Academic Writers as Interdisciplinary Agents in the University Access Programme

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Abstract: The paper reports on academic writers as interdisciplinary agents in the University Access Programme (UAP). Among the many challenges, UAP students experience is academic writing. Due to student assignment performance in the first semester of 2022, the sociology module coordinator identified challenges students experience in sociology, particularly in the first year of study. Identified academic writing challenging matters in this regard refers to paragraph construction, referencing and/or citing, and paraphrasing. The challenges mentioned above seem to be addressed in one developmental module (academic literacy) students undertake. With that in mind, our students seem to treat modules in isolation. The academic literacy module teaches students how to reference, paragraph construction, and paraphrase. However, when students engage with modules like sociology, they seem not to apply what was taught in academic literacy. This paper reports on the important role academic writers play in assisting students in academic writing matters via a boot camp (refresher camp) conducted for students. The boot camp's focus was assisting sociology students with academic writing in preparation for their final assignment. Data were gathered from students via written feedback and evaluation of the boot camp. The results from the university gradebook indicated significant improvement in assignment writing matters; this improvement was also expressed in students' feedback.
Keywords: Academic writing, boot camp, interdisciplinary agents, University Access Programme.

This paper reports on a boot camp conducted for sociology students to address academic writing challenge(s) at a University Access Programme (UAP) in South Africa. If this challenge is not addressed, a student could be hindered in articulating, transitioning, and progressing to a higher university level. The University of the Free State (UFS) in South Africa introduced UAP in 1993 for many deserving students who did not meet university admission requirements due to underperformance at the school level (Marais & Hanekom, 2014). South African Higher Education Institutions (SAHEIs) seem to have made significant efforts and strides in enhancing access (Sithaldeen & Van Pletzen, 2022). Such strides are noticeable as UAPs seem to address the issue of access to higher education institutions (Marais & Hanekom, 2014). However, the program's functions have not changed since its inception, even in light of new and different challenges, even more so as education evolves.

Student needs and challenges differ with each cohort; cultural relativism must be the focal point (Sekonyela, 2021). Accordingly, South African Higher Education Institutions (SAHEIs), particularly those that offer UAP, employ a multi-campus approach to address

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academic writing challenges students experience (Sekonyela, 2021). In UFS-UAP, all registered students enrolled in developmental modules such as English Literacy and Skills and Competencies for Lifelong Learning (UFS, 2023). These modules address graduate attributes as identified by the institution. English, for example, focuses on academic writing. Hence, the call for HEIs to afford academic literacy support for students, particularly first-year students (Khumalo & Reddy, 2021).

Despite the different developmental modules students enroll for, there seems to be a disconnect between major and developmental modules. Khumalo and Reddy (2021) said that writing centers in various institutions are instituted to cultivate students' writing development and teaching and learning of isolated skills. In my observations from working with UAP students, students seem to treat modules in isolation. As Khumalo and Reddy (2021) indicated, students learn skills to facilitate academic writing development. However, because students seem to treat modules in isolation, the possible emphasis on the significance of skills is not asserted. For example, what is taught in English seems not to be applied in sociology. That being the case, there is a need for collaboration and an interdisciplinary approach to academic delivery. When collaboration and interdisciplinary in maintained, a university would create an environment where all students can develop capabilities essential to achieve educational functioning (Gore & Walker, 2020).

For the above reasons, there seemed to be a need to address many challenges students experience in academic writing. Academic writing impacts student performance on essay and/or assignment writing and negatively affects general performance (i.e., tests and presentations), impacting students' confidence and participation and, to some degree, potentially leading to attrition. Moreover, when students have no access to academic writing support, such could abet students engaging in academic misconduct (Gamage et al., 2020). Accordingly, this paper aims to convey the benefits and significance of academic writers for students. The locality of academic resource(s) such as academic writers is pivotal in that such need to be accessible and afforded an environment for students' realization of their capabilities.

University Access Programme

University access programs have many names globally. Shah and Cheng (2019) noted that some nations refer to UAP as an "enabling course," which refers to a "course of instruction provided to a person to enable the person to undertake a course leading to a higher education award" (p. 187). These courses have been in existence in Australia since the 1970s. In the United Kingdom and the United States, such courses are called foundation or preparatory (Shah & Cheng, 2019). Peck et al. (2010) and Mzangwa (2019) argue that these courses widen student participation. There seems to be a similar agreement on what constitutes a UAP student. Gore and Walker (2020) posited that UAP students are those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. At the same time, Shah and Cheng (2019) suggested that students come from underrepresented groups, lacking opportunity and access, and from marginalized backgrounds. Therefore, in this paper, UAP refers to programs intended to afford students an environment that will enable them to develop capabilities and allow them to progress to their preferred undergraduate degrees.

Although many South African HEIs regard these students as academically underprepared, students who strive to thrive as independent learners often must do so with inadequate academic support. Moreover, most UAP students seem unprepared to adjust to the demands of university (Shah & Cheng, 2019), which seems to be the case in South African HEIs (Sekonyela, 2021). Hence, academic support, specifically academic writing, will enhance a smooth transition to mainstream programs and better academic performance (Khumalo & Reddy, 2021). South African HEIs, particularly those with UAPs, must be cognizant that

students have different capabilities and that some may have strong academic capabilities although they did not perform well at the school level. Accordingly, institutions must afford an environment where students' capabilities can be realized (Gore & Walker, 2020) and develop capabilities that facilitate students in thriving academically, which means a need for constant support (Shah & Cheng, 2019). In short, groups have different needs within a group; hence cultural relativism must be recognized (Sekonyela, 2021).

In South Africa, programs that widen participation seem to only exist in limited institutions such as the University of the Free State, the University of KwaZulu Natal, the University of Limpopo, and the University of Cape Town. Although South African universities offer access programs, more must be done in support-initiated programs. For example, the UFS developed the Programme for Academic Student Success (PASS) for mainstream students (Strydom et al., 2016). However, this initiative seems to marginalize UAP students; therefore, initiatives such as PASS can also be made available for UAP and at campuses where the program is offered (Sekonyela, 2021).

Learning Assistance Support Centre

Learning assistance support centers, where available, seem to play a vital role in students' success (Sekonyela, 2021). Speirs et al. (2017) acknowledged positive outcomes associated with these centers, including increased motivation and engagement and students' involvement in co-creating the curricula. By co-creating the curricula, students become involved in creating assessments. Additionally, this enables students to identify and realize their capabilities, ultimately fostering learning, placing them in a position to identify shortcomings, and enabling them to seek timely assistance. Therefore, HEIs must ensure that all students, particularly first-year students, are afforded an environment essential to develop capabilities to achieve educational functioning (Gore & Walker, 2020).

UAPs need much more recognition than currently afforded as these programs seem to address social inclusivity and increase students' involvement and enrolment in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which consequently play a pivotal role in the economy of the country (Sithaldeen & Van Pletzen, 2022). Therefore, it remains the responsibility of HEIs to address social inclusivity for all (O'Shea et al., 2016). For O'Shea et al. (2016), all HEIs need to provide equal opportunities to all its students, despite students' level of study; this, in turn, assists students in realizing their capabilities. Evidently, in Reed et al.'s (2015) study, widening participation initiatives and the impact thereof in Australia are captured. Initiatives such as a mentoring program for media students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Programme (HEPPP) have successfully addressed and enabled students' transition to mainstream programs (O'Shea et al., 2016; & Reed et al., 2015). Moreover, CALD and HEPPP programs in Australia appear to have successfully facilitated increased capacity, confidence, and a sense of collegiality, motivation, and social capital (O'Shea et al., 2016; Reed et al., 2015). Furthermore, Gale and Parker (2014) recognize the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) as an example of good institutional practices in facilitating student transition to HE of choice.

Initiatives similar to CALD and HEPPP are available for South African students, particularly at UFS (Strydom et al. (2016). For instance, CTL initiated PASS at the UFS to empower students to cope with the transition from their first year of study to the second. However, this kind of initiative is not present in access campuses. PASS seems limited to extended program students with an admission point (AP) score of 25-30 (depending on faculty requirements) and first-year mainstream students with an AP score of 30 and higher. This seems to exclude UAP students, as their AP scores range from 18-24. CTL seems to offer similar student support as Academic Learning Support Assistance (ALSA) and Learning Assistance

Centre (LAC) and provides learning support such as essay writing skills on a one-on-one basis and in a group setting (Peck et al., 2010). This approach is indistinguishable from what Arendale (2010) mentioned: a learning assistance center (LAC). According to Peck et al. (2010), ALSA involves subject expertise with a clear understanding of the nature of essays, particularly in academic disciplines, and insight into the critical demands, use, and understanding of the many theories expected from the students. Additionally, Khumalo and Reddy (2021) suggest collaborative approaches or practices that will meet students' academic needs. That is, collaborative practices will address diverse discipline-specific writing needs.

Franklin and Blankenberger (2016) perceived centers such as LAC as being in a position to provide a wide range of services in support of the mission of the institution, such as tutors, study groups, support for special needs students, study skills instruction, writing assistance, and computer assistance. For Franklin and Blankenberger (2016), these designed centers need not be exclusive; that is, centers are open to all students, those who did not meet the university admission score, and the mainstream student population. Northall et al. (2016) articulated that university academic expectations are different from vocational education and training (VET) in South Africa known as TVET; that is, Northall et al. (2016) observed that students often struggle with academic referencing, essay writing, and using information technology (IT) sources. Therefore, this observation calls for the visibility of accessible learning assistance support centers. Additionally, Khumalo and Reddy (2021) highlighted the importance of writing. In South African HEIs, particularly universities of technology, students struggle with learning and maintaining requisites for academic writing practices. Therefore, Khumalo and Reddy (2021) recommended that first-year students need discipline-specific (curricular) and general academic literacy support exposure.

Academic Resource(s) Locality

For most institutions in South Africa that offer UAP, there seems to be a prevalent modus operandi, which is that a program is housed at a campus different from the campus where mainstream students are housed, namely an academic preparatory academy (Arendale, 2010) and/or TVET (Northall et al., 2016). This practice is prevalent in some South African universities, such as the University of the Free State (UFS) and the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) (Sekonyela, 2021). However, resources such as writing centers must be accessible to all students.

Drawing from Franklin and Blankenberger's (2016) assertions, UAP academic support needs to be improved. Franklin and Blankenberger suggested the availability and accessible learning assistance support centers (LASC) as one mechanism. Moreover, the locality of LASC as an academic resource is vital. Franklin and Blankenberger (2016) identified LASC as "a designated physical location on campus that provides an organised, multifaceted approach to offering comprehensive academic enhancement activities outside of the traditional classroom setting to the entire college community" (p. 4). Consequently, the availability and locality of such a center are viewed as a practice and critical resource that an institution can avail to students.

The many functions that centers such as CTL perform include tutoring, study groups, support for special needs students, study skills instruction, writing assistance, math assistance, and computer assistance. However, in this case, the main function was to address students' academic writing difficulties, such as paraphrasing, referencing, paragraph construction, and argument (UFS, 2023). Additionally, when students attain such skills, which aids them in not engaging in academic misconduct (Gamage et al., 2020). The designed centers are available to students who did not meet the university's required admission score and the mainstream student

population. Conversely, services provided by CTL to mainstream students were availed to UAP students. Therefore, in this regard, academic resource locality refers to reachable resources.

In contrast to Franklin and Blankenberger's (2016) view of what constitutes LASC, LASC refers to the availability, accessibility, and locality of support in this case. On that account, LASC does not refer to a physical building, and rather what is of great importance is the availability, accessibility, and locality of academic support within student reach. Consequently, students benefit from a support center where students, individually and in a group, can access writing consultants (Malthus, 2015). Therefore, our students being able to attain academic writing support enabled and helped students realize their capabilities.

Furthermore, ALSA affords student access to academic support associated with academic success (Peck et al. 2010). ALSA's function is to assist with essay writing one-on-one and in a group setting. This is similar to LAC, mentioned in Arendale (2010). For Peck et al. (2010), for ALSA to function effectively, different actors' involvement in such subject expertise is eminent. In this regard, academic writing experts were involved rather than only subject experts, and an interdisciplinary approach was at play. Involving both experts was vital as they understood the nature of essays for specific academic disciplines. They additionally have insight into the critical demands, use, and understanding of the theories expected of the students.

Interdisciplinary Approach

Interdisciplinary means combining two or more academic modules into a learning experience to make sense of how they relate to each other (UFS, 2021). In some institutions such as UFS, students were allowed to apply the knowledge gathered in the first semester to a practical and social issue, which required them to use skills obtained in Sociology as well as in other related social sciences, in this case, skills acquired from English module (academic literacy). Hence, this is called an interdisciplinary approach to learning. Similarly, for Allen (2022) interdisciplinary approach draw upon two or more disciplines and consequently leads to the integration of disciplinary insights.

For Kasch (2023), interdisciplinary learning focuses on authentic and real-life learning content and experiences that can be supported through different course designs and teaching approaches. Similarly, in van den BEEMT et al. (2020), interdisciplinary engineering education (IEE) was implemented to train engineering students to combine theories, concepts, and methods from different disciplines in a single context. Moreover, Khumalo and Reddy (2021) suggested collaborative practices, where academic departments and writing centers address students' academic needs. That is, support needs to focus on generic academic literacy and encompass discipline-specific writing.

Additionally, in Allen's (2022) study, interdisciplinary education refers to "a mode of curriculum design and instruction in which individual faculty or teams identify, evaluate, and integrate information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of knowledge to advance students' capacity to understand issues, address problems, and create new approaches and solutions that extend beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of instruction" (p. 23). Therefore, due to students' performance in the first academic semester, academic writing support seemed to be needed. Additionally, students were reskilled with techniques and tools to enhance writing skills and understanding of concepts which facilitated understanding of given social issues. This translated into students' ability to address given social issues and improve student performance. The interdisciplinary approach enabled students to realize the interconnection between modules (English literacy and Sociology), consequently leading to an improved understanding of academic writing matter.

Hakizimana and Jürgens (2013) asserted that there was value in collaborative student learning, which is one element at play in an interdisciplinary approach. Collaboration between student-student and student-facilitator is necessary to be effective and meaningful. Time (when to initiate) and group size also must be considered. For example, in Supplemental Support Service (SSS), students are organized into small study groups of 5-7, which proved highly successful. Academic programs such as SSS were held close to the tests and examinations, as it was when students were more focused on their learning and started to prepare for tests or examinations. In programs of this nature, each group is facilitated by students who successfully completed the module, and this method seems to have contributed to improved student academic performance and retention. A similar approach was initiated in UAP academic writing boot camp; however, CTL academic writers, not students, facilitated the program.

Functionalism as Framework

August Comte (1798-1857) is known as the father of sociology (Sadovnik & Coughlan, 2016) and a main contributor to functionalism. Comte saw the need to theorize about nature and the dynamic of societies; therefore, Comte developed the study of sociology (Ferrante, 2016). His view of functionalism posits that in society, individuals cannot exist in isolation (Ferrante, 2016; & Stewart & Zaaiman, 2015). An individual needs other to continue to exist and survive (Ferrante, 2016; Turner, 2014). For Turner (2014), Comte analogized society to a complex organism built from other social organisms. In a social universe, all parts have functions and requisites, and those social requisites necessitate for it to persist in its environment.

Functionalism postulates that for society to thrive and function smoothly, all parts need one another. Functionalism best shows that when all parts within an institution function interdependently, an institution functions smoothly, and equilibrium is maintained. Hence, functionalist proponents point to the performed functions and dysfunctions within social institutions. Therefore, for these proponents, functions and dysfunctions help maintain equilibrium, order, and stability (Benokraitis, 2016; Ferrante, 2016; Henslin, 2008).

Functionalist proponents such as Comte and Spencer seem vivid about the existence of diverse parts in society and their need for one another to continue (Ferrante, 2016; & Stewart & Zaaiman, 2015). For example, education is an institution and part of society and consists of different or diverse parts. Accordingly, all parts must work collaboratively for education to continue functioning smoothly. As one part of education, all relevant stakeholders must be involved to ensure UAP's smooth functioning. UAP functions smoothly when students have equal opportunities across all campuses; in other words, UAP students need equal access to opportunities and academic support as mainstream students. One functionalism proponent, Emilé Durkheim, also analogized society to the human body consisting of different parts or institutions: family, education, the economy, and the state. He asserted that society's institutions were interdependent and functioned to maintain the larger system (Ferrante, 2016). In light of Durkheim's view, there seems to be a need for a UAP for collaboration and interdependence among different actors. In this instance, the actors being students, lecturers, resources, and institution management. Consequently, interdependence among different actors translates to collaborative functioning that will enhance teaching, learning, and transition, providing students with a sense of collegiality.

Findings and Discussion

Student perception: Boot camps were conducted across the three UAP campuses of one University in South Africa. The following objectives were addressed per the aim and needs,

that is, students were expected to: 1) Write a rough draft of an essay/assignment using skills taught by the Sociology facilitator, academic literacy facilitator, and the librarian. 2) Reference, cite, and paraphrase using skills taught by the above three stakeholders. 3) Peer mark a rough draft and give extensive feedback on a peer's draft. 4) Discuss feedback and incorporate this feedback into a final draft of an assignment.

Students seem to have benefitted from the boot camp. Below are some of their experiences and suggestions (all names are pseudonyms).

Leane noted, "The boot camp was a success as it helped clarify how to write the introduction. And it also helped me to add more information on how to write the conclusion."

Lucia suggested, "The boot camp was a success. It helped me a lot to develop skills in how to write academic essays. Moreover, the boot camp helped me to understand how to structure academic essays not only for Sociology but for all other modules…. The boot camp made it easier for everyone to understand how to structure academic essays using the right resources in it; we were also taught how to reference."

Jones shared, "The boot camp was beneficial to me because I got to learn and understand the theme of the day. I managed to ask questions where I couldn't understand because there was enough time. I think it would be best if the university made boot camp compulsory at the beginning of the year."

Liza said, "The boot camp was beneficial because I learned how to write the introduction. At first, I did not know the difference between the thesis statement and the roadmap."

From the shared experiences above, students seem to have benefitted from boot camp. Students seemed to share sentiments and were elated at having attended. Many suggested that interventions such as this must be implemented right at the beginning of the academic year. Students tended to believe that if they had such boot camp earlier, it could have benefitted them with all their modules.

Among the different themes identified was that students were now confident with writing, comprehending, and referencing; this is evident in Lucia's response, "…..boot camp made it easier to understand…..we were also taught to reference ." Students also viewed and understood that academic writing is a process, and to master such a skill, one needs to practice. This is evident in Jones's shared experience"…. I managed to ask questions where I did not understand….." From Jones's shared experience, it is clear that students now understand that academic writing is a process that requires one to ask questions for better understanding and to master the art of writing.

In addition, students seem to have realized that they need to co-exist, be involved in curriculum development, and seek assistance on time; Jones also reiterates this "….I managed to ask questions where I couldn't understand because there was enough time." Many expressed appreciation in that they were confident with paragraph construction, referencing, and in general, constructing or writing an academic essay utilizing relevant resources (sources), as Lucia's response suggested, "……It helped me a lot to develop skills on how to write academic essays. Moreover, the boot camp helped me to understand how to structure academic essays not only for Sociology." Lucia's experience of boot camp suggests that she did not only benefit in relation to the sociology module. Generally, boot camp helped her to successfully read and write with comprehending other modules. Furthermore, Jones added, "… I think it would be best if the university makes boot camp compulsory at the beginning of the year." One can deduce from Jones's response that boot camp was beneficial; he even suggested that such support should be provided from the beginning of the academic year.

Results before and after boot-camp

Table 1 below provides assignment instructions and a marking criteria sample. This is a sample of assignments students had to compile in the first (1st) semester. The expectation was for students to gather relevant information on a given topic and to ensure that upon submission, they adhere to academic writing technical aspects, which entails introduction, well-written and constructed paragraphs, and correct referencing style. The same assignment was given to all students at all different campuses.

Table 1
Assignment Instructions and Marking Criteria

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

- Your essay should cover aspects of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, which are:
  - An identification and discussion of any two global issues that you believe have contributed to the high food and fuel prices in South Africa at present. You should discuss each issue in terms of when it started or became predominant. At least two sources should be used for this section.
  - A discussion of what the literature says about how the two issues contribute to high food and fuel prices in SA. This section should include at least two appropriate sources.
  - You are supposed to interview any four (4) people, preferably your class mates (you can still interview people who are not your class mates). This can be done face-to-face, by email or social media. Ask each to tell you what they think are two issues that have contributed to the high food and fuel prices in SA. After interviewing them, you will then discuss the findings (what they have said). We urge you to use graphs to help your discussion. Please note that you do not have to attach the actual interviews done. You only attach a clean copy of the questions used for the interview.
  - A discussion that compares what the literature says, and what your respondents said. Are there noticeable similarities/ differences?
  - A definition of the "sociological imagination", and applying it by discussing your own personal insight on what could be done by the South government to help with the high food and fuel prices.

| COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION OF COMPONENT	MAXIMUM MARK
COVER PAGE	First page showing: module code and/or name, assignment title, lecturer or facilitator's name and date of submission.	½
PLAGIARISM DECLARATION	A form that says you did not steal the essay from someone or from a book or article, and that should you have done any of these, you agree that you can be punished.	½
TABLE OF CONTENTS	A table of contents lists the components and shows in which pages they can be found.	½
INTRODUCTION	A paragraph that says something general about the issue in the topic, then outlines how the essay/ assignment will discuss this issue.	2
GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE TWO ISSUES	Refer to assignment instructions	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	Refer to assignment instructions	2
INTERVIEW FINDINGS	Refer to assignment instructions	3
COMPARISON BETWEEN LITERATURE REVIEW AND INTERVIEW FINDINGS	Refer to assignment instructions	2
APPLICATION OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION	Refer to assignment instructions	1
CORRECT REFERENCING AND TABLE OF CONTENTS	See example on Blackboard	2
CONSISTENT USE OF PARAGRAPHS TO BREAK ARGUMENTS	See example on Blackboard	½
TOTAL		15
DEDUCTIONS		
Late submissions	-3 marks per day late	
Group composition	-3 marks individual submissions	
Group composition	Assignments with over 2 people will not be marked	
Not using in text references	-3 marks	

The three figures below across all campuses show student improvement in assignment writing; this can be attributed to the boot camp conducted for all students.

Figure 1
North Campus Results Before and After Boot Camp

NORTH CAMPUS (before) Assignment
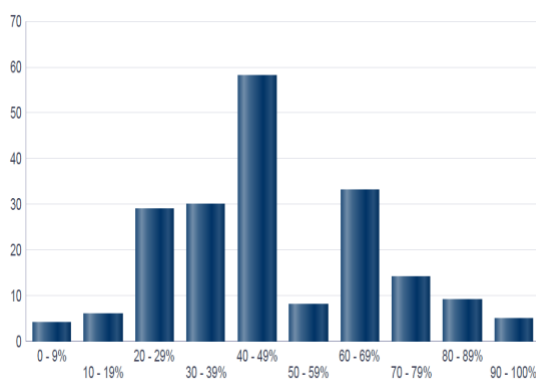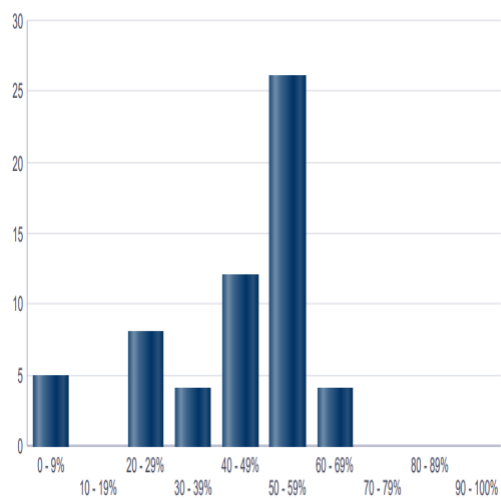
NORTH CAMPUS (after boot camp) Assignment
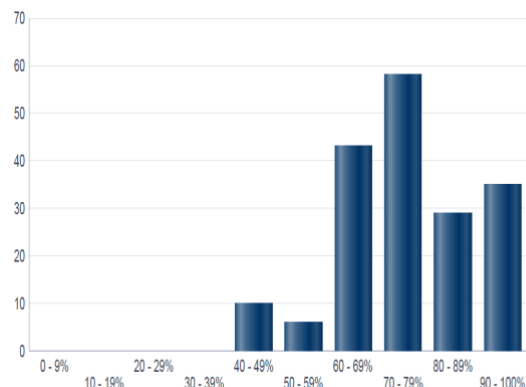
Figure 1

Figure 1 above shows the results before and after conducting boot camp at the North campus. Even though the results presented in Figure 1 are for different semesters (semester 1 and semester 2) with the same student cohort, academic writing expectations for sociology are the same throughout the year. This figure indicates improvement in students' assignment performance. Reference will be made to the figure on the left (semester 1) and the figure on the right (semester 2). The figure on the left (before boot camp) shows that the majority of students performed in the 40-49% range; this suggests that students did not perform well and pass the assignment. One can attribute non-performance (university requires 50% to pass) to students not being able to engage with academic writing matters. However, there is improved performance, according to the figure on the right. The figure on the right shows improved performance after boot camp. Unlike the figure on the left, that on the right shows that most students performed in the 70-79% range. This performance can be attributed to boot camp conducted for students, where students were able and had enough time to ask questions about assignment/academic writing matters where they lacked. Therefore, from the data shown in Figure 1, one can deduce that boot camp did benefit students.
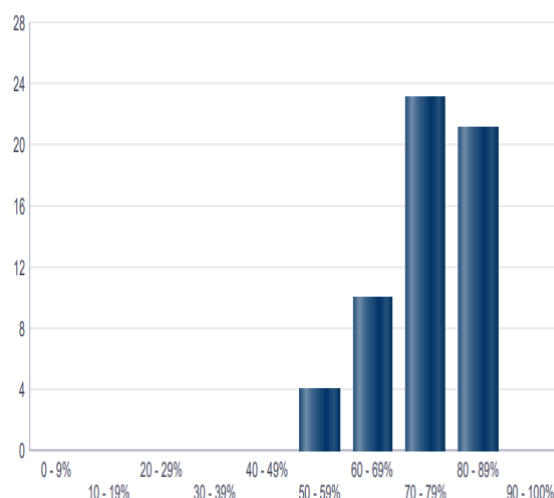
Figure 2
West Campus Results Before and After Boot Camp
WEST CAMPUS (before)   **WEST CAMPUS (after boot camp)**
    Assignment   **Assignment**

Figure 2

Figure 2 above shows the results before and after conducting the boot camp at the West campus. Like the North campus, results presented in Figure 2 are for different semesters (semester 1 and semester 2) with the same student cohort; academic writing expectations for sociology are the same throughout the year. This figure indicates improvement in students' assignment performance. Reference will be made to the figure on the left (semester 1 before boot camp) and the right (semester 2 after boot camp). The figure on the left (before boot camp) shows that most students performed in the 50-59% range; this reveals majority of students passed the assignment. However, performance improved, according to the figure on the right after boot camp. Unlike the figure on the left, that on the right shows that most students performed in the 70-79% range. This performance can be attributed to boot camp conducted for students, where students were able and had enough time to ask questions about

assignment/academic writing matters where they lacked. Therefore, from the data shown in Figure 2 (after boot camp), one can deduce that boot camp did benefit students.

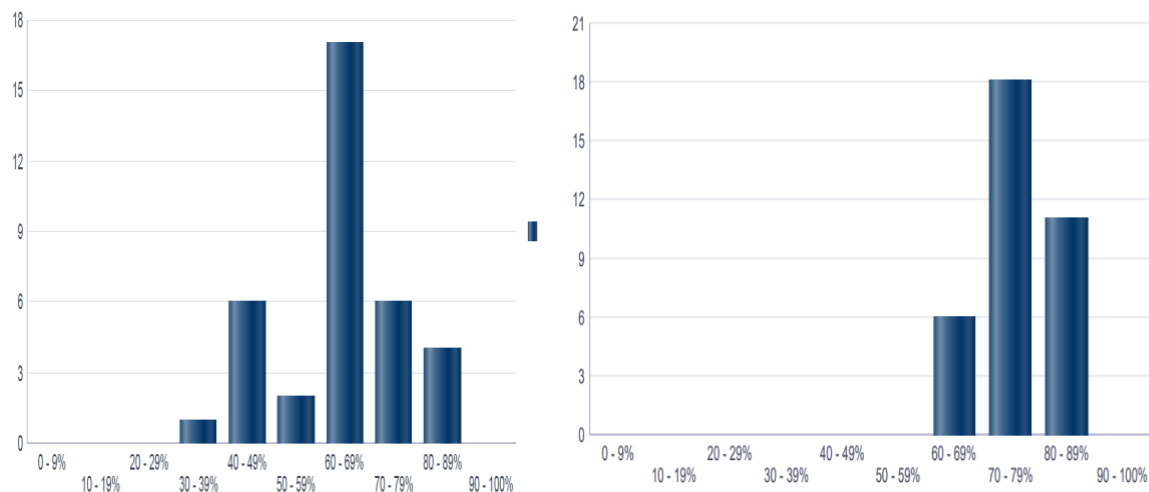**Figure 3**
East Campus Results Before and After Boot Camp
EAST CAMPUS (before)   **EAST CAMPUS (after boot camp)**
Assignment   **Assignment**

Figure 3

Figure 3 above shows results before and after conducting boot camp at the East campus. Even though the results presented in Figure 3 are for different semesters (semester 1 and semester 2), academic writing expectations for sociology are the same throughout the year. From this figure, there is an indication of improvement in students' assignment performance. The figure on the left (before boot camp) shows that most students performed in the 60-69% range; this suggests that students performed well and passed the assignment. Additionally, the figure on the right (after boot camp) indicates improved results. Therefore, all students performed optimally on the East campus in the semester. Therefore, Figure 3 shows that boot camp benefitted students, which is also evident from student perception.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 reveal that students understood boot-camp expectations, as most were prepared and had the first draft available. One can also deduce that when two departments collaborate in learning and teaching, students seem to benefit, which leads to improved confidence and participation. Students suggested that this kind of initiative must be implemented from the first semester of each year. Moreover, students explicated that should they have had an initiative of this nature early in the year; they could have also performed well in other assessments, such as tests.

Collaboration: There is value in collaborative learning, as Hakizimana and Jürgens (2013) maintained when academic programs such as SSS are afforded to students and are held close examination or even in preparation for assignment submission. Figures 1, 2, and 3 above indicate that students benefitted due to boot camp being held close to the assignment submission. It was when students were more focused on their learning and started to prepare for tests or examinations (Hakizimana & Jürgens, 2013). In SSS, each group is facilitated by students who successfully completed the module, which seems to have contributed to improved student academic performance and retention. A similar approach was initiated in UAP academic writing boot camp. However, instead of students facilitating, in this regard, an academic writer from CTL facilitated the academic writing boot camp. Consequently, academic writing was

improved, and students completed assignments. Results from boot-camp-related activities seem to corroborate the functionalist view that when parts that exist in society function interdependently, such society thrives. Furthermore, our interdisciplinary approach draws upon two disciplines, consequently integrating disciplinary insights (Allen, 2022).

Academic resource(s) locality is vital. As Arendale (2010) suggested, LAC is one of the most valuable resources an institution can afford for students. Academic resources such as LAC take different forms at different institutions. Some refer to ALSA, LAC, CTL, SSS, etc. Peck et al. (2010) argued that, for ALSA to function effectively, from functionalist proponents, when different actors function interdependently, order is maintained, and expectations are met. The involvement of subject expertise is eminent in the academic writing journey. In this regard, academic writing experts were involved rather than only subject experts. Involving both experts was vital as they understood the nature of essays for specific academic disciplines. They additionally had insight into the critical demands, use, and understanding of the theories expected of the students (van den BEEMT et al., 2020). Consequently, this collaboration yelled favorable outcomes, and all parties involved seem to appreciate the effort.

Interdisciplinary agents: Darling (2015) viewed navigation of university culture as an understanding of general education and the courses that students were enrolled in. In other words, one responsibility of an academic advisor is to be an interdisciplinary agent, which in this context means helping students to understand the connection between different modules (Egan, 2015). However, academic writers served as interdisciplinary agents (Kasch, 2023). Moreover, as van den BEEMT et al. (2020) suggested, an interdisciplinary approach was implemented to train students to bring together combinations of theories, concepts, and methods from different disciplines in a single context. Consequently, students' performance improved.

Through academic writers, UAP students are in a position to understand what they are studying and why, which in the end, enhances their engagement in general education (Egan, 2015: 80; Kirk-Kuwaye & Sano-Franchini, 2015; Lowenstein, 2015). One advantage associated with academic writers as interdisciplinary agents is that students seem to understand the connection between what they are studying and how one module can lead to the successful completion of another (Khumalo & Reddy, 2021; van den BEEMT et al., 2020). Students could apply skills learned in a specific module to another, such as the English module to Sociology (UFS, 2023).

Conclusion

UAP students seem less confident regarding their academic capabilities. One reason can be attributed to the definition of what constitutes or who enrolls in such a program. Many SAHEIs regard these students as academically underprepared; however, such institutions expect students to thrive as independent learners with minimal academic support. Therefore, this work aimed to suggest and indicate UAP student needs, particularly academic writing, and suggest how academic writing can be addressed. Moreover, the findings revealed that student capabilities could be realized through collaboration from different disciplines. Consequently, such increase capacity, participation, confidence, and motivation. Therefore, SAHEIs that offer Access Programmes need to consistently identify students' challenges each academic year; this will ensure that appropriate support is afforded, and that students' cultural relativism is realized. That is, different cohorts might have and need different support, also maintaining existing academic support.

Learning assistance support centers seem to play a vital role in students' success. Positive outcomes associated with these centers need to be acknowledged. Among the many positive outcomes is increased student motivation and engagement with the curricula. Additionally, this enables students to identify and realize their capabilities, which ultimately

fosters learning, places students in a position to identify shortcomings, and enables them to seek assistance in time. Therefore, HEIs must ensure that all students, particularly first year, are afforded an environment essential to develop capabilities.

Moreover, students suggested that this kind of initiative should be introduced in the first semester as they believe and view such as beneficial. Additionally, they believe they could have performed better in the first semester and not only in this specific module but all the other modules. Similarly, students assert that addressing academic writing matters from the beginning of the year facilitates good assignment writing and will enable them to comprehend the presented material. As a result, that will aid in good academic performance in general. Students' beliefs and practices in implementing an interdisciplinary approach need further exploration, as not much evidence, if any, is well documented, particularly concerning UAPs. Therefore, this calls for further research on the impact of an interdisciplinary approach on teaching and learning from students' perspectives and experiences.

The data in Figures 1, 2, and 3 suggest that students' questions and challenges were addressed. In that, students showed improved performance in the second-semester assignment. From data from all campuses, one can conclude that students benefitted from the boot camp. However, interventions are never without challenges; even with this boot camp, some challenges were experienced.

Some implications identified while conducting a boot camp were financial difficulties. Due to boot camp being held over weekend (Saturday), some students had challenges coming to campus. Lack of preparedness led to sessions being longer than anticipated, as some students did not bring assignment drafts. Another implication was with subject expertise; that is, only academic writers were available to avoid chaos and interruption from subject expectations. However, it would have helped to have academic writers and subject experts during boot camp.

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