

# Academic advising and a core curriculum: The first year experience

University of the Free State  
(SOUTH AFRICA)



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UFS·UV  
EDUCATION  
OPVOEDKUNDE

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF FYE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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# Higher education in South Africa

- Higher education participation rates remain low in comparison to other countries.
- 30% who enter SA higher education system annually drop out during their first year.
- Less than 50% of students who enrol for diplomas or degrees ever graduate.
- Only one in three students of the intake into 3 year degrees graduate in record time or within 4 years.
- Fewer than 50% receive a higher education qualification after 5 years (Scott, et al., 2008).



# Higher education in South Africa

*"Financial difficulties among the country's large pool of poor black students are, unsurprisingly, largely to blame as first generation students from low-income, less educated families are the most likely to drop out."*

[[www.universityworldnews.com](http://www.universityworldnews.com) (SOUTH AFRICA: Student drop-out rates alarming)]



# Contextualising FYE in South Africa

Different models of FYE across the country – most models focus on a connection of service points.

## Institution 1

1. Placement testing
2. Orientation and registration programme
3. Library and LMS orientation
4. Tracking of student performance
5. Tutorial programmes
6. Co-curricular activities
7. Residences as centres of academic excellence

## Institution 2

1. Early Assessment
2. Careers Service
3. Wellness Service
4. Orientation and Advocacy
5. Writing Centre
6. Information website
7. Academic and non-academic support workshops

## Institution 3

1. Orientation
2. Computer skills
3. Career information
4. Financial advice
5. Success skills (time management, exam preparation)

# FYE in the US

5 key elements of an effective FYE, defined by NRC (2008):

- Student transitions: Student Orientation.
- Connection between research and practice: Supportive campus environment and learning communities.
- Inclusions: Developmental academic advising.
- Collaboration: Academic student tutorial support.
- Lifelong learning: Curriculum and co-curricular interventions.



# FYE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

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# FYE at the University of the Free State

Orientation and academic success skills



Academic Advising and the core curriculum module (UFS101)

Enhance learning, development and engagement through academic advising and the core curriculum module.



University of the Free State (South Africa)

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# ACADEMIC ADVISING

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# Academic Advising in the South African context

- An important component with rich tradition of helping students make the most of their higher education career.
- Essential is integrating with first-year transition programmes – academic advisors are the key agents contributing towards the informational, conceptual and relational skills received by the student.
- A process to enhance student engagement in first-year.
- Improved academic advising services contribute to student satisfaction and retention within the institution (NACADA, 2008)

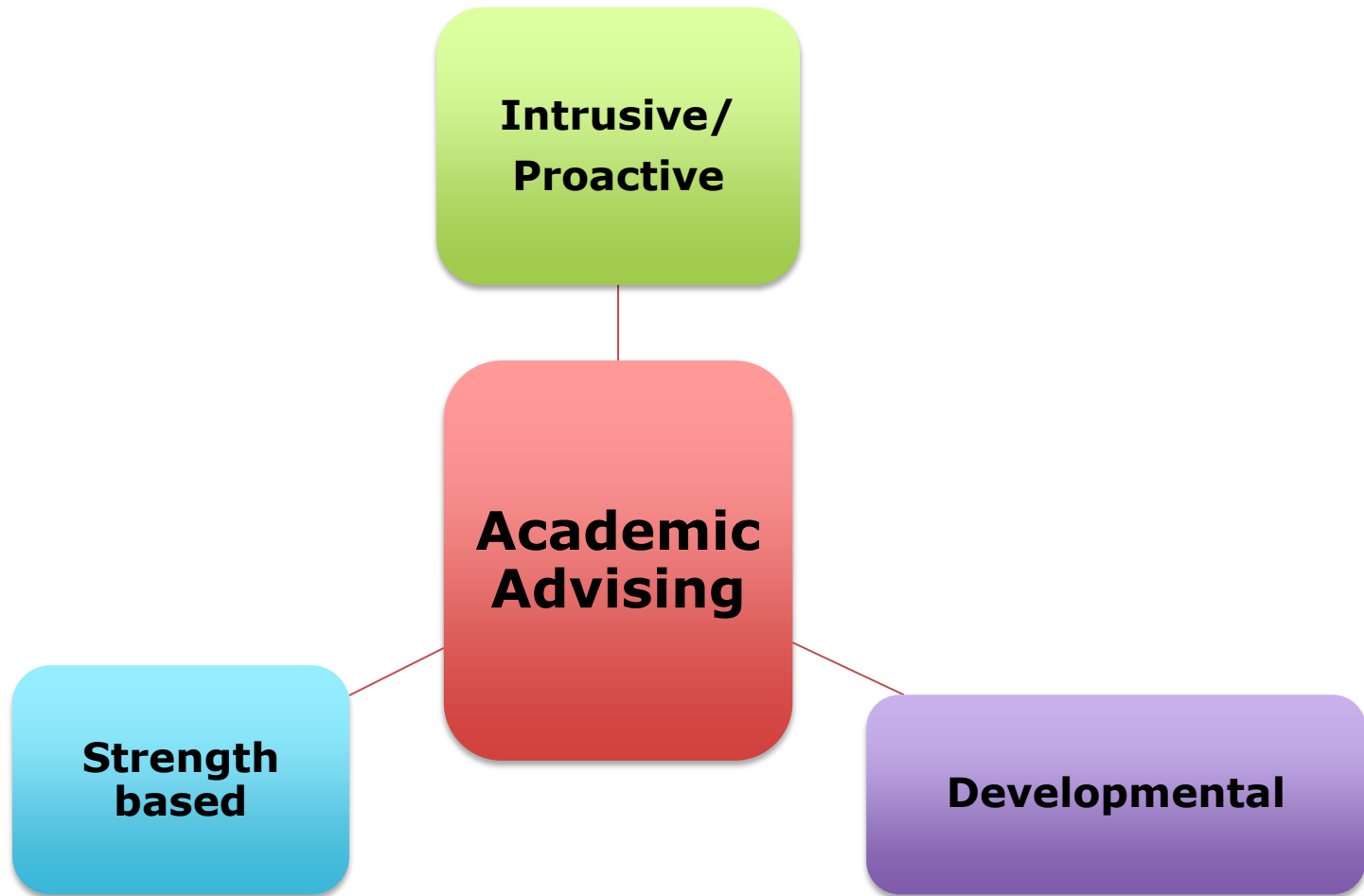


# Why UFS students need better advising

- Underprepared for higher education
- First generation students
- Majority (commuter) students feel that the UFS does not care about them – limited sense of belonging
- UFS students overload themselves in terms of credits
- Better advice helps students to plan better, progress quicker and more successfully through their degrees. (SASSE 2009)



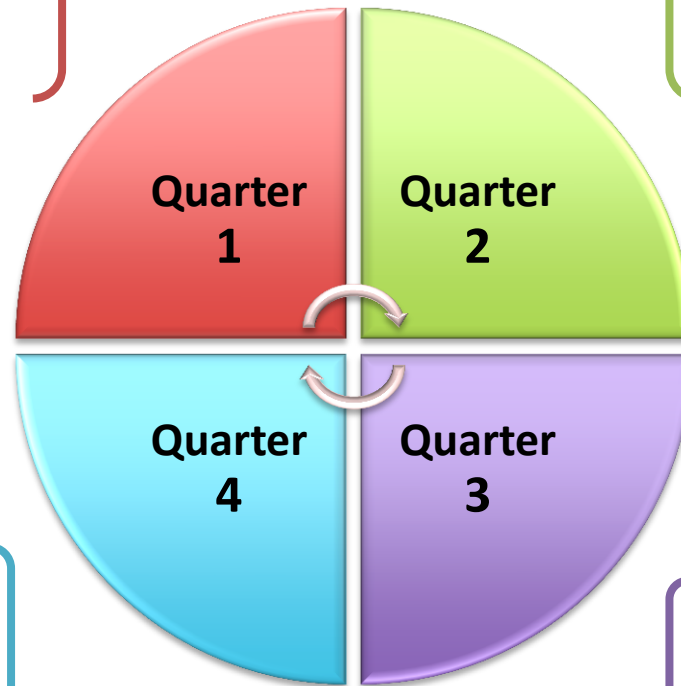
# Academic Advising Approaches at UFS



- Orientation & Registration
- Communication channels
- Goals and objectives

## Semester 1

- Tracking progress
- Exam preparation



- Year-end examinations
- Academic advice for the next year
- Future plans

- Second semester registration
- Revisit goals and objectives

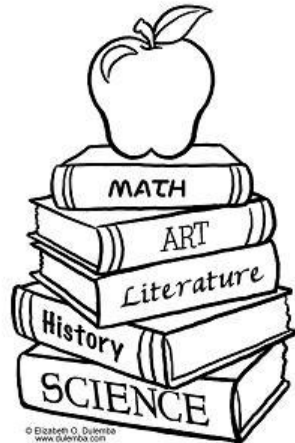
## Semester 2

# CORE CURRICULUM MODULE

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# UFS101 as the core curriculum module

- First of its kind in South Africa.
- Different from the typical University 101 model.



- Vice-chancellor felt that it should focus more on a common intellectual experience than academic success skills.
- Delivered on a large scale - 5000 students in 2014.
- Flipping the classroom in 2014.

# Overview of UFS101

Multi-disciplinary, core curriculum module for undergraduate students.

Disciplines: Anthropology, Law, Astrophysics, Astrobiology, History, Economics, Chemistry and Social Psychology

## Outcomes

- Explain the value of different disciplinary perspectives;
- Apply different disciplinary perspectives as part of critical thinking;
- Demonstrate basic reflective academic skills – reading, writing and argumentation skills; and
- Reflect on how higher education empowers citizens to engage with the challenges facing the 21<sup>st</sup> century world (locally and globally).





# UFS101 growth in student numbers

 = 200 students (Bloemfontein campus)

**2011**



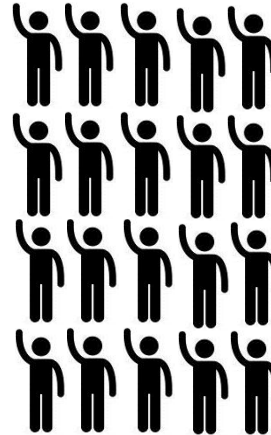
BFN: Pilot with 200 students

**2012**



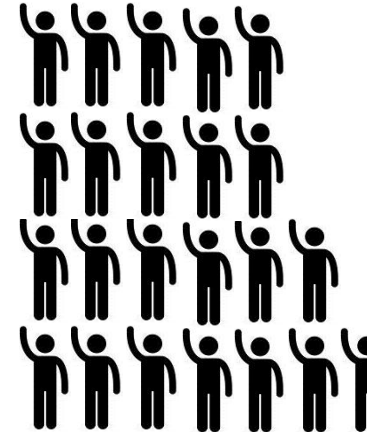
BFN: Full roll out with 2000 students

**2013**



BFN: Full roll out with 4000 students  
QQ: Pilot of 150 students

**2014**



BFN: Full roll out with 4500 students  
QQ: Full roll out with 400 students  
KBY: Full roll out with 180 students

# Blended Learning in UFS101

## Why?

- Avoid one-way transfer of information
- Students participate actively
- Responsible for their own learning

## How?

- Videos
- Discussions
- Debates



# Large Class Teaching in UFS101

- “...comprise between 150 and 300 students or up to 500 students.” (Exeter Ameratunga, Ratima, Morton, Dickson, Hsu & Jackson, 2007)
- UFS101 = Megaclass
- South African Context



# Large Class Teaching in UFS101

- Adaptation of lecturing methods
- Anonymity



# ASSESSING IMPACT THROUGH STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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# Student Engagement

“...the amount of time and effort students spend on academic activities. ...allocation of resources and organising of learning opportunities and services from the institution.” (Kuh, Kinze, Shuh & Whitt, 2005)

A focus on student engagement offers institutions the opportunity to enhance the prospects for a diverse range of students to survive and thrive in higher education. The Engagement Indicators of student engagement are:

- Academic challenge
- Learning with Peers
- Experiences with Staff
- Supportive campus environment
- High-Impact Practices (McCormick, Gonyea, Kinzie, 2013)



# Student Engagement

*"Advising is viewed as a way to connect students to the campus and help them feel that someone is looking out for them."*

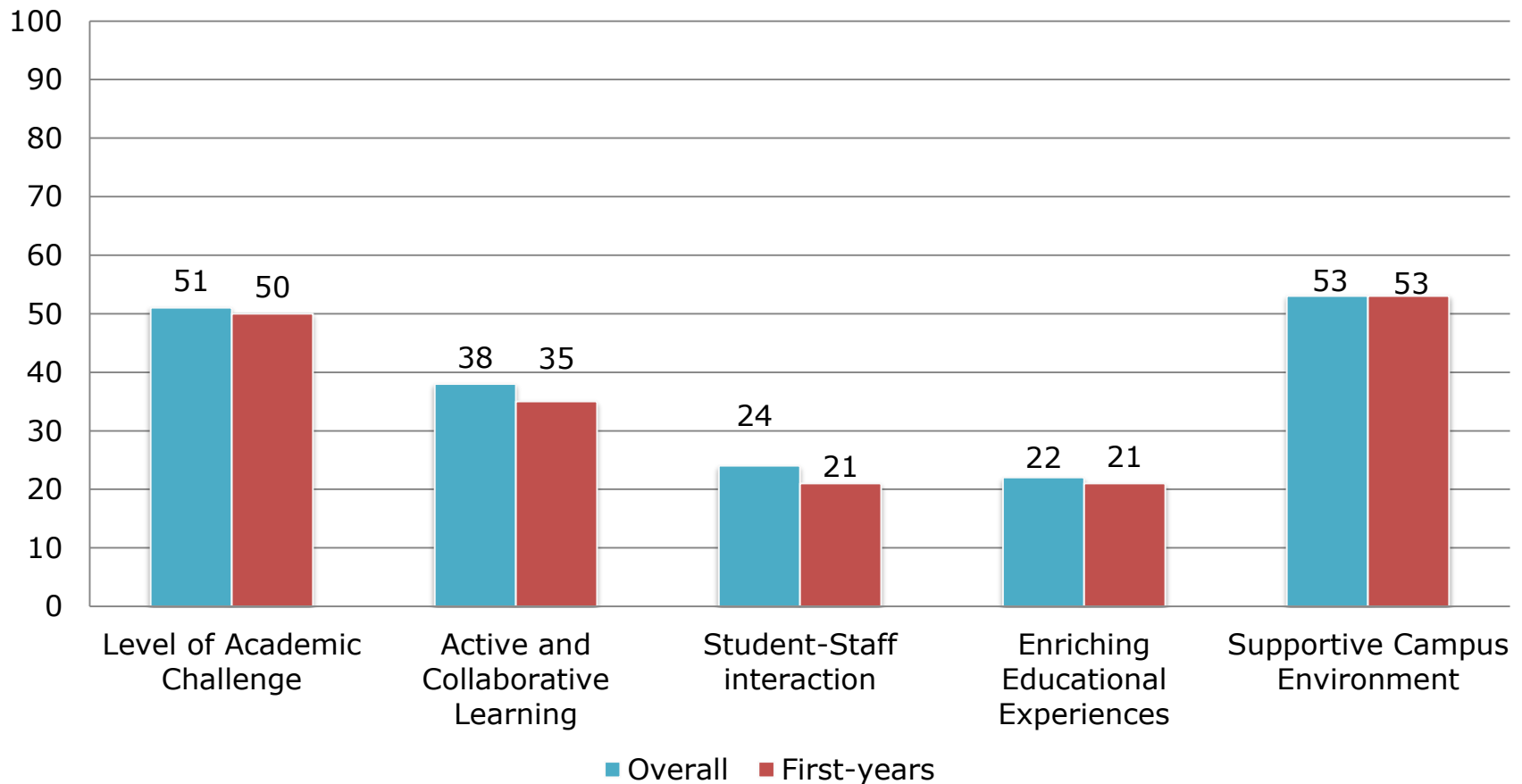
*"When done well, academic advising helps students to develop and act on meaningful educational plans and contributes to the institution's teaching and learning mission."*

-Kuh, 2007-



# Student Engagement in South Africa

## Mean scores of benchmarks of student engagement across universities in South Africa (2010)





# Student Engagement and the FYE

De Sousa (2005) identifies a few guiding principles that blend student advising, engagement and the core curriculum to promote lifelong learning:

- Think of advising as a tag-team activity
  - Faculty and support staff interventions to support and contribute to students' teaching and learning (Registration and first-year orientation).
- Help students map out a path to success
  - Academic success presentation in the Orientation programme.
- Focus on meaningful interactions with students
  - Learning communities promoting peer-facilitated support and academic tutorial programmes for first-year "high-risk" modules.
  - Core curriculum module – UFS101.
- Connect students to co-curricular learning opportunities
  - P3 mentors and tutorial groups where skills development takes place.
- Encourage students to seek out and learn from experiences with different forms of diversity
  - The university core curriculum module – UFS101.

# Student Engagement at the University of the Free State

In comparison to other universities in South Africa, the first year students scored:

- Significantly higher on Academic Challenge
- Significantly lower on Learning with Peers
- Significantly higher on Experiences with Staff (2013)

High impact practices included learning societies, service-learning, research with staff, and practical learning.

Of the first year students, only 33% participated in HIPs.



# UFS101 and Academic Advising

UFS101	Academic Advising
Education gap between high school and university; scaffolding is required.	Contributes to scaffolding.
Focus on student engagement benchmarks.	Focus on student engagement benchmarks.

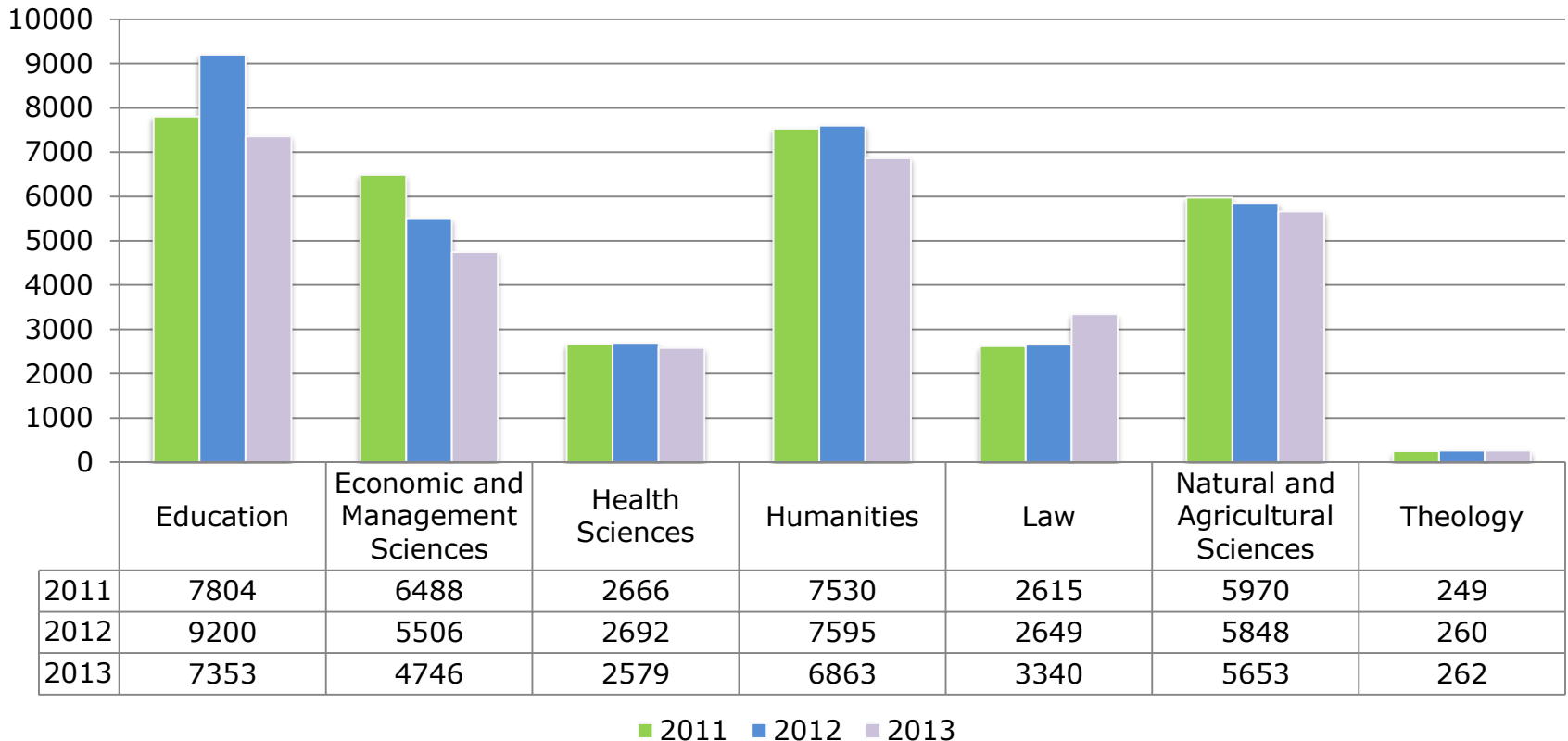
FYE is strengthened by this dual approach between teaching and learning and student support.

# EVIDENCE OF ASSESSMENT

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# Academic Advising and Student Engagement

**Total number of enrolments per faculty at the University of the Free State**



# Academic Advising and Student Engagement

Data collection	First-year mainstream student interviews (proactive advising) Online reflection journals (per term)
Research approach	Action research



# Academic Advising and Student Engagement

## Pilot study of pro-active academic advising sessions

Faculty	Average number of sessions	Minimum number of sessions	Maximum number of sessions
Economic and Management Sciences	2	1	6
Law	3	1	5
Health Sciences	4	2	4
Humanities	2	1	4
Theology	3	2	5
Natural and Agricultural Sciences	4	1	6
Education	2	1	3

*"Hey. Just needed some to talk to. It's been so hard to adjust to the varsity level but now it's getting better. Now that I know theirs is someone like you to listen to my thoughts and where about I am starting to show my full potential and the best I can be... I want to schedule a monthly session with you if that's possible."*

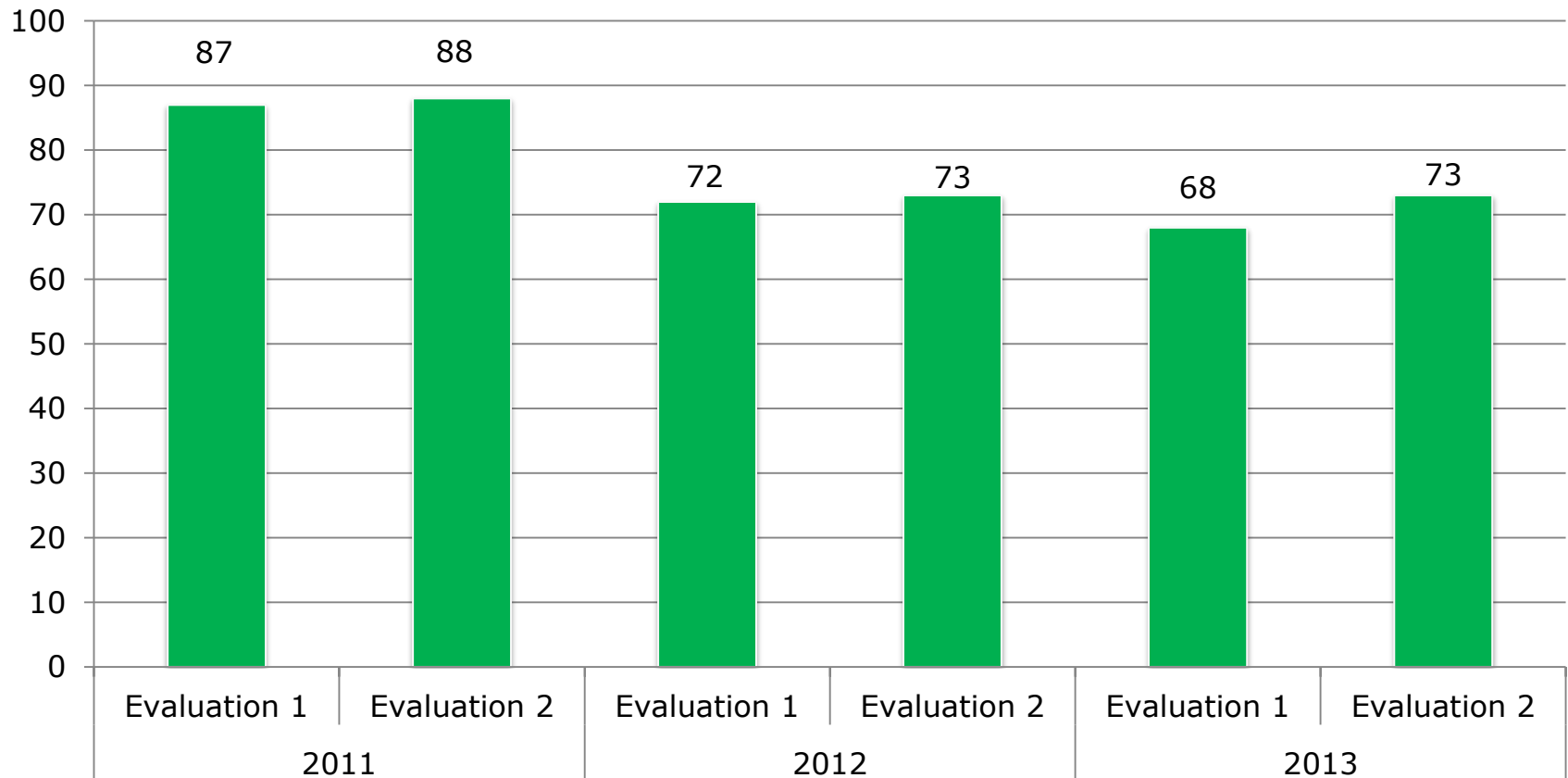
# UFS101 and Student Engagement

Data collection	Online surveys and focus groups with students and learning facilitators
Research approach	Action research and annual formative evaluation



# UFS101 Academic challenge

## Level of academic challenge appropriate for first-years



# UFS101 Academic challenge

## Level of academic challenge

*"The questions we dealt with during this unit was very challenging for most of the students and difficult to answer but they were not impossible to answer one just had to think outside of your usual mindset."*

*"There were times that I struggled because you have to think deeper than normal. But I did it and I liked it."*

*"The difficulty of this module does allow us to think and challenges us positively."*

*"I am an accounting major yet I could fairly comprehend the content of all the units and where I fell a bit short, the available materials on blackboard and the studyguide helped me to fill in the blanks."*

# UFS101 Learning with peers

## Active and collaborative learning

*"... being put on the spot with questions that we do not have an answer for and them getting a remark about how wrong it is causes that you do not want to take part in the discussions."*

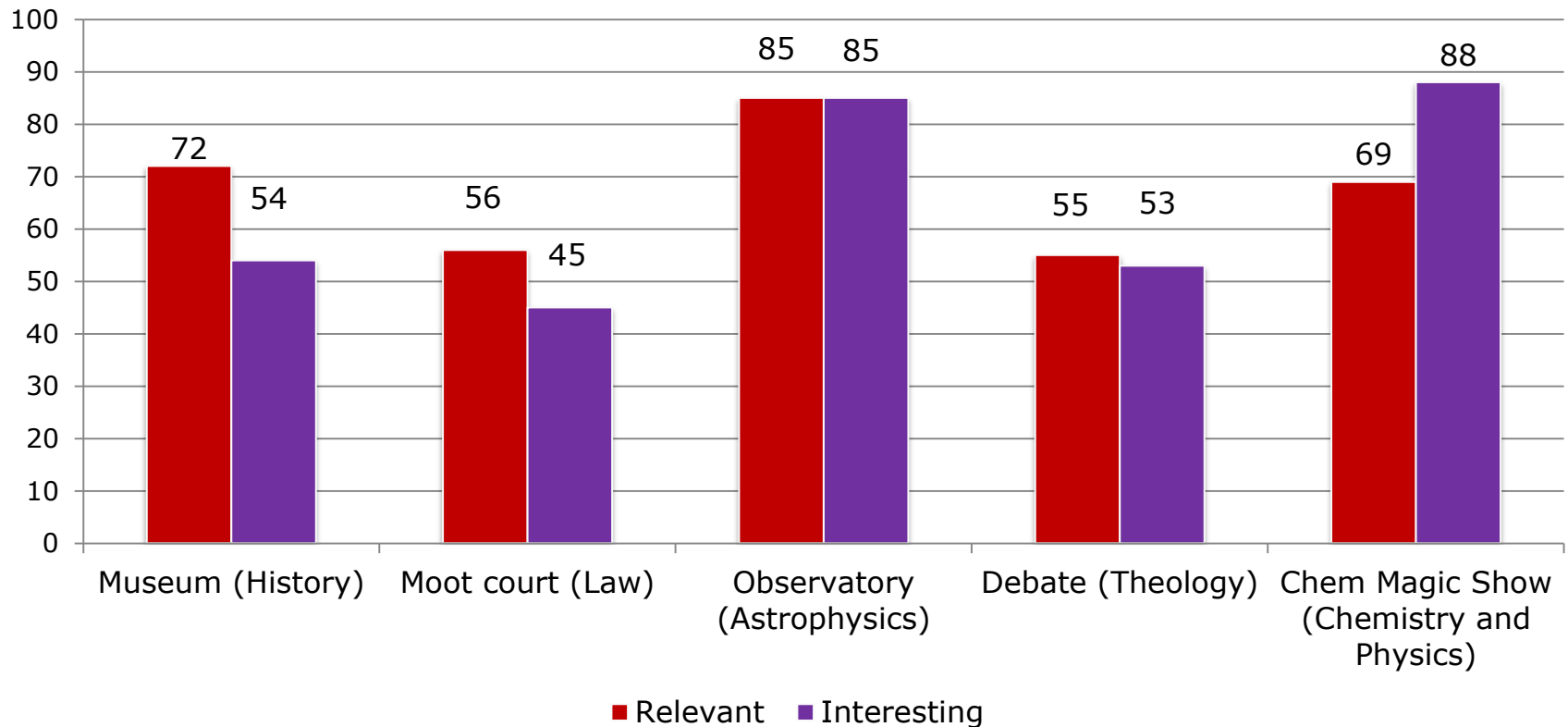
*"I liked the fact that most lectures were open up for discussions which made us students to even understand things more better"*

*"It allows students to take part in the module by discussion more than any model"*

*"The learning facilitators were prepared and the fellow students respected each other's views. Tutorials were a chance for us to sit down with fellow students all from different back rounds [sic] and to just talk with each other. The facilitators created a pleasant atmosphere and I really enjoyed UFS101!"*

# UFS101 High-impact practices

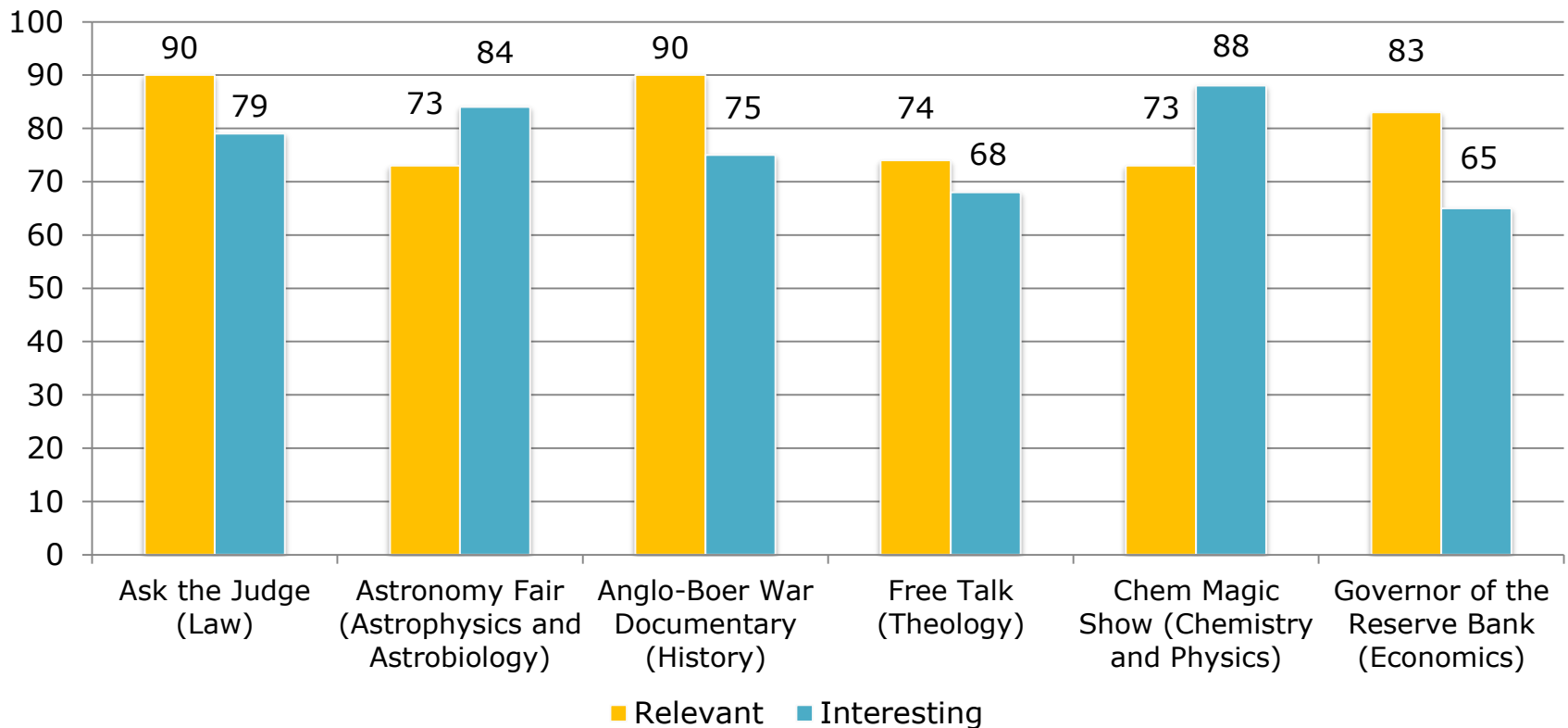
## Percentage of students indicating learning experience as relevant and interesting



2011

# UFS101 High-impact practices

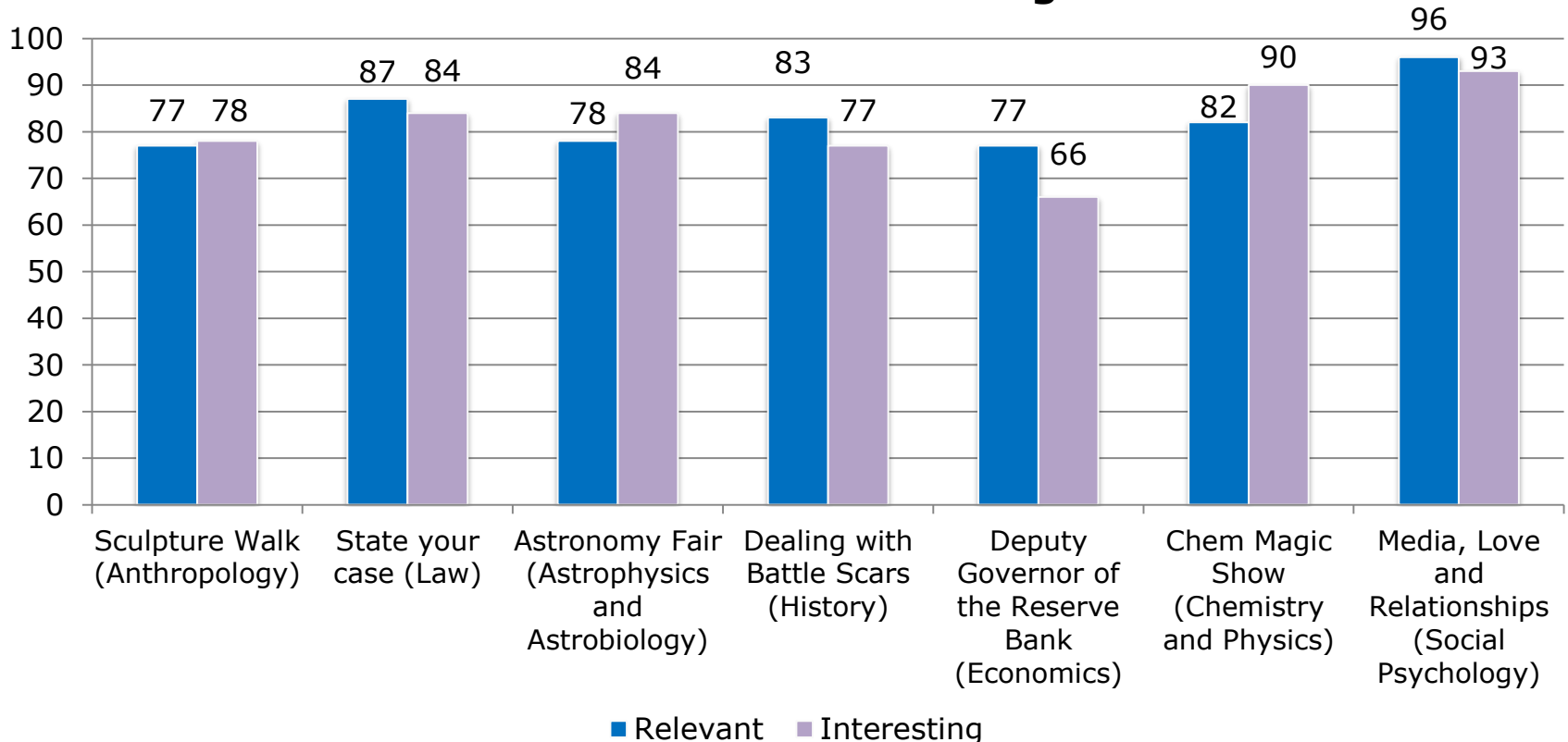
## Percentage of students indicating learning experience as relevant and interesting



2012

# UFS101 High-impact practices

## Percentage of students indicating learning experience as relevant and interesting



2013

# UFS101 High-Impact practices

## Enriching educational experiences

*"The debate was very intellectual and didn't really enrich my understanding, because i couldn't understand it anyway."*

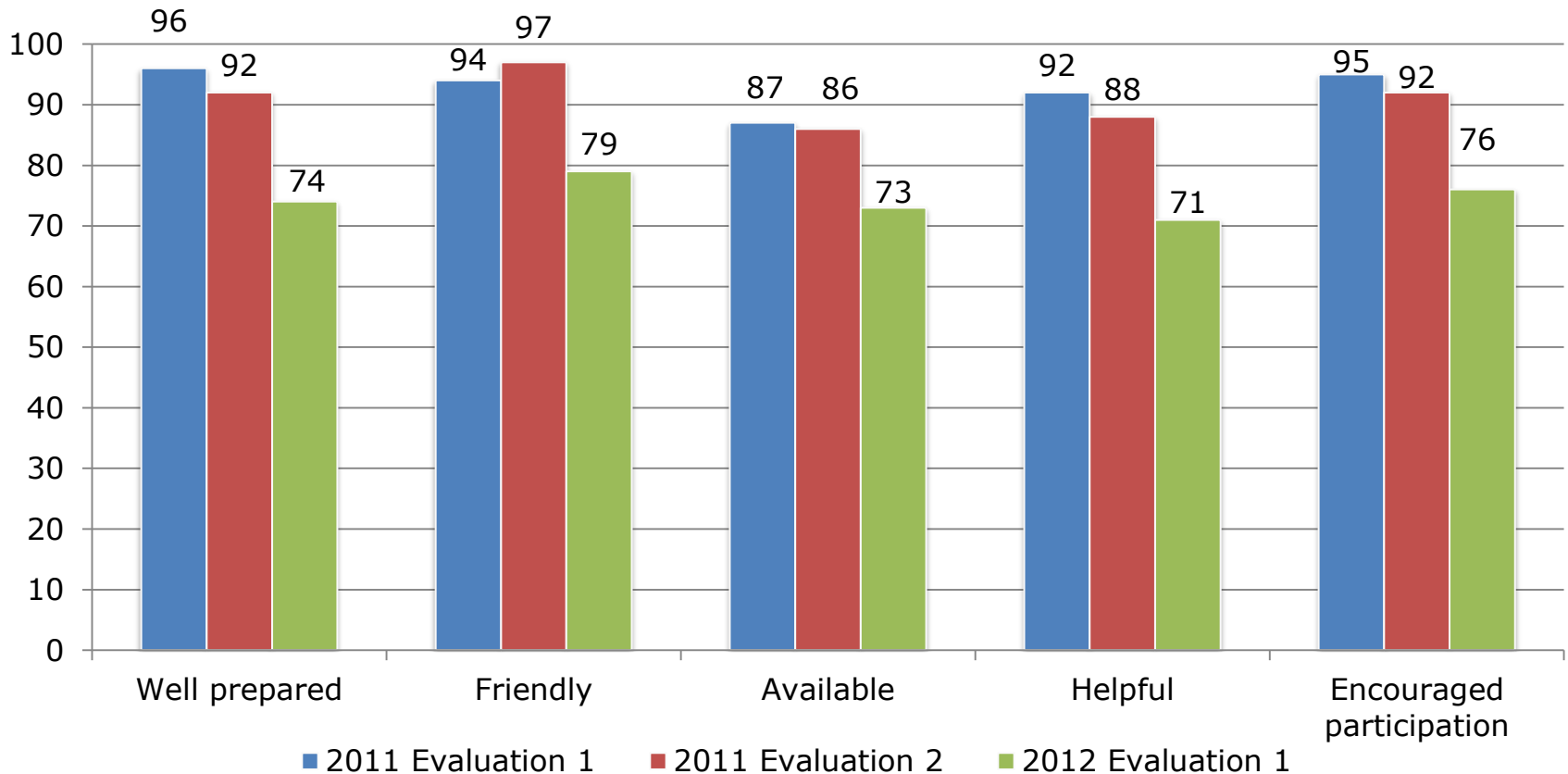
*"I have to admit the learning experiences were so out of the box. I learnt so much that i did not know and how to look at issues differently. I walk away a very different person"*

*"these activities were very relevant and they helped us learn and understand the contents of the units better. Beside just sitting in class and listening to the lecturer, we had an opportunity to learn while getting some fresh air in a different place."*

*"The visit to Boyden was astounding and eye opening. I realised how large our universe is and how many answers it can reveal about our past. Seeing what we had learnt of in a practical application was very helpful and made things more accessible."*

# UFS101 Experiences with staff

## Students perspectives of learning facilitators

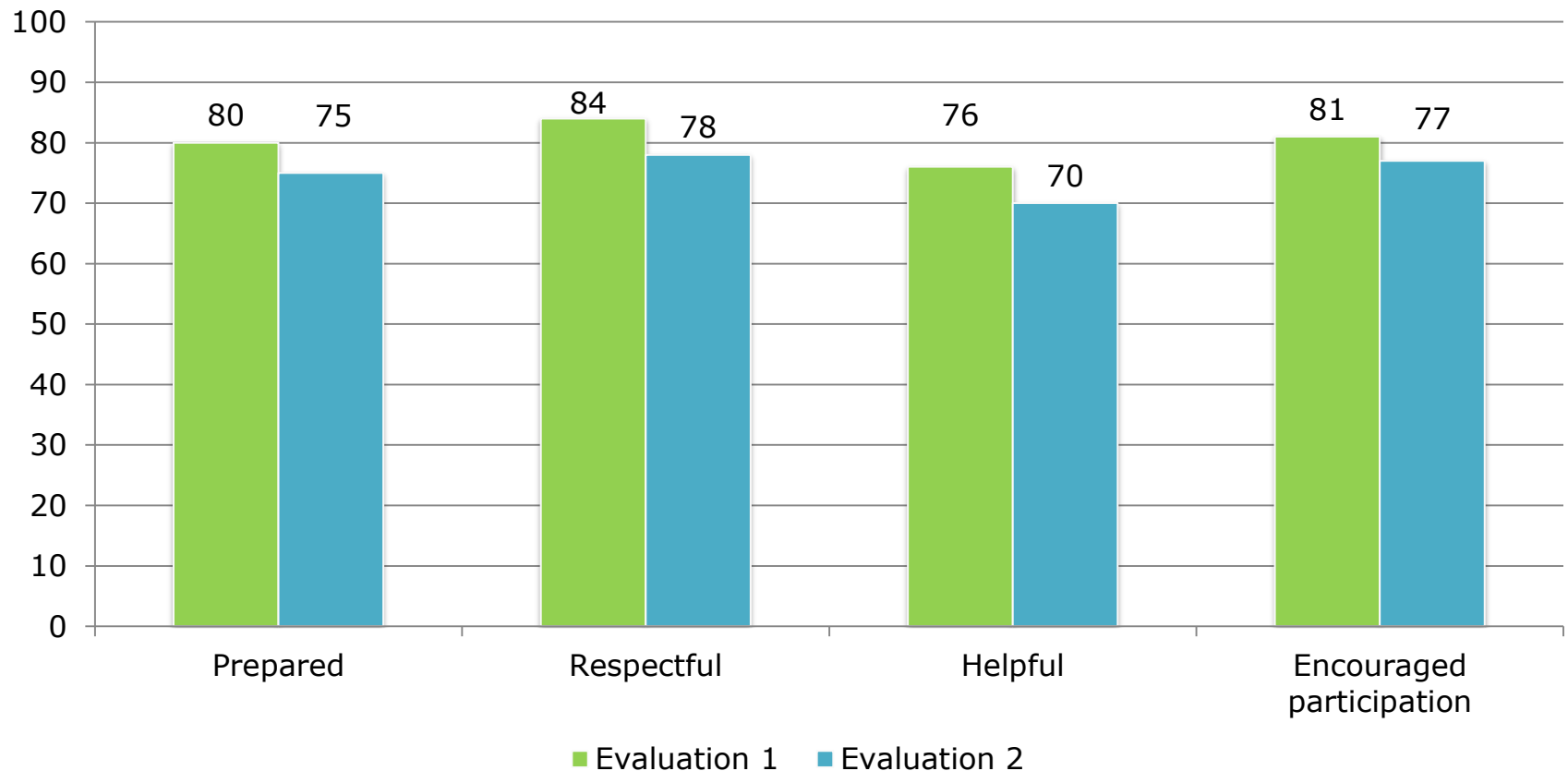


2011 and 2012



# UFS101 Experiences with staff

## Student perspectives of learning facilitators



2013

# UFS101 Experiences with staff

## Student-staff interaction

*"All the learning facilitators i've come across during the course were all prepared for the tutorials and encouraged participation from everybody. Even if you are a shy person, when you're there having tutorials, you feel, like there's nothing that can stop you from expressing your views. I remember my first UFS101 tutorial where the learning facilitator made us do an ice-breaker because we all couldn't speak, we were shy. Because of what she did, we all ended up enjoying the tutorial and participating."*

*"I love my facilitator because she was always available and if you struggled with anything she is always there to help and explain things better"*

*"She is so friendly and really encouraged group discussions"*

*"I had the best learning facilitator!!! he listened with such enthusiasm to our discussions. I never got the impression that he judged us or pretended to have more knowledge than us. Instead he listened and asked questions and motivated. Tutorials were really wonderful"*

# THE WAY FORWARD (INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT)

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# Academic Advising implementation goals

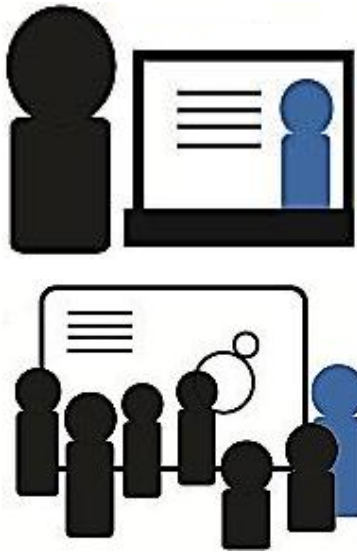
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of credit load.
- Updating curriculum information as part of the UFS re-circulation effort.
- Develop an institutional academic advising policy.
- Implement academic advising syllabus.



# Flipping a core curriculum

## Flipped Discussion Teaching (FDT) Model

Flipped classroom approach



Discussion as a way of teaching  
(Brookfield & Preskill, 2005)

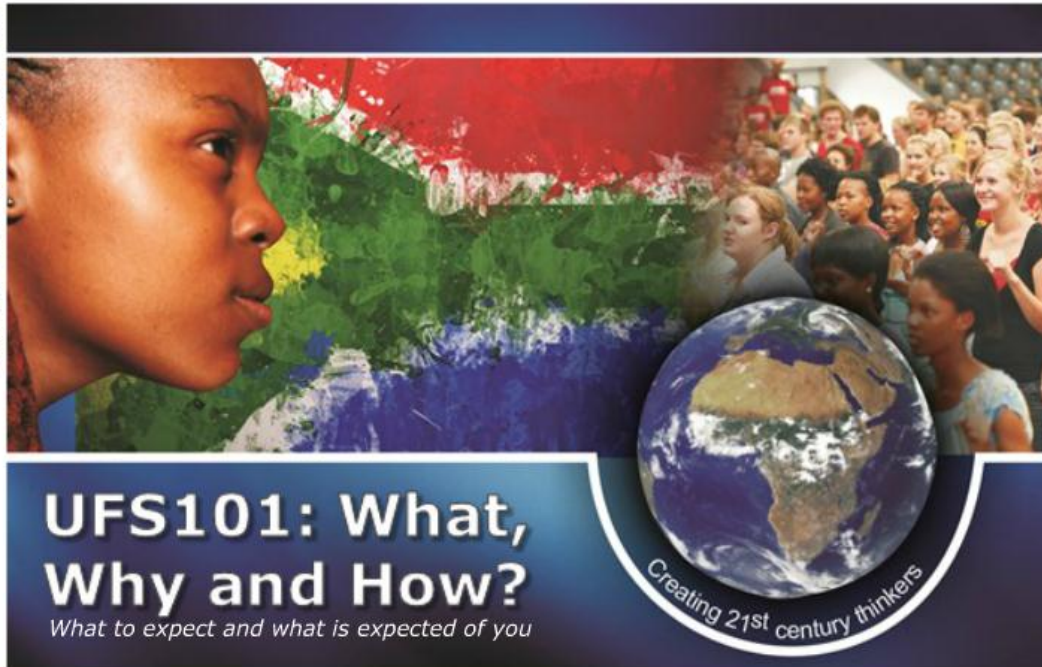


Naked Teaching approach (Bowen, 2012)



# UFS101

Creating 21<sup>st</sup> century thinkers  
February 2014/ Introduction Unit



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OUTLINE

NOTES

Search... 

-  ...
-  Message from the UFS Vice-Chancellor
-  ...
-  Overview of UFS101
-  Critical Thinking Tips
-  Meet the UFS101 Presenters
-  How to Pass
-  Stanford Sophomore College Programme

# Flipping a core curriculum

## Benefits:

- Increased student engagement
- Enhanced student experience

## Challenges:

- Teaching assistants need extensive training
- Inducing change at the university

## Value:

- Innovative large class teaching
- Aid of technology and discussion to enhance learning
- Prototype from which lessons can be learned in Teaching and Learning





# A few last words...

“After climbing a great hill, one always finds that there are many more hills to climb”  
Nelson Mandela


“It always seems impossible until it is done”  
Nelson Mandela



“You learn how to cut down trees by cutting them down”  
Bateke proverb

“Just do it”  
Nike





**Thank You**  
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