

Unisa and work-integrated learning provision on Telperion:

Where has all the experience gone?

Abstract:

Since 2008, the University of South Africa (UNISA) has in partnership with Ernest Oppenheimer and Son (EOS) been providing Work-integrated Learning (WIL) experiences on Telperion Nature Reserve just outside Bronkhorstspuit. This collaborative partnership has provided necessary academic support required to improve overall student graduation success with over 50% of all the 2015 graduates having gained experience in varying degrees at Telperion.

This poster focuses on looking into where the Unisa students; which have been a part of this partnership; are in terms of graduation, their career directions and further studies. A word of mouth and social media platform was used to collect the results informally through a student participation network. Results reflect an interesting trend with regards gender and a positive reflection on these students' graduateness and employability.

Introduction:

Results of the Unisa and Ernest Oppenheimer and Son (EOS) partnership over the past nine years, reflects a growing and significant contribution towards student academic success directly linked to the WIL component of the academic qualification (Wilson and Wilson, 2015). Last year's figure of conservation graduates who had gained part or all of their WIL experiences through this partnership was over 50% of the total WIL graduates for the Unisa qualification National Diploma in Nature Conservation (Wilson and Wilson, 2015).

The research question this poster seeks to answer, follows on logically from the academic success of this initiative. *Where have these skilled students ended up?* This is a pertinent question given that Unisa sees employability as an indicator of student success (Unisa, 2010).

Method:

Students (n=116) who had kept in touch and or formed groups on social media such as Facebook, were used to populate data on employment status and those studying further. Data was therefore assumed to be common knowledge and in the public domain. Graduation status and gender of the students were known by the authors. As such the data can be considered random in design and non-biased.

Results and Discussion:

From the data represented by this poster, it becomes evident that females (58%) have made greater use of this student support partnership by dominating the headcount.

71% of the specific students reflected on, have graduated with a ratio of females:males being 45:26. 24% of the students are yet to graduate whilst only 5% have dropped out of their studies. Males dominate this drop-out four fold (see Figure 1).

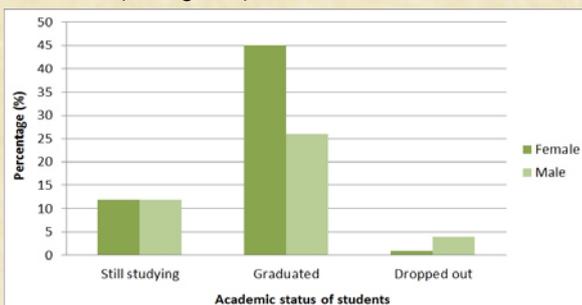


Figure 1: A reflection of the number of students who have graduated through the Unisa-Telperion partnership

At least 61% of the graduates have found employment. The term 'at least' is used due to the fact that employment status could not be confirmed for 28% of the students included in this study. 5% of graduates have sought employment outside of the conservation sector. Regrettably, 11% of graduates have not found employment.

Gender equality has been met in the Government / Parastatal Conservation sector which has also employed the majority of the graduates (34%). The Private Conservation sector has absorbed 17% of the graduates and surprisingly 71% of these are females. 5% of graduates have gone to work for Non-governmental Conservation organizations (see Figure 2).

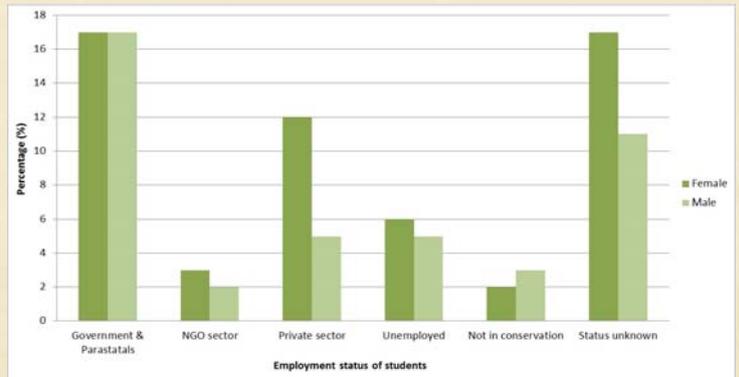


Figure 2: Graduate employment, reflecting gender, within the various conservation sectors

13% of graduates have gone on to pursue further Conservation related studies, with females clearly dominating this move (73%) .



Some of the WIL students busy on Telperion honing their conservation skills

Conclusion:

The Unisa-Telperion partnership has not only proven to have undoubtedly made an impact as a higher education academic support initiative, but is also addressing national conservation needs.

It is clear that the days of classifying conservation as being a male dominated sector has clearly passed, with current graduate figures reflecting gender equality and transformation. This is not only evident in the expected Government (employment equity) sector but also in the private sector. There is a clear move by female students to continue further studies and this bodes well for a conservation future with more females in leadership roles.

Drop-out rates and those who change career employment paths are reflected nationally in all sectors of society for Unisa graduates (Archer & Chetty, 2013). The question does need to be asked however, about the 11% Nature conservation students who remain unemployed, despite the sector having been identified as one which has both a critical and scarce skills shortage (SANBI, 2010).

References:

Archer, E. and Chetty, Y (2013) Graduate employability: Conceptualisation and findings from the University of South Africa. *Progressio*. 35 (1), pp 134-165

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