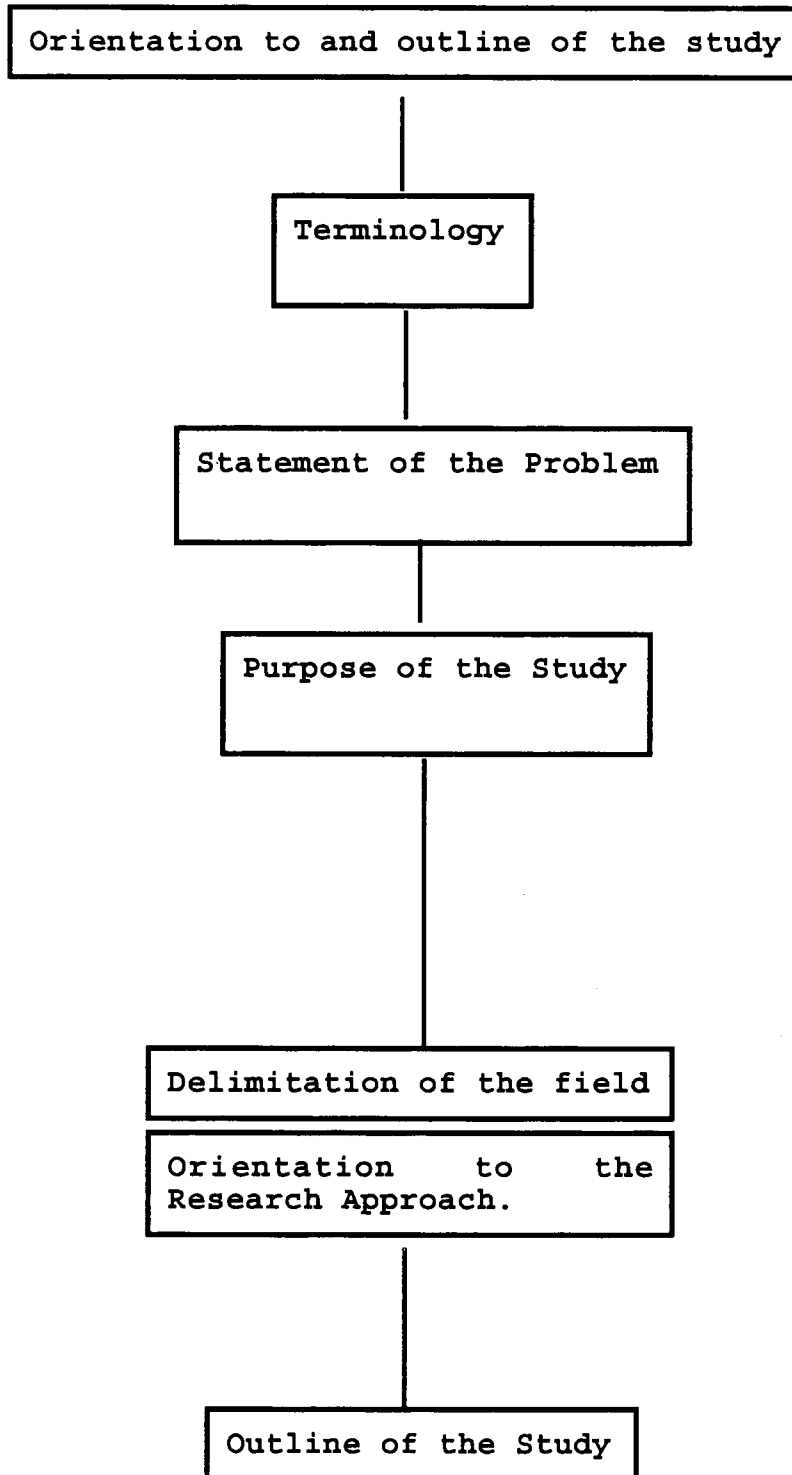
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# CHAPTER 1. ORIENTATION.

Schematic representation of chapter 1.



## 1.1 Orientation to the study

The Academic Skills Programme (ASP) was implemented for the first time on the Sebokeng Campus of Vista University in 1992 as an initiative by the Department of Student Development. At that time the Department of Student Development consisted of Counsellors whose sole function was personal, career and academic counselling for students. The department expanded, to include a second division comprising of the Academic Skills Programme, which became known as ASP or the AS programme. This marked a meaningful change in the perception at Vista University in supporting students with the learning process. The historical context of the university dictated the size and functioning of the programme. The developments within higher education, particularly in the emerging field of academic development (AD), soon placed considerable strain on ASP as conceived at Vista University. To understand the implementation and development of the programme, the broader university scenario must be understood.

Vista University, the second largest university in South Africa, has been engaged in the challenges of Higher Education over the past four years in a way that, on the one hand, suggests innovation (Annual Report of Academic Skills Programme, 1996: i). On the other hand it suggests an *ad hoc* implementation of programmes and management styles that have not been logical or in tune with trends within the greater South Africa (SAAAD Needs and Assessment and Audit Project, 1997: 5). Programmes, such as Academic Skills Programmes, have met with varied success and became the subject of severe criticism (Nolte, et al: 1997: 167). Innovative programmes and attempts at improving the teaching and learning model of the university, have on the one hand been hamstrung by the structure and the vast needs, as manifested in crisis situations of the university community, and on the other aided by the transformation process. The transformation process has focussed on the democratic election of university leaders and implementation of affirmative action firstly, and the teaching and learning process secondly. A new management team was put in place in 1996. The results are to be seen in the changes that have taken place since then. It must be taken into consideration, however, that the force which propelled transformation in the first place continued to assist in change throughout the process. Such a force is made up of both academic and professional staff and students.

Teaching and learning models were being revised during the writing of this dissertation (Van Ryneveld, 1997). The process of revision and change is not a quick one and is beyond the scope of this research. This study will critically investigate the functioning of the Academic Skills Programme. Against this background the Academic Skills Programme will be contextualised, both within South Africa as well within the broader university community. It will then be evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in supporting quality Higher Education as decreed in the Bill on Higher Education. In the preamble, issues of redress, excellence and optimal opportunities for learning amongst others, are considered desirable (Higher Education Bill, 1997:1 ).

Vista University has been engaged in distance education through the Distance Education Campus (VUDEC), in Pretoria, and in contact tuition at seven campuses situated in three provinces of South Africa. The campuses are located in Gauteng with East Rand, Soweto, Sebokeng (Daveyton), and Mamelodi being the areas where the campuses are situated. In the Free State, campuses are in Bloemfontein and Welkom. In the Eastern Cape the campus is in Port Elizabeth. The focus of this study is on selected campuses of Vista University, dealing with contact tuition.

These campuses function as semi-autonomous units, with Directors and Registrars managing and directing the teaching and learning processes on each campus. Campuses differ regarding the range of faculties and departments, represented by a single head of a department per subject, based at one of the campuses. Subheads function on the remaining six campuses. Academic management is thus fragmented in its distribution for courses and faculties. In an attempt to overcome this fragmented academic management, the Vista Guided Self Study Method was devised (Jenkins, 1997). It played a crucial role in attempting to make all teaching content uniform. In itself the system was seen to be fraught with problems, which at times overrode the positive effects originally planned (Jenkins, 1996).

Generally the shift in enrolment between 1994 and 1996 (see Vista statistics 1992 to 1996), has been away from a distance model, to increased contact tuition. This change has challenged the manual- and self- guided system in terms of sheer numbers of students using it. The shift has also posed challenges in terms of the issues of redress and educational transformation which had become prominent in the post-apartheid restructuring of Higher Education. The manuals have been seen to be controversial. On the one hand, it is seen as cutting costs for students. On the other, it is seen to be a poor replacement for original texts, thus encouraging rote learning rather than deep

learning. Challenges to the traditional Vista tuition model included the restructuring of curricula to meet the needs of the majority of the student population. Jenkins (1997) points to the advantages of a four-year curriculum at Vista, while at the same time retaining quality teaching and learning in the nineties. The possibilities of four-year curricula as reflected in the Green Paper on Higher Education, is quoted by Grobbelaar to “ meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes” (Grobbelaar, 1997:10).

## **1.2. Terminology.**

The following working definitions will be used in this study:

**Academic skills:** These are skills needed by students, in order to succeed academically at university level, as identified by universities. These skills include reading, writing and comprehension of a higher order (Agar & Knopfmacher, 1995:124), mathematical processing (Nyamapfene & Letseka, 1995:165), time management and intrinsic motivational skills (Seabi, 1996:360). Study skills like note taking and memory techniques, is another essential component of academic skills (Van Ede, 1991:157).

**Academic development:** This is an emerging field of educational development which encompasses activities such as staff development, student support, access and admissions support, curriculum design and development, and research development. (Scott, 1996: 35-36). Academic Development aims at empowering both students and staff so as to make them perform at their maximum potential (Imenda, 1995:178)

**Academic skills programme:** A programme designed either separately from or integrated into the mainstream curriculum, which focus on preparing and equipping students with the necessary skills to succeed /master particular courses or subjects. A combination of programmes addressing a variety of academic skills can be managed under the auspices of ASP. Such programmes may include Student Assistant (SA) programmes (Frans & Forson, 1996:37), tutorial programmes (Agar, 1992:96; Bulman, 1996:5) or bridging programmes.

**Tutorials:** An active learning method in which small groups of students meet to verbalise their

understanding of contents and generate new meaning through interaction with their peers (Hunt, 1995:37). **Tutor programmes** are integrated courses in which ASP or AD practitioners approached by departments, assist students at all years of study to engage in smaller groups with the contents and necessary skills to master the content. Staff can either be attached to faculties or ASP/AD units. The University of Stellenbosch implemented a Work-study programme in 1996 (Botha et.al, 1994:372) which engages senior students as tutors and assists them financially with their own studies. At different institutions tutors refer to staff, employed contractually, or students. Tutors mediate between lecturers and students.

**Supplemental instruction:** An academic assistance programme aimed at increasing student performance and retention. Its features are that it is peer driven, has voluntary attendance, is cost effective and focusses on high risk courses rather than high risk students (Clark & Brophy, 1995: 220). Unlike tutorials these sessions are not always time tabled and can occur even at residences in the evening (SI Training session, Clark, 1997)

**Bridging programmes :** These are programmes outside the scope of the university curricula but designed to compliment them once a student is successful and admitted to the university. These programmes are aimed at school leavers and can occur prior to the start of a university year or during school holidays. They are aimed at assisting students to improve skills during an intensive period of “apprenticeship” to student academic life.

**Foundation courses:** These often started as bridging programmes but become aligned with the academic programme for enrolled students. These students have to attend and fulfill the requirements of credit bearing courses in order to gain admittance to second or subsequent years of study. They are semester or whole year courses aimed at assisting under-prepared, disadvantaged students to compete at first year level (Patel (c), 1997:7).

**Augmented courses :** Intensive programmes offered over the first two years of undergraduate study (Patel (c), 1997:7).

### 1.3 Statement of the problem

Vista University has seven contact campuses catering for students predominantly from historical Department of Education and Training (DET)<sup>1</sup> schools. These campuses are diverse firstly because they are situated in different geographic regions. These are:

1. Eastern Cape (1 campus),
2. Free State (2 campuses),
3. Gauteng (4 campuses).

These campuses also differ in that the students of the Gauteng campuses are drawn from urban areas, whereas more students from the Free State and Eastern Cape areas come from rural backgrounds (Sociology Department, 1992 :4-5).

This diversity corresponds with the ethno-political division of the country into areas of ethnic groupings (Pavlich and Orkin 1993:1-4). The Mamelodi, Soweto, East Rand and Sebokeng campuses were confronted with even greater diversity of language, cultural and educational paradigm differences, because of their geographical location within urban areas, (Bernitz 1996:75). The urban areas of South Africa attract people with different mother tongue languages. In South Africa with its provision for eleven official languages, language has been an area of debate, especially in relation to language of instruction. Vista university uses English as medium of instruction. To students with English as a second or third language, the medium of instruction complicates learning. At the same time English medium of instruction is a common and unifying factor amongst the seven campuses. The focus of Vista's Department of Student Development, established in 1992, had been to provide support for students and specifically in the areas of writing skills, vocabulary and study skills (Vista Annual Report 1993: 6). This focus on skills students lacked, was in accord with the student deficit model for support, held by other institutions at the

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<sup>1</sup>Prior to 1994, the different population groups in South Africa resorted under separate systems i.e Different departments of education catered for different population groups, defined as Whites, Indians, Coloureds and Blacks. Blacks, Coloureds and Indians were administered by the DET, which was commonly accepted to be poorly funded and inferior in quality in the provision of education in contrast to the Department for Education which catered for Whites.

time of the programme's inception. The deficit model used in providing support programmes has been challenged by certain historically white institutions (HWI)<sup>2</sup> as well as a few historically black institutions (HBI).

In summary, the main problem to be addressed in this study is that the Vista University AS programme has not been properly analysed and evaluated before.

The sub-problems listed below relate to the effective functioning of the programme as it has been implemented between 1992 and 1996. They refer to the difficulties ASP co-ordinators have identified as problems in running the AS programme with its component programmes. The sub - problems to be addressed in this study are those identified by participants in the Vista Department of Student Development ( Forson, et al. Minutes of consensus building workshop, July 1996:1-2): -

Problem 1: Conceptualising what Academic Development is or reaching a common working definition;

Problem 2: The direction Academic Development should follow at Vista University;

Problem 3: What coherence the academic skills programme has in terms of effectively evaluating it. How does the diversity or uniformity of the programme affect its functioning?;

Problem 4: How the structural, managerial, reporting and communication lines function with regards to ASP co-ordinators, campus management, academic staff , central university management and students;

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<sup>2</sup>Terminology such as HBI and HWI are used only within the context of the socio political and historical background of the study. Vista university is understood to be an HBI, as a result of the majority of its student composition being black. It was seen to be run by a management structure with a predominantly white composition, which was seen to manage the university from a HWI perspective until 1996. Divisive terminology is not intended as immutable stereotyping, but rather as clarification within the context of literature referred to, within the historical time.

Problem 5: What the needs of students and AD staff are in the teaching and learning process and how these impinge upon the functioning of the AS programme.

Sub - problem 1

refers to a shared mission for Academic Development at Vista University against which the programme can be evaluated. Problem 2 refers to a vision and problems 3 to 4 to the effectivity of the structure, coherent plan and guidelines of the programme against which its functioning can be analysed. Problem 5 relates to the flexibility within the programme to accommodate change and improvement of the programme.

There has been a growing need amongst ASP co-ordinators and specifically the researcher, to evaluate the AS programme. Evaluation is essential in order to improve the functioning and delivery of such a programme. Issues such as the most effective and appropriate forms of delivery of programmes, financial sustainability, access of under prepared students, massification as termed by the National Committee on Higher Education or, NCHE (see Department of National Education a), 1996), and staff development programmes to address diversity and appropriate teaching, were identified by Kotecha (1995:5) and remain relevant. The investigation into the functioning of the AS programme, is done in terms of what it has and has not contributed to learning at the Vista University and the Welkom Campus in particular.

#### **1.4 The purpose of the study.**

Within the focus of changes at Vista University, this study aims to investigate and critically analyse the functioning of the AS programme for the period 1992 to 1996 at selected campuses of Vista University. It also aims at suggesting possible alternatives and means to improve the effectiveness of the current AS programme, should it prove necessary.

This study seeks to achieve the following research objectives in particular :

- 1.4.1. To contextualize the Vista University community within its historic and present campus system;
- 1.4.2. To contextualize the Academic Skills Programme within Vista University as well



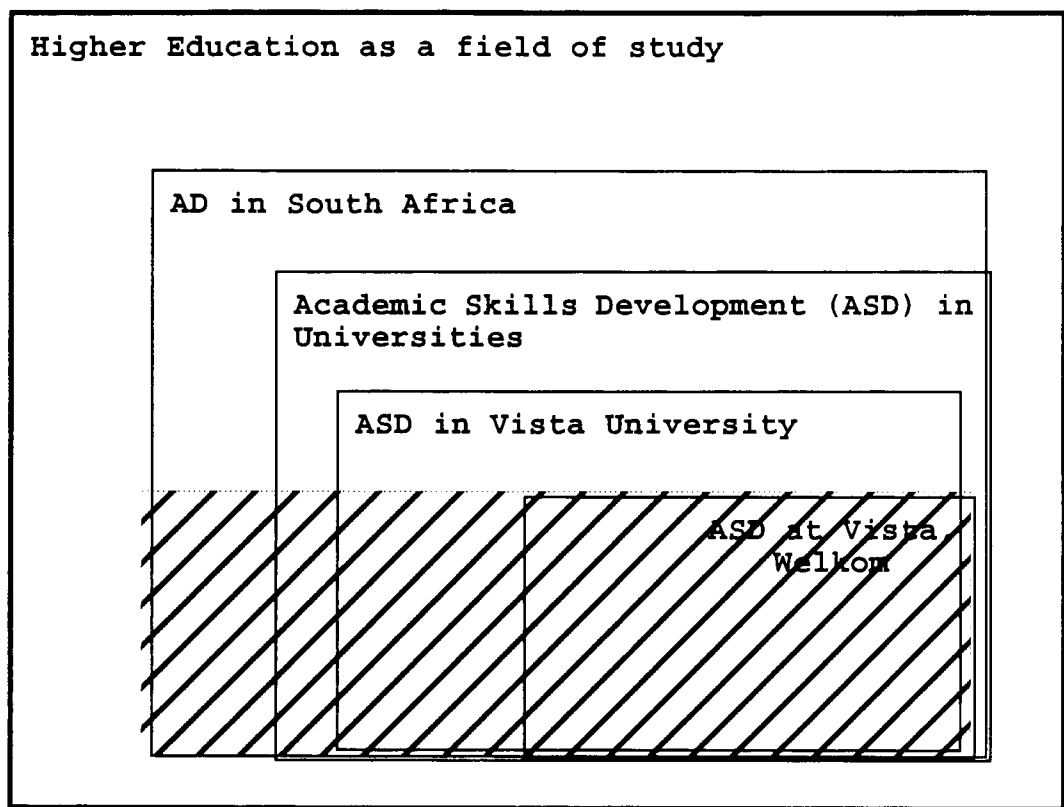
- as within the broader context of Academic Development in South Africa;
- 1.4.3. To investigate how the AS programme has functioned on selected campuses of Vista University, focussing on similarities and differences among campuses;
  - 1.4.4. To critically evaluate the success of the AS programme in terms of student and staff feedback as well as success rates of students;
  - 1.4.5. To recommend, if necessary, possible changes for improvement of AS programmes within the transformation process at Vista University.

The focus of this study is to evaluate the programme, firstly within its context as it was in 1992, and then analysing its feasibility as it stands within the context of the rapidly changing university within the wider South African academic development debate. The prevalent trends that informed the decision to adopt the ASP instead of other available options will be discussed in as far as they are relevant to the focus of the study, which is to answer the question whether the AS programme is adequate to fulfill the needs of staff and students of Vista University of the nineties and projected needs of the year 2000 and beyond.

## **1.5 Delimitation of the field.**

The diagram below (figure 1) provides an indication of the position of this study within Higher Education as a field of study. The areas of academic development and academic development in South Africa, as well as academic skills development in Universities and Vista University, in particular, provides a broader framework within which the study is based. The study seeks to investigate the functioning of the AS programme on selected campuses, of Vista University, and in particular on the Welkom campus critically. The demarcated area indicates the field of AD nationally and its influence on Vista University, Welkom campus, specifically.

**Figure 1. The AS programme of Vista University within Higher Education as a field of study.**



The researcher is employed by Vista University, Welkom Campus, situated in the Free State, central South Africa, which is the youngest campus.

## **1.6 The Methodology used in this study.**

### **1.6.1. Research approach.**

The research approach is qualitative with the main research methodology being the contextual case study.

A case study of academic support at Vista University with comparisons between campuses is constructed in accordance with the approach to a case study by Burgess (1989:116). The study informs the qualitative nature of research employed in this study.

The use of the case study is particularly relevant when in its design, the following definition of the case study is accepted:

"An empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." (Yin, 1994:13).

Following the definition above, the blurring of distinctions between the phenomenon (functioning of the AS programme) and the context (the specific conditions of the campuses) allows for clarification of the situation of the broader programme of Vista University. Simply this would mean within the Vista University context there may be the expectation that conditions on all seven campuses are similar and that the AS programme would then function similarly. In this study the prevailing conditions and needs of diverse geographical campuses will be compared in relation to any differences that may or may not exist in the functioning of the AS programme on those campuses. The Welkom campus case will be discussed in relation to the overarching guidelines of the AS programme for all campuses.

The technical characteristics in the design of the study forms the second part of the above definition:

" The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result it relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion. As another result it benefits from prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis." (Yin,1994:13).

Qualitative analysis <sup>3</sup> and interpretation of interviews, documents and questionnaires will be made in as far as findings are validated through triangulation and cross - checking, once interviews are likewise interpreted. The collection of data from multiple methods is aimed at increasing the reliability of observations and improve the quality of conclusions drawn (Mouton & Marais, 1993:91). The case study can then provide thought-through experiences, similar to those

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<sup>3</sup> Not "qualitative research" as indicated by Van Maanen, Dabbs, & Faulkner, 1982.

documented by Stenhouse et al. (1982:29), which can be analysed and applied to a present situation or future situations.

The nature of the researcher's involvement must be spelt out at this stage as her objectivity could be questioned. In the gathering and interpretation of data, validity is indeed always a concern. In this case, the researcher is an ASP Coordinator on the Welkom Campus. This could be seen as an advantage, since it allows for insight and working experience with the programme in its diversified structure. The study, therefore serves the purpose as tool of evaluating the programme and focussing on the needs of the Vista Welkom university community, in the short and long term..

This research falls within the qualitative type of research described by Worthen & Sanders, because its purpose as applied research is described as "producing knowledge relevant to providing a solution..to a general problem" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:19). The knowledge about the functioning of the programme at one of Vista university's constituent campuses can provide possible solutions to the problems experienced with the programme on the other campuses. The focus remains firmly, however, with finding solutions for the programmes' functioning, on the Welkom campus.

### **1.6.2. Data gathering techniques.**

To build the case of the AS programme at Vista University, the following research techniques are utilised: Interviews, questionnaires and primary and secondary sources. The study employs primary documents such as minutes of meetings, proposals and policy formulation for the Department of Student Development. Documents, papers given at conferences, articles and books dealing with Academic Development and support programmes were consulted. Sources such as questionnaires to AD staff and students, interviews held with identified staff (both management and co-ordinators) and students on the campuses were analysed and discussed. Selected campuses were visited, interviews were held and relevant statistics related to the implementation of the AS programme were consulted. In this process various techniques were used to gather information.

Techniques used were the following:

- The study of available literature. The field of academic development is relatively new in South Africa and literature consisted mainly of papers delivered at conferences or articles written for journals. Overseas publications both journals or papers, and books, were consulted for a broader perspective.
- Questionnaires sent to ASP co-ordinators, student assistants, heads of departments and directors of Student Development . These questionnaires focussed on perceptions of target groups on the role, function and successes of the ASP programme. The centrality of the programme in ensuring success of students at the university was investigated. The perceptions analysed alongside data of pass rates at the specific Vista campuses and for Vista as a whole. The questions were designed as open - ended questions and only three were asked. This was done to allow respondents the opportunity to freedom in framing answers (Frey & Oishi, 1995:28).
- The interviews focussed more specifically on the ASP Co-ordinators and their assessment of the programmes. Interviews with lecturers who have worked in collaboration with ASP Co-ordinators on specific sub programmes within the broad ASP programme was held to ascertain the broader Vista Perspective on the reasons for success or failure of the programme, in meeting the needs experienced by staff in the teaching and learning model of the university.

## **1.7 The outline of the study.**

This study is pursued under the following headings:

Chapter 1 aims to orientate the reader.

Chapter 2 seeks to contextualise the AS programme as functioning within Vista University, and in the broader South African Higher Education context. More specifically, it contextualises the programme at the Welkom Campus of Vista University.

Chapter 3 focuses on comparing the seven campuses and the implementation of ASP on each..

Chapter 4 attempts to critically evaluate the success of the ASP programme for Vista University, specifically at the Welkom Campus. Here the programmes strengths and weaknesses in terms of its aims, will be dealt with.

Chapter 5 seeks to make recommendations, for restructuring, if necessary, student support programmes based on both the literature and the empirical data for the Welkom campus.

## CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALISATION OF ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAMMES

Schematic outline of the study.

### Contextualisation of the Academic Skills Programme.

Vista University within South Africa	Academic Development as a field of work
The historical perspective of Vista University within Higher	The Academic Support Programme historically in relation to the emerging field of Academic Development.
The Welkom Campus in the historical context of Vista University and Vistas support for students.	Towards a definition of Academic Development
University strategies for supporting students	Models of Academic Support Programmes in South Africa

**Brief summary of the chapter.**

RESEARCH PROBLEM:	The Vista University AS programme has not been properly analysed and evaluated before.
RESEARCH GOAL/AIM:	To investigate and critically analyse the AS programme of Vista University. (1992 - 1996).
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* To contextualize the Vista university community within its historic and present campus system;</li> <li>* To contextualize the AS programme within the Vista University as well as broader South African AD context;</li> <li>* To investigate how the AS programme has functioned on selected campuses focussing on similarities and differences;</li> <li>* To critically evaluate the success of the AS programme in terms of student and staff feedback as well as success rates of students;</li> <li>* To recommend possible changes for improvement of AS programmes within the transformation process at Vista University.</li> </ul>
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: Research approach: Methodology: Techniques:	Qualitative and Descriptive. Contextual Case study. Primary sources :       - Minutes - Proposal documents - Policy documents Secondary sources :   - Books - Articles - Reports Questionnaires to :   - ASP Co-ordinators - Student assistants - Heads of Departments - Directors of Student Development Interviews :           - Lecturers - AD practitioners.



## **2.1. Introduction.**

In this chapter the AS programme at Vista University, Welkom Campus, is contextualised in the greater Vista University environment. In turn student support in the form of ASP at Vista University is described against the background of such support in tertiary education in South Africa. The Academic Skills Programme is contextualised within the broader field of Higher Education (HE). ASP is described in relation to Academic Development. The types of ASP models within South Africa is described before the one chosen by Vista University in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 4 the Welkom Campus Case study, is analysed.

## **2.2. Vista University within the broader South African context.**

Higher Education in South African remained separated along racial lines in accordance with the Apartheid policies of South Africa until 1994, when elections inclusive of all people and parties took place. At this stage the exclusion of universities act of 1959 was repealed. This study spans a period of what is considered in South Africa to be political freedom of two years (1994-1996), preceded by inequality (1992-1993) in South Africa. The political history and its effects on educational policies, influenced Vista University and the implementation of the Academic Skills programmes. The reality of Apartheid, until 1994, affected the geographical location as well as the educational background from which its student body came.

### **2.2.1. Vista University from a historical perspective .**

Vista University was established in 1982 to accommodate the needs and requirements of the urban Black youth of the time (Education Policy Unit, 1995:1). The Interim Research Report of the Education Policy Unit at the University of the Western Cape interpreted the establishment of Vista University as a response to the "...changing historical conditions in South Africa which challenged the policy of grand apartheid...." and "...signalled the acceptance of the government of the permanent presence of Blacks in the urban areas of South Africa...." (Education Policy Unit, 1995:2) . Within the Apartheid philosophy, Vista provided an alternative university for the

"local<sup>4</sup> matriculants" (Vista, 1993:8) and provided an alternative to the traditionally White universities (English or Afrikaans). Smith (Vaderland, 13 January 1982) quotes Dr Ferdie Hartzenberg, (present leader of a Conservative Afrikaner political organisation) as suggesting the idea of a tertiary institution for Black students "... on their doorstep".

The first three permanent campuses, Soweto, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth, were functional in 1992. These campuses, and the subsequent four, Mamelodi, East Rand, Welkom and Sebokeng, were geographically widely spread out across the country. This provided numerous challenges to the University in terms of exercising control over the teaching and learning process. The University, in answer to this challenge, provided their lecturers with the Vista Guided Self-Study Model as the tuition model. Lecturers were expected to assist their students in maximizing study pursuits rather than taking responsibility for the student's learning (Beneke, 1992:1). Manuals were designed with the many educationally disadvantaged students, in mind, who were entering Vista "...with distinct shortcomings, especially in cognitive language proficiency" (Beneke, 1992:3). During a new staff orientation programme this point is elaborated on, in a shortened version of the original two principal documents related to the Vista Guided Self-Study Model:

" Add to this (cognitive language shortcoming) the western cultural context to which so much of academic subject matter is linked and to which the bulk of Vista students did not have access. Then consider the geographically separate nature of the Vista campuses, producing students from widely divergent communities with few independent study skills, who are all expected to master the same subject content presented by an equally divergent group of lecturers, sit a standard examination and meet the same evaluative standards and their chances of success are minimal" (Beneke, 1992:3).

The manuals proceeded from the basic assumption that students should study on their own or in groups and that the primary function of lecturers was to enable students to do so (Beneke, 1992:2). An added advantage was seen to be that they served as summaries with extracts from

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<sup>4</sup>: "Local" being the predominantly Black youth entering the university from the feeder schools of the township or suburbs geographically located next to the University campus.

academic literature which the students were then given. Students hardly needed to purchase any text, or prescribed books. The libraries provided extra reading material. The manuals have been controversial and although related to curriculum design which, in turn, is part of the broader field of work, of Academic Development, ASP co-ordinators have never had any input in their design. The manuals, as used prior to 1996, were not popular as they were viewed with the suspicion that they were inferior in content and that Vista university in providing these to students were giving their students inferior education. Vista Students then argued that the inferior manuals and inferior education was part of the Apartheid strategy to provide black students with inferior education. A decision was taken in 1996 by management to “...find new pedagogical methods to augment and to offer an alternative to the use of study manuals. It was noted that the use of manuals restricted the sphere of academic reference of students and that it also promoted rote learning”. (Minutes of consensus building workshop, 1996:4)

As a result of the mistrust in educational provision by the Apartheid - driven government for particularly black students, the Vista University campuses came to be viewed as inferior along similar lines as primary and tertiary education was seen to be inferior, catering for Black and coloured South Africans separately. Mhlane (1994:13) contends that “... The inequalities that were built into those separate education systems made it impossible for their graduates to enjoy equal opportunity in the labour market. These (historically black) institutions were under resourced and poorly funded and had to rely heavily on financial aid from either NGO’s or overseas donors” . As with the manuals, the advantages of the localised campuses of Vista were swallowed up in the issues of the political struggle of those opposed to Vista university. The university is “...ideally placed to play a vital role in the new higher education system...” (Maher, 1996:12), because it is located in major black townships and has a vast experience in distance education.

The contact tuition campuses of Vista University, built at the edge of townships were often swallowed up within the township, as it grew. These campuses ensured that students would be able to reside in the township and not need hostel accommodation, which minimized expenditure for the university. Vista University is the second largest university in South Africa after the University of South Africa (UNISA). Vista University started off with 300 students in 1982, and

has grown to provide for 32 000 students ( Cloete in Maher, 1996:12). In 1996, 32 182<sup>5</sup> students ensured that Vista as the largest historically disadvantaged university , provided increased access to higher education to the majority of the population. A total of 19 341 students were enrolled at the six contact-tuition campuses. The Further Training campus based in Pretoria is a distance education institution along the lines of UNISA, with study guides and manuals. The six contact-tuition campuses operate as semi - autonomous structures with their own character. In order to understand the background of the student body, the learning culture of students as influenced by political events will be briefly described.

The 1976 Soweto Revolt highlighted the crisis within a divided apartheid system. It set into motion a series of protests that focussed on changing the grossly inferior provision of schooling in Bantu Education (Pavlich, 1993:1-3). The results of Matriculation pass rates were effected by the lack of provision for adequate schooling in the first place. What little learning was taking place was further disrupted by the waves of boycotts and loss of hope in education, as a means to overcoming inequalities, that resulted in students dropping out of school. This very crisis contributed to the establishment of Vista University, as recommended by the government appointed commission of inquiry in 1978. This government commission had initially been chaired by Dr G van N Viljoen, (Education Policy Unit Report,1995:1) rector of Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) and subsequently by Dr F P Retief the rector of MEDUNSA (Medical University of South Africa).

The implication of the political and academic situation for Vista University was that the majority of students entering the university had poor matriculation pass rates. They had had inferior school education and were thus even less prepared for university studies. Whilst matriculation endorsement was the criterion for access into the university, Vista investigated other criteria such as the Swedish rating system, used on the Welkom campus until 1996 . Entrance tests were then devised. This system awards points to matriculation subjects obtained either on Standard or Higher Grade (Sharwood & Rutherford,1994:40-4) . Faculties pre-determine the minimum entry requirement prior to selection. Students who may not have qualified purely on the basis of matriculation endorsement or "exemption" as it used to be called, then stood a chance of being

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<sup>5</sup>By 1996, Vista had 32 183 students according to the South African Survey (Sidiropoulos et al, 1997:208)

admitted to the university. Academic support is usually focussed at particular programmes to assist students admitted under the criteria of special admissions. Various access programmes such as Academic Support in Engineering at Cape Town (ASPECT), and the Vista Academy extension, Accounting Potentiality Development programme (APDP) for Commerce, in the faculty of Commerce at Vista University (Welkom campus) are two examples. The APDP is a programme initiated in 1998 to assist students, simultaneously to improve the content subjects in the area of Commerce in which they had weak results at school level, and to start two B. Comm subjects at the Vista University Welkom campus.

### **2.2.2. Vista University within the higher education field.**

Pavlich & Orkin (1993:1-4) point out that matriculation results are not reliable predictors of competence or achievement for university study. The retention rates at Vista University, as well as the number of years it has taken a student to complete a degree, bear this out.<sup>6</sup> It must also be taken into consideration that it is not always poor performance that results in a student spending five to eight years on a degree course as economic factors contributed. For example, a student may complete one year, work for a year to accumulate money for the second year and so could effectively spend five years completing a three year degree. This reality has focussed on the need for restructuring curricula at institutions to allow for multiple entry and exit points (Jack, 1996:68). The Green Paper on Higher Education (1996:12) points out that low throughput indicates high drop out and/or failure rates. The historically black institutions have significantly poorer pass rates than historically white institutions. With more mature students enrolling at universities it is noted that longer study time is needed for completion of courses. This will of necessity lead to institutions becoming more flexible to accommodate the notion of Life Long Learning (Greyling, 1997:4-5)

The concern that many South African Universities share for the high attrition rates of especially first year students was shared by Vista University. In 1992, the solution to the problem at Vista was tackled in the envisaged expansion of the Department of Student Development's activities. The Department expanded from rendering a counselling service only, to include the AS

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<sup>6</sup>At Vista it takes students on average 4 to 5 years to complete a three year degree.

programme. The focus of the Department of Student Development was on supporting students. In line with this perspective the Academic Skills programme was directed specifically at students. Within the debate surrounding ASP in South Africa (discussed fully in 2.3), this focus has been criticised. The criticism will be considered in chapter 3 although the purpose of this study, is to investigate and critically analyse the functioning of the programme as it has been operating. The Audit conducted by the South African Association for Academic Development (SAAAD) in 1996, appears to support the structure in which Counselling services is part of a Central Development Unit together with student support and other Academic Development work,( SAAAD,1997:119).

Within the context of the students coming from the now defunct, dysfunctional Department of Education and Training (DET) system, academic preparedness was lacking in students. The gap between school subjects, university material and method of presentation is often daunting for first year students. Students are often confused with regards to expectations the university has of its students and student responsibility. Being a young adult in an environment which is challenging and stimulating on the one hand, but demanding discipline and rigorous application of responsibility and dedication to learning on the other, can be very confusing. The creation of bridging programmes (Nyamapfene & Letseka, 1995:165) and orientation programmes are two possible solutions from tertiary education, but pre - university teaching also needs attention both from the Department of Education and Vista University. The proximity of the campuses, to the townships, of Vista University make them ideal geographically to reach out to the secondary schools. Within Vista University the Department of Education conferred 500 BA Education, 78 B Ed degrees and 5 099 certificates and diplomas in their 1997 graduation ceremonies across all campuses. The Education faculty is by far the largest faculty at Vista University (Graduation ceremony, 1997:8). They are, theoretically, in the best position to assist in improving the quality of secondary school education in their catchment areas.

Students develop coping skills and networks that support them separate from university designed interventions. At Vista University student political movements such as Azanian Students' Convention (AZASCO), Pan Africanist Students' Organisation (PASO), South African Student Congress (SASCO), address a need of belonging for many first year students. These groups give peer support where family support is unavailable or may have been unavailable, due to political crises, family breakdown. Specifically in the case of the Welkom campus, the migrant labour

system has had a disruptive influence. These political organisations recruit at school level, and affiliation continues through to tertiary level. These parties appear to serve a similar networking function, as the "old boy " network used to serve in the White universities. Amongst these are the sense of belonging which enables new students at tertiary level to find mentors and guides in familiarising them with the tertiary culture, academically, socially and emotionally. These student movements have on the Vista University campuses encouraged solidarity and taken the needs of their affiliated students to heart. The involvement of senior students in the lives of junior students encourages an involvement in their academic work. When the slogan of a "culture of learning", used by the African National Congress (ANC) and its student movement adherents, encourages academic achievement, then the influence of these senior students is to be welcomed.

### **2.2.3. Strategies universities devised to support students.**

Universities serious about the task of teaching and encouraging students and ensuring learning, have come up with a variety of strategies to deal with the problems experienced by new students. Amongst these are bridging programmes (Swanepoel,1995:318), access programmes, Supplemental Instruction (Clark & Brophy,1995:220) and tutoring programmes (Esterhuizen 1995:250) and foundation courses (Jack, 1995:267). Some universities have attempted to involve senior students in their programmes whereas others have not. At Vista University senior students were involved in the Student Assistants Programme, which will be discussed in chapter three.

Vista University was in the position that it did not need to diversify its student population along racial lines as the traditionally White universities attempted to do. A factor however that has been obscured by the racial issues is that of cultural diversity. There are eleven language groups within South Africa, of which nine are Black language groups. Despite this, these languages are part of the manifestation of a certain cultural discourse. The relevance for Vista and for Academic Development in particular lies in the fact that institutions must take cognisance of diversity of culture and at the same time empower students and staff to distinguish between myth and reality of what constitutes culture and quality education. Vista University has to contend with the majority of its students coming from deprived educational backgrounds. Only on a few campuses were there any students coming from more advantaged school back - grounds.

Table 1 provides statistics on the student enrollment according to race at Vista University for 1992. An indication of cultural diversity on the Welkom campus of Vista University in 1995/96 is provided by Table 2.

**Table 1. 1992 Enrolment by race at Vista University.**

2778	African or Black students
465	Coloured students
41	Indian students
156	White students
3440	Total

( Source: Educational Policy Unit, 1995:4)

**Table 2. Distribution of nationalities 1995-1996 at the Welkom Campus of Vista University.**

National group	1995	1996
Ovambo	1	1
Indian	2	1
Herero	0	1
Unknown	2	0
Swazi	10	11
Northern Ndebele	5	5
Venda	3	3
Coloured	5	7
Southern Ndebele	18	17
Northern Sotho	38	31
Tsonga	21	27
White	54	36
Zulu	85	92
Tswana	198	196
Xhosa	237	216
Southern Sotho	828	818
TOTAL	1507	1462

(Source: Van der Linde, 1998:2)



Table 2 indicates a linguistically heterogenous group of students with Southern Sotho speakers comprising just over half of the total number of students. It seems obvious that a reasonable argument exists for Vista University to address issues of multiculturalism on the Welkom campus.

Moving from the general Vista University context to the selected campuses and the Welkom campus in particular, the functioning of the AS Programme also moves from the general to the particular. It needs to be explained that the general university culture influences particular campus cultures. Yet campuses have retained their own style and ethos. Likewise the general AS Programme vision and mission, although designed to create a measure of uniformity, has differed considerably in its interpretation on the different campuses.

If the teaching and learning model of the university had been successful as originally designed, in its implementation, there would have been no need for ASP (Jenkins:1996). As a result of the failure of the model, measures had to be taken to remediate the situation. Whether the choice of ASP or Academic Development (AD) was the best at the time is not relevant to this study. The fact is that ASP was chosen and implemented in specific ways on various campuses. The effectiveness and functioning of the programme and its relevance to the university within the transformation process is the concern of this study. As the ASP is a form of *intervention* and as such expected to have certain desired outcomes, these outcomes are expected to occur over a period of time and is part of the programme logic model (Yin, 1993:66).

The model of the ASP at Vista University must therefore be seen in its original conceptualisation before the actual functioning can be investigated. In this regard in South Africa ASP was perceived to be a way of redressing the inequalities of inferior educational backgrounds. ASP was seen to be a programme aimed at Black students entering White universities. ASP became a solution to the high failure rate of Black students at White universities (Mhlane, 1988:15). Whether this perception is valid in terms of other countries or not, will be discussed in chapter 3. Of importance are the positive changes towards an equal educational system, in which ASP is challenged and could become redundant. If ASP was only a support programme aimed at redress at tertiary level, then ASP could well become redundant within ten to twenty years given a functional equal schooling system. If ASP served other needs of students it may have a place in the tertiary education of the new millennium. The answers to the questionnaires discussed in

chapter 3 reveal that student assistants perceived ASP as contributing in a variety of ways to student academic life. These perceptions are summarized in figure 5, page 66 .

#### 2.2.4. The Welkom Campus of Vista University.

Table 3 provides the numbers of students registered at the Welkom campus between 1987 and 1997. Statistics were compiled on the campus from 1993 onwards whereas previous numbers were collated from Central Campus records. All students below received contact tuition. Part-time students refer to those who attend evening classes and usually spend more years completing their studies than full-time students. Part-time students work during the day, and tend to be more mature students, whereas full-time students enter the university soon after completing school, in most cases the next year. Full-time students attend morning and afternoon classes and are younger in age than part time students. This distinction is not the usual one in which part-time students refer to those studying through correspondence at the Vista University Campus for Further Training, in Pretoria.

**Table 3. Registrations for full-time and part-time students, 1987 - 1997.**

TOTAL REGISTRATIONS.											
	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Full-time					347		685	802	1046	1052	943
Part-time					282		530	495	460	407	622
	211	255	314	425	629	970	1217	1300	1507	1462	1565

(Source: Van der Linde, 1998:1)

Welkom Campus has grown from 211 students in 1987 to 1565 in 1997. By 1989 it was given full campus recognition when it moved from its temporary location to its present position in Mothusi Road. It is situated in the Goldfields in Northern Free State and serves the needs of students from the Northern Free State. The campus started as a temporary site with full-time students, part-time students and academic, administrative and professional staff members, i.e library and student development staff.

The faculties represented on campus are Arts, Education and Economic and Management Sciences. The Welkom campus is predominantly involved in training students in Education. The department of Student Development started in 1992 with the counselling division which had one counsellor. In 1996 a second counsellor was employed. The first academic skills co-ordinator was employed in 1995 and took the task of academic counselling and training of student assistants from the counselling division. The Activities of the ASP division will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter.

The numbers, as represented in table 3, indicate the growth of full - time students between 1993 and 1996. These figures represent an average increase of 9,5% for the period 1993 - 1997. Different factors outside the scope of this study affected these statistics. The only relevancy to this study in the 1997 statistics is the substantial growth in part - time student numbers. This could be interpreted as an increase in more mature students who could not afford to study full time or who saw the need to further their education within an increasingly competitive market. Vista Welkom campus is also the only campus that does not have another university within close range. It does not have student residences and students find their own accommodation. The nearest other residential university to it is the University of the Free State which is one hundred and seventy kilometres away in Bloemfontein.

The different types of students, (full - time or part-time) make their own demands on the presentation skills of lecturers. This in turn calls for specific support as the age, experience, and needs of part-time students differ to an extent from the younger full time students. Both academic staff and students require support in coming to grips with the challenges posed. The Welkom campus was faced with growing numbers of students entering the university from the local schools. As the Goldfields expanded up to 1995, due to the need for gold in world markets, more people came to work on the mines and more schools were built. With the slump in the gold price the Goldfields saw retrenchments and a general decline in mining since 1995. This affected the Welkom campus both in numbers of student enrolments and financially. Despite the negative socio-economic climate, the University still had a mission to fulfill in providing both relevant and quality education to its students. The initiatives by the department of Student Development at Welkom Campus will be addressed more comprehensively in chapter four.

The restructuring of Vista University has impacted on the day to day running of the Vista Welkom campus . Restructuring took place in 1996 with the appointment of a new management team. A new vice- chancellor, professor HP Africa, took office in January 1996 with two new deputy vice - chancellors . For academic affairs, professor K Nyamaphene was appointed, and for administration, professor T Keto took office in August 1996. On the Welkom campus a new campus director, professor TZ Mthembu was appointed on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1996 and the new registrar, Mr SEC Mabizela shortly afterwards (Vista University Annual Report, 1996). The significance of these appointments cannot be underestimated as the events leading up to the appointments left in their wake much confusion and disruption in the teaching and learning process. After these appointments, new leadership visions had to be adapted to by staff and students. Throughout this process, the support of students, (as in fact all teaching), had to be maintained and delivered at a high standard. Such a period of restructuring and transformation leaves the way clear for much innovation and rethinking of the university's mission and influences curriculum . In turn the support delivery offered by departments such as Student Development, has to be reconsidered and reformulated to support the Universities teaching and learning aims. This aspect will be looked at in chapter 4 as part of the Welkom case study, when the specific needs of a campus as perceived by its management is addressed and supported.

### **2.3. Academic Development as a field of work.**

The problems faced by higher education institutions generally, in the past, were also experienced at Vista University. These problems can be summarised as follows:

- Higher education institutions were compelled to consider potential capacity rather than matriculation results within the selection procedure of students;
- Institutions believed that they needed to maintain standards for teaching, research and learning;
- Institutions had to develop academic development programmes to ensure retention and success rates of particular students coming from the old Department of Education and Training (DET) school system (Pavlich & Orkin, 1993:1-10).

In developing programmes many historically White institutions focussed on what they believed

were skills students needed to "bridge the gap" between their educationally disadvantaged background and university. Academic Skills Programmes were needed to "assist Departmental staff to bridge and support under prepared students into fulfilling academic experiences and careers" (Blunt, 1993:96).

Together with bridging, Blunt (1993:96) pinpoints the following concepts, activities and projects, which are associated with ASP:

- Language across the curriculum;
- Cognitive Skills;
- Peer group learning;
- Mentoring;
- Holistic support and counselling, bursaries, role models and giving support for accommodation and travel;
- Study orientations;
- Meta-learning and learning styles;
- Problem solving;
- Computer-based education;
- Study skills; and
- Critical thinking.

This list provides a spectrum of the needs lecturers and academics experienced their students as having. At the same time the list cannot be confined purely to students coming from deprived educational backgrounds since these problems are currently experienced by most students, especially so as more students have access to higher education. The list above also indicates the varied existing perceptions concerning what tasks Academic Development staff are trained for and are expected to be capable of performing. The diversity in expectations that exist is echoed in the lack of uniformity of AD programmes observed by Kothecha (1995:39). She states that the brief for Academic Development was observed to be "...open to wide interpretation..." and also the "...focus of AD programmes varied dramatically to include direct teaching instruction to under-prepared students in bridging or adjunct language programmes, curriculum development, supplementary instruction, staff development programmes, computer-aided instruction, language

development, educational technology, cross-cultural communication, life-skills and tutor training programmes” (Kotecha, 1995: 39). The lack of governing principles for AD work was identified as having been caused by the lack of a theoretical base, broad vision of the relationship between curriculum and access. Integral and related to the confusion was the lack of formal recognition of AD in higher education and the multiplicity of AD programmes’s funding base.

### **2.3.1 The emergence of academic development as a field of work.**

As the proportion of students from DET backgrounds increased, universities focussed increasingly on the teaching and learning strategies. ASP’s could not deal with large numbers and university cultures were changing, in which the balance of small numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds swung to larger numbers. The move according to Pavlich & Orkin (1993: 1-11) was away from the individual to the institutional environment. The argument changed then from small groups of students needing to be “fixed” or remediated, within a large body of prepared students to that of a large environment of unprepared students, whose needs had to be met by institutions. Kotecha (1995:36) maintains that a commitment, pro-activist and sense of ownership of institutions implementing faculty-based foundation courses addressed this problem through addressing “...the access and academic development (and under-preparedness)...” issues.

Institutions like the universities of Fort Hare, Venda, Zululand and Vista did not increase foundation courses during the time that the historically White universities were piloting these programmes. At the University of the North a Maths/Science bridging project, and a credit bearing first year English course with study and writing skills emphasised, existed in 1993 (Segall & Kotecha, 1993:209). Vista University experimented with a Science and English foundation course in 1993, but neither were as successful as originally envisaged. In the case of English, the course was integrated into the first year general course after an initial pilot study was conducted (Smith 1992:34). At most historically Black universities it was considered more relevant to include the aspects of foundation courses into a first year curriculum. The majority of their students needed the skills offered by these support courses. At the historically Black universities, a greater emphasis was placed on staff development in order to review approaches to teaching and developing teaching methods that would reach large groups of students in classes. Group

learning was one strategy developed to cope with the large number of students (Nyamaphene & Letseka, 1995:165).

Bajinath illustrates the lack of funding for developmental work with an example from the Western Cape region: "...during 1989, UWC's (University of the Western Cape) enrolment was 88% of the University of Cape Town and 86% of Stellenbosch University's, but its (UWC'S) funds were only 36% of UCT's and 37% of Stellenbosch's." ( Bajinath, 1992:710). Yet, it is clear that the historically advantaged institutions, of which Stellenbosch and the University of Cape Town are two examples, did not receive funding for support programmes or foundation courses specifically either.

Mehl, in his keynote address at the 1992 South African Association of Academic Development (SAAAD) conference stated:

"...the common message that we get around the country is that AD activities are not catered for in the subsidy and therefore universities need to put in their own money or soft money into this essential activity...the formula makes provision for successful outcomes. Thus, if an AD activity in a particular department enhances that department's pass rate, then the increased money which the university receives by virtue of the subsidy because the students were successful must be directly attributable to the AD activity." (Mehl, 1992:13)

The differences between universities then appears to be in the internal policy of the institution in distributing finance. By 1996, AD units were in operation at the Universities of the Western Cape, Zululand, Fort Hare, and Transkei. Academic practitioners or academic skills co-ordinators (as at Vista university) were also functional (Jiya, 1996:1-13). These activities of AD units are not well documented in presentations at SAAAD conferences from 1992 to 1997 from historically disadvantaged institutions (HDI's), with the exception of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) Where few papers represented the historically disadvantage institutions, they were delivered by mainstream lecturers by and large. At UWC, papers presented by AD staff represented much reflective thinking on the practice at that institution's AD unit. The academic support programme at Vista University was designed along the lines of the historically

advantaged institutions, which elicited criticism from within Vista, because it was feared that "... educational development (the term was preferred to ASP by Du Toit) would remain on the periphery of mainstream education..." (Du Toit, 1992:92).

### **2.3.2. Academic support in relation to academic development.**

Within the South African context, debates concerning *academic support versus academic development* continue. The former refers to developing students in various ways whereas the latter focusses on activities relating to the development of the teaching and learning environment in which staff and curriculum development is accentuated. (SAAAD, 1997:5). Different universities opted for different models. At Vista University ASP, or the academic skills programme, is synonymous with academic support programme. Despite the name of the department being Academic Skills (Support) Programme the co-ordinators on the campuses have opted for their own version of either academic support or for academic development. This will be clear in chapter 3. This trend fits in with Kotecha's observation for Academic Development in general that "...activities cover a very broad spectrum and indicate that there is an absence of governing principles for AD work..." (Kotecha, 1995:36). As AD is an emerging field of work, it is understandable that the principles are fluid and in process. The tensions created in the establishment of working principles for AD, is the fuel in the challenge to formulate the parameters of this new field. There are a number of reasons given for this transference of emphasis in practise of AD instead of ASP at Vista University. It does however, increase the fine tension which exists within the relationship of Vista and its seven contact-tuition, semi-autonomous campuses. In turn it can lead to misunderstanding, frustration and lack of cohesion between the campuses, as the paradigms from which the work is to be done differs. This issue will be dealt with in more detail in chapter three.

Academic development, as a term in the nineties, encompasses Academic Support programmes, although ASP was established in the 1980's at traditionally liberal (usually the English speaking universities of the Witwatersrand, Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg) institutions (Drewett, 1993:32). It attempted to deal with the complex difficulties of inadequate schooling or disadvantaged educational background of Black students and their consequent high drop-out rate at university (Agar, 1992: 93). It set out to maximize academic performance of first year students



and increase the number of professionally qualified Black people (Mhlane, 1994:288). The most difficult process that has emerged in twelve years is that of integrating departmental teaching and academic development.

Drewett (1993:32) points out that much radical theory of ASP has stemmed from Althusser's theories, who argues that education forms part of the broader capitalist superstructure ensuring suitable supplies of labour and future capitalists. Drewett argues that this tradition of ASP, in line with the Althusserian theory, focuses on merely "supporting" students who are not coping academically. It is then interpreted that by giving them a set of strategies it is in fact for the purpose of avoiding organisational change. Some authors argue that it is preferable that the whole structure of South African universities will have to change" (Drewett, 1993:32). ASP's were then seen to be passively part of the educational "state ideological apparatus". The problem of student difficulties were seen to lie solely with the "...social structure, power structure, and collective personality of the university itself" (Vilakazi & Tema, 1985:3).

Whether this argument is entirely correct within the larger context of ASPs internationally, is another matter. Indeed it appears that although the term "support" is viewed suspiciously in South Africa by some, since it implies something outside the mainstream of academic work, it is still widely used as a term ( McLean & Surtie, 1995:75) and may have wider meanings than that ascribed to in South Africa.

In the South African context, Drewett (1993:37) maintains that ASP needs to be regarded as complex and flexible. The fact that ASP developed in general out of a "dysfunctional" system is significant. ASP's have had tremendous freedom (Drewett, 1993:39) to formulate policy and direction. This autonomy has been conducive to academic developmental innovations amongst staff on the one hand, and the needs of students, for a more effective system of academic instruction, on the other. ASP provides the conditions which would foster a coherent and planned strategy for change within the university as well as being an agent of institutional change at the university. On the Welkom campus, however, ASP has been part of the process of change but can hardly claim to be the change agent.

The difficulty with ASP has been that it operates in different ways according to individual

interpretations even when there is a formal statement of intent. The lack of thorough research has resulted in ASP staff acting upon their own particular preferences of style in dealing with student problems. Drewett et.al. (1991:122) put this well:

"At a particular moment, at a particular location, the activities of ASP may be focussed in a certain direction. In the broader order of things (in terms of social structures) ASP at a particular moment, may fulfill a specific function. In a moment, as the relationship between student and teacher changes, and/or is constantly re-established, the functions of the ASP will change, intentionally or not. What may have been the original objective of ASP will become obscured either due to uncertainty of the exact material conditions, or as a result of shifting needs and (hopefully) constant readjustment to meet those needs."

### **2.3.3. Academic Support Programmes historically.**

Part of the criticism against Vista University's academic support programme (Patel, 1996) has its roots in the historic perspective of these programmes in South Africa. In analysing the functioning of the programme it must be seen against the political background which led to the emergence of support programmes.

Historically, in South Africa, the terminology "academic development" and "academic support" pointed to very different practices according to Stewart (1991:124). In the first place, Academic Development referred to practices within Black institutions, whereas Academic Support occurred in open White institutions. Despite similarities in the structures of these programmes qualitative differences in educational objectives and pedagogies existed. Stewart does not spell out what these differences are, but compares the history of Black institutions in the United States with that of Black institutions in South Africa. The development of critical thinking skills is mentioned and significant in the light of Black students evaluating their political and economic power. In 1991, a minimal number, due to state policy on numbers of black students allowed at HDI's, asserted themselves. AD contributed as platform through which transformation at institutional level could take place (Mehl, 1992: 5-6). This view is similar to the idea that AD contributes to institutional change as expressed by Drewett and others (1991:122).

Debates began emerging in the late eighties concerning different models for academic development. Models of ASP, such as the adjunct, infusion, and the integrated model will be clarified in paragraph 2.5.

In South Africa, ASP has come to be seen as coming from the approach of White institutions servicing the needs of disadvantaged or Black students. Under-prepared students in South Africa were assumed to be Black students with learning difficulties (Agar & Knopfmacher, 1995:115). Internationally the phenomenon of academically under-prepared students was recognised in 1988 (Weinstein, Zimmerman and Palmer in Agar & Knopfmacher, 1995: 115). Stewart (1991: 122) argues that this approach varies little from the approach in the United States. There it is also known as Academic Assistance Programmes (AAP). Such programmes, as in the example of Penn State University, are situated in a learning centre and work closely with counsellors. At Penn State there existed a direct connection between departmentally located staff and the centralised structure or unit. Stewart (1991) argues that the philosophy underlying AS or AAP is non-revolutionary in character aimed at changing students and not the structural characteristics of the system. Stewart (1991) contends that, unlike South Africa, the United States of America's student population was more representational of a diverse student population and thus the challenge in South Africa was greater to change the structural status quo (Stewart, 1991:122). Mhlane, (1994:288) points out that the trend in South Africa was more towards integrating ASP within departmental mainstream teaching with the University of Natal as an example.

Within the Vista context, the majority of the student body was Black and came from the educationally disadvantaged background. According to Jenkins, the tuition model originally drafted for Vista and which should have made Academic Support programmes redundant, was not successful in practice (Jenkins, 1996). The Vista Guided Self Study Model was based on the supposition that all the students were coming from the same background (DET and disadvantaged) and that academic support should not be "added on", but integral to the mainstream teaching of the University. This model had been designed by the director of Teaching Development and Student Services of Vista University. One of its principles was that large lecture halls were impersonal and did not cater for student needs. Secondly, the number of formal lectures was reduced to only two formal lectures per week. Small tutorials classes were then to continue the learning process. Thirdly, study manuals were designed to provide for preparation

for interactive learning during lectures. Students were supposed to go through these before coming to formal lectures and tutorials. For a variety of reasons this tuition model became defunct. That is the point at which Vista started to investigate the options available to provide assistance to all their students.

Academic Development was seen to be the answer to the criticism levelled at ASP's, that they became "...the buffer between the university and black community - a kind of academic group area..." (Mehl, 1988:52). AD, as promoted by SAAAD from its establishment in 1986, represented a shift of emphasis from the student to the curriculum as a whole (Walker & Badsha, 1993:5). AD then grew in South Africa as a result of the dissatisfaction HBI's experienced with ASP which was not addressing the issues of large numbers of students from educationally impoverished backgrounds. These HBI's were still involved in staff development and training in teaching methods and the development of educational technology. According to Walker and Badsha (1993:5) HBI's were not engaging in any meaningful curriculum review.

#### **2.3.4. Academic Skills Programme and Academic Development.**

At this point it is useful to clarify the position of the academic skills programme (ASP) at Vista University within the debate surrounding academic support programmes (often in the literature referred to as AS programmes or ASP) and academic development (AD). The Vista University ASP functions in the same way as the traditional South African academic support programmes and no clear differentiation exists in the different terminology. Before looking at how the Vista University ASP functions the functioning of other AS programmes in South Africa will be briefly considered.

The structural organisation of the field of work within South African institutions is closely linked to the decision to call it AD or ASP. Where institutions have created Units or Centres, rather than departments, the term AD has been used. The Universities of Cape Town, the Orange Free State, the Witwatersrand, the Western Cape, Fort Hare, Transkei, North West and Zululand are examples. Where the field of work was incorporated within departments such the Research and Development department at Technikon Northwest, and Student Development at Vista University

it follows a specific AS programme for students. One of the benefits of a unit is that it can research a programme consultation with a faculty and then recommend that the faculty adopt the programme or not. A department is limited in that it has a set curriculum it budgets for and is expected to deliver as efficiently as possible. The structure of ASP as a division of the department of student development limits its flexibility.

In this regard Scott (1996:36) points to the importance of distinguishing between student development activities that have become recurrent (such as AD tutorial programmes) and innovative developmental work which is aimed at producing lasting improvement in approaches and systems. Higher education emphasises that once such programmes or approaches have been established, they ought to be funded from recurrent resources in order to be sustained. "Bridging" or "foundation" courses which were initially developed as AD initiatives become recurrent and indispensable to a department, faculty and institution should be resourced as such. The mechanisms whereby institutions fund such programmes or units differ greatly. Where funding has been provided by alternative routes to state subsidies it has often been the case that units were formed, but where state subsidy is relied upon, and staffing points related to number of students within a department, as in the case of Vista University, Academic Skills Programme co-ordinators could not access the state funding and were originally funded by grants from the International Development Trust (IDT) or through other funds raised by the director of the department.

Scott (1996:36) makes the point that

“..to ensure coherent and cost efficient development, AD work needs to be stimulated, co-ordinated and academically guided at faculty and institutional level by means of a sound organisational structure that can facilitate inter-faculty and inter-institutional programmes and cooperation, in the context of clear goals and policies.”

It becomes even more significant that the AD work be cost efficient within the developments of South Africa, especially during the period of institutional vying for earmarked funding for programmes that are in line with the funding allocation policy of the Bill on Higher Education described as for the purpose of “redress” in chapter 5 no 39, (Higher Education Act, 1997:30).

The qualitative and short term aim of academic development programmes (Agar et al.,1991:5)

was in the early nineties, the facilitation and enrichment of teaching and learning. The qualitative and medium - term aim was to increase the number of Black students who graduate, who succeed in chosen professions and who reach leadership positions. The long-term aim was in the contribution to structural change, in terms of the vision of a non-racial, democratic, post - Apartheid South Africa through changing institutions, attitudes and structures within the wider society. Five years later in 1996, the first aim is still relevant in achieving the second aim. How effectively the long-term aim has been achieved within the institutions, has been dependent on the structural positioning either central as in a unit or centre, or peripheral as a department. Other factors in terms of the leadership and funding of units or the department would contribute to the effective achievement of institutional change, but is beyond the scope of this study.

Drewett (1993:47) advocates "... that any programme geared towards academic development should involve inherent flexibility which allows for cooperative achievements to prevail, regardless of their outcome..." Drewett cites Pusey, who sees the causes for intervention, leading to a process of reform, as emanating from complex social structures. The process of reform can have unforeseeable consequences. This process of reform is seen to be the important focus. It is in this context that AD can be taken as an instrument in the reform process of an institution.

The rapid changes within the very complex social structures Pusey refers to, within South African higher education has resulted in the fulfilment of some of the aims of academic development such as greater access to institutions. At the same time the changes emphasised the need for AD to develop and rethink its aims, practises and direction as articulated by Agar (1991:5), precisely because not all the consequences of AD could be anticipated. In this regard the following factors have had a major impact on AD within the period 1992 to 1996 of this study. The factors are as follows:

- The election of the majority party to government;
- The rapid transformation of education allowing for massification and access to all higher education institutions by all students;
- Financial crises within higher education:-
  - a) for students;
  - b) for institutions dependent on external funders;

The under preparedness of most institutions to transform and make decisive policies and implement these practically to address the needs of their clients. The Vista example of an institution caught up within the maelstrom of post apartheid expectations and realities mirrors that, faced by even the most prepared, organised or intuitive institution. The changes within secondary education policy and the need to ensure quality education within higher education.

It is envisaged that ASP's should firstly "...promote aggressive admissions policies based on researched selection procedures..." (Blunt, 1996). This should be done in co-operation with already existing programmes such as the Teach Test Teach programme at the University of Natal and the Alternative Selection Procedure Adopted by the Economics and Management Extended Curriculum Programme (Flockemann, 1992:536). Admissions policies allowed students to participate in these programmes which were run in conjunction with ASP and faculties. In effect these programmes became part of an extended curriculum. An overview of Student's results Relative to Alternative Selection Criteria (1989- 1991) is an example of courses existing at institutions that have delivered good work and which ought to be taken seriously in the pursuit of improving access possibilities for students (SAAAD, 1992:536-550).

Secondly, ASP's should "...help faculties design new curricula with aims, content, teaching' learning strategies and evaluation procedures more relevant to the SA context and a non-racial, democratic future..." (Strydom and Bitzer, 1992:3). If an ASP is located in a centre or unit it can have a consultative role to play in designing curricula to meet the needs of the majority of students entering the universities. Faculties at Vista University revise their curricula regularly to meet the demands of academic standards set by quality assurance committees such as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). ASP can assist with needs assessment research amongst students to help inform a multi cultural design of curricula, taking into consideration, amongst others, learning styles of students. At Vista University very little co-operation in this regard between faculties and ASP has occurred, partly because ASP has been regarded as a department assisting students with adjunct programmes. The functioning of ASP at Vista University has not been clearly understood or advertised to faculties.

Thirdly, ASP's should change the attitudes by of institutions to the position of the disadvantaged student and the realities and challenges of a post-apartheid future. Concepts related to this are

transformation (Brijlal 1991, Sanders and Seneque 1992), and at-risk students (Parsons 1993). Institutional change is also the objective of institutional self evaluation (Strydom, Bitzer and Beyleveld, 1992) and quality assurance (Strydom and Bitzer, 1992:3.) In the late nineties the changing of attitudes of institutions should also be directed towards the institution evaluating the marketability of its students within the growing unemployment situation in South Africa.

Fourthly, ASP's are suggested to assist in institutional development by facilitating institutional change in universities in order to make them more representative of and responsive to the disenfranchised majority of students. There are limits to what ASP can do when they are not faculty-based (Hofmeyer and Spence, 1989:47). ASP can also contribute to "... non-racial cultures in universities..." (Millar and Boughey, 1991:124) and if the aim of university is student self-direction, their approach must be student centred. This means starting from where students are in terms of their own perceptions of what they think they know, what they would like to know and how they think they learn (Millar and Boughey, 1991).

ASPs were at its earlier stages of development, however, also seen to be programmes designed to meet the demands of the private sector who were forced to admit more Black graduates to their companies by the Sullivan Code<sup>7</sup> (Mhlane, 1988: 22-29). Companies were then keen to finance and support programmes assisting in producing Black graduates they could employ within especially the Science related fields. ASP's initially served small numbers of predominantly Black students. This perception was viewed as both positive in that it trained Black graduates of high quality to take leadership positions in companies, who in turn received American financial aid during the sanctions - against - South Africa, period. Within a higher education environment, where changes in educational practice and transformation is in process, it is not always clear what the exact nature of the educational philosophy underlying the practise is. Indeed educators find themselves within "multiple contradictions" (Dzvimbo, 1996) and reflection on practice becomes essential.

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<sup>7</sup>This code was a calculated attempt to maintain United States economic interests in South Africa. It stipulated the requirements for USA companies doing business in SA, to continue during the period of sanctions. A stipulated quota of Black management personnel controlled by point ratings was reviewed annually and financially rewarded.



The basic assumptions underlying ASPs as noted by Lazarus ( ISHE, 1995:1) were that:

- The “problem” was located in the student.
- The “problem” primarily manifests in communicative, cognitive and subject specific deficiencies.
- The “problem” can be cured through academic support programmes such as additional tutoring, language courses, foundation years and slow streams.

In the Vista University context ASP centred on the student as having a “problem”. Students do have problems which can be related to the political and economic climate of the day. Students can also have problems which may be temporary with a particular course with which they need support. Some students may need ongoing support due to being educationally challenged. If an institution chooses to locate the “problem” in success rates of students, primarily within students, and if the majority of students come from a disadvantaged background which predisposes them to having problems such as those Blunt (1993:96) identified ASP as supporting students with, then the institution’s argument is flawed. It cannot be expected of any effective ASP to address and successfully support the majority of students. If that ASP is limited in terms of resources , finance and structural effectivity it must be expected to reach only a small margin of students. In accepting the above aims of ASP, an institution such as Vista University has to transform it teaching and learning process, which includes curricula redesign and effective staff development programmes.

#### **2.4. Towards a definition of Academic Development.**

It is useful at this point to consider what Academic Development means and then to look at the AD practices within the international and South African contexts.

According to SAAAD (1997:8), AD encompasses the following activities:

- Access programmes run by university/ technikon;
- Bridging or foundation programmes for courses and faculties;
- Specialised support given to students which focusses on skills development, i.e.

- writing workshops, study skills;
- Specialised language programmes for speakers of languages other than English;
- Departmental AD projects, with tutors based in departments;
- Staff development courses for new staff members;
- Workshops for staff on issues such as teaching and learning and assessment;
- Curriculum development programmes;
- Participation of AD staff in Broad Transformation Forums.

Academic Development proves to be an inter-disciplinary field of work that aims to enhance the effectiveness and quality of higher education (Scott, 1995:23). As yet, there is no agreed definition or delineation of AD. Significant differences in views on the goals, nature and role of academic development exist amongst those involved (ISHE, 1995:1). Some of these views are depicted by the following quotations:

“Academic development is a process aimed at addressing deficiencies in the academic backgrounds of many students who enrol in universities ...” (ISHE, 1995:1)

Academic development is particularly about “... institutional change and capacity building, as much as individual development...first order change improves current practice without altering the basic organizational arrangements, or changing the way lecturers and students perform their roles. Second order change, however, challenges the way the institution is put together, its goals, structures and roles, including collaborative work cultures...academic development is second order change. It aims to bring together student learning, staff development, and organizational development in an integrated process at departmental and faculty level. The purpose goes beyond single innovations. Rather, the concern is for a sustainable learning organization having the capacity for continuous and long term improvement, and centrally concerned with student engagement and learning for the development of student’s full potential” (Walker and Badsha,1993:2).

A generalised definition in summary of the above reads: “ AD is about institutional change, capacity building, student learning, staff development, curriculum development and organisational development in an integrated process at departmental and faculty level” (ISHE, 1995:2).

Academic Support Programmes within the broad field of Academic Development is thus contextualised. In some cases the terminology changes, and Educational Development is preferred (Blunt, 1996).

Within the Australian context, specifically at the Universities in the State of Victoria, it appears that learning support units existed in all the higher education institutions in 1995 (McLean et al. 1995: 79-81). These units were located predominantly in academic faculties 15 (46%) in student services 13 (39%), or faculties with some in academic staff development units 2 (6%). The remaining 3 (9%) were located elsewhere. The staff located in units in faculties or other locations were becoming increasingly involved in adjunct programmes. Even so these adjunct programmes integrated learning skills teaching into content teaching and was not seen as generic programmes disconnected from mainstream teaching. Generic programmes would be those in which students are taught general skills which they are expected to transfer and apply in their courses.

## **2.5. Models of a ASP in South Africa.**

The different types of ASP models, need brief clarification. The oldest model of ASP in South Africa, is one generally referred to as the adjunct model. During the initial phase of ASP, Universities were not expecting to change, but instead to assist disadvantaged students, through ASP to adapt to the university's admissions criteria, standards and curriculum (Mhlane, 1994:307). The programmes run under the auspices of ASP had to convince sceptics that academic standards could be maintained (Beard, 1989: 73-76) and that ASP intervention regarding the reduction of failure rates and drop - out rates, was monitored. This was valid at the four founding Universities of Natal, Cape Town, Witwatersrand and Rhodes. This monitoring allowed for the early criticism that as adjunct models ASP was based on a "deficiency" or remedial approach to disadvantaged student's problems. ASP was typically run from a central unit and either provided workshops on general skills or subject specific skills taught by a trained ASP person. It stood separately from departments and faculties, although some discussion between academics and ASP staff informed the content of the workshops. Contents of the programme need not have been subject specific. Attendees at workshops could attend voluntarily or be referred by their lecturers or identified for referral, as a result of poor performance.

The integrated model consists of closer co-operation between ASP staff and academics within a department. Groups of students now attend credit bearing courses with subject matter directly related to their field of study. In the case of Stellenbosch University (Botha et al., 1995:363-367) the integrated model was understood to be functioning from a central co-ordinating unit. This central unit, in turn, assisted faculties and departments to accept responsibility and ownership for the bridging programmes, foundation courses, language proficiency courses, tutor programmes and programmes facilitating recruitment, access, admissions and funding.

The infusion model is one in which ASP skills are taught to lecturers who in turn use these in tutorials or lectures. Their teaching approach differs and ASP staff may be employed with faculties to serve either as lecturers (in limited capacity) or as consultants to lecturers on their teaching and learning styles. Throughout the main focus is on student development. AD practitioners are integral to the department or school and not part of a distinct Unit or Centre (Van der Heever et al, 1993:161).

The AS programme at Vista University between 1992 and 1996 falls into the category of adjunct model. Attempts have been made to move it towards an infusion model and to move away from the terminology of ASP towards AD in an attempt to become more effective and efficient, in 1996. The changes advocated at the strategic planning meeting of June, 1996 will be briefly discussed in chapter 5.

This chapter has sought to place the academic skills programme at Vista University firstly, within university's historical context, and secondly within the field of work of academic development in South Africa.

The following chapter will compare the academic skills programme of the various Vista University campuses and see which model is being espoused to on these campuses if any particular one can be identified.

## CHAPTER 3. COMPARING ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAMMES AT VISTA UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES.

Schematic outline of chapter 3.

Comparing Academic Skills Programmes at Vista University Campuses.

Developmental approach, theory and method.

- The construction of a case study for Vista University.

Overcoming potential pitfalls and limitations of the case study method.

The application of the case study methodology:

- Exploring ASP practice on the campuses.
- Describing the process of gathering information from the questionnaires, interviews and available literature.
- Explaining the findings and integrating the data.

Data gathering for the case study:

- Historic overview.
- Questionnaire survey.
- Interviews.
- Annual reports.

Findings and conclusions drawn from the data.

Brief summary of chapter 3.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CASE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pitfalls and limitations of case studies.</li> <li>● The application of the case study.</li> <li>● Staffing influencing ASP.</li> </ul>
TECHNIQUES USED IN GATHERING THE DATA;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The questionnaire;</li> </ul>
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE PROGRAMME.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Available documented comments</li> <li>● Campus comments.</li> </ul>
CONCLUSIONS DRAWN.	

### 3.1. The construction of a case.

This chapter addresses an ASP case study in the context of Vista University. Before reporting and analysing the data, it might be valuable to look at the reasons why a case study was chosen as the research approach for this study (also see par. 1.6.1, pp 12-14 and par 1.6.2, pp 14-16).

The case study was chosen as means of research for a number of reasons. Firstly the case study is a "portrayal" of a specific situation. This portrayal is then analysed, interpreted and verified according to the guidelines provided by Nisbet et al., (1978:24-25) and consists of :

- An analysis consists fitting the varied information into a framework. This framework ideally emerges as the study proceeds, but is preceded by supporting evidence and examples of exceptions are mentioned. The different types of support programmes in South Africa are mentioned whilst the Vista academic skills programme's functioning is the focus (Nisbet et al., 1978:19).
- Evidence followed by an interpretation. The reader may verify the inferences from the summarised evidence given. The conclusion is the cumulation of evidence and is to be found in chapter four.

Secondly, the Vista context of seven contact campuses lends itself to the case study method of research. The diversity and the structurally determined similarities of these campuses enlarges the scope of the study. At the same time it was necessary to limit the parameters of the study to specific issues and to concentrate on specific campuses in as far as they contributed to the Welkom campus case study.

In an attempt to avoid the trap of selective reporting of the case study method all the completed questionnaires and interview transcripts were closely studied. An example of the questionnaire and the interview questions are included as Appendix 2. In a case study done by Wild, Schriener and Richardson (Cohen & Manion, 1995:116) the participant observers used interviews and for the sake of greater readability, the researchers reported on the specific, detailed information and interviews, rather than having verbatim commentary transcribed in the body of the study. A

similar approach is followed in this study with a summarised report on the interviews given in figure 8 a) and b). Case studies employ different strategies ( Yin, 1994:3-4) and these strategies are used for different purposes. These purposes are to be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. In this study the first part seeks to clarify the WHAT of ASP according to literature, but also the HOW of practices at the selected campuses (cf chapter 2).

### 3.2. Overcoming potential pitfalls and limitations of the case study method.

The components of the case study include:

- Defining strategy;
- Clarifying the propositions and integrating them into the analysis of the data;
- Conclusions drawn from the interpretation are reported and recommendations may be made.

The first component, namely the defining of the strategy relates to the procedure followed to gain data. Interviews were held with twelve Vista staff members across selected campuses and with one staff member of the University of Port Elizabeth (see figure 2 for particulars and list of interviewees).

**Figure 2. Particulars of interviewees.**

Name	Institution	Department
Prof E Jenkins	Vista University, Central Campus	Director Student Development
Mrs F Patel	Vista University, Central Campus	Central Co-ordinator ASP
Mrs L van Ryneveld	Vista University, Cental Campus	Institutional Development
Mr N Bernitz	Vista University, Soweto Campus	ASP Co-ordinator
Mr AL Jadrijevich	Vista University, Welkom Campus	Senior Student Counsellor
Mr B Blunt	University of Port Elizabeth	Director Centre for Organizational Development.
Mrs O Allie	Vista University, Port Elizabeth Campus	Librarian, Writing Centre
Mr E Nkomo	Vista University, Bloemfontein Campus	Education Lecturer
Mr S Menye	Vista University, Bloemfontein Campus	ASP Co-ordinator



Mr W Mann	Vista University, Bloemfontein Campus	Senior Student Counsellor
Mrs C Motha	Vista University, Mamelodi Campus	ASP Co-ordinator
Ms P Frans	Vista University, Mamelodi Campus	SI Co-ordinator

Questionnaires were sent out in order to get an overview of what ASP means to ASP staff. These were sent out early in 1996 to both ASP co-ordinators and student assistants on all seven contact - tuition campuses. The questionnaires were aimed at clarifying the perceptions of staff working with the programme, as to how the programme functions and the effectiveness thereof. The aims and goals of ASP as set out in 1992 and specifically in the 1996's revised mission statement as set out in the various circulars, is compared with the reality experienced on the campuses. The revised effects of the revised mission statement of 1996 can only be seen as representing the departmental vision of how AD or ASP should be functioning. The period of ASP functioning after 1996 is outside the scope of this study. Annual reports, minutes of meeting and circulars were used to provide a wider spectrum of evidence than provided by the interviews and questionnaires.

The second component of the case study (Yin 1994:20-22), namely the clarification of propositions, were met by reporting of the problems experienced by those involved in ASP either as clients or service providers as they interpreted ASP against the goals of the programme. The unit of analysis was chosen to be the selected campuses and in particular, the Welkom campus. This was done through the gathering of information through interviews, questionnaires and observation. A list of participants are found under 3.1.1.

The third component of linking data to propositions, and criteria for interpreting the findings, can be seen in the way whether or not, ASP definitions have fitted national (SA) and Vista University trends. The criteria for interpreting a study's findings (Yin 1994: 25-26), differs according to the philosophy and paradigm employed by those involved in ASP or AD, and is closely linked to the actual debate surrounding the appropriateness of ASP and its current definition. ASP has had to adapt and change in practise to the needs of its clients and according to the perspectives of co-ordinators employed by Vista University.

One of the questions that became necessary to answer as part of the case study methodology, is

whether it is possible to evaluate the functioning of the programme according to the criteria set out initially by the programme definition. This became necessary because the initial criteria were taken from the ASPs functioning at universities where ASP primarily dealt with a small number of disadvantaged students. ASP at Vista University dealt with large numbers of students and less staff per student ratio and yet had to achieve and meet its vision. The criteria had to be evaluate to see whether or not they were realistic. This will be dealt with in paragraph 3.4. The dynamic nature of the process of change within the field of AD necessitates reflection on, and renewal of propositions and criteria for the work to be done. Despite the external context of assuring quality of service provided and the budgetary restraints placed on higher education institutions, feedback on courses and programmes has become an integral part in effective teaching strategy (Hounsell, 1997:3).

The process of transformation is not static or completed and finalised at any given stage, and at the time of conducting this study change was taking place. The implications of transformation for ASP was that staff working with the programme had to contend with changes in management of the department of student development and changes in management on campuses. The programme had to meet the changing expectations of students and lecturers involved in curriculum redesign within their departments without having any avenue for input into either curriculum design or significant input in student expression of their expectations.

Firstly this meant that the ASP staff found themselves working in an isolated space between the students and academic staff. Academic staff saw no reason for consulting ASP staff in curriculum design firstly because ASP staff were seen to be professional staff and not academics.

Secondly ASP staff were seen to be language experts with not knowledge of science or commerce related subjects. The ignorance of academic staff must be seen in the context of the absence of educational qualifications for lecturers, which could have enlightened perceptions regarding basic learning and academic literacy theories. The students preferred to express their perceptions on transformation without consultation with university staff members. On campuses where local transformation forums (LTF's) functioned students often reversed democratically chosen decisions because their implementation was seen to be too slow and mass action taking the shape of strikes or class boycotts forced management to make quick decisions. Within such a climate

of unsettled and often changed schedules it became very difficult to evaluate the functioning of a programme planned to coincide with the academic year. At the time of completion of this study the department of student development had no director and no certainty as to whether ASP would continue to exist or if it did, what the structural changes would be. Under such circumstances it is very difficult for staff to deliver their best service, and remain motivated.

### **3.3. The application of the case study methodology to ASP at Vista University.**

#### **3.3.1. A brief overview of the development of Vista University's ASP.**

A brief history of the ASP programme at Vista is necessary before its merits can be discussed. In 1992 Professor ER Jenkins became Director of the Department of Student Affairs (as it was known in 1992, the name had changed to the Department of Student Development by 1995) - consisting of only a Student Counselling section. The Vista Guided Self Study Method, had up until then been considered adequate in fulfilling academic needs of students. The basic assumptions underpinning the guided self-study model was firstly "that students should study on their own (either individually or in a group setting) as far as possible, and " secondly " that the primary function of lecturers "was" to enable students to do so (Department of Teaching Development and Student Services, 1987:3). For a variety of reasons the ideal fell short from the practice and an investigation was launched and conducted by Professor Jenkins as to the best way of improving pass rates and student retention rates.

Following a study tour of the USA in 1988 by the director and interviews with staff at the South African universities of Cape Town, Durban-Westville, Natal, Rhodes and Western Cape, a report was written indicating alternatives for Vista University (Jenkins, 1991:1). At American universities ASP was integrated into mainstream courses which certain students were obliged to take. Jenkins maintained that "...experience of academic support at other universities has shown that, ...it is desirable to meet student's needs through institutional and curriculum planning and staff development. However, while this remains the ideal, even the University of the Western Cape concedes that additional academic support in projects of various kinds, outside the normal academic curriculum, are at present still necessary..." (Jenkins, 1991:5).

Jenkins (1991:7) proposed in consultation with Vista staff, that in starting academic support at Vista the approach had to be flexible to allow for experimentation, and "...the initial aims had to be realistically modest; there had to be an openness towards developing a variety of modes dependent on the variations between campuses and departments..."

From the report, which led to the addition of ASP to the department of Student Development, twelve points were made. These broadly spell out the path for ASP at Vista university (See Appendix 2 ). These points were condensed into the mission statement of 1992 (Intercom, 1992: 2) which read:

“ Student Services is dedicated to promoting academic excellence in a holistic way, utilizing all available methods and resources through a high professional standard of service rendered impartially to the university student community. In support of this, Student Services is committed to enhancing through personal, group and vocational development strategies the all-round welfare and self-actualisation of all registered and prospective students.”

The services included a Vista Study Guidelines booklet, study skills seminars, the writing of a manual for the Science Communication Course (SCC) , individual assistance to students, a guide on English Language Notes and the introduction of the Student Assistant programme as funded by the Independent Development Trust (Intercom, 1992 :3-5).

Nine months later the focus of the department shifted slightly more towards an integrated model of ASP (Intercom, 2 May 1993) :

"Today the focus in academic development programmes has shifted from general skills training to assisting students within the context of a discipline. Skills programmes should ideally be integrated with content for full academic relevance."

In particular, acquiring English language skills, was seen to be an important element of the AS programme. This was in line with the perception of AD at Rhodes University where Collet (1992:178) maintained that the aim of AD programmes was to support the student in acquiring a level of language competence which was sufficient to enable the student to cope with the

linguistic demands of academic courses.

English is a second or third language to most students. Figure 3, bears this out on the Welkom campus. In accordance, the original recommendation made by Jenkins (1991:11-12) "...four or five English Second Language experts..." were appointed at the campuses with Mr N Bernitz on the Soweto campus; Mrs A Knott on the Port Elizabeth campus, Ms Dine du Preez on the Sebokeng campus and Mrs D Raff on the Port Elizabeth campus, as tutors. Of these original four the three co-ordinators at Soweto, Sebokeng and Port Elizabeth are still in their original posts. Their duties (See appendix 1 for full list) was to include the teaching of a one-semester course on English for academic purposes. The suggestion was that this would be fifteen hours of one hour per week of teaching within an academic department, wishing to make use of the services of the language expert.

Support projects, proposed and run by departments, were to be evaluated and reported on. Apart from providing a consultancy service for students the staff of AS were to prepare new materials and modify programmes. In consultation with the Teaching Development department (later to be known as Institutional Development or ID), the AS staff were to liaise with lecturers and tutors on implementing study and language skills. Writing and research skills courses were to be run either in consultation with student advisers or in facilitating the Centre for Cognitive Development in so doing.

AS programmes were experiencing similar developments at WITS, UCT and Natal. In 1993, ASP was offered at three different levels at these universities. They were:

- Individual or group consultations with ASP tutors (Kagee, 1994:360);
- ASP tutor seminars on study, language and cognitive skills; and
- Tutorials designed in collaboration with departments at their request. These tutorials moved towards content based ASP within disciplines.

SI was still linked to academic support but was emerging as a bridge between student support and a shortage in staff resources, where increasing numbers of students challenged teaching (Davies, 1994:165).

The AS programme expanded in terms of staffing and functioning. The inclusion of students allowed the work of ASP staff to be extended into more departments in a regular and monitored way. A head office co-ordinator was appointed in 1994 to co-ordinate ASP activities. A deputy director to the department co-ordinated the counselling division.

The student assistant programme was first implemented on the East Rand, Soweto and Port Elizabeth campuses in 1993 (Frans et al, 1996:37) co-ordinated by ASP. In 1994 it also expanded to the Welkom campus under the co-ordination of the counsellor (Jadrijevic, 1996). Academic departments elected a mentor who, in co-operation with the ASP co-ordinator, selected one senior student per department. Each campus had the choice of ten funded SAs from the department of Student Development. The SAs signed a contract with the ASP co-ordinator and submitted monthly claim forms signed by the mentor for payment. SAs were paid for ten months of the academic year.

Selection procedures could be determined by relevant departments with basic guidelines from the Department of Student Development. These guidelines covered the selection of students with a good academic track record and having good communication skills, to the work they did in the academic department. SAs were not allowed to mark or award marks to tests to be used in evaluation of a student and were not to invigilate during tests or take over teaching responsibility for a lecturer (Frans et al, 1996:37-39). Problems involved in this programme will be discussed after the answers per campus have been analysed. When IDT funding came to an end the programme ceased in 1996. The university was not prepared to take over funding for the programme and co-ordinators urged departments who had used the services of senior students trained and remunerated by the department of student development, to employ their own students from 1997 onwards. On the Welkom campus eg, some departments saw and felt the need to continue with the AD tutorials offered by these student assistants (SAs) in the past, and found money to employ them. Certain departments had already employed senior students independently from the department of Student Development.

In the situation where a departmentally organised tutorial system had collapsed on some campuses and barely survived on others, the SA programme provided students, especially first years, with

a more interactive approach to learning. In 1993 a mathematics tutoring programme started on the Soweto campus with 100-150 students participating. Regular training and development of workshops, was facilitated by the ASP co-ordinator (Bernitz, 1993:6).

The AS programme expanded to include the Supplemental Instruction, (SI) programme in its various forms on at least two of its campuses (Port Elizabeth- run by an SI committee, and Welkom- a pilot project) by the end of 1995. The implementation and functioning of these programmes differed in a variety of ways on the campuses as is shown by the comments made in answer to the questionnaires in figure 10 a -b.

Intensive training of ASP staff as SI facilitators at Port Elizabeth university was completed between 1995 and 1997. Counsellors or student advisers had the opportunity of being trained by Dr Deanna Martin -founder of SI in Kansas-, in Bloemfontein in 1993, and again in 1997. In 1996 an SI co-ordinator, Ms P Frans, based at the Mamelodi campus, was appointed.

Although it was called the AS programme, a wide range of programmes were offered. Changes occurred including the title change of tutor to co-ordinator, and the extension of staff through the appointment of ten student assistants per campus. The co-ordinators did not teach credit bearing courses by 1995. With the exception of the further training campus or VUDEC (Vista University Distance Education Campus), in Pretoria the other seven campuses had a full staff complement in 1995 of one co-ordinator per campus assisted by the ten student assistants appointed to work as tutors within academic departments.

The Independent Development Trust had been the main sponsor for ASP at Vista university, with further support from Anglo - De Beer's Chairman's Fund and the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust (Intercom, 1995:1). Kagiso Trust sponsored the purchase of equipment and the peer counselling programme. This situation changed at the beginning of 1996 when the contract posts for ASP co-ordinators were finally with the last post at Sebokeng, being taken over by the university. All ASP staff were then on the University payroll. The co-ordinators appointed at Bloemfontein, Mamelodi, East Rand and Welkom at the beginning of 1995 were all appointed into permanent posts. The importance of acceptance of ASP by the university, in that it is prepared to create permanent posts for ASP staff, affirm the principle that the university

recognised the need for ASP and the role it can play in the university's development of teaching and learning strategies. ASPs as part of AD's prime concern with mainstream educational processes, became the institution's responsibility.

Scott (1996:35) makes the point that a distinction exists between student development activities that become recurrent, with AD tutorials programmes as an example, and innovative developmental work. The latter would be aimed at producing "...lasting improvements and approaches and systems...". The example here would be the planning and introduction of a new course or teaching approach that is often labour-intensive but carries the potential for lasting benefits to the institution. Such courses or approaches then need to be incorporated into standard processes and funded from recurrent resources in order to be sustained. Bridging or foundation courses are examples as they often originate as AD initiatives but then become recurrent and even indispensable to a faculty or department (Scott, 1996:36). Jenkins had made a similar point that it was highly desirable that full-time staff be given permanent appointments and not contract appointments. The reasons given by Jenkins (1991:9-10) were:

- It is difficult to attract good staff to temporary, short-term appointments.
- Permanent appointments of, often marginalised Student Development staff gives them access to a career path and the university reward system. These staff members can also share in teaching mainstream academic courses.
- Experience had shown that contract staff were less inclined to document their work.

### **3.3.2. ASP practises at Vista University campuses influenced by staffing.**

The practice at a specific campus is linked to the context of the campus and the perception of the co-ordinator of his/her duties there. By 1995 the ASP co-ordinators job description (Appendix 2) had expanded to being open-ended, with the co-ordinators showing initiative and self-motivation. The main duties included the following:

- Arranging content based short courses.
- Run a consultancy service for staff and students on:-writing, learning and language



skills.

- Build up learning resources on the campus.
- Develop course material (curriculum design).
- Facilitate the Supplemental Instruction, student assistants' as ASP tutor's programme, with the necessary evaluation.
- Conduct research and read papers or write articles on these ASP related issues.

The ideal profile for a co-ordinator, from the job description would include:-

- Excellent interpersonal and professional skills.
- Motivation with the ability to take initiative in arranging and facilitating courses.
- Knowledge with regards to tutoring, teaching and higher education practices.
- Knowledge concerning learning theory and practice.
- Expert knowledge in the field of language in general and the English language in particular.
- Good managerial and administrative skills.
- Experience as researcher in the area of evaluation.
- Experience in the area of curriculum design.

Although staffing is not directly the focus of this study, it has influenced the implementation of the AS programme on the campuses. It is noteworthy that no official training programme, diploma or course exists for academic developers working in the field, despite recommendations and attempts by universities such as Cape Town to have master or doctoral programmes for practitioners of AD. Staff relied on organisations such as SAAAD and South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education (SAARDHE) to provide training in the form of workshops or conferences. Capacity building in the form of staff development for Academic Development has been a need expressed by staff, who rely on themselves and colleagues in the field to provide an informal support network (Knott, 1995:6 - 8)

In July 1996 a strategic planning (Patel, 1996) meeting took place over three days. The outcome resulted in a renewed vision and mission statement as well as recommendation for the running of the programme. It was the first time that a full complement of permanent staff members of the

ASP section of the department reflected on their goals and future plans. Previous meetings had dealt of necessity with concerns and issues in the daily running of the programme. The mission statement changed as follows:

“Academic Development at Vista University facilitates the achievement of the maximum potential of all staff and students. Academic Development supports the processes of effective teaching and learning through curriculum, language, policy and research development.”

The vision included the following shared values:

“To enhance student academic self - esteem;  
To infuse and integrate academic development concerns into all faculties and departments.”

The objectives identified were:

“ In partnership with all university staff, Academic Development:  
conducts research into academic issues and concerns;  
facilitates student development; and  
plans, implements and designs relevant staff/student development programmes” (Minutes, 1996 June: 1-2).

The original vision had grown to include staff development, curriculum planning as well as policy and research development. Campus diverse needs and campus co-ordinator skills, dictate specific functioning on the campuses.

### **3.3.3 Techniques used in gathering the data.**

**The techniques included a questionnaire survey and interviews.**

### **3.3.3.1. Academic Skills Programme as interpreted by student assistants and ASP staff : a questionnaire survey.**

Questionnaires were sent out early in 1996 to both ASP co-ordinators and student assistants on all seven contact - tuition campuses. This endeavour was aimed at clarifying the perceptions of staff working with the programme. It allowed for the analysis of the aims and goals of ASP as set out in 1992 and specifically in the 1996's revised mission statement, in comparison with the reality on the campuses. It must be borne in mind that the revised mission statement could only be seen as criteria if seen as representing the departmental vision of where AD or ASP should be at. It would take a longer to see practical results as, changes in perception and implementation of ASP would take longer.

Table 4 indicates the summarised results of the questionnaire survey amongst student assistants:

**Table 4. Results of a questionnaire survey with student assistants (Sas).**

Campus	Number of SA questionnaires mailed	Number of SAs questionnaires returned	Number of SAs having at least one year experience.	Number of SAs having more than one year's experience
Port Elizabeth	9	4	4	-
Mamelodi	13	3	2	1
Welkom	11	7	6	1
Soweto	14	4	3	1
Sebokeng	8	0	-	-
Bloemfontein	10	0	-	-
East Rand	11	4	2	-
Total	67	22 (33%)	17	3

According to Table 4, a total of 22 questionnaires (33%) were returned out of 67 sent to seven campuses. Two Vista campuses, Sebokeng and Bloemfontein, were not included in the survey as disruptions on those campuses made it difficult for normal university business to continue. From Table 4 it is clear that only three students were identified as having more than one year's experience of working with the department and in particular in the field of ASP. Two did not complete that particular question. The trend was confirmed that little continuity exists from year to year. New student assistants had to be trained each year. This situation was a problem in that little mentoring between senior SAs and new SAs could take place. The co-ordinators spent much time and effort training new students as SAs each year. These efforts could have been focussed in more effective ways. Better planning for a measure of continuity between academic staff and ASP co-ordinators could alleviate the problem. Welkom had the highest response rate. This can be attributed to the researcher making a greater effort on that campus to collect responses. The poor response rate could indicate the problems of poor communication between co-ordinators and SAs and the general disillusionment with the discontinuation of the programme. SAs could have felt that there was no point in answering a questionnaire which they interpreted as being about the SA programme rather than the AS programme. SAs could also have seen the answering of the three questions as imposing on their time. In some cases the broken and telegraphic style in which the questions were answered shows that students are not used to completing questionnaires and

giving their own answers (See Appendix 2 for questionnaire ).

The questions posed to the SAs are grouped and analysed per campus and per question. In summary the question responses are given in figure 3. The questions were:

Question 1: What do you think are the benefits of the Academic Skills Programme?

Question 2: What do think are the problems of the Academic Skills Programme at your campus/ office?

Question 3: Do you have any other comments you would like to make on the Academic Skills programme?

**Figure 3. Summary of responses to question 1 of survey.**

Question: What do you think are the benefits of the AS programme?	
Campus	Collective Response.
Bloemfontein	No response
East Rand	Smaller groups allow for interaction with material and peers.
Mamelodi	Study groups are formed and students learn how to write assignments
Port Elizabeth	Students learn study skills and gain confidence in achieving academically Student assistants form a communication link between lecturer and students Students learn communication and leadership skills. They gain better vocational skills.
Sebokeng	No response
Soweto	Student assistants help students adapt to university life. Study skills are learnt and small groups enable students to discuss work. Better communication exists between the students and the Sa than between lecturers.
Welkom	Students who attend ASP do well in their studies, especially those attending SI sessions. Students learn skills needed at university which they never learnt at school. First year students trust the SAs to help them with their academic careers.

The responses included negative comments which are included in figure 4 as weaknesses of the AS programme.

**Figure 4. Weaknesses emerging from the programme as reflected in the questionnaire survey given to SAs.**

<b>Weaknesses identified and included for question 2 of the survey.</b>	
<b>Campus</b>	<b>Collective Response.</b>
Bloemfontein	No response
East Rand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources such as venues for tutorials are lacking.</li> <li>• Lecturers let SAs mark scripts which causes problems for the SA.</li> <li>• Lecturers should co-operate and advertise tutorials.</li> <li>• Afternoon sessions are restricted by transport problems students experience.</li> </ul>
Mamelodi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SAs should be trained more frequently.</li> <li>• SAs have no office space .</li> <li>• Payments to SAs occur haphazardly.</li> <li>• Departments should be involved in training SAs.</li> </ul>
Port Elizabeth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SA programme becomes the responsibility of the SA and department and ASP co-ordinator should share responsibility. Training should be done jointly and more regularly.</li> <li>• The programme should be integrated into departments.</li> <li>• Payment is often delayed to SAs.</li> <li>• Lack of resources such a computers hamper its effectivity.</li> <li>• The programme needs better advertising and should be introduced at orientation and continue in the revision period.</li> </ul>
Sebokeng	No response.
Soweto	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tutorials are often attended by too large groups.</li> <li>• Resources such office space is inadequate.</li> <li>• SAs should have the power to award marks .</li> <li>• The AS programme should be included in the curriculum and more ASP co-ordinators should be employed in departments.</li> <li>• Certificates of proficiency should be awarded to those attending the programme.</li> </ul>

Welkom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students do not use ASP optimally.</li> <li>• SAs are poorly paid.</li> <li>• Students expect quick fixes before a test or exam.</li> <li>• More training should be given to SAs.</li> <li>• Voluntary attendance of SI leads to infrequent attendance.</li> <li>• Lecturers should encourage students to attend.</li> <li>• Lack of resources such as office space for consultations, and venues for SI limit the programme.</li> <li>• The poor culture of learning amongst students aggravate problems.</li> <li>• SAs should be chosen for good communication skills and not just according to their academic achievement. SAs should also be employed before the start of the academic year .</li> </ul>
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What emerged strongly from all campuses is that in the opinion of student assistants, ASP referred either to the SA programme or to SI. They hardly saw ASP as functioning in any other capacity. One possible reason for this could be that only one ASP co-ordinator on a campus has limited time to attend to all the aspects of the job description and then focuses on running one programme, namely SA or SI . Another explanation could be that because the students are involved in either the SA or SI programme they see only that programme and do not link it with the ASP co-ordinators wider programme. The questions themselves may also not have been explicit enough. The aim of the questionnaires was aimed at general perceptions, rather than to make distinctions on behalf of those questioned. The strengths and weaknesses as identified by the student assistants of the SA and the SI programme have been summarised in figures 5 and 6. They include the responses observed most frequently.



**Figure 5 . Strengths and weaknesses of the student assistants programme and ASP.**

Strengths of the programme	Weaknesses of the programme.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ It teaches students academic skills.</li> <li>▶ Students adapt better to university life.</li> <li>▶ Students succeed more at university.</li> <li>▶ SAs are links between lecturer and student.</li> <li>▶ Students are better equipped for job market.</li> <li>▶ SAs learn leadership and communication skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ For students: Poor contact with departments and ASP on some campuses leads to misunderstandings.</li> <li>▶ Students do not use ASP often enough due to not knowing about the programme or due to not bothering</li> <li>▶ For SAs: No office space, or venues.</li> <li>▶ Poor remuneration and long waiting periods for payment is frustrating.</li> <li>▶ Not enough training workshops.</li> </ul>

One of the difficulties expressed by these assistants and those independent of the AS programme prior to 1997, was the lack of mentor ship. They often felt as if they worked in a vacuum. In that regard the recommendation that student assistants be trained and regularly monitored and not be left to work in isolation, was made. The comments referring specifically to the Supplemental Instruction<sup>8</sup> programme are summarised in figure 6.

**Figure 6. Strengths and weaknesses of the SI programme.**

Strengths of the SI programme.	Weaknesses of the SI programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Students who have difficulties in class benefit from small groups.</li> <li>▶ Better academic students attend SI as they see its benefits, and assist the rest of the group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Students who do not prepare for sessions do not maximize their opportunities.</li> <li>▶ Students attend poorly and expect the SI leaders to assist them before a test or assignment.</li> </ul>

It is noted that only the SAs from Welkom mentioned SI . It can be deduced that they saw the programme as part of ASP. No mention of SI on the other two campuses is made as the

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<sup>8</sup>It must be borne in mind that SI was only run on three of the seven campuses by 1996. This was PE , Mamelodi where it was run by an SI co-ordinator and Welkom where it ran simultaneously with SA and many SAs were running SI as a pilot project.

programme was new on the Mamelodi campus with a distinction made between SI and ASP. This distinction was reinforced by the appointment of the SI co-ordinator with a specific SI office and it was introduced in 1996. As this campus's SI programme has its own co-ordinator, the perception that it is separate from ASP could occur. On the PE campus it has been co-ordinated by an SI Committee comprising of academics with access to the ASP co-ordinator for consultation. Students could see the functioning of SI as separate from ASP.

The questionnaires sent to ASP co-ordinators were the same as the ones sent to student assistants. Of the six<sup>9</sup> questionnaires sent out four responses were returned, including one from Central Office. One co-ordinator apologized for not returning the questionnaire as she had only been in the Department for five months and did not feel qualified to respond. Two co-ordinators returned the questionnaire without completing it but instead submitting other documentation, i.e previous ASP reports and electronically mailed notes related to the questions. This made the task more difficult to analyse the questionnaire returns. The questionnaires had been designed to focus on specific issues whereas general material hindered the effectiveness of the strategy, and led to related but divergent issues, and confusing the specific issues. The questions were still applied to the two other responses and extra comments added to question 3. Figure 7 a, b and c, represent the summary of responses received from the questionnaire survey, and figure 9 from the other documentation submitted.

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<sup>9</sup> No questionnaire was sent to Welkom as the researcher of this study was the ASP co-ordinator on that campus.

**Figure 7 a ) Responses to questionnaire survey sent to campus co-ordinators.**

<b>Question 1: What do you think, are the benefits of the Academic Skills Programme?</b>	
<b>Campus.</b>	<b>Comments.</b>
Bloemfontein.	No response
East Rand	No response.
Mamelodi.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual consultations provide for personal interaction and communication. The co-ordinator can then bring the students problems to the lecturer.</li> <li>• Academic skills workshops benefit students and reveal problems, eg note taking skills and lecturers presentation weaknesses.</li> <li>• SAs compiled a content based study skills manual for first years for 1997.</li> <li>• Research into students problems in a particular department led to that department attending to the specific writing problems in time tabled practicals for their students.</li> </ul>
Port Elizabeth.	Other documentation submitted.
Sebokeng.	No response
Soweto.	Other documentation submitted.
Central Campus.	Refer to interview

**Figure 7 b ) Responses to questionnaire survey sent to campus co-ordinators.**

<b>Question 2: What do you think, are the problems of the Academic Skills Programme at your campus/ office?</b>	
<b>Campus.</b>	<b>Comments.</b>
Bloemfontein.	No response.
East Rand	No response.
Mamelodi.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary nature of ASP, attendance is very poor. Students prefer to attend at crisis times when “quick-fixes” are needed prior to tests or exams.</li> <li>• Academics refer students with study skill problems to the co-ordinator and do not consider it part of their job to assist in finding a solution to the problems. ASP is seen as a clinic for passing problems and responsibility to.</li> <li>• The SA programme as part of ASP has the following weaknesses:-</li> <li>• SAs do not attend training regularly;</li> <li>• Some departments misuse SAs in getting them to attend to administrative duties;</li> <li>• SAs preparing for and conducting regular skills tutorials find students not attending and then expecting individual help when an assignment is due.</li> </ul>
Port Elizabeth.	Other documentation submitted.
Sebokeng.	No response.
Soweto.	Other documentation submitted.
Central Campus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major structural and professional problems exist, eg, the link between counselling and ASP is confusing.</li> <li>• The line of responsibility and accountability is not clear, co-ordinators must report to Heads of departments, the central campus co-ordinator, director of department and the campus director.</li> <li>• Non-academic status limits co-ordinators</li> <li>• The ASP role is not recognised within the academic mainstream or by academic staff because it is aligned to student development.</li> </ul>

**Figure 7 c) Responses to questionnaire survey sent to campus co-ordinators.**

Question 3: Do you have any other comments you would like to make?	
Campus.	Comments.
Bloemfontein.	No response.
East Rand	No response.
Mamelodi.	Refer to interview.
Port Elizabeth.	Other documentation submitted.
Sebokeng.	No response.
Soweto.	Other documentation submitted.
Central Campus.	Refer to interview.

### **3.3.3.2. The interview responses.**

Interviews were conducted in November 1995 at Central campus and at two of the campuses. The other interviews took place between April and June 1996. Interviews were conducted on the Welkom campus in 1996 and 1998. The majority of interviews took place with the interviewer recording and transcribing the interview for analysis. One interview took place telephonically, whilst some comments were verified telephonically as well. The results of the interviews are summarised in figure 8. The interview question was: What are your observations regarding the successes and failures of the AS programme?

**Figure 8 : Summarised interview responses.**

**a) Weaknesses of the AS programme:**

Interviewee	Response summarised.
<p>Director of Student Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASP needs a central unit from which programmes and projects are monitored and evaluated.</li> <li>• The Science project was a flop, and a four year course may be a better option than a bridging course.</li> <li>• The perceptions of staff and students affect the effectivity of ASP, and staff are not always willing to co-operate with ASP.</li> </ul>
<p>ASP Central campus co-ordinator</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In context with AD nationally the link with counselling weakens the programme as it is seen as a remedial effort.</li> <li>• The terminology ASP instead of AD limits the effectivity because of its negative connotations. ASP is a deficit model.</li> <li>• The lack of expertise or knowledge of ASP, by leadership at the university , limits the promotion thereof. ASP has no influence on academic related issues at the university as it has no voice at any level of governance.</li> <li>• ASP co-ordinators are diverse in their fields of expertise which makes cohesion of the programme difficult. A diversity of programmes on campuses complicates evaluation.</li> <li>• Funding for programmes such as SI is a major problem.</li> <li>• A central unit may assist in balancing the dilemma of staff and student development which ASP is not able to address because of its structure.</li> <li>• One ASP co-ordinator per campus is inadequate in addressing campus needs. One person does not have the different specializations required for effective AD work. An example is that an SI co-ordinator is a full time position per campus. The ASP co-ordinator has duties such as writing centre and SA co-ordination with campus specific needs demanding attention, i.e. staff development and/or access and selection etc. committee work. Co-ordinators hardly have time for research.</li> </ul>

Mamelodi campus co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the ASP focus purely on students teaching problems cannot be adequately addressed.</li> <li>• ASP is not an acceptable name within the national context for the work needed on campuses.</li> <li>• Poor avenues for communication between lecturers and co-ordinators leads to working in isolation. Issues such as the need for tutorials, venues, SI has no natural platform where it can be discussed.</li> </ul>
SI Mamelodi co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service rendered to staff and students needs more cohesion and support from the university, both financially and structurally.</li> <li>• Shortage of office space means that the 10 SAs or SI leaders share the co-ordinator's office and this leads to difficulties when the single computer is in use or a consultation is in progress or sought.</li> <li>• Co-ordinators need capacity building, in i.e. computer skills, communication skills improvement and research skills, training.</li> </ul>
Bloemfontein co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administering the SA programme takes time and much preparation. Without secretarial assistance all ASP work, advertising etc takes up a great deal of time.</li> </ul>
Ex- co-ordinator , Bloemfontein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a great need for staff development and training especially within the teaching area and co-ordinators do not have the time or mandate to fulfill this role adequately.</li> <li>• Projects for schools, orientation, staff awareness of student problems workshops etc cannot be successfully done by one person.</li> </ul>
Counsellor, Bloemfontein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is too little opportunity for academics and ASP staff to consult on problems or work on projects jointly.</li> </ul>
Counsellor, Welkom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASP is viewed as an appendage of counselling and this limits the scope of ASP. At the same time co-operation between ASP and counselling is effective once the work of ASP is clearly defined.</li> </ul>

## 8.b) Strengths of the AS programme:

Interviewee	Response summarised.
Director of Student Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AS programme was an attempt to overcome the problems not dealt with by the self-guided tuition model of Vista.</li> <li>• Issues and options involve the nature of ASP, i.e should it be credit bearing , voluntary or compulsory are debated.</li> <li>• Should it be integrated or concentrate on language and skills development.</li> </ul>
ASP Central campus co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual campuses served by co-ordinators can address campus specific needs through diverse programmes.</li> <li>• A broad AD agenda functions under the auspices of ASP.</li> <li>• The SA programme broadened the campus ASP influence and benefited departments and students.</li> <li>• the writing centres involved academics and students in the learning process. This is functioning well in PE and Bloemfontein. At Mamelodi it follows a slightly different pattern as a writing project within specific departments.</li> <li>• SI is an answer to the termination of the SA programme with more positive learning outcomes. All 7 co-ordinators are trained as SI supervisors. On PE campus an SI committee runs SI, on Mamelodi an SI co-ordinator was appointed. On Welkom campus a pilot project is running.</li> <li>• Staff development under the auspices of ASP is taking place on the East Rand and Welkom campuses.</li> <li>• Curriculum development or involvement occurs sporadically at some campuses.</li> </ul>
Mamelodi campus co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students who are in need of writing skills benefit from projects such as the writing project. As a joint venture between the academic department and ASP ownership for student learning is shared and the results better because of co-operation.</li> <li>• Lecturers are often unaware of the difficulties their students experience, and in consultation with ASP much of the misunderstandings can be cleared up and teaching and learning improved.</li> </ul>



SI Mamelodi co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SI provides a service to students and departments.</li> <li>• Departments and students have a choice to participate or not in the programme. This leads to responsibility being taken for active learning.</li> <li>• A structured programme such as SI allows for data collection and regular evaluation and monitoring which gives positive feedback to students and departments.</li> </ul>
Bloemfontein co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The writing centre gives lecturers the opportunity to engage with their students and assist them in improving their writing. This improves student lecturer communication and allows for clarification of content.</li> </ul>
Ex- co-ordinator , Bloemfontein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students need the skills ASP can offer.</li> <li>• The workshops run by SAs benefit students who can openly speak to these older students and share their problems.</li> </ul>
Counsellor, Bloemfontein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students benefit from support, as they struggle with language related and general skills problems never taught at school.</li> </ul>
Counsellor, Welkom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group learning such as happens in SI sessions contribute to better understanding of work and improves communication skills.</li> <li>• Especially first year students need assistance in adapting to the academic labour needed to be successful in their studies. The SA programme assisted departments in reaching students effectively. Large classes and limited venues with few departments running tutorials, allows for poor student lecturer communication. Students have to overcome many difficulties, SAs and peer counsellors assist them with support and advice.</li> </ul>

### 3.3.3.3. Strengths and weaknesses related to the programme as drawn from available literature.

Comments from documents submitted instead of answering question three are summarised together with comments drawn from the 1996 annual report. The 1996 report was selected as it represented all co-ordinators most current views. Comments from earlier annual reports and submitted documents did not differ significantly from the 1996 reports and so the 1996 comments were selected as the most updated views. The Welkom campus perspective will be dealt with in chapter 4 and related to these four campus perspectives. See figures 9 a and b and 10 for comments summarised as weaknesses and strengths as perceived by co-ordinators.

**Figure 9. Summary of comments related to strengths and weaknesses of the programme drawn from co-ordinators' 1996 annual report.**

<p>a) Weaknesses of the programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of funds, challenges the success of the AS programme (Menye, 1996: 5); (Knott, 1996:58)</li> <li>• Additional staff members needed given the number of programmes run by current co-ordinator (Menye, 1996:5);</li> <li>• Limitations to the programme's success is the unavailability of venues for tutorials (Menye, 1996: 5);</li> <li>• ASP should be more vigorous in promoting themselves as resources for lecturers as well as student (Motha, 1996:26);</li> <li>• More interaction between lecturers and ASP co-ordinators needed (Motha, 1996:26);</li> <li>• SI must be funded by the university and venues and time slots for SI sessions is important in the successful running of the programme (Motha, 1996:31); venues need to be created (Knott, 1996:61);</li> <li>• Sustain ability of student assistantship programme and SI is important (Knott, 1996:47); the university needs to take responsibility for funding these programmes (Forson, 1996:89);</li> <li>• Computer literacy must be linked to academic literacy (Knott, 1996:47);</li> <li>• Student assistants need office space (Knott, 1996:51);</li> <li>• Lack of departmental commitment and lack of co-operation and support from mentors, make the SA programme difficult to implement successfully (Du Preez, 1996:73);</li> <li>• Fewer students than in the past, still see ASP as threat to their self image (Bernitz, 1996:76);</li> <li>• Communication gaps exist between faculty deans, heads and sub heads which complicate communication between ASP staff and lecturers (Bernitz, 1996:77);</li> <li>• Lack of university back-up system in processing data or statistics in evaluation creates problems (Forson, 1996:91);</li> </ul>
<p>b) Strengths of the programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing for academic purposes programme, benefited students assignment structure (Motha, 1996:25);</li> <li>• Supplemental Instruction implemented in consultation with lecturers is enthusiastically received (Motha, 1996:30);</li> <li>• Writing centre benefits students and staff (Knott, 1996:64);</li> </ul>

In analysing these responses what emerges firstly is a concern with the structure and organization of the As programme. Secondly, the status and effectiveness of co-ordinators, linked to the first point, appears to be of concern to some of the co-ordinators more than to others. Thirdly, the exact nature of the work of co-ordinators is blurred. Some refer to very specific functions such

as: student assistants' training and mentoring, individual consultation, whilst others refer to broad topics such as transformation, and curriculum development. It appears that there are different perceptions of what ASP is what its benefits and problems are and where it is going. This difference in perspectives represents the broader South African dilemma in which academic developers find themselves. The difference in perspective is noted between the co-ordinators more recently employed in ASP (since 1995) and those who have had longer involvement with ASP / AD, from 1992. The co-ordinators with more exposure and experience to the debates in South Africa through attendance of SAAAD conferences and interaction with other universities, are inclined to move towards an AD approach.

Co-ordinators describe themselves differently. One referred to AD co-ordinator whereas others refer to ASP. This can be as result of the questionnaires referring to ASP with the one co-ordinator deliberately choosing AD to indicate the perceived need to change from ASP to AD. The reference to AD is also in line with the consensus amongst co-ordinators reached at the strategic planning meeting to change the name from ASP to AD and continued referring to themselves as AD practitioners in correspondence with departments and management concerning the designing of foundation courses as example ( Patel (c), 1997:1).

ASP's main brief was to support students. The main concern of the ASP co-ordinator was to implement, co-ordinate and evaluate the Student Assistant (SA) programme. Sixty - four SA's were appointed on the seven contact -tuition campuses in 1996, needing training and monitoring (Du Preez, 1996: i - ii). It soon became apparent that AD staff were drawn into the areas of admission and selection committees, and transformation fora in various capacities on the different campuses. By 1996; Mamelodi, (Annual Report, 1996: 31), Port Elizabeth (Annual Report, 1996: 66), Sebokeng (Annual Report, 1996: 74), ASP co-ordinators were involved in campus admission and selection committees. By 1996, ASP staff needed to reflect and rethink their role and function and the effectivity of the AS Programme.

From these comments it becomes clear that very divergent thinking is taking place with regards to the AS programme. From the comments of co-ordinators and student assistants the analysis is drawn per selected campus and given in figures 10 a to e. For reasons of confidentiality, campuses are not identified by name.

**Figure 10 a). Summary of campus comments: Campus A.**

- The student deficit model is no longer acceptable within the transformation process Vista university is finding itself in. The deficit model was concerned with language and study skills and was divorced from the curriculum, teaching model and academic programme of the university as a whole. ASP has had to respond to student needs and incorporated new developments. These new developments include the establishment of Writing Centres, Writing Project and Supplemental Instruction Programmes (Patel (b), 1997:1).
- A new structure for ASP has to be devised in which an integrationist approach in line with Academic Development goals is achieved.
- ASP has to become more campus orientated and work in closer co-operation with campus management (Patel (d), 1997:2). Budgets for the AS programme should be located within the campus rather than externally.
- ASP staff should be recognised as academics who have full participation in the academic mainstream life of the campus (Patel (c), 1997:2). The implication is that ASP is removed from its position as second wing in the department of student development and severs links with student counselling.

**Figure 10 b). Summary of campus comments : Campus B.**

- The communication channels between ASP staff and faculty deans, heads and sub heads of departments is poorly defined and often non existent. This hampers effective intervention by ASP staff on curriculum design and teaching practise on a campus. The co-ordinators role as mediator and advisor is marginalised as there is no specific governance model which ensures ASP staff a voice in academic matters. This perspective is echoed in minutes of meeting held between ASP staff in 1996 in which co-ordinators requests that they have representation on Faculty and sub-faculty meetings. Co-ordinators felt that they needed to be involved in the drawing up of time-tables on campuses ( ASP/AD meeting minutes, 1996:2).

**Figure 10 c). Summary of campus comments : Campus C.**

- Campus specific projects such as the Writing project benefits students more than generalised skills workshops. This is because specific needs of students are attended to.
- The AS programme should be better advertised to students and staff as a resource for better teaching and learning.
- The communication between lecturers and ASP co-ordinators should be more formalised. Better communication can lead to better co-operation which in turn can benefit student learning and success. An example would be the co-operation which could occur in raising funds for SI which ultimately benefits a specific department or faculty.
- The co-ordinator in partnership with lecturers can devise researched strategies to improve both teaching and learning at the university.
- The university should invest in funding effective programmes such as SI. Time-tabling sessions and allocating venue space for SI is essential in running the programme effectively.

**Figure 10 d). Summary of campus comments : Campus D.**

- The deficit model of ASP should be replaced by an AD model which aims to transform the institution through curriculum development. Management of the university should consult with stakeholders at ground level where needs dictate rapid change and innovation.
- Programmes such as SI and the SA programme should be funded by the university.
- Projects such as Writing Centres benefit the students but must be accorded venue space and support.
- AD co-ordinators have no administrative support and yet are expected to service all the students at a particular campus single handedly. The lack of personnel seriously hampers efficient and effective implementation and functioning of any developmental programme.
- AD co-ordinators are expected to be involved in research and yet are not accorded professional status which does not allow them research or recess leave accorded to academics.
- AD needs to be integrated into each faculty with a language and learning specialist appointed per faculty. The field of AD is wide and gender equity and the promotion there of should be part of AD activities on campus. AD staff need to be supported and nurtured in the immense developmental task of assisting the process of transformation of the university.
- The co-ordinators role is that of consultant to departments and academic, SI, Writing Centre committees rather than being the “fixer” of the problems.

**Figure 10 e). Summary of campus comments : Campus E.**

- To integrate staff, encourage curriculum design development, and contribute to policy making and transformation of the in an institution is a tall order for a single person on a single campus. At Vista University the structure of eight campuses complicates the situation even more. At this campus the situation is complex in that the campus must conform to the other campuses and at the same time respond to specific needs within the community it serves as a higher education institution. These constraints add to the difficulty in running the AS programme both effectively and efficiently.
- The different activities included under the auspices of the Academic Skills Programme, include: the student assistants programme, the Supplemental Instruction programme, general workshops, staff development, community outreach, planning for a writing centre, committee work
- Good working relations and co-operation with counsellors assist in promoting ASP through workshops and projects undertaken jointly.
- The proposed Learning Centre on the campus is in effect a move towards integrating support on the campus for both lecturers and students.
- There is a dire need for a campus staff development co-ordinator who can assist academic staff in implementing effective teaching strategies.

These five campus perspectives echo the general problems identified under 1.3. The diversity of the campus perspectives mitigates against effective evaluation of the programme. Two co-ordinators saw their role to be that of consultant or advisor and one co-ordinator saw the job as entailing research and implementing projects and programmes. One co-ordinator focussed on individual or generalised workshops whereas another saw their job as dealing with the organisation and curricular aspects of the teaching and learning process rather than dealing with students directly. On campus E, staff development was seen to be as important as student support. These differences highlight both personality differences and point to different approaches on campuses. The need to enlarge the team is evident and yet, unlike the campus E case, no mention of working in co-operation with counsellors is made.

No research appears to be taking place in partnership between campuses although similar problems exist and students had highlighted a list of similar difficulties. Time constraints and lack of capacity could account for this. The freedom to respond to campus needs could have the negative impact on ASP staff in that much time is taken up by negotiation for the programme, attending to the poor results of students rather than having the time to plan and intervene at the

source of problems. Curriculum development is mentioned by co-ordinators as an essential element of transformation and yet the department is hardly consulted in this area. In the five years of this study two co-ordinators were appointed to work on the Science foundation course and two to assist in 1992 and 1996 respectively with English for academic purposes courses.

### **3.4. Conclusions drawn from the data generated by questionnaires, interviews and reports.**

From the data gathered, it seems that six main areas of concern can be identified. These areas are:

- The structural position of ASP within the university;
- The confusion related to accountability to and communication between central campus and campus directors;
- The need to find a common working definition which would underpin the work of ASP co-ordinators;
- The need to change the mission of ASP and the coherence of the programme in order to contribute more meaningfully to the academic life of the university;
- Continuing research into the needs of staff and students at Vista University, within the broader field of higher education nationally; and
- The budget and funding for ASP at the university.

Firstly it appears that ASP is structured in such a way that it offers support in a vacuum. Where ASP is seen to be a partner if not agent of change within the university, it is structured to have direct input into governance at the university. Co-ordinators comments reveal the limitations of ASP. No official links exist between ASP and Senate or any academic committees of the university. The director of student development, because of his professorship in English, had access to Senate meetings. The department has no seat in its own right or written agreement to a place at senate or any other university committee. The director functioned as a link between academic departments and student development. When he retired this link was lost.

Both students and academic staff perceptions of what ASP is vary. It appears that the short comings in the general structure makes effective communication difficult. In turn this makes the

introduction of programmes such as SI very difficult as the process of suggesting, discussing and implementing such a programme with lecturers takes place at individual initiative on campuses, rather than as a university decision to implement it.

Secondly the confusion in reporting lines is highlighted by the five campus comments in figure 10. All five campuses imply a need to report in ways similar to that of academic departments. The suggestions that ASP becomes integrated into departments would mean that ASP would report to faculty heads and subheads on campuses. At the same time campus projects such as writing centres would need to be accountable to the campus director who is in charge of academic development generally for particular campuses.

Structurally it appears that the tensions created by a centrally organized institution with semi decentralized operations functioning as contact campuses, impinges negatively on ASP. Central campus appears to have a co-ordinating function but the divergent needs and degree of practical if not legal autonomy of campus directors allows for further disintegration of uniformity. The lines of accountability are not clearly spelt out. The suggestions offered by co-ordinators imply a need for restructuring at campus level.

The management structure of the department has allowed for flexibility in terms of the functioning of the AS programme. This is evident from the diverse activities that have taken place on the campuses. At the same time central co-ordination has become increasingly difficult, hence the recommendation by the task team on student development that ASP be linked to Faculties and be accountable to the deans of faculties (Recommendations: task team, 1997) rather than to an external department neither accountable to Senate or Dean's committees nor influential in the transformation process from a governance perspective.

Thirdly it can be deduced from the findings that different theories regarding ASP operate on different campuses. It seems that co-ordinators see the primary function of ASP ranging across the spectrum of academic support. This includes academic consultation with individuals, general workshops, writing centre initiatives, access programmes through to being consultants to staff and students.



The investigator found, in line with the definition of Yin (1994:22), that the variations in programme definition by those involved in the AS programme on different campuses complicated the analysis. The "climate" of the different campuses and their specific needs influenced conditions or "components" prior to, but related to the programme and its definition. This relates to the difficulty in comparing the functioning of the programme to realistic criteria set for implementation of ASP. In the absence of such criteria across campuses, evaluation of the programme is virtually impossible.

Fourthly the need to formulate clear goals for the department becomes evident. Despite the need for flexibility in approach it emerges from the data that the effective functioning of the programme is hampered by the loss of focus and tensions in perspective that have developed since the inception of the programme. This loss of focus need not be viewed negatively as development and developmental work tends to be both creative and dynamic. Phases of expansion of the scope of developmental work and creative forms of student development is necessary. It is however always important to reflect and redirect focus. The disciplined and professional adherence to specific goals and strategies lends itself to the academic environment of the university. ASP may be better understood and taken seriously by students and academic staff if it formalises its goals in tandem with the university's mission. ASP needs to be able to show results.

Fifthly it appears that co-ordinators are aware of the need to conduct research and implement findings. This need is expressed in comments relating to both the status of ASP staff as professional rather than academic, and the variety of activities taking place under the auspices of ASP. It seems that in order to define goals certain activities and programmes will have to take priority over others. The dynamic nature of academic development demands that those involved in this area participate actively and productively in expanding the field.

Sixthly finance and budget was identified as a problem. Briefly the budgetary constraints related to the allocation of money to the department for both personnel and the running of programmes within ASP. The budget for all ASP co-ordinators were controlled centrally by the ASP co-ordinator and ultimately the director of the department. The counselling wing of the department's budget was controlled by the campus director. This disparity caused both confusion at campus level and at the central finance office. The fundraising activities for the department were centrally

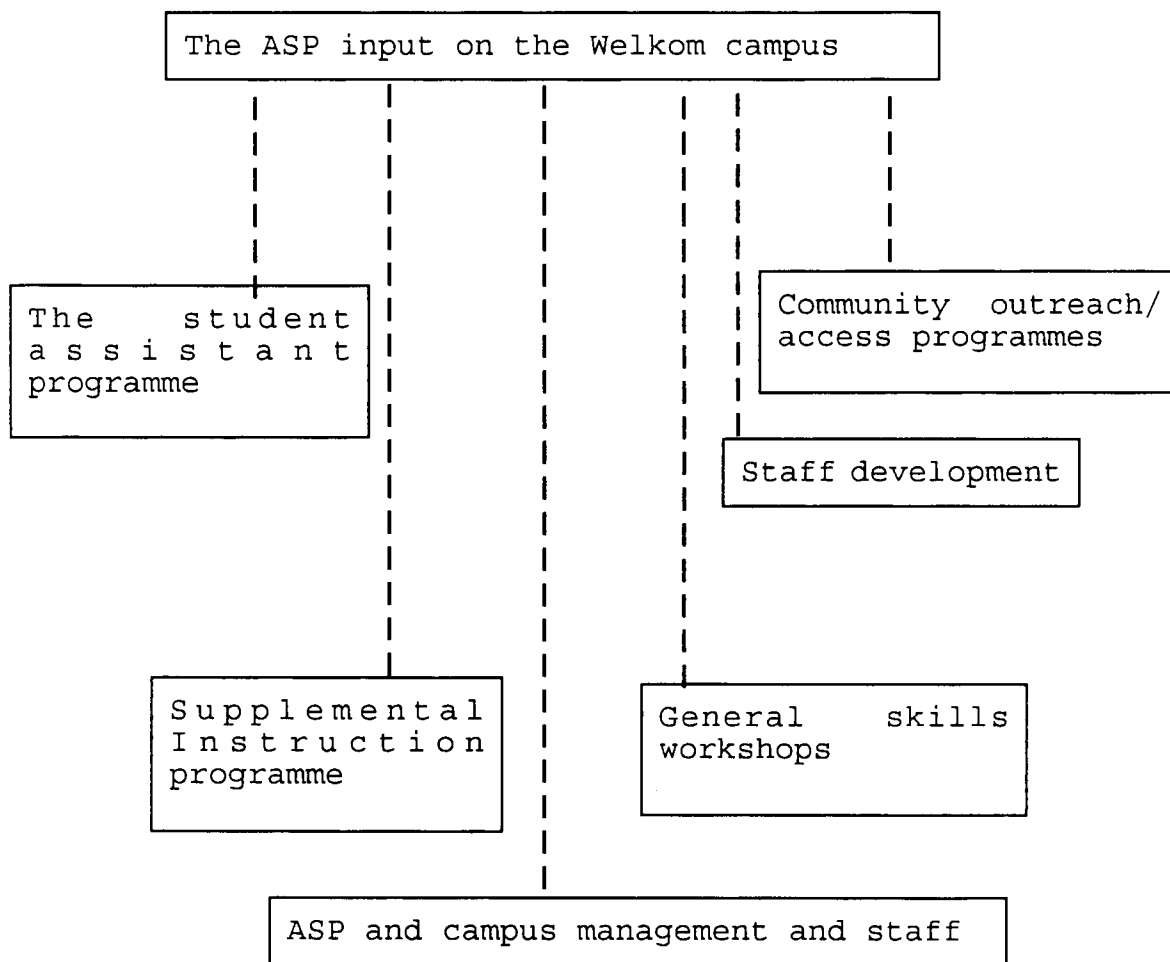
controlled, although campuses raised funds in consultation with the director for specific projects such as the Writing Centre at Bloemfontein campus (Menye, 1996), Accounting Potentiality Development Programme (Jadrijevic, 1996).

The need is expressed that the university finances programmes centrally rather than relying on short term funding. In order to persuade university management ASP will have to be clear on its goals and as in the case of SI have well researched reports available for consideration.

There is a definite need expressed by ASP staff to restructure the department and revisit its goals so that it can function effectively and contribute positively to academic life on the campuses. In the next chapter the Welkom campus ASP is analysed as a specific case study.

## CHAPTER 4: The functioning of Welkom Campus Academic Skills Programme.

Schematic representation of chapter 4.



## Brief summary of chapter 4.

The Academic Skills Programme at Vista University Welkom Campus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● The student assistants programme;</li><li>● The Supplemental Instruction programme;</li><li>● General workshops;</li><li>● Staff development;</li><li>● Community outreach.</li></ul>
Academic Skills programme in relation to management and staff.	
Conclusion.	

### 4.1. Introduction.

In this chapter the Welkom campus is used as case study to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the programme in context of its aims. The different activities which took place under the auspices of ASP will be described and then discussed in terms of strengths and weaknesses.

### 4.2. The Academic Skills Programme of Vista University, Welkom Campus.

The department of Student Development at the Welkom campus, started with the Counselling

Division which had one counsellor. An Academic Skills Co-ordinator was employed in 1995. Supplemental Instruction was introduced as a pilot project in the second semester of 1995. In 1996 a second counsellor was employed. In 1996, 11 student assistants worked in 11 departments. ASP activities expanded in 1996 to include a measure of staff development. It became clear that not only students were in need of assistance, but that many staff members needed assistance in teaching effectively under difficult circumstances. Staff also required assistance in teaching in English. This was made explicit by some staff on the one hand and obscured by others who felt that the medium was less important than the facts of their subject. (Goedhals, 1997:2) General skills workshops, specific departmental workshops, i.e. essay writing for Sociology 100, students, and individual consultations were held.

In terms of its mission statement of 1992, the programme aimed to render a service of high professional standards to the university community through the use of strategies to develop the all-round welfare and self-actualisation of registered and prospective students. The 1996 mission statement specified support for staff and students in the teaching and learning process. Curriculum, language, policy and research development were identified as areas for support. With these aims in mind the strengths and weaknesses of ASP on the Welkom campus will be dealt with in the conclusion of this chapter.

#### **4.2.1. The student assistants Programme at the Welkom campus.**

The main aim was to assist first year students to bridge the gap between school and university (Frans, 1996:1). Student assistants (SAs) were trained as peer counsellors and given communication and group dynamic training within a general life skills training programme. It was left to the departmental mentors to do specific subject related skill's training. SAs were selected particularly in departments which had a high first year failure rate (Mathematics, Statistics and Accounting) and in departments where assistants were requested by the sub head. The applicants were then short- listed in terms of their academic records after consultation with the relevant mentor and or sub head of that department for which

application was made. Interviews were then scheduled and selection occurred on the basis of commitment to the programme and communication skills displayed during the interview. Applicants were then informed by the co-ordinator whether they were successful or not (Forson in Frans, 1996: 5).

The 1995 the ASP workshops, training sessions and seminars for 1996 focussed on equipping SAs with tutorials and administrative skills. SAs were scheduled to meet once a week for an hour's training session. These were not always held as a result of changes in the time table of students, meetings by either students or staff or tests or exams. In 1996 training was organised differently and SAs had to attend two workshops or training sessions offered between February and October. If they attended less of these sessions than the required two, they did not receive the certificate from the department of Student Development at that department's end of year ceremony. At that ceremony peer counsellors who had attended workshops and complied with the requirements for peer counselling were also awarded a certificate. The workshops attended by the SAs or peer counsellors were specifically printed onto the certificate. This meant that the ASP co-ordinator had to keep very careful records of workshops and training and lists of attendees. Figure 11 indicates the nature of these sessions:

**Figure 11. ASP Workshops, training sessions, seminars for 1996.**

<b>ASP WORKSHOPS, TRAINING SESSIONS, SEMINARS FOR 1996.</b>	
FEBRUARY	Workshop: Reading and note taking. Training: SAs: What is a tutorial? Training: SI training of leaders.
MARCH	Workshop: Assignment writing and note taking skills part 2. Using the library effectively. Training: Preparation and presentation of materials at tutorials. Workshop: Assignment writing.
APRIL	Workshop: Memory skills in preparing for exams. Training: Small group work during tutorials. Workshop: Reference techniques. Workshop: Preparing for lectures. Workshop: Study methods.
MAY	Workshop: Peer group learning. Workshop: Studying effectively. Training: Study skills and exam preparation.
JUNE	Workshop: Answering exam questions. Workshop: Communication skills. Training: Exam preparation.
JULY	Workshop: Assessing strengths and weaknesses of study methods. Workshop: Assignment/ Essay writing. Training: Self study and motivation to improve knowledge.
AUGUST	Workshop: Using questions while learning. Workshop: Speaking with confidence. Training: Questioning techniques in tutorials.
SEPTEMBER	Workshop: Test preparation, how to maximise memory Workshop: Self assessment of understanding of work. Training: Self evaluation in tutorials and exam preparation.
OCTOBER	Workshop: Exam notes and summaries. Workshop: Effective peer groups. Training: Answering exam questions/ setting exam questions!
NOVEMBER	Workshop: Effective writing of exams.

Source (Frans, 1996:7).

An analysis of these workshops, by the researcher, showed that although they aimed at improving student learning and retention, each session could have been expanded into a series of sessions. The contents per sessions could in themselves have been run as a series of workshops. The programme was very generalised and served as an overview of the topic with hints to help

students. SAs were expected to attend and pass the information through to their tutorials or SI sessions. The further weakness in this system was that no system existed to monitor whether SAs were in fact implementing the skills learnt during these sessions. As not all sessions were attended there was little knowing if the students had even learnt anything. It was a very frustrating and unsatisfactory mode of functioning for the co-ordinator who had to rely on verbal feedback from the SAs and test results from students to see if any progress was being made. Peer feedback was not possible under the circumstances for all students as classes clashed and SAs often had to move venue at the last moment to accommodate unscheduled or changed time tabled use of venues. The shortage of space on the campus made it impossible to have even a common working room for SAs. Consultations had to take place in what was then the old prefabricated library which had no space for small quiet seminars. The library was in itself a hive of activity with various meetings and discussions conducted loudly. SAs often resorted to holding a seminar in the open in a corner of the campus or requesting the use of the ASP co-ordinators's office for consultations. The effectivity of the programme suffered considerably under these conditions. The evaluation of the SA programme constituted impressions, student results and general attendance (Frans, 1996: 15) rather than measurable effective evaluation. SAs did, however, bridge the gap between lecturers and students, providing positive feedback to academic departments with regards to the learning situation (Frans, 1996:15).

On the Welkom campus in 1996, eleven students were appointed as assistants with two sharing a post. Their training was twofold. Firstly training was for tutoring, and secondly eight students received training in SI.

Student assistants employed by departments directly requested to be allowed to attend workshops with the SAs from the department of Student Development. This is significant as the reasons given were as follows:

- They had felt isolated, and benefited from discussing similar problems with other SAs in formal training sessions, despite different disciplines in which they operated.
- They received no training from within their own departments as lecturers were too busy.
- They felt vulnerable and unprotected. This occurred when they had to mark student's work and were then subjected to abuse when students received low marks. SAs who did



not mark tests were also abused as the common perception amongst students were that all SAs marked tests.

- They sometimes waited longer for payment than SAs in the department of Student Development.

The first three points confirm the point that peer collaboration and group learning on the Welkom campus has been found to be more successful in general, than individuals working in isolation. Point 3 is significant as SAs in the AS programme were specifically protected within their contract from marking. When SAs in this programme were introduced to the first year class at the beginning of the year their duties were spelt out by the ASP co-ordinator to the whole class. The non-marking was highlighted as an SA would lose their appointment immediately they were found to be marking. Mentors and SAs were well aware of this. Point 4 is not clear in that SAs in academic departments received their stipends directly through their bank accounts on the specified date all staff were paid. Unless a banking error occurred or the SA's details were late in reaching Central campus finance department, their payment occurred smoothly. The SAs in the department of Student Development contended with late payments as dates for final submission of claim forms changed without the ASP co-ordinators being aware of it, from time to time.

When the funding for this programme came to an end in 1996, the programme ceased to exist as a programme run within the department of Student Development. The programme was difficult to evaluate in terms of specific measurable improvements to student learning. A more qualitative analysis in terms of regular student attendance of tutorials or workshops indicated that students perceived a need themselves. Their regular attendance indicates that they perceived the tutorials as beneficial.

In 1996 the Welkom campus used some of the said SAs as Supplemental Instruction leaders, who were then paid as SAs. SI was seen to be an option for the campus to follow in terms of integrating the academic support into the main stream curriculum. SI if funded by the departments and university, could be a more cost effective programme than the SA programme. Students participating in SI within high risk courses succeed more than students who do not participate in SI. Students involved in SI sessions persist in their studies and graduate within the years allocated to the degree programme (Frans, 1996:2). Students make more effective use of loans and

departments have a higher success rate per year.

#### **4.2.2. The Supplemental Instruction programme at the Welkom campus.**

The SI programme was piloted in the departments of Mathematics, Statistics and Accounting, by the ASP co-ordinator. Senior lecturers in these departments on the campus agreed to the piloting of the programme as long as the SAs employed by the department of Student Development, was trained as SI leaders. These departments traditionally had a poor first year pass rate. This was the first phase in implementing SI on the Welkom campus.

Throughout the trail period, the SA programme and SI were measured against each other in order to try and establish which programme better suited the Welkom campus needs. In 1996, phase two started in February with the training of six SI leaders in the departments of Psychology, English, Sociology, Accounting, Public Administration and Statistics. Mathematics continued SI with the same leader or SA of the previous year. An SI leader was appointed by May, in Economics. The department of Geography had employed two student assistants and requested that they be trained for SI together with SAs from the department of Student Development. At this point it must be noted that the two students employed by the academic department, attended all training workshops, but could not be adequately monitored. The reasons for this varied firstly in the lines of accountability that were outside the ASP scope. Secondly, both were teaching students who had interruptions in running SI due to teaching practice which took out four weeks of participation on the campus. Keeping control over records on student attendance and performance was impossible. Thus only the six departments mentioned previously could be considered for the pilot project.

Problems encountered in generally administrating the programme included difficulties experienced in keeping statistics of student results. In order to draw meaningful conclusions from test and exam results a measure of uniformity in number of tests as well as the quality of these, had to be defined. Different departments used different testing systems and in some departments the SI leader noted ten tests per term whereas others had less. Some tests were included in the term mark and then in the July and December results. Some departments gave tests which were aimed at students assessing their own progress. It became impossible to find a common norm across all

departments to evaluate those students attending SI sessions across the university. At best students attending SI could only be compared to those not attending.

The group attending had to be further divided into those who attended between one to thirteen sessions. Their marks were then compared among groups and against the larger class. Because only one SI leader was able to work in a department the group attending SI was small. Ideally an SI group should be no bigger than 10 students. The group of Accounting students will illustrate the difficulties.

Out of a class of 132 students registered for first year, twenty- six attended SI voluntarily. Of these, seven attended SI very regularly and obtained an average mark of 59% . Their attendance had been between nine and eighteen times in the first semester. This in itself is not a good attendance rate, but it must be remembered that general participation in SI was only possible once a week as there was only one leader who held three SI sessions per week. The group in comparison to the first one attended between eight and eleven times in the semester and obtained a general average of 51%. When compared to the latter figure, it appears at first glance that the regular attendees' results prove that regular attendance does improve results. But because the variable such as class average was not available to the SI leader to calculate, these statistics are not reliable. The fact that these students may have been the better achievers or even the ones who were repeating Accounting and therefore had a better idea than the others in any case, can not be discarded either. The problem of record keeping was complex and the inexperience of the SI leader and the ASP co-ordinator expounded the difficulties. A further weakness was the lack of expertise in using computer programmes to keep data and make graphic representations thereof by both ASP co-ordinator and SI leaders. Only the ASP co-ordinator's computer was available to all SAs working as SA or SI leader. The limitations in capacity and equipment made it difficult to evaluate the programme quantitatively. Qualitatively, however, certain generalised conclusions about the programme can be deduced. Table 5 indicates that students themselves believed that they benefited from attendance and continued to do so. Valuable feedback to the lecturers was obtained through the sessions.

**Table 5. Number of students who attended SI in comparison to the number of registered students for first year.**

Number of SI leaders.	Department	SI attendees.	Registered students
1	Accounting	26	132
1	Economics	11	174
1	Public Admin	19	123 (1st and 2nd years)
1	Statistical Methods	23	90
1	History	16	200
1	Psychology	24	24
1	English	39	172

In Statistical methods better record keeping resulted in better quantitative data. Here out of 90 students, twenty-three attended regularly. Of this group of twenty-three students, the second block test results showed that eleven students who attended infrequently obtained a mark of 36%. The class average was 25%. If the irregular attendees are grouped with the non-attendees, they obtained a mark of 30,5% together. The regular attendees got 60, 5%. These statistics appear to point to the positive contribution of SI. Final conclusions cannot be drawn, however, as these results were for one block test only .

From the pilot project, conclusions as given in Figure 12 could be drawn. These conclusions were drawn by the ASP co-ordinator.

**Figure 12. Summary of conclusion drawn from SI pilot project.**

- Departments could run an SI programme internally with training being done by the ASP co-ordinator.
- SI is an appealing programme to students due to its voluntary nature and the fact that it is peer driven (Frans, 1996:11-15).
- SI is a cost effective programme with clear aims and objectives. With institutional support it can effectively replace the SA programme.
- It is essential that a mentor or SI co-ordinator manages the programme in order to gather qualitative data and assess the quality of sessions as outlined in the Instruction manual for SI supervisors. The programme should have administrative support in the form of computer availability and access to secretarial assistance for the typing of reports and data conversion.

Source (Forson, 1996:91).

The SA programme had provided funding for the running of the SI pilot project, in that SAs were trained as SI leaders. When the SA programme ceased at the end of 1996 departments were encouraged to appoint their own SI/ SA leaders. It was felt after a visit by Ms Frans the SI co-ordinator at Vista based at Mamelodi, that it was essential that departments receive SI supervisory training before implementation of the programme. The SI co-ordinating function was an essential element in the implementation of the programme. Each campus should have its own SI co-ordinator as the ASP co-ordinator had additional programmes to implement, and could not do justice to SI. This view complimented the request by the ASP co-ordinator, in a memo of May 1996, for an additional ASP co-ordinator on the Welkom campus (Forson, 1996:1).

In analysing the SA and SI programmes, the SI programme was found to be the better option for Vista University. The criteria are summarised in Figure 13.

**Figure 13. Reasons why SI is a better option for Vista Welkom campus than SA programme.**

- It is a well researched programme with intensive training and monitoring processes catered for within its outline.
- Group learning is very effective in an environment such as Vista Welkom where students learn from each other. The funding for student support is eased through a system whereby senior students could effectively ease their own financial burdens by earning money.
- It is an effective learning strategy to reach larger groups of students in which one to one support is not viable or cost effective.
- It is a programme which can be evaluated because it has such specific strategies, aims and goals.
- If the programme is to be run effectively the university must be committed to its retention firstly by funding it and secondly by supporting it through its infrastructure (Frans, 1996:19).
- Venue space and time tabling of the programme would need to be given committed attention to (Motha, 1996:31). In the prefabricated building environment of the Welkom campus venue space was an important issue as well.
- SI leaders need careful training and monitoring throughout the year. This monitoring needs to be done in the form of training and support for leaders. The monitoring can be organised in such a way that leaders mentor each other. It is not to be seen as punitive but as assisting in the smooth running of the programme. (Forson in Du Preez, 1996:91)

The results of the SI input in the Accounting Potentiality Development Programme (Jadrijevic, 1997) provides further evidence that SI is a programme that is able to affect learning positively.

#### **4.2.3. General workshops for students on the Welkom campus.**

General skills workshop are not considered very effective as little skills transfer occurs between the different subject studied. Agar et.al (1991:14) mention that programmes have learnt through trial and error that programmes must transmit and transfer knowledge and skills within a subject context. Both in terms of learning theories and student motivation, subject-based knowledge, concepts and processes are considered criteria for evaluating how effective programmes are.

General workshops have been poorly attended by between ten and forty students. These workshops often fulfil an emotional support role in that they occur during crisis times in the

academic year. The workshops address issues such as assignment writing just before assignments must be handed in, or exam strategies shortly before exams are written. When these workshops were held generally early in the year they were not attended by all many students.

In 1996 the two wings of the department, counselling and ASP, decided to combine energy and work on jointly held workshops. The senior counsellor, Mr Jadrijevic, devised a time table for departments which allowed students across the faculties to attend a 1 ½ time tabled slot of their choice on the programme of workshops offered. Attendance was “compulsory” although no credits were given or any steps taken against non attendance. Flexibility allowed for the choice of which session to attend. Throughout the first semester weekly seminars and workshops were offered with Counselling and ASP taking turns in presenting topics on life-skills ( assertiveness, time - management, etc) and academic skills ( reading skills, note taking skills, etc). One topic was covered per week with six possible times for attendance. Registers were kept and although attendance was said to be compulsory two hundred and sixty first year students attended these workshops. The ASP co-ordinator, Mrs Forson and counsellors Messrs Tlali and Jadrijevic supported each other in co-presenting these (Jadrijevic and Tlali, 1996:4). During the second semester the campus time table changed and building renovations to SRC offices started. As a result the old library which had been used for these workshops, became temporary SRC offices. The time tabled workshops became time consuming as other campus activities needed attention and conferences and seminars disrupted the regularity of the presentation . It was decided that only six generalised workshops were to be held after that. These workshops were conducted by a team of SAs in July as the ASP co-ordinator attended the Winter school in Cape Town, which was held over three weeks (Forson, 1996:84-85).

Attending to student skills problems is one attempt to improve the learning at the university. Supporting students in the learning process is a necessary part of the academic development As student learning is dependent on staff teaching it became necessary to engage in staff development. The ASP co-ordinator was nominated to chair the staff development committee on the campus. Through this committee’s attempts to enhance staff professional development , and its facilitation of the department of Institutional Development’s (ID) staff development programme, staff development became part of the ASP co-ordinator’s work.

#### **4.2.4 . Staff development on the Welkom campus.**

The existence of the Free State Staff Development Network ( Bitzer and Mbuli,1997:1) supported and assisted the ASP co-ordinator in efforts to come to grips with this very important aspect of the university's delivery of quality teaching.

At Vista University, staff development traditionally followed a centralised model whereby the department of Institutional Development, based at the Central campus in Pretoria conducted a series of workshops to all staff across the seven contact campuses. These workshops were uniform and well planned. They followed a definite set programme and was aimed at 748 staff members (Bitzer and Forson, 1997:1). The needs of specific campuses could not effectively be addressed. The workshops, although excellent in presentation and content, served much the same purpose as the generalised workshops. The campus needed to address its specific staff needs. The Free State Staff Development Network was successful in its bid to linking with Curtin University, Australia in the Australian Links Project for staff development at the end of 1996. This opened doors for staff capacity building in the participating institutions. The Welkom campus participated fully in 1997. The focus became narrower in 1997 on specific issues. Previously campus initiatives in staff development on the campus consisted of lecturers presenting short papers to colleagues either on work in progress or completed masters and doctoral thesis. Only academics staff were catered for.

Staff development and ASP involvement in staff development was at a germination stage. It is important to note that the attempt to begin staff development on the campus itself is in line with the summary made by Delvare (1996:52) of the Case study of 1992 which saw the following factors as important in improving the effectivity of academic development programmes:

- The formalisation and expansion of staff development programmes;
- Innovative teaching should be encouraged;
- Mainstream academic staff profiles should be diversified in terms of sex and race;
- More resources should be made available for curriculum development;
- There ought to be a greater sensitivity amongst staff for the expectations and needs of the student body; and



- Evaluation should be ongoing and research findings integrated into programmes.

#### **4.2.5. Community outreach on the Welkom campus involving ASP.**

The department of Student Development had embarked on a pilot project called, Upgrade 95 in 1995. This project was undertaken to meet the needs, "...of those matriculants whose matric results did not gain them entry into institutions for higher education studies..." (Jadrijevič and Tlali, 1996:9). In 1996 the project focussed on the Science group of subjects and changed name to the Vista Academy for Science and Technology. This registered school (with the department of education) operated after working hours between 16:30 and 17:30 during the week and on Saturday mornings. Students rewrote matric and received tuition in Vernacular, Afrikaans second language, English second language, Mathematics, Physical Science and Biology. All of the students had obtained a senior certificate in their previous matriculation examination, which did not qualify them for university entrance. Two of the thirty -seven students had failed matric previously. At the end of 1996 the school had a 100% pass rate and 74% matriculation exemption rate. The ASP co-ordinator taught English and academic skills to the students and acted as secretary to the school. An intensive English programme of forty hours was conducted in August of 1996, with senior students at the university. These students were teaching candidates and were exposed to materials design and conducted tutorials. The programme benefited both the university students and the school learners as it served as an access programme.

The ASP contribution to this community project was in the area of English language improvement which is generally in line with the job description for ASP co-ordinators, already referred to previously. More work could be done in the area of English teacher education forums as indicated in the request for a second ASP co-ordinator. English communication skills has been an area of concern for the English department on the campus. Students who have to read and write in English, which is often their second or third language (see Table 2, pg 24), show specific difficulties. Oral proficiency is the first requirement for learning a language, and most students can communicate sufficiently. It is in the area of writing and reading for academic purposes that difficulties are experienced. Plans for implementing a Writing Centre is in progress to address these issues.

### **4.3. The AS programme in relation to campus management and staff.**

The relations between campus management and ASP during the past two years (1995 -1996) has been positive with management giving support to ASP projects. The community projects testify to this as does the completion of the Student Learning Centre which gives venue space for SI and tutorials. The goals for improving the quality of teaching and learning on the campus are shared by management and members of the department of Student Development (Jadrijevich, 1996).

Up until 1996 ASP budgets were controlled through the Director Student Development Central campus. Campus ASP budgets were drawn up in Pretoria and all claims were directed through the Director and Central campus co-ordinator. This works effectively within academic departments. As long as ASP is part of Student Development, and the counselling budget is controlled by the campus Director, but the ASP budget is controlled by central campus, confusion exists. This occurred in the daily running of the AS programme. Telephone accounts, fax, photocopies and stationary was placed under Student Development and paid as such. At times ASP expenses were paid for from the counselling budget. It can be concluded that both ASP and counselling should have separate budgets controlled by the campus director in the absence of any other structure such as a registrar student affairs, existing.

With regards to staff on the campus the absence of a staff developer on each campus has led to a certain amount of confusion. The ASP co-ordinator was asked to facilitate and advertise Institutional Development's staff workshops. Academics, and especially new staff, understood the co-ordinator to belong to Institutional Development. This perception led to discussions within the departments on the boundaries and areas of overlap between staff and institutional development represented by the department of Institutional Development. In August 1997 the notion that only the department of Institutional Development could be involved in staff development was finally cleared when it was decided that campus management, staff and students had to decide what their staff development needs were and who was best suited on the campus to address these needs. It was decided that the departments of Human Resources, Institutional Development and Student Development should co-operate in the area of staff development (Patel (a), 1997:3). There is a need for this issue to be clearly defined and staff developers who with the University's vision, mission and teaching and learning policy in mind, could implement workshops

on campus, merging specific needs.

The complicating factor in streamlining effective functioning of any project on the Welkom campus is closely tied to the degree of autonomy of the campus. A fine tension exists between the autonomy of campuses and their adherence to central campus. Various governance models have been proposed and are under discussion. The introduction of a campus parliament on the Welkom campus is a pilot study in effective governance (Mthembu, 1996).

The effective functioning of ASP and its adherent projects is closely tied to the issues of campus autonomy. In this regard an integral example is the autonomy of a campus to raise funds for a project. Another example is the membership issue of one campus to a regional body. The Welkom campus chose to become a member of the Free State consortium, but the Bloemfontein campus did not wish to join this fundraising body which exists only in the Free State. It took the Welkom campus from 1995 to 1998 to organize through central management, permission to be part of the Consortium. The tensions involved in being a unique campus with its specific needs having to conform to policy and become uniform with the other individual campuses, leads to delays and misunderstanding within communication between campus and central campus management. Within the field of higher education the forces and processes of transformation are often perceived and addressed differently between campuses. It is a mammoth task to integrate and unite the campuses. Indeed it is almost a pilot study for higher education in South Africa attempting to streamline and focus its teaching delivery.

#### **4.4. Conclusion.**

The question, whether ASP succeeded in its aims, is a thorny one. ASP has set itself idealistic goals. There has been a contribution made which is more noticeable by its absence, in the case of the SA programme, than when it was running. This indicates that the programme needed to market itself more and that research findings of improved student learning should have taken place. Support from the university in terms of a committed contribution towards staffing and financial support would have eased the process of evaluating the programme more effectively. The growth in student numbers and students who graduate from the Welkom campus is an indication that improved learning and teaching is taking place. It cannot be attributed to the AS programme

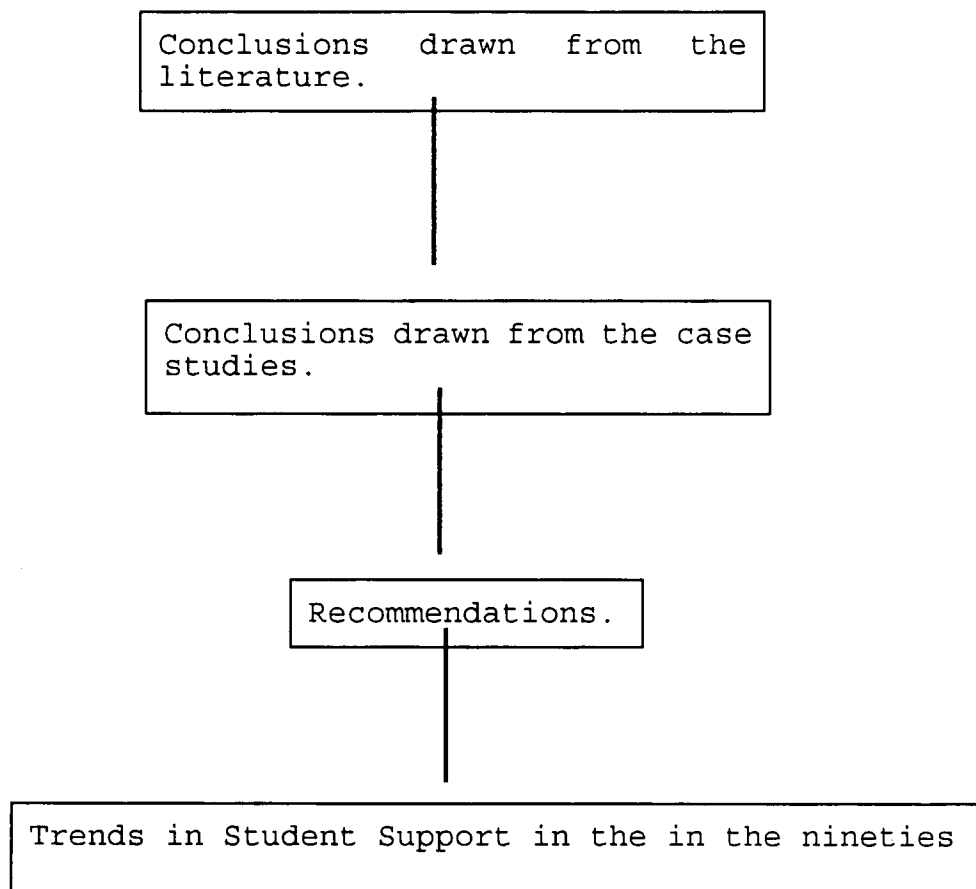
only though. The Accounting Potentiality programme can be credited with the growth in the number of first year students who passed Accounting 100 and continued to second year. In 1996 only eleven out of one hundred and twenty-one students passed. At the end of 1997, after the implementation of the programme, Welkom campus had the highest first year pass rate of all the Vista campuses (Jadrijevic, 1998). From this it can be concluded that the improvement is directly linked to the intervention of the department of Student Development in the shape of SI presented in this programme.

First year students have identified the need for assistance in a needs analysis done on the campus (Tlali, et al, 1998). The needs identified were the learning skills and strategies ASP saw as part of its work. The need being there for ASP, it is the most effective structuring of the programme that needs attention.

The short period of time in which ASP functioned on the campus, two years, as well as the many changes that have taken place within the campus with a change in management occurring at the end of 1995, and within ASP, moving from the SA to SI programme, has made any type of evaluation extremely difficult. The criteria for the programme changed and the difficulties involved in merging campus needs and goals with those of the other campuses confounded any concerted effort to evaluate the programme effectively.

## CHAPTER 5. RECOMMENDATIONS.

Schematic representation of chapter 5.



**Brief summary of chapter 5.**

Conclusions drawn from the literature: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organisational structure linked to finance</li><li>• Vista University vision linked to the type of support offered</li><li>• Crisis in higher education necessitates strategic planning</li><li>• Diversity of programmes a challenge for Vista University</li><li>• Integrated programmes preferable to general programmes</li></ul>
Conclusions drawn from the case studies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The structure and organisation of ASP needs reviewing</li><li>• status and effectiveness of co-ordinators need reviewing</li><li>• The aim and strategies needs revision in terms of the University's vision</li><li>• University funding for academic development and funding is necessary</li></ul>
Recommendations.
Trends in student support in the nineties.
Conclusion.

## **5.1. Introduction.**

Recommendations made in this chapter are based on the findings of the study. As the study sought to investigate the functioning of ASP, recommendations refer to ASP or AD. Acknowledging that the choice of name is related to philosophical and theoretical paradigms, recommendations do not select one above another. The reason being that the selection of a name is related to the mission of the university and the decision of a name change remains with the Vista University community. The recommendations will then only indicate the existing choices and point to trends.

## **5.2. Conclusions drawn from the literature.**

From the literature the following points are important for consideration in planning more effective support:

- Organisational structure and finance are closely linked (cf. Mehl's comments par.2.3.1, p 30).
- The type of support offered is a strategy to enhance the quality of education offered, which in turn is linked to the vision of Vista University ( cf. par.2.3.2, pp 32-34).
- Higher education will still be faced with an educational crisis in the near future. Massification and under-preparedness of students will challenge universities (cf. par.2.3.4, p. 36). The problem of first year drop outs or students failing second year at Vista University, when they are not supported any longer (Delvare, 1996:49 ) will continue to be a problem until the educational problems of the country has been addressed. The process could take a number of years still. In the meantime students cannot be left unsupported due to financial constraints.
- The diversity of existing programmes which exist in theory and practise is a further challenge for Vista University ( cf. par.2.3.1, p.30). Choice of programmes will depend on the aims of the university. Choices will have to be made in order to improve the functioning of these programmes. Evaluation and research is essential and must be planned when choice of programmes are made.
- Programmes that have integrated skills and language into content have been more successful than general programmes (cf. par. 4.2.3, p.93).

It is clear from the literature that effective support in the form of ASP or AD has to be clearly articulated in terms of structure (cf. p. 37 for Scott's remarks), and cost effectiveness. In the context of higher education in South Africa the aims of programmes such as ASP have to be redefined. The aims as spelt out by Agar et.al., (1991:5) referred to on page 38, remain relevant for academic development in general. At Vista University redress remains an issue, and will continue to do so until education at feeder schools improve to such an extent that learners are equipped to deal with some of the basic academic skills they themselves feel inadequately prepared for, as identified by Tlali et.al (cf. p. 99)

The involvement of AD in curriculum design as mentioned in the literature (cf. p.39) is an area which AD or ASP at Vista University will have to give attention to. Co-operation between the department of Institutional Development, academic departments and AD will depend on communication channels and the agreed need to share expertise.

A crucial issue for ASP at Vista University is the nomenclature given to the type of work required by the university and offered by the department of Student Development, for its students. Considering the debate and meanings attached to ASP (cf. par.2.4, p. 41-43) as well as the limitations and confusion created by the attachment of other areas of work with the programme, indicate that a name change is advisable. A term such as educational support may be a neutral name. Academic development is used outside South Africa and was the name preferred by ASP co-ordinators as outlined by ER Jenkins (Report, 1997:4). Such a name change had previously been suggested (Minutes of strategic planning meeting, 1996:1).

At the Welkom campus of Vista University it can be expected that the growth in numbers of students (cf. Table 3, page 26) will continue. This trend will be in line with the national trend towards massification. If this is the case and the trend towards multi lingual backgrounds continue (cf. Table 2, page 24) special attention will have to be given to English as medium of instruction and learning. Firstly, students entering the university at the Welkom campus may need a compulsory module on English, integrated into the degree they choose. Such a course would need to be content based and credit bearing in line with the study of Mc Lean and his partners (McLean et.al., 1995: 85) study. From this study the following points are summarised:



- There is a need for a contextualised programme and the development of close co-operative links with faculty staff.
- A didactic approach should be avoided and students should instead be alerted to their individual learning requirements.
- It is important to maintain a research link, and reflect on programmes.
- There is a need to develop in students an awareness of the importance of their being responsible for their own learning.
- Units dealing with similar issues should communicate in order to share resources, develop professionalism and collaboration.

In devising programmes that address specific needs, such as English for specific purposes or communication in commerce, the lessons and experiences of the past must be taken into account.

Delvare ( 1996:49-51) makes the following salient points :

- Programmes which had incorporated alternative selection procedures were more successful;
- programmes had to be considered legitimate before they exerted a positive influence;
- Programmes have to have people in charge who have legitimate power and influence within the institution in order to have access to formal decision-making structures;
- Staff must be well qualified and able to benefit from feedback and programme evaluation;
- Programmes were more successful when they also offered non-academic support and worked closely with financial support offices. Student accommodation, health and sports officers working with academic development create a holistic environment for emotional, psychological and academic development;
- Programmes imparting knowledge and skills had to be subject based for best results. In the process of evaluating a programme's effectivity, student motivation, subject- based knowledge, processes and concepts must be considered;
- A key factor to success is the amount of time a student spends acquiring new skills within a programme. The maximum time-on-task is required to acquire new knowledge, practise new skills, processes and attitudes;
- Compulsory attendance gives better results.
- Courses that were credit bearing had a better chance to succeed in their aims as student

motivation and attendance increased.

- Extending the curriculum with either a bridging year at the beginning or including support throughout a spread out degree of four instead of three years addressed the issue of poor pass rates.
- Faculty integrated models were more successful because the accountability for the programme stayed with the faculty and staff accepted the responsibility of ensuring student success more readily.
- Basic skills such as numeracy and competence in English were emphasised in goog programmes.
- New technologies and alternative learning strategies, played a key role in the success of these programmes. These strategies included computer -assisted instruction, peer-group learning, small-group tutorials and one-to-one contact.
- Research monitoring the failures and successes of the programmes are essential. The successful programmes responded to feedback and thus improved the programmes.

Academic staff, also need to improve their own English communication and teaching skills. In this regard teaching programmes for lecturers, and staff development, located at campus level, is essential.

These issues relating to staff are in turn affected by the location of support offered to them and the relevance of the content of the support. As little or inadequate teaching takes place in many historically disadvantaged communities students are left with few learning strategies to apply when they embark on studies at Vista University. Not only the learning process must be considered, but the adequacy of teaching methods needs attention (cf. 39). What was considered remedial, support or even bridging may well have to become mainstream as proponents of AD have been advocating. This should not only happen by placing AD practitioners within faculties or departments but also in the structuring and training of lecturing staff in AD strategies. Indeed if these were sound strategies that helped students within a deficit model, surely when applied in general teaching, all students will benefit?

### 5.3. Conclusions drawn from the case studies.

From the case studies the following points emerged:

1. The structure and organisation of ASP needs reviewing (cf. figure 7b) and c), p. 67 - 68);
2. Status and effectiveness of co-ordinators needs attention(cf. figure 7b) and c), p.67);
3. The aim(cf. par 3.3.3.3, p. 72) and strategies (cf. figures 10a) - e), pp. 75-77)of the programme needs revision;
4. Vista University should invest more funds into academic development and programmes such as SI (cf. figure 10d), 76) and Writing Centres (cf. figure 10a), p. 75) which enhance student performance.

Implicit in point number one is the acknowledgement by the stakeholders of Vista University, that AD (using the definition on page 42 from ISHE, 1995:2) is needed. That being the case, the structure and organisation of AD, both at Central and on the seven contact campuses, must reflect the importance and responsibility of any unit or department in charge of AD. The implications of accepting that AD is necessary, relates to point four. Funding has to be made available to units or faculties prepared to integrate AD in programmes such as SI or through modules. AD staff would have to be expanded to include expertise in areas such as curriculum design and staff development on the contact campuses.

Point two reflects the need for recognition identified by co-ordinators and students. The latter as reflected in their need for prompt payment and venues (cf. p.64). ASP co-ordinators work professionally with academic departments and have been expected to and felt the need to conduct research, present papers and write articles, yet do not enjoy official research time . As professionals they need to expend their own knowledge of the emerging field of academic development.

Point three follows point one in that AD needs to be in line with Vista University's teaching and learning plan as reflected in mission statements and implementation time frames. AD can only structure effective strategies when it is in consultation with campus needs and the university's vision. Co-ordinators indicated that working through and with campus management as counsellors have been doing would be better than floating between individual campuses and central campus.

The adjunct model of ASP which has functioned at Vista University has received opposition from academics who left the responsibility of skill's acquisition of their students to the department of Student Development in the absence of structured tutorials. ASP co-ordinators on the camp found this task beyond them and have strongly motivated for a more integrated approach either through the implementation of SI within departments or through recommendations of co-ordinators appointed within departments (Task team report, 1997: 3) charged with the responsibility to do AD work.

The department of Student Development has to negotiate with the Vista University community: academics, students and management exactly what the needs are and how best academic development or academic support programmes can fulfill these needs. From the department's strategic planning meeting (June, 1996) the following points were raised:

- The department needed to expand its functioning to include more research.
- There should be an involvement in staff development. In order to do this the staff component would need to be carefully considered and expanded on the campuses where necessary.
- The link between counselling and academic development should be maintained in as far as the same segment of the university community, the students are served.
- In the structuring of the authority lines AD needs to be integrated into faculties and at the same time serve on academic committees on the campuses.
- Closer co-operation with the department of institutional development (ID) should be encouraged . This could benefit both AD and ID. ID is central campus based with no links on the campuses which AD staff could provide. AD is in need of specialised research which ID could assist with. ID is involved in curriculum planning which AD staff can contribute to with their knowledge of student learning and feedback from programmes such as SI.
- Dynamic interaction and good communication channels between the university departments and committees would facilitate quality restructuring of teaching and learning at the university.
- The university should state its teaching and learning policy and develop strategies to implement this policy, utilising all its staff.

#### 5.4. Recommendations.

The recommendations are based on the conclusions in paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 as well as the interview with Bill Blunt (Figure 2, p. 49). In structuring the programme in the most effective way a number of factors must be borne in mind.

- The first one concerns the nature of the work and the terminology chosen. It is recommended that academic development or educational development be considered as an alternative to the all too narrow academic skills programme. The AS programme has outgrown its own confines.
- The second consideration is that of having either a central unit or complete integration into departments. The suggestion is that each campus have a central unit which liaises with the other units and is responsible to the director of the campus. Within this unit staff development, ASP, and other student services may be monitored by a sub head or senior staff member. The unit will have to have the status of its staff clarified. As research and evaluation would be expected from them the conditions for academic staff ought to apply. On the other hand counsellors and support staff dealing with finance and health may prefer the status of professional staff. There could be a balance between the two. A unit would be important as it would provide the infrastructure for research and much needed evaluation of programmes (Delvare, 1996:60). Experienced staff in these units are essential in focussing energy and directing funding along the most productive channels.

In the area of funding for these units Delvare (1996:62) mentions the key issues, also identified by Mehl (cf. par 2.3.1, p.31) on the issue of government funding for AD:

- "...the need for the institutional location and management of AD, including the question of 'ownership', to be given systematic attention and for guidelines to be agreed on in the interests of effective and accountable use of resources...";
- "...the need to identify funding mechanisms that would both be in line with the main thrust of the new ministry's funding policy and suit the future form and direction of AD- the particular challenge here being to find a balance between grant-type funding, which can target specific forms of development and maximise impact but is not necessarily recurrent,

and formula-based funding, which is more secure but is inherently vulnerable to hijacking...”.

In this regard a programme such as SI and specific staff development programmes which are at present centralised at the Vista central campus, Pretoria, may be ideal for short term funding whilst long term fundraising and research into the impact of these programmes of Vista university is undertaken.

The success of faculty-integrated programmes is an important point in the context of Vista University. The absence of such integrated programmes or the failure thereof in the past have contributed to the weakness of the programme. The pilot project on the Welkom campus, the Accounting Potentiality Development Programme is moving towards an integrated approach of support. The success of the programme must not be underestimated or taken for granted. Should the funding raised by the counsellor end, the programme will end, and the faculty will be back to square one. Should the faculty acknowledge the need for either a bridging programme or sustained support in the shape of SI or modular courses throughout the degree, and is prepared to fund the programme through employing a programme or SI co-ordinator and the relevant tutors, the university will benefit by graduating better and more students.

From the documentation (Patel (b), 1997:2) it has been suggested that either and preferably at campus level, or central campus level, a well structured unit be established. This unit should interact on equal footing with university management and academic staff in order to co-operate and contribute to the teaching and learning at the university. The proposal has been made that a deputy vice-chancellor be appointed for students at a Central campus level (Task team report, 1997:3). Either a deputy or a full registrar for student affairs should also be appointed per campus. This position would oversee all student affair issues and report directly to the deputy vice-chancellor student affairs. Academic development and any academic skills programmes would resort under a senior co-ordinator on the campuses who would liaise with the campus registrar student affairs. On the campuses academic committees could oversee issues and developments beneficial to the campus teaching and learning process. A registrar would be in a position to assist with the raising of funds and general financial administration of academic development ( Patel (d), 1997:1-2). Staffing needs can be best ascertained on each campus and its plans and development of programmes. Evaluation

of ASP or AD can only be done for each campus because of the diversity of functioning of ASP on the different campuses.

A unit appears necessary to ensure that support and academic development continues and does not become subsumed into the faculty where other priorities may be seen as more urgent. A central unit can provide both the research element and the co-ordinating function between different approaches used within different departments or faculties (Delvare, 1996:58-60).

An ASP co-ordinator, or preferably, an AD co-ordinator appointed per faculty would be responsible to both the dean of the faculty and the registrar student affairs. This faculty based model would allow the co-ordinator to serve staff as a consultant, allow for research, negotiations with the business sector and the forging of community links (Hofmeyer and Spence, 1989:47). This position would entail the devising of programmes and credit bearing modules within departments which would be content based skills programmes. Foundation courses and SI would be run from this position. Senior students could be appointed as tutors and SI leaders. The co-ordinator would be in a position to teach some of the modules, but the prime function would be as consultant and evaluator. Evaluation should be part of the process of devising and implementing any programme or strategy aimed at improving the learning situation (Calder, 1995:81).

The individual efforts of campus co-ordinators and co-opted academic staff or senior students as tutors, needs to be directed and supported through research and finance. A move must be made away from crisis management or the addressing of immediate needs to a pro-active integrated approach.

It is essential that a staff development co-ordinator be appointed per campus. Academic staff are often in need of assistance regarding teaching innovatively and in the absence of a mentoring system for staff, a staff developer could assist as consultant. This person could in the Welkom campus case be part of the department of student development. Part of the duties of this portfolio could be to co-ordinate a writing centre. It would be necessary that AD staff in departments and student development staff meet regularly to review aims, and in consultation with academic staff and management be involved in transforming the university into a quality institution of higher education.

## **5.5. Trends in student support in the nineties.**

Rickinson and Rutherford (1995:161-171) address the issues related to high attrition rates of first year students at British Universities. They see as one of the causes the governmental policies, at the time, of widening of access to higher education, rapid increase of student numbers and the changes in the funding mechanisms contributing to the problem. The factors identified in their study as influencing students were:

- The degree to which students perceived themselves to be prepared both academically and emotionally in the transition process from school to university, and
- The availability of appropriate personal and academic support, during the transitional phase from school to university. The study focusses on emotional preparedness for further studies, and gives no indication that high risk students come from a particular racial group.

The emotional preparedness is often neglected within research in attrition rates in South Africa. It is obscured by the political and educational redress issues. It can be argued that it should be taken into consideration even more seriously in South Africa, because education is such an emotional issue as a result of the political background. The violence experienced on especially the historically disadvantaged campuses relate to financial and transformational issues and are charged with emotional energy. This factor impinges upon the learning in tandem with the fear of academic failure. In this regard the close co-operation between academic development and counselling services is strongly recommended. ASP or academic development cannot offer support to students without considering the student holistically.

In South Africa the restructuring of higher education has become a necessity. Not only to stay in line with trends from overseas institutions of higher education, but because of the needs of its own people. Support for students is essential and redress programmes (White Paper on Higher Education, see Department of National Education, 1997:34) as proposed should not be disregarded. With massification more students enter universities and less students are prepared for the academic preparedness expected from them. ASP may be an unpopular term but in essence has a valid contribution to make. The scope and rigour of implementation needs serious attention.



The issues South African institutions grapple with are not that unique and challenges such as management, finance and the ability to meet massification with quality tuition, are experienced internationally (Bitzer, 1997:11).

Trow (1995:23) suggests that "Student services must use reallocation, retrenchment, and reduction as tools to positively restructure program and staff expectations. Confronting the issues of contracting, outsourcing, developing outcomes and assessment measures, and maintaining the role of making a viable contribution to the institution's overall mission requires considerable effort and creative thought on the part of student services administrators. Playing a significant part in the development of strategic plans and tying budget decisions to those plans can help assure that student services survive." She stresses that it is not enough justifying their existence through the impact of student services on retention and graduation rates or the impact on overall student satisfaction. The judicious use of allocated resources and an ability to restructure programs and services to address the social, economic, and demographic challenges faced in higher education, and addressed by student services, must demonstrated.

The critical analysis of the changing needs of ASP at Vista University has to be considered at regular intervals. There is a lesson to be learnt from Kotter (1995:12) with regards to student assessment experience in Europe and the United States show that:"... Efforts to choose performance indicators without regard to how they can or will be used are doomed to failure. This lesson holds true as well for efforts to use performance indicators that have not been chosen carefully by those who must ultimately use the resulting information to improve programme, institutional or system performance". Five criteria for judging performance as indicators are listed by Kotter:

- purpose and alignment across inputs,
- process and outcomes,
- coordination throughout the system,
- coordination of methods, and
- use of decision making. These five address both choice and usage issues of programmes and types of support.

The summary of Kotter's (1995 :8) division of the types of student learning and the types of services required to address these types is given in Appendix 5.

From the Victorian universities (Australia) case study (cf. par.5.2, p. 103) similar problems to those mentioned by Vista University ASP co-ordinators were highlighted. These include the following:

- The location of the learning and language support unit within the university.
- The resources and funding of these units.
- The regularity and extent of communication between different units within the institution, and
- The conditions, i.e full time, part time etc, of employment of staff.

#### **5.6. Recommendations for follow-up studies.**

From this study it has become clear that there are areas which require further study. The recommendation is that further exploratory or analytical studies be conducted into the following areas:

- The tracking of success rates of students attending ASP programmes (SI included) throughout their degree period at Vista University.
- Staff teaching methods through classroom observation, peer observation and student perceptions be reviewed.
- The impact of home environment and study conditions, as influenced by the socio-economic climates at the different contact campuses, on student motivation and success.
- The types of language and study skills students bring with them when entering the university and the adequacy or not , of this in relation to expectations from the university.
- The types of educational philosophies underpinning teaching within the different faculties of Vista University.
- The impact of foundation courses on lifelong learning.
- Success rates of students participating in work-study programmes in comparison to students receiving grants or bursaries.

- Studies be undertaken across campuses to ascertain similar trends or differences in campus needs in i.e writing skills students bring with them when entering Vista University for the first time.

## **5.7. Conclusion.**

The strengths of the AS programme at Vista University, is manifested in the attempts by ASP to transform itself and the engagement in programmes such as SI. The fact that co-ordinators express the need for change signifies the need to become more functional in addressing the problems experienced on the campuses. The department of Student Development has shown initiative and been involved in self reflection during the period covered by this study. The expertise and motivation of those involved in developmental work must be taken seriously and channelled by management to the benefit of Vista University. The locus of responsibility for learning should be shared between the students, the faculties, ASP and the university. This responsibility is manifested both in the professional delivery and evaluation of support, and the financial assistance given to programmes and innovative endeavours. Research will indicate the student response to the degree to which they benefit or did not benefit from the programme.

The strengths and contribution of ASP has made thus far cannot be ignored. As a valuable resource to Vista University, it needs to be realigned within University policy, in order to be most effective.

What may need to be considered as an alternative to establishing units for academic development is the integration into curricula of these skills. As faculties reflect on and restructure their degree programmes they may need to consider integrating academic skills and subject discourse into these programmes as modular courses. These may in the long term be cost effective. In the short term they would require careful planning. It seems unavoidable that programmes such as SI will need to be utilised for as long as students enter institutions of higher learning with educational disadvantages. Students will need support in the form of Writing Centres as an example. These programmes will need to be reviewed regularly to ascertain how effective they are and to meet the changing needs of students.

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## Appendix 1: Twelve pointers to the running of ASP, 1992.

Staff and students at Vista supported the creation of the department of Student Development. The original Vista Tuition Model encouraged student support;

Student Development staff would offer additional services in consultation with Teaching Development to assist departments, especially on issues relating to language;

Students participating in Academic support must be "fully convinced" that they need it or resentment will follow;

Major AS courses must be credit bearing;

AS should not involve extra work for students already having difficulties in coping;

AS should not be more of the same, i.e extra examples (innovative teaching was required);

Offered correctly, students would accept consultancy assistance in language, supplementary academic assistance and study skills;

At Vista there is support for consultancy by referral;

The attractive system of "...variable duration...", whereby a student is required to attend a course until a required standard is reached would not easily be incorporated within an inflexible degree structure;

0. Short-term courses are effective and well supported if voluntary but may not reach all students in real need;

1. As mixed evidence existed on the efficacy of separate, credit-bearing courses on study and cognitive skills and language, it was suggested that Vista should try a one-semester course if it could be credit bearing;

12. The standard of English at the university would probably improve if staff were to use English more in discussing academic matters (Jenkins, 1991:8-9).







What do you think are the problems of the Academic Skills at your campus?

Because of the voluntary nature of Academic skills workshops/seminars offered by ASP co-ordinators, attendance is very poor. Secondly, the 'quick fix' culture prevails amongst students. For example I initiated writing for academic purpose workshops for Psychology students, and the students attended because they needed help on the assignment they were busy with and after the assignment has been submitted students stopped coming. Those workshops were meant to be ongoing until the students write their final exams.

Students with study skills problems are referred to the ASP co-ordinator instead of departments approaching the ASP co-ordinator to find out what could ASP and Academic Staff do to address such problems. In this way ASP is regarded as a clinic.

The Student Assistanship programme as forming part of ASP has its weaknesses

- \* SAs do not attend training regularly
- \* Some academic departments misuse the SAs in the same that they make them do largely admin work.
- \* Students do not consult unless they need quick help with an assignment or test. At the beginning of the year when SAs were appointed, I told those SAs who do not have tutorials in their departments to see the students in groups so that they can address their problems on a weekly basis. The students were divided into groups and they indicated on which days they would consult the SA. The students seldom turned up.

The department of African languages tried to address this problem by giving one lecture period to the SA so that they can conduct group sessions.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAMME

Individual consultations provides students with the opportunity to talk freely about their problems, and through ASP co-ordinators students' academic problems can be brought to the attention of lecturers.

Presenting academic skills workshops benefits the students and at the same time problems that students experience in lectures are revealed. For example last year I presented a seminar on the listening and note-taking skills. One student asked me, how can he listen and take notes while lecturers are simply reading word by word from the Study Manual. I wrote a memo to all lecturers to make them aware of the above-mentioned problem.

This year I conducted a mini study in the department of Psychology



to find out the kinds of problems that students' experience with writing academic essays. A mini report was submitted to the Psychology department and it helped in the planning of assignments for the current semester. My recommendations were taken seriously, and the department drew up a time-table for practicals so that those writing problems can be addressed during practicals. "Last week I have seen a notice where Psychology students were invited to attend a practical on the summarizing skills." Through the initiative of ASP, academic departments are taking responsibility of offering study skills to their students.

Through the Student Assistanship programme, SAs on our campus compiled a content-based study skills manual for first year students for 1997.

# Academic Skills Programme

## Department of Student Development

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Dear Colleague

Would you please be so kind as to help me by a) completing the questionnaire below as thoroughly and as honestly as possible. The questionnaire forms part of the research I am conducting for my M Ed, into the Academic Skills Programme (ASP) as run by the Department of Student Development. Your answers will inform the research and could contribute to improving ASP at Vista. If you have any queries or objections to completing the questionnaire, please contact me at the above address. I would appreciate it if you could let your student assistants complete the same form which I have included copies of. Names on the questionnaire is optional. I would be grateful if you could let me have these responses as soon as possible, preferably by the end of August.

Your speedy reply will be appreciated.

Cordially

Linda Forson ,  
ASP Coordinator

### Appendix 3. Job description for ASP 1992-1995

1. Establish strong working relationships with student counselors, members of academic and administrative staff and student organizations, e.g. the SRC and societies.
2. Arrange short courses, which are content or discipline based, in language and/or study skills in consultation with academic department. Co-ordinators may act as consultants and advisers to academic departments in designing and implementing any language and learning intervention programmes and projects within a discipline.
3. AS/D Co-ordinators must liaise with academic sub-heads and work towards an integrated academic literacy model instead of an add-on approach. The integrated model encourages lecturers, students and co-ordinators to work as a team to enhance the language and learning skills of students within the context of a discipline.
4. Assist academic staff who are willing to give their students additional academic support. Encourage academic staff to participate in the Writing Skills and Learning and Tutorial Centres on the campus.
5. Provide a consultancy service for students and staff (academic, administrative and professional) on AS/D related issues. Advise and guide programmes and projects which will enhance the academic potential of students and staff.
6. Build up language learning resources on the campus, e.g. in the library, for students and staff to use by themselves.
7. Develop course material in consultation and collaboration with student leaders and academic staff.
8. Liaise with the Student' Representative Council as to students' needs and their expectations of AS/D.
9. Facilitate the training and development of student assistants or SI leaders and ASP tutors. The functions of the co-ordinator include the implementation, maintenance and supervision, evaluation, etc. of the student assistants programme.
10. Conduct a variety of co-ordinating functions regarding ASP issues on campus. Advertise services to students and staff on an ongoing basis.
11. Conduct research in the field of Academic Development or related areas to strengthen standing within the university and write papers or articles.
12. Actively participate in conferences/seminars/workshops by reading papers.
13. Keep records of all ASP related interactions including student and academic staff contact and prepare an annual report based on this information." (Department of Student Development: Job Description, 1995:1-2)

**Appendix 4.** Community project intensive English programme at Vista Academy, Welkom campus. 1996.

Testing was done on 31 candidates before the intensive programme started and again after the completion thereof. Thirty one students wrote the final test with six absentees which is why the same candidates' first test was considered. The tests were identical in format and kindly supplied by the Cambridge Certification Syndicate, Namibia. The results were as follows:

1. If 33,3 % is the pass mark then the number of students who failed test A were 22 and those who failed test B:5.
2. The number of students who obtained a C symbol or higher for test A was one, and for test B was 3.
3. The class average for test A was 31% and for test B , 44% This shows an improvement of 13%. As the tutors never saw test A or B they were not teaching to a paper.
4. The class average for June exams was 50% and 59,78% in September (Forson & Jadrijevich, 1996:35).

**Appendix 5: Types of student learning and the type of student service required. The faculty role is indicated as well:**

Student Learning	Faculty Role	Student Services	Peer- group /individual learning
1. Accumulation of knowledge and information.	Presenter; assessor of learning; faculty or librarian as guide to resources.	Educator and resource to campus for: information about students and their learning styles; environmental designs and programmes to enhance learning values; attitudes and behaviours such as multiculturalism, relativistic commitments, spiritual and physical development.	Independent learning; use of guides to access new technology and help with independent learning.
2. Skill development	Coach outside class; group discussion leader; trainer of student coaches.	Advisor and trainer for individual and groups; educator for developmental skills such as conflict resolution, planning and organizing, delegation and control	Older more experienced peers as coaches; action settings using skills
Conceptual development	Mentor and model; small group discussion leader; convener of cooperative learning groups; one-on-one advising; faculty student interaction.	Mentor and model; coach/advisor and designer of opportunities to enhance conceptual learning; one-on-one advising	Peer-group interaction; co-operative learning groups; testing ideas in real-life experience; independent learning.
Personal/social development	Role model in student's academic major; advising for academic career goals.	Role model as a professional and as a person, advising for personal, social, and career goals; assessing developmental task competencies and achievements	Older more experienced peers as student leaders: student peer-group interactions in clubs, organizations, residence halls, volunteer programmes.

Marie L. Kotter (Restructuring Student Services: A Political Framework. 1995:8)