

**THE PERSONAL CONTEXTS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
IN SOCIAL WORK AT UNISA**

by

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SUMMARY

The Department of Social Work at UNISA places the emphasis on developmental social work and trains students according to the Person Centred Approach which emphasises the uniqueness of each client. The question thus arises if this Department is indeed working with their students in a person-centred way, and if students think the Department lives out a person-centred philosophy. Exploring the personal contexts of students would give the Department of Social Work the opportunity to try and find a fit between the personal contexts of students and the national requirements of training.

From a population of 114 fourth level students in Social Work at UNISA, a self-selected sample of 79% emerged. Focus is placed on the students' perceptions of following five areas: (1) the self, (2) family life and family of origin, (3) living and study conditions, (4) UNISA and social work training, (5) social work as future career.

The following key concepts were used:

- Constructivism
- Conscious and unconscious experiences
- Context
- Department of Social Work
- Family life cycle
- Perception
- Respondent
- Self
- Stability and change
- Students
- Systems
- University of South Africa (UNISA)

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This research project made me aware of how important support systems are. The importance of support systems is one of the aspects which I discussed in this project. This is also one of the many areas where I could identify with students. Without the emotional encouragement, prayers and help of the following people, this project would probably never have been completed:

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- My Lord and Saviour for giving me the strength and persistence to complete this and for making me aware of how important people are.

I declare that

**“THE PERSONAL CONTEXTS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN SOCIAL
WORK AT UNISA”**

is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and
acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....
SIGNATURE
RULENE ANNEMIE LINTVELT

.....
DATE

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Appendix 1: Student questionnaire

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

The University of South Africa (UNISA) is a distance-learning institution offering tertiary education on a part-time basis. This allows many students to further their education despite being in either fulltime or part-time employment. Study conditions can be very difficult for some of the students, due to different reasons. These reasons can be personal, or due to the distance-learning institution. Both contexts will pose certain challenges to students. This project is aimed at researching the personal contexts of the fourth level students in social work at UNISA: their personal life contexts in interaction with the UNISA context.

A personal stance

As this research report is feedback from my personal journey into the lives of the fourth level students at the Department of Social Work at UNISA, I have decided to write it in the first person. This also fits with my personal epistemology that there is no such thing as true objectivity and that everything I know and experience is part of my own reality (Bateson, 2002: 28). My knowledge-base is formed through my personal experiences and the meaning I give to it, as "our brains make the images that we think we 'perceive' " (Bateson, 2002: 28). This research is thus subjective to how I experienced it, and according to how I give meaning to it. From the information gathered, I will draw my own generalisations and give my own interpretations.

When I decided to take a walk through the lives of the fourth level students in Social Work within the UNISA context (hereafter referred to as "students" or "respondents"), I struggled with some unanswered questions: Who are these students? Where do they come from? Why have they decided to enrol for this specific course? What do they hope to achieve afterwards? What role does their family life and personal background play in their decision to study social work and what is the nature of their support systems? What challenges are they meeting and how do they face these challenges?

In this report I am describing my perception of the students and their life experiences according to the person-centred theory of Carl Rogers (1951) which serves as a theoretical foundation for the study. This is an exploration of the respondents' experiences of themselves, their families, their studies and their life experiences in general. I am also exploring how students cope with their sometimes very difficult situations, whilst simultaneously having to cope with

the unique study milieu, being a distance education student, at UNISA. The presented data gives a broader picture of these students and their struggles, and indicates how they cope with study and personal life challenges.

1.1. MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

Conversations with lecturers at the Department of Social Work showed me that there is a lack of information on the undergraduate students and their personal contexts. Very little is known about their backgrounds, their physical environments, their financial situations and their study conditions at home. The Department of Social Work also needs to determine if the course fulfils the needs of the students and of the social work environment in which students will eventually work.

Another unanswered question is how these students cope with their studies, taking into consideration the time and finances needed. My preliminary conversations with some of these students showed that many of them are studying part-time. This means that many of them have to find time to take care of families, work and study. Other students are studying full-time and are struggling to get the necessary financial support for their studies whilst some of the respondents who are studying fulltime also have household responsibilities.

My own observation and involvement with students on all levels of their undergraduate study over a number of years at three different universities in South Africa has led me to the perception that many of the undergraduate students in social work fall in the family life cycle of the young adult. According to Carter & McGoldrick (1989:195) and Specht & Craig (1987:195) one of the major developmental tasks of the young adult is the building of intimate relationships. The question that arises is, if, and how, the fourth level UNISA student in social work finds time for this amongst all his/her other responsibilities. Students in other life phases have to attend to other developmental tasks, which also make it difficult for them to study and balance family life, like taking care of young children or elderly parents. Enrolling for tertiary education brings a daunting change and challenge for all these students, which forces a new stability into their families and personal lives.

1.2. RESEARCH GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

My main question is: **“What does the personal context of the undergraduate student in social work at the University of South Africa look like?”**

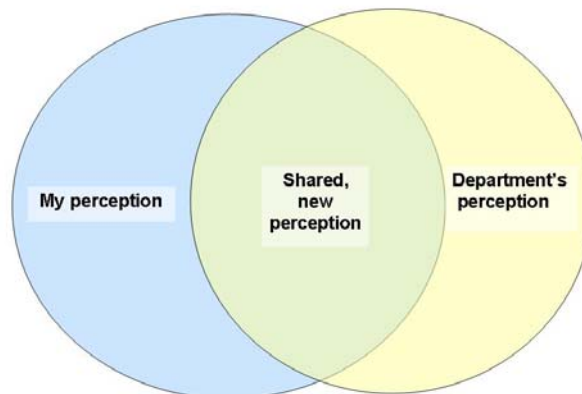
To get this answered, I have asked myself some further questions:

- (1) How do these students cope with the challenges of their studies, taking into consideration:
 - The family life stages in which they find themselves and the developmental tasks they are facing;
 - Their financial situations;
 - Their relative isolation from lecturers and other students, which is characteristic of distance education?
- (2) What do their backgrounds and personal situations look like?
- (3) What are their perceptions of the "self", being students within the unique context of UNISA and also being individuals within a specific personal context at home?
- (4) How do they perceive the social work training they are busy with at this stage? How can this training be adapted to the advantage of students to give them the necessary support they need to complete their studies successfully?
- (5) How do they see social work as a future profession, and do they still want to become social workers? If not, why are they still continuing their social work studies?

1.2.1. Research goal

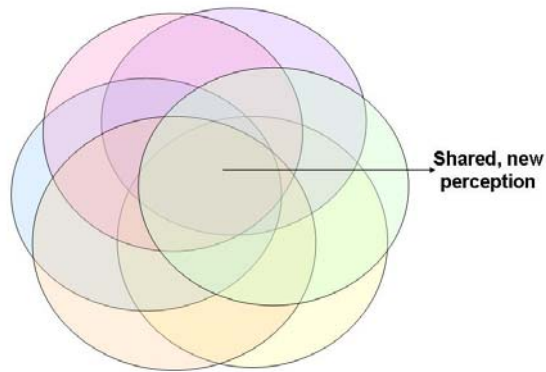
Through this research project I am striving to broaden my own perception about the personal contexts of the undergraduate students in social work at UNISA, which I hope to share with the lecturing staff at the Department of Social Work. I believe that this study will contribute to shared, new perception, which Bateson (2002: 64-65) describes as "binocular vision" and can be explained with the following figure:

Figure 1:
Binocular vision



It speaks for itself that each person at the Department of Social Work has a different perception of the students, and that the co-perceived, new reality will be a very intricate multiple "binocular vision"; more like a kaleidoscope. And the more people, the more perceptions will have to be added:

Figure 2:
Multiple binocular vision



My goal with this research can thus be formulated as: **To broaden my knowledge-base about the personal context of the undergraduate student in social work at the University of South Africa and to co-create an expanded knowledge-base through this with the Department of Social Work.**

1.2.2. Objectives

In order to reach this goal, I have set the following objectives:

- To broaden my knowledge-base about the personal context of the undergraduate students in social work at UNISA by collecting data from a representative group of these students;
- To find relevant literature with regard to the general expected personal context of students and identify connecting patterns and themes between the literature and the data from the questionnaires;
- To share my perceptions with the Department of Social Work. Through this I hope to co-create a new understanding of the undergraduate student within the Department of Social Work. A new understanding can provide the Department of Social Work the opportunity to create maximum support through a person-centred curriculum without compromising the quality of the training, whilst still complying with the training requirements for registration of social workers.

1.2.3. Value of the research

According to my perception the value of the research lies in the following:

- My knowledge of the personal context of the undergraduate student in social work at UNISA will bring a new personal understanding of who these students are.
- If this new knowledge can be shared with the academic staff at the Department of Social Work, a new education and training modus operandi in cognisance of the student profile can co-evolve from it.

1.3. RESEARCH METHOD

1.3.1. Research design

According to Collins (1988:256) the answer to the research design “provides the answer to the question of: ‘What are the means which I shall use to obtain the information I need?’ ” How can I get the information that I need to answer my questions? I started with general discussions with some of the students and with lecturers at the Department of Social Work to determine what they think the Department of Social Work should know about the undergraduate students. I then studied the Person-Centred Approach of Rogers (1951) as well as other basic principles of the systems and cybernetics theories to determine how I can give meaning to the data that I was about to gather. After this I gathered data from the respondents concerning their personal contexts. By identifying themes and patterns and comparing these to the information from available literature I can create meaning from the data. By giving meaning to the information and sharing it, new knowledge can be obtained for both me and the Department of Social Work.

Grobbelaar (2000:82-100) classifies research into the following groups:

- 1) ***Categories:*** According to Grobbelaar (2000:83) research can be divided into two categories: basic research and applied research. “Basic research is used to enhance fundamental knowledge about social reality” while applied research “try to solve specific problems” (Grobbelaar, 2000: 83-84). This research project is of a basic nature, as it is aimed at the expansion of knowledge and perceptions about a group of respondents that is still unknown.

- 2) **Methodology**: Grobbelaar (2000:87-88) also divides the methodology of research into two groups, namely quantitative and qualitative research. This research project falls into both these categories. It firstly gives more general information about the profile of the students by using closed, quantitative questions. Secondly there is a qualitative component in this project, which is aimed at the “meaning of the experience, action or interaction of the research object” (Grobbelaar, 2000:87). This is done by using open-ended questions that I can interpret and categorise in terms of themes.
- 3) **Aims**: In this study I investigate the “ ‘what’ of the matter” (Grobbelaar, 2000:93) with no final answer. This gives the research an exploratory nature. There is also a descriptive component as I aim at “giving the specific details of a situation, social environment or relationship” (Grobbelaar, 2000:95).
- 4) **Time dimension**: The research falls within a specific period of time in which I gathered information (Grobbelaar, 2000:99). The data was gathered over a two-month period, namely January and February 2007, as a once-off event amongst the chosen sample that will be described later on.

According to the above-mentioned classifications, I am of the opinion that this study can be described as **basic research** of a **qualitative** and **quantitative** nature according to **exploratory** and **descriptive** methods within a **limited time** dimension.

1.3.2. Validity and Reliability

1.3.2.1. Validity

In a research process, validity consists of two parts, namely: the measuring instrument has to measure what it is designed for, and it has to measure correctly (Delport, 2002: 166). For this research project a self-administered questionnaire is used as measuring instrument. This measuring instrument was tested during a pilot study before implementing it in the actual study, thus making it a valid instrument. It measures what I want to measure, namely information on the personal contexts of the respondents. The quantitative data is in many instances explained by qualitative data which indicates the validity of both sets of data.

Concerning the “correct measurement”, I believe that a “personal context” is per definition “personal” and “correct” is also a personal definition. It is thus impossible to say if the measuring instrument is “correct” according to anybody else’s standards than my own.

1.3.2.2. Reliability

Reliability “refers in general to the extent to which independent administration of the same instrument ... consistently yields the same (or similar) results under comparable conditions” (Delpont, 2002:168). Delpont continues to say that reliability is about how well the measurement is done. I approached the entire population as the ideal sample for this research and thus believe that this gives the highest possible form of reliability for this specific study **in this particular timeframe and with these specific respondents**.

1.3.3. Sampling procedure

“A population can be defined as the entire group of persons or set of objects and events the researcher wants to study” (Van Rensburg, 2000:147). The population chosen for this research project is all the fourth level students (N) who were registered by the end of January 2007 for at least one fourth level module in Social Work at UNISA. The rationale for choosing this group of students is based on my perception that all of these students have completed all the previous levels of social work training, and can thus give a good indication of the needs and challenges posed to undergraduate students in Social Work at UNISA.

Van Rensburg (2000:149) describes a sample as “a part of a whole”. This definition is supported by Arkava and Lane (1983:27) who say it “comprises the elements of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study”. In this research project the “sample” is the “whole”. As mentioned previously, the whole population was invited to participate in this research. This ended in a self-selected sample of 90 (n) students that eventually emerged from a possible 114, which reflects a total of 79% of the total population.

1.3.4. Data collection and pilot study

1.3.4.1. Data collection and application

Due to the unique nature of this study I find it impossible to execute a separate literature review. Virtually nothing is known about the personal contexts of these students and no literature is available that can be directly linked to this study. After discussions with my study leader, I decided to gather literature on the relevant themes about the personal contexts of the respondents as it emerges once I start sorting the data I collected. These include looking at the challenges posed by their specific life-situations as well as the challenges posed by a distance-lear-

ning institution within the South African context. This literature is not discussed as a separate chapter, but is incorporated with the data presentation.

For the empirical data an extensive self-administered questionnaire was compiled. The questionnaire comprised closed questions of a quantitative nature, while questions of a more qualitative nature, where respondents were asked to explain and describe certain phenomena and experiences in their lives, were also included. A pilot study as described in paragraph 1.3.4.2 was executed. The final questionnaire (Annexure 1) was distributed amongst the respondents and completed in January and February 2007 during the respondents' first practical workshops.

In this report I analyze the empirical data gathered from the different questionnaires in order to identify themes and patterns connecting the respondents with one another, which Bateson describes as, "first-order connections" (Bateson, 2002:10). I also compare the empirical data with the literature data in order to find patterns that connect the group of students to the literature in general – "second-order connections" (Bateson, 2002:10).

1.3.4.2. Pilot study

A preliminary questionnaire was implemented with a pilot group of 25 students during July 2006. From this pilot group, nine students were asked to give written feedback on their experiences on the questionnaire and to make recommendations. This information and feedback were used to refine the final questionnaire, which was distributed amongst the respondents during the final data collection period.

1.3.4.3. The survey process

The final questionnaire (Annexure 1) was distributed to all students who were registered for at least one level four module in Social Work at UNISA before the onset of the first workshops of 2007. In order to reach this goal I had to involve all the workshop facilitators in all the regions where these workshops were conducted. In the Pretoria region I visited the learning centre and distributed and collected the questionnaires myself. For all other regions I worked through the regional co-ordinators in the respective regions. A total number of 114 questionnaires were distributed of which 90 were returned. Table 1 on the following page indicates the return rate of the questionnaires as per region.

Table 1:

Distribution and return rate of questionnaires

UNISA CENTRE	POPULATION (N)	SAMPLE (n)	%
Pretoria	47	34	72%
Johannesburg	17	16	94%
Polokwane	15	13	87%
Durban	23	23	100%
Bloemfontein	3	3	100%
Cape Town	9	1	11%
TOTAL	114	90	79%

1.3.5. Ethical considerations

1.3.5.1. Professional code of conduct

In order to ensure that the research adheres to ethical standards, I have complied with the ethical guidelines for social work conduct and practice contained in the following policies:

- The ethical code of Social Work in South Africa, as posed by the South African Council for Social Service Professions;
- The Social Work Act (Act 110 of 1976);
- Ethical policies of the University of South Africa regarding research projects;
- Ethical policies of the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa regarding research projects.

1.3.5.2. Ethical issues

Strydom (2002: 62-73) discusses eight ethical issues that need consideration during the re-search process:

- Harm to respondents: "Subjects can be harmed in a physical and/or emotional manner" (Strydom, 2002: 64). In this research I am of the opinion that possible harm is limited to the minimum as respondents could decide for themselves what information they feel comfortable to share and what not.
- Informed consent: Respondents need to know the advantages as well as disadvantages of the research (Strydom, 2002: 65). To reach this, I explained personally to the students why and how the research was carried out in Pretoria, and asked the co-ordinators to do the

same in the other regions. This also gave students the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns from their point of view.

- Deception of respondents: "Lying in research purposes is common, especially in the case of small qualitative projects. Deception is, however, hardly needed in large quantitative surveys" (Strydom, 2002:66). In my opinion the extent of this study prevented the deception of the respondents.
- Violation of anonymity: All questionnaires were completed anonymously with no means to link any questionnaire to any particular student. The only known information is a link to the region where the student attended the workshops.
- Actions and competence of researcher: This study is done under the guidance of an experienced tutor and is conducted under the watchful eye of the Department of Social Work at UNISA. I see this as enough reason to believe that the research is competently executed.
- Co-operation with contributors: As the research is done for the Department of Social Work at UNISA, full co-operation came from the Department of Social Work and its staff. Feedback has been given to both the study leader and the head of the Department of Social Work during the research process and after completion thereof.
- Release and publication of the findings: This research report will serve as feedback to the reading public. Strydom (2002: 71-71) emphasizes the objectivity of the report to which I object, as there is no such thing in my epistemology. I will, however, try to make conclusions of a more general nature by looking at patterns and themes, which can be defined as objectivity from another epistemology.
- Debriefing of respondents: All respondents were invited to arrange debriefing during the research process. None of them made use of this offer – from which I conclude that either the nature of the research was not threatening to respondents, or respondents did not feel comfortable to come forth to arrange a debriefing session.

1.4. CONCEPTUALISATION

- **Constructivism**: Reality is created by the individual through experience and interaction with his environment. Each person's experience of reality is based on his own experience and within a specific context, which differs from that of others (Efran, Luken and

Luken, 1988: 28). The realities of students differ from one another in the same way as my reality differs from that of any other researcher who may decide to do research on the same topic with the same respondents.

- ***Conscious and unconscious experiences:*** Conscious experiences refer to those experiences a person is aware of. Unconscious experiences refer to the experiences of which a person is unaware. Unconscious experiences can also be described as sub-conscious experiences, but the term “unconscious” is used in this research in accordance with the description of Grobler, Schenk and Du Toit (2003:44).
- ***Context:*** The context set the parameters for the research. In this case the context is the personal situation of each respondent, including both their personal life situations and study conditions. These contexts differ from one respondent to another, although they may seem to be similar in certain areas.
- ***Department of Social Work:*** This refers to the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa (UNISA), Pretoria, South Africa.
- ***Family life cycle:*** The family is “a system moving through time” (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989: 4). Each student finds himself/herself within a specific stage of the family life cycle which has an impact on the personal context of each student and which differs from those in other stages of the family life cycle.
- ***Perception:*** Perceptions are unique and individual. “People respond in terms of both experience and perception” (Grobler, Schenck & Du Toit, 2003:49). This links to the concept of constructivism, indicating that each respondent has a different perception of his/her personal context, which also differs from that of the Department of Social Work and in turn of each lecturer at the Department. Perceptions can also be defined as “ideas” or “opinions”.
- ***Respondent:*** For the sake of this research, a respondent is a student studying at the University of South Africa at the Department of Social Work and who was registered for one or more modules on the fourth level by the end of January 2007.
- ***Self:*** “A portion of the total perceptual field gradually becomes differentiated as the self” (Rogers, 1987: 497). The self refers to the perception a person has of him/herself. It is an image of the self, as created through experiences and perceptions and through inter-

action with the environment and significant others. In this study the self of the respondents refers to the whole self that include the student-self, the emotional-self, the family-self and all other parts of the self of each student.

- **Stability and change:** "The more things stay the same, the more they are changing" (Keeney, 1983: 150). Stability can only be maintained by making small adjustments in order to keep the stability. The complementary nature of stability and change shows that the one cannot exist without the other. In this research emphasis is placed on both the change and stability of each respondent within the process of change from a non-student to a student, and also the foreseen change from student to professional social worker.
- **Student(s):** In this research, the term "student" or "students" refers to a person or persons, studying at the University of South Africa at the Department of Social Work and who was or were registered for at least one module on the fourth level by the end of January 2007.
- **Systems:** According to Hall and Fagen in Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967: 120), systems are "a set of objects together with relationships between the objects and between their attributes". For the purpose of this study a system refers to the student as an individual, the family, UNISA or any other significant social system in the lives of the students.
- **UNISA:** The University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

1.5. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

The difficulties I encountered can mostly be linked to the uniqueness of a distance-learning institution in general and to my own personal situation, which is also of a distance-learning nature.

- There are a small number of students who did not attend any workshops, due to not being registered for modules that required attending the first workshops for 2007. These workshops were the ideal occasion for me to approach students for participation in the research. Students who were not required to attend these workshops were thus not included in the study. Attempts to get hold of them in other ways were unsuccessful.

- It is possible that some students are excluded from the research due to not having received their final complementary examination results. Without their examination results they were prevented from registering for level four modules and therefore also prevented from attending the first workshops of 2007, which automatically excluded them from this research.
- The Student Administration at UNISA could not give a reliable indication of the final number of students who were registered for fourth level modules in Social Work with the onset of the first workshops. It is thus possible that the final number of fourth level students changed during the following months. As 114 questionnaires were handed out, I decided to use this number as my population.
- The standard of writing skills and use of language of some of the respondents are inadequate to give proper feedback on some of the questions and these responses are not included in this report.
- In spite of the positive results of the pilot study and the changes I made to the questionnaire, it turned out that some of the respondents still did not understand and interpret all the questions in the final research questionnaire correctly.
- I am undertaking this study whilst being based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. This poses a huge personal challenge for me in terms of the distance from the UNISA library, the respondents, the Department of Social Work and my study leader.

Although all of these aspects can have an influence on the reliability and validity of the research, I am still of the opinion that a good picture can be formed on what the personal contexts of the fourth level students in Social Work at UNISA look like and what they see as challenges and needs during their studies at the Department of Social Work.

1.6. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: General orientation: This chapter gives an overview of this research project. This includes motivation for the study, research goals and objectives, the research method, conceptualisation and the difficulties encountered during the research.

Chapter 2: The person-centred approach in social work education: I discuss the person-

centred theory of Carl Rogers (1951) and its relevance to this study.

- Chapter 3: The student as person: This chapter gives general information concerning the fourth level students in social work, like age, language and sex. It also tends to qualitative data, like the "self" of the students as they described themselves and the personal changes that occurred during their period of study.
- Chapter 4: Family life of the student: I discuss the data received about the family life of the respondents. These include both their families of origin and their present family situation. This is also linked to the stages of the family life cycle.
- Chapter 5: UNISA as learning institution: In this chapter I give an overview of distance education as a phenomenon and concentrate on social work education in this regard. This is be compared to the data I received from the students about how they experience their studies at UNISA as a distance-education facility, and specifically the Department of Social Work.
- Chapter 6: Living and studying conditions: In this chapter I discuss the living conditions (area and housing) of respondents and the conditions under which they are studying, considering their work situation and their other responsibilities at home.
- Chapter 7: Perceptions of social work: In this chapter I discuss how the students perceive themselves in terms of future social workers also Social Sork as a profession.
- Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations: I finally draw some conclusions regarding the undergraduate students at the Department of Social Work and strive to make recommendations in order to assist UNISA and the Department of Social Work in possible ways to support their undergraduate students during their studies at UNISA.

CHAPTER 2: THE PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Social Work at UNISA uses the Person-Centred Approach of Carl Rogers in the training of students in social work. Through my studies at the Department of Social Work and also my involvement with the training of students, I became very familiar with this model and find it very useful to apply in any context where it concerns people and their behaviour.

In this chapter I give a short summary of the Person-Centred Approach and its 19 propositions, as stated by Carl Rogers (1951). I link this theory to concepts from the systems theory as described by Bateson (2002, originally published in 1979) and the cybernetics theory by Keeney (1983). All these theoretical frameworks form part of a post-modern, constructivist philosophy.

2.1. OVERVIEW OF THE PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH

To understand how I come to my conclusions at the end of this research, the reader needs to understand the primary theoretical framework I use, namely the Person-Centred Theory of Rogers. As the goal of this study is to explore the personal contexts of the respondents, this is not an attempt to discuss this theoretical model in detail. I only give a short summary of the 19 theoretical principles that Rogers made in connection with people and their experiences in general and then apply it to this study in particular.

The Person-Centred Approach is about the individual and his/her self-concept and how a person experiences the world around him/herself. These experiences include experiences with both the environment and other people and can be experienced on either a conscious or an unconscious level. No person can experience something without it impacting on the self-concept of the person. How a person reacts (behaves) to all these experiences, says something about the self and the self-concept. This self can be either acceptable to the individual, or not. It can also be accepting towards others, or not. Only if a person is content with the self, he/she will be at peace with his/her personal life and life-situation. By using the Person-Centred Approach, a facilitator can help an individual to discover this self-concept and help the individual to change it in order to become more accepting towards the self and others around them.

As I believe that learning is made easier when linked to a known phenomenon, I use a metaphor of islands linked to one another with bridges (Figure 3) to discuss the 19 theoretical principles (propositions) of the Person-Centred Approach. Each island represents some of the theoretical principles which I grouped together as themes:

Figure 3:
Summary of Person-Centred Theory



2.1.1. Island of self

As the Person-Centred Approach is about the individual and his/her self-concept the immediate question is: how does this self look and how did it come into being? To answer this, I start with the island right in the middle of Figure 3 that consists of the following three propositions, which describes the self and its development:

2.1.1.1. Proposition 8: Forming of the self

“A portion of the total perceptual field gradually becomes differentiated as the self ... an organized, fluid, but consistent conceptual pattern of perceptions of characteristics and relationships

of the 'I' or the 'me' " (Rogers, 1987:497-498). Specht & Craig (1987:224) describe the self as "the perception of personal identity". This is supported by Grobler et al (2003:9) who conceptualise the self as "the person's conception ... of whom he or she is". This self evolves from all the different experiences and perceptions of a person which eventually form the idea of who a person *thinks* he/she is.

This proposition is significant for this research process as each student who participated in this study has a different perception of the self. Each of them comes from a different background with different experiences within their different contexts.

2.1.1.2. Proposition 9: The self in interaction with the environment and significant others

"As a result of interaction with the environment, and particularly as a result of evaluational interaction with others, the structure of the self is formed ... together with values attached to these concepts" (Rogers, 1987:498). How a person experiences the self, depends on how he/she gives meaning to his/her experiences and how these experiences impact on the self-concept at that specific time and within that specific context. A person creates his/her own reality through his/her experiences and through interaction with the environment within a specific context (Efran et al, 1988:28; Minuchin, 1974:2). As no person can live in isolation, and is in constant interaction with others and with his/her environment, the way a person sees the self (self-concept) is built upon this interaction and how he/she thinks others see him/her. Grobler et al (2003:13) state that "the self is defined in relation to others". The self can be seen as the description of this self to someone else. This is a form of meta-communication and is dependent on the context and nature of the relationship (Watzlawick et al, 1967:84).

Within the South African context, with 11 official languages and even more cultural groups, the role of significant others and the environment is of great importance. Proshansky in Specht & Craig (1987:143) refer to **prejudice** in this regard as "negative attitudes directed towards members of social groups who are perceived by themselves and others in terms of racial, religious, national or cultural-linguistic attributes."

In this study, the respondents' self refers to the student-self, but also the self as co-student, mother, father, child, brother, sister, colleague, employee, or wherever the respondents find themselves. The self of a specific respondent differs from the selves of that same respondent within his/her other roles and also differs from that of other respondents within similar roles.

2.1.1.3. Proposition 4: Self-determination

“The organism has one basic tendency and striving – to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism” (Rogers, 1987:487). This proposition can be compared to the needs of a person as described by Maslow (1943:370-396) where he describes the needs of humans from the basic to the more advanced. Although there are differences between them, both Rogers and Maslow describe the needs of people in terms of hierarchies. Maslow describes the needs as starting from physical needs and moving towards psychological needs, while Rogers describes it more in terms of the preserving and growth of the self. Rogers starts his hierarchy with the maintaining of the self, then move to a next level of enhancing the self and lastly the actualising the self. For Rogers (1987:487) all of these happen through self-determining the needs and self-decision on how to react and respond to experiences. It is, however, important to remember that there are no rigid boundaries between these three levels that Rogers proposes. A person will try to enhance and actualise the self while simultaneously trying to maintain it on other levels.

In this research, students had the opportunity to decide whether to participate in the research process or not, although they were encouraged to do so. Not all of them wanted to participate in the process eventually, clearly showing self-determination in this regard.

2.1.2. Island of All Experiences

As each individual is subjected to different experiences throughout his/her life, it is important to see how people deal with these experiences. For this we have to take a ride over the bridge to the next island, the Island of All Experiences.

2.1.2.1. Proposition 1: Each person is unique and lives in an ever-changing world

Rogers (1987:483) states that “every individual exists in a continually changing world of experiences of which he is the centre”. Each person is a living organism (system). The environment and others around this person are also living organisms. Living organisms are continually changing and growing. With the individual in constant interaction with the environment, the self will also keep changing according to the changes in the environment around him/her. This is what Rogers (1987: 483) refers to as “a continually changing world of experiences”. Grobler et al (2003: 44) add that these experiences take place on either a “conscious” or an “unconscious” level. The individual is not always aware of his/her experiences or how he/she reacts to those experiences.

In terms of this study it means that:

- (1) Each respondent lives in a world that is central, unique and personal for each of them. These include their study situation, background and home situation which differ from one another;*
- (2) The world of each respondent is changing continually and the self changes with it: all respondents have changed since they enrolled for their degree in social work and also since they participated in this research process;*
- (3) The experiences of each respondent take place on both conscious and unconscious levels. Although most of the information gathered was on a conscious level, it stands to no reason for me that revisiting their pasts would awake past feelings and memories of an unconscious nature.*

2.1.2.2. Proposition 2: The perceptions of people differ from one another

"The organism reacts to the field as it is experienced and perceived. This perceptual field is, for the individual, reality" (Rogers, 1987: 484). Each person perceives the world around them differently from others (Grobler et al, 2003: 49). This principle links to the principle of uniqueness. As each person is unique, the way they experience the world will also be unique. Bateson (2002:28) refers to this as subjectivity: "objects are my creation, and my experience of them is subjective, not objective" while Watzlawick et al (1967:260) talk about "second order knowledge" or "meta-knowledge – knowledge *about* and not knowledge *of*." In order for me to understand another person's world and his perceptions of it, the other person has to reveal this to me. Bateson (2002:64-65) uses the term "binocular vision" to explain that two (or more) persons have to share their "maps" or perceptions with each other. By sharing, a new perception of reality will be created (a co-constructed reality) as discussed in the previous chapter. Yet, each person will still see this new co-constructed reality differently from the others who participated in this co-construction process.

This principle is significant in this research, as each student perceives this research, their studies, their backgrounds and their present situations differently and uniquely from that of the other students. This makes it difficult to interpret the data and I can merely reach conclusions by identifying patterns and themes from the data I received. According to this principle it is also clear that all interpretations are my own. These interpretations are of a second order nature as they are my perceptions (meta-knowledge) of the information I received.

2.1.2.3. Proposition 3: A person reacts as a whole being to experiences

"The organism reacts as an organised whole to this phenomenal field" (Rogers, 1987:486). A person is a whole being, consisting of physical attributes, ideas, emotions, needs, behaviour, social relationships, values and more. All of these parts are interconnected and cannot be set apart from each other. Bateson (2002:35) also emphasises that a whole can be divided into parts to make it convenient, but that there is no rule on how this division should be done. The whole, no matter how divided, will still be the whole.

The limited scope of this research makes it impossible to explore the respondents in their full "wholeness". For the purpose of this research, I took the liberty of "dividing the whole into parts" (Bateson, 2002:35) and concentrate only on the personal context. Still, I can only explore a very small part of this personal context of each student and can merely describe my own observations of that miniscule part that each student shares with me.

2.1.2.4. Proposition 5: Behaviour is aimed at satisfying needs

"Behaviour is basically the goal-directed attempt of the organism to satisfy its needs as experienced in the field as perceived" (Rogers, 1987:491). Behaviour can be either conscious or unconscious, as experiences take place either consciously or unconsciously. A direct line can thus be drawn between the **behaviour** and the **need** at a specific point in time.

All students who participated in the research process are motivated by a need to be heard. Some of the students to whom I spoke beforehand, confirmed this verbally and said that they feel that there is a need for this type of research.

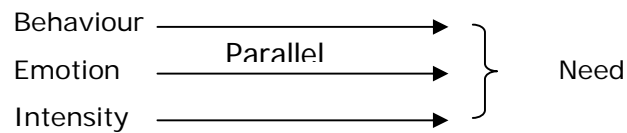
2.1.2.5. Proposition 6: Behaviour is accompanied by emotions

All behaviour is accompanied by emotions. The intensity of the need and emotions correlates with the behaviour of the individual (Grobler et al, 2003:61). No behaviour occurs without emotion attached to it. Even if a person just obeys an order, there are still emotions that accompany this behaviour.

This leads me to the conclusion that behaviour and emotion form parallel lines towards the need. Before illustrating this, we also need to look at the intensity of the emotion. The importance of a **need** correlates with the **behaviour** and also the **intensity** of the **emotion** that accompany it. See Figure 4 on the following page:

Figure 4:

Connection between behaviour, emotion, intensity and need



In this research it is clear that the needs of some students to be seen and heard are much higher than those of others. I gather this from the responses of some of the students to some of the questions. In some instances I can pick up on high emotions and difficult situations.

2.1.2.6. Proposition 10: A person's value system derives from interaction with significant others

Our value systems are formed through our interaction with the environment (Rogers, 1987: 498). These values can be either experienced as **personal** values or values taken over from others as if experienced by the self (Grobler et al, 2003:65). Everything of worth (a value) can be traced back to a personal experience. Some of these values are of higher importance than others – depending on the importance the individual attaches to the experience that precedes the value.

As values are an integral part of the self, this proposition forms part of this research on two levels, namely the personal values of each individual (myself and each student), but also the value of the research for me, as the researcher, for the Department of Social Work at UNISA and for the students as the respondents participating in this study.

2.1.3. Island of experiences that fit the self

We deal with our experiences on either a **conscious** or an **unconscious** level. Experiences on a conscious level are experiences that normally pose no threat to the self and the person accepts these experiences as part of his/her past. These experiences can thus be seen as to “fit with the self”. The next bridge will take us to the Island of Experiences That Fit the Self.

2.1.3.1. Proposition 11: Dealing with experiences

A person deals in one of four ways with experiences. Two of these take place on a conscious

level (**symbolised**) that fit with the self-concept. These two are discussed as part of this island while the other two that take place on an unconscious level (**unsymbolised**) are discussed as part of the next island.

The nature of this study appeals to the conscious of the respondents, and thus only the two parts of the proposition about the conscious forms part of the data.

2.1.3.2. Proposition 11(a): Symbolised experiences

Experiences are “symbolised, perceived and organised into some relationship to the self” (Rogers, 1987: 503). We all make sense of our experiences by giving meaning, or symbols, to it. The experiences that we “understand” and which eventually become part of our story, take place on a conscious level and is referred to as “**symbolised**” experiences by Rogers (1987: 144-145).

2.1.3.3. Proposition 11 (b): Ignored experiences

Experiences can be **ignored** “because there is no perceived relationship to the self structure” (Rogers, 1987: 503). Grobler et al (2003:24) describe ignored experiences as “not relevant to us at present”.

2.1.3.4. Proposition 12: Behaviour and the self-concept

“Most of the ways of behaving which are adopted by the organism are those which are consistent with the concept of self” (Rogers, 1987:507). Rogers here refers to behaviour that takes place on a **conscious** level. A person will normally not have any trouble to accept behaviour that is consistent with whom he/she thinks he/she is and of which he/she is aware.

Students could fill in the questionnaire according to the way they felt comfortable. All information is gathered in a conscious way with no attempt to explore the respondents' unconscious experiences.

In this study I concentrate on exploring the conscious experiences of students and thus no in-depth attention is paid to the following propositions which focus more on the unsymbolised experiences. They are just discussed briefly for the sake of completeness and to give the reader a full picture of the Person-Centred Approach and the process of change.

2.1.4. Island of experiences that don't fit the self

As our way of dealing with **unconscious** experiences differ from how we deal with experiences on a conscious level, we need to take a look at these separately. These experiences "cannot be allowed into the conscious or only in a distorted way" (Grobler et al, 2003: 31) because it poses a threat to the self-concept.

2.1.4.1. Proposition 11(c): Denied experiences

Some experiences that don't fit with the self of a person will be **denied** (Rogers, 1987: 503) because it poses a threat to the concept of the self. A person will then deny that the experience ever took place, or will deny his/her behaviour during the experience.

2.1.4.2. Proposition 11(d): Distorted symbolisation

Some experiences that don't fit with the self of a person will be **distorted** (Rogers, 1987: 503) to make it more acceptable to the self. In this case the person "cannot allow (himself) to attach the appropriate symbol to them" (Grobler et al, 2003: 32) and will redefine behaviour or experiences that threaten the self too much.

2.1.4.3. Proposition 13: Denial of inconsistent behaviour

Behaviour can be motivated by unconscious or unsymbolised needs (Grobler et al, 2003: 34). These needs are not acceptable to the self of the person and will be denied.

2.1.4.4. Proposition 14: Creation of stress

"Unsymbolised experiences or distorted symbolisation of experiences that cannot be incorporated into the self create tension" (Grobler et al, 2003: 36). A person will feel threatened when he/she becomes aware of experiences that are inconsistent with the self-concept.

2.1.4.5. Proposition 16: Defending the self

When under stress and feeling threatened, a person will try to defend and thus maintain the self (Rogers, 1987: 515). This defence can be an active deed, like shouting, denying or attacking the accuser, or it can be inactive behaviour like keeping quiet.

2.1.5. Island of change

Is it possible for a person to change unconscious experiences that threaten the self by bringing it to a conscious level where a person can be more accepting of these experiences? How does this happen, and what will the outcome be? For this we need to ride to the Island of Change.

2.1.5.1. Proposition 15: Reconstruction of the self

During a process where the unsymbolised becomes symbolised, a new self is reconstructed when the newly symbolised experiences are incorporated into the old self-concept (Grobler et al, 2003:76). A new self will develop from this.

Change and **stability** are complementary to each other and yet, together they form a whole. In spite of change in a person's life, there will always be a part of the self that will remain stable. In order to keep this core of the self stable, the individual needs to keep adjusting it by making small changes in order to accommodate the world around this core self. Like walking on a tightrope, a person has to keep making small corrections and changes to stay stable (Bateson, 2003:58). The self will start to change slowly and gradually as a person becomes more and more aware of his/her experiences.

Although the aim of this study is not at changing the selves of any of the respondents, I am of the opinion that just by participating in this research everyone involved in it will change during the process, including myself. I can also see the process of change in the students throughout their different levels of study.

2.1.5.2. Proposition 18: Acceptance of the self and others

When most of a person's unsymbolised experiences are symbolised, he/she will become more accepting of the self and also more accepting of others, even if they are different from him/her (Grobler et al, 2003:79). This is sometimes referred to as the "I'm okay, you're okay" principle as described by Berne (1964).

This proposition does not form part of this study. I do, however, believe that through studying the person-centred approach of Rogers all students became less judgemental and more accepting of others who differ from them. I personally observed this during the training of, and personal involvement with, students. I saw that students, trained to use the person-centred approach, tended to be less judgemental than students who were not trained in this approach.

2.1.5.3. Proposition 19: Development of a new value system

When a new self-concept is formed, a person will also develop a new value system that is more consistent with his/her new self-concept (Grobler et al, 2003:81). He/she will “throw off” the values that were not consistent with the self as he/she becomes more aware of these inconsistencies. He/ she will simultaneously accept other, new values that were previously part of the unsymbolised experiences.

The testing of values forms part of this research project. I want to find out why their studies are so important to these respondents – in some cases it is so important that they are willing to give up most of their personal life in pursue of this qualification.

2.1.6. Recursive patterns

As we change continuously and are continuously subjected to new experiences, the whole process starts all over again; thus the last bridge will take us back to the “Island of self”. This whole process is part of who we are and will continue throughout our lives, mostly on an unconscious level.

Most people are able to move through the processes of symbolising their unsymbolised experiences without the help of a facilitator, but some people need assistance and intervention from outside. For this a facilitator is needed to facilitate a process of exploring the self and eventually to bring change along.

2.1.7. The boat of the facilitator

I use a boat for the last part of the metaphor as I believe that the facilitator has to facilitate a process of change by moving between all the islands the client poses to him. Through this the facilitator can help the client to create new meaning (perceptions) and a new self by the discovering of new islands and new places on the islands he/she was unaware of.

2.1.7.1. Proposition 7: Frame of reference

“(The) best vantage point for understanding behaviour is from the internal frame of reference of the individual himself” (Rogers, 1987:494). The facilitator needs to be able to walk through the life of the client as if he/she becomes the person and perceives this world as the client does. Throughout the facilitation process the facilitator has to check his/her understanding of

the client's world. This is the only way to ensure that the facilitator and the client stay on the same page. Mutual exploration will ultimately give the client and the facilitator the feeling of mutual understanding.

2.1.7.2. Proposition 17: Conditions for facilitation

When a client feels safe and no threats are posed, he/she will start to explore experiences that are unsymbolised (Grobler et al, 2003: 72). From this safe place the client will start symbolising the unsymbolised experiences and eventually start forming a new self. It is the task of the facilitator to create this safe environment for the client. If the client does not trust the facilitator, he/she will not feel safe enough to start exploring deeper issues in his/her life.

I believe that my relationship with many of the students, and also many of my colleagues, created a trustworthy place that makes it possible for students to participate more freely and willingly in this research. I also believe that this is one of the reasons why such a high response could be achieved.

2.2. THE WORLD OF THE FOURTH LEVEL STUDENT IN SOCIAL WORK AT UNISA

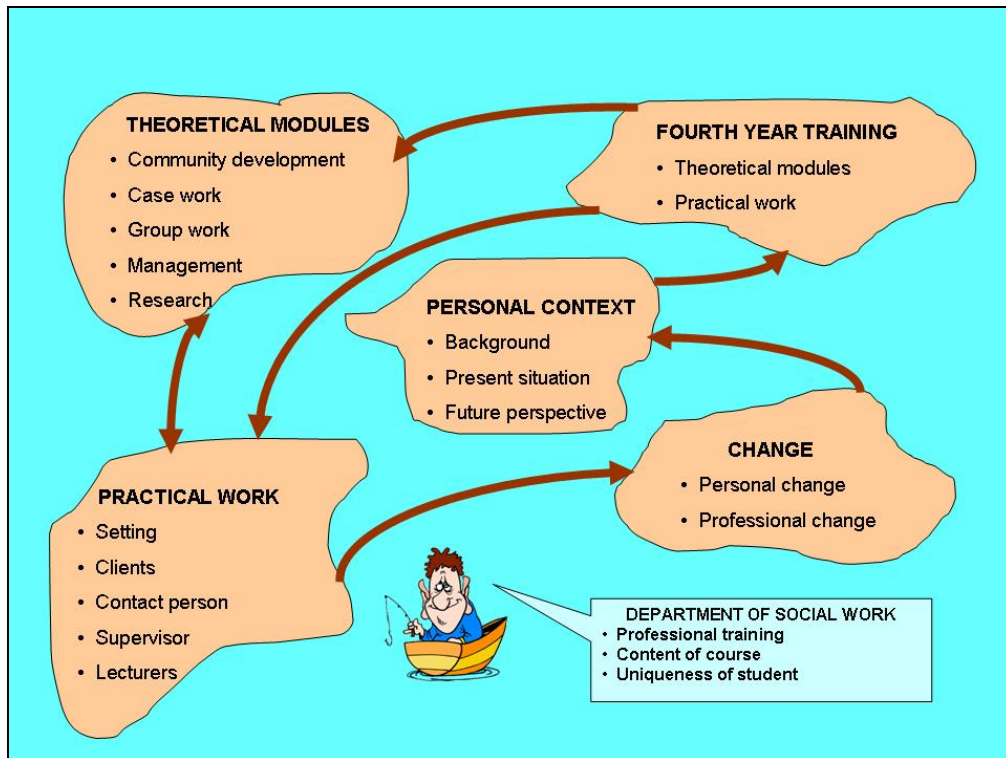
This research forms part of a bigger picture in which the Department of Social Work at UNISA hopes to broaden their perception of their undergraduate students and eventually strives to render a better training opportunity to all their undergraduate students. And as this research is only one piece of a larger puzzle, it is important to link this to the other puzzle pieces as well.

As the respondents of this research are fourth level students, I am trying to describe their worlds only in terms of the fourth level. I am of the opinion that this can, however, be with reasonable success applied to the worlds of most of the undergraduate students in social work, but I need to make a clear distinction here. Some students who enrol for the social work **theoretical modules** (first level to third level) use these modules in their journey to another destination than that of the professional social worker. My focus is specifically on those students who are pursuing a dream of becoming a professional social worker and thus enrol for the **practical modules** as well.

In the same way that the self is the centre island of the Person-Centred Approach, I see the **personal context** as the centre island in another ocean, namely the world of the fourth level student. See Figure 5 on the following page.

Figure 5:

The world of the fourth level student



The personal context consists of the background of the students, their present situations and also their dreams for the future. These areas are the main focus of this research, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

This personal context is however interconnected with other aspects of the fourth level student's life specifically, namely their training as social workers. Starting with the personal context, it links to the **fourth year training** at UNISA consisting of the **theoretical** and **practical** modules.

The **theoretical modules** mentioned here are those presented on the fourth level. As can be expected, many level one to three modules can be added, looking at all the undergraduate students of the Department of Social Work.

The **practical work** shown in Figure 5 gives an indication of how complicated the practical training of the fourth level student in Social Work at UNISA is. Each student also has to cope with the practical setting (organisation where he/she is placed for practical work) where they will be working with clients for the first time. Here each student has to account to the contact person at this practical setting, but also to the practical supervisor, as appointed by UNISA, and the

lecturers who stay the primary responsible persons for the training. When the expectations of all of these people differ from one another, it can create a lot of confusion for the student. The study of theoretical modules together with the practical implementation thereof, brings change on a personal and professional level during this preparation period for the student. Ultimately the change will again reflect back to the **personal context** with the whole process repeating itself in a circular way. The professional training of students will change the world of the student, firstly from that of student to a professional social worker, and continue changing on personal and professional level once they start working as professionals.

In all of this the **Department of Social Work** is the facilitator of change. Change is facilitated through the professional training process and has to meet the standards of the Standard Generating Body of the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP). In order to reach these standards, the Department of Social Work has to ensure that the content of the course meets the set standard, while at the same time considering the uniqueness of UNISA as a distance learning institute and the uniqueness of the personal context of the student.

Lawlor (2007:2) focussed in her research on the training of the fourth level students and the practical work part thereof. She specifically addressed the following three islands in her research: the fourth level training in general, the practical work and the link between practical work and the theoretical modules.

SUMMARY

Rogers built his Person-Centred Theory on 19 propositions. I discussed these propositions using a metaphor of islands in an ocean (Figure 3). As this theory is specifically aimed at the self-concept of a person, I see this self in the centre of the ocean with the other islands surrounding it. The function of all the other islands is to shine some light on the experiences of the fourth level student and how he/she deals with it. All the propositions were linked to this research. I also gave a perspective of how this research forms part of a larger project in which attention was paid to both the personal and academic situation of fourth level learners, according to the principal of wholeness (Figure 5).

In the following chapter, focus will be placed on the self of the fourth level student and the changes that occurred during their period of study.

CHAPTER 3: THE STUDENT AS PERSON

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I discussed the Person-Centred Approach of Carl Rogers and how it is applicable to this research. From this chapter onwards I will discuss the respondents according to this theoretical model. All propositions indicated are according to the discussion in Chapter 2 of this research.

I start this chapter off by looking at who the fourth level students in Social Work at UNISA are in terms of general information like their age, sex, race and culture. This is followed by a more qualitative discussion on how the respondents see themselves as individuals. Through all of this I hope to start developing a new perception of the selves of the respondents.

Please note: From this point forward I quote the respondents' answers and comments verbatim in all tables. All other verbatim comments and replies are printed in blue.

3.1. GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE FOURTH LEVEL STUDENTS

3.1.1. Age and gender distribution

Social work has traditionally been known as a woman's career. "Social work is globally a female dominated profession" (Schenck, 2003: 10). This is also reflected in the data received in this study with 87% of the respondents being female and 12% male, while one respondent does not indicate his/her gender.

The ages of the respondents as reflected in Table 2 on the following page are divided into six age groups, namely 20 to 25 years, 26 to 30 years, 31 to 35 years, 36 to 40 years, 41 to 45 years and those above 45 years.

The average age of students is 32,6 with the eldest respondent 59 years and the youngest 21 years old. Most of the students are under 40 years of age, with 38 (42%) of them between the ages of 20 and 30 and 34 (38%) of them between 31 and 40 years. Fifteen students (20%) are older than 40 years. The average age of the younger students, those between 20 and 35, is 28,8 years, while the average age of the older students, those over 35, is 43,2 years.

Table 2:
Age distribution of respondents (n = 87*)

AGES	n
20 – 25 years	21
26 – 30 years	17
31 – 35 years	25
36 – 40 years	9
41 – 45 years	7
45+ years	8
TOTAL:	87*

(* 3 students do not indicate their age.)

I find it very significant that the average age of the students are almost 33 years while the average age of the younger group of students (those between 20 and 35) is almost 29 years. At two other tertiary educational institutions where I have worked previously, the average age of the fourth level student is closer to 22 years. The students at the other institutions are, however, studying fulltime and start their studies directly after completing secondary school. At UNISA I thus make the following two preliminary conclusions concerning the ages of the respondents, which will be addressed later on in more detail:

- (1) Some students do not start with their tertiary studies directly after completion of their secondary school education;
- (2) Many students cannot complete their studies within the four year minimum period allocated for this course.

3.1.2. Race and language

Within a South African context with four main racial groups, 11 official languages and even more cultural groups, the role of significant others and the environment (*Proposition 9*) are of great importance. Race, language and cultural background have to be taken into consideration when developing new modules and a curriculum for social work in general.

3.1.2.1. Race

According to SouthAfrica.info (2008b) "Africans are the majority (of people living in South Africa) ... making up 79.6% of the total population" with the white population estimated at 9,1%, the brown/coloured population at 8,9% and the Indian/Asian population at 2,5%. This is more or less in line with the data received from the respondents, especially concerning the black and

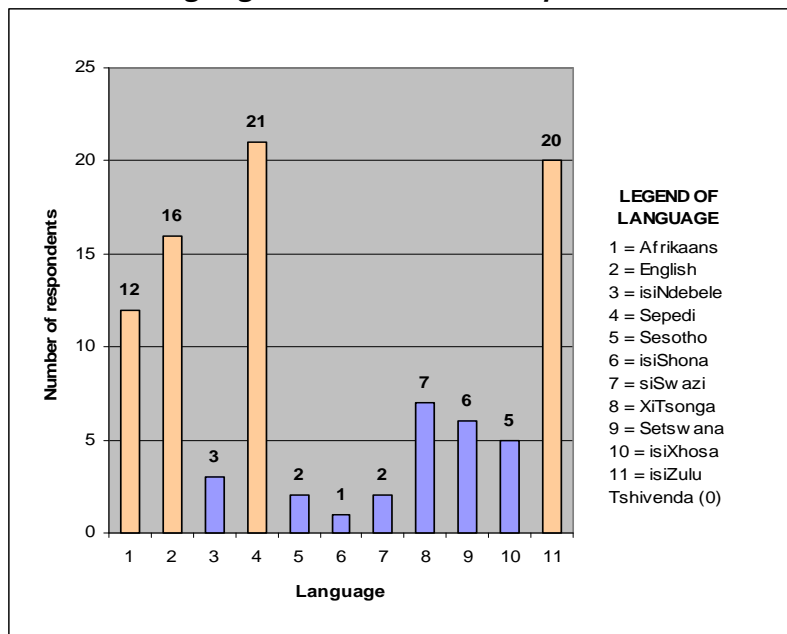
Asian/Indian students. The racial groups of the respondents are indicated as 65 black students (72%), 18 white (20%), four brown (5%) and three Indian/Asian (3%) students. The number of brown students does not give a good indication of their representation as only one of the nine questionnaires handed out to the students in the Western Cape was returned, this being the area with the highest brown population in the country. The other brown students who participated in the research are from Pretoria and from Bloemfontein.

We are believed to be the rainbow nation: "South Africa is a culturally diverse country, one nation made up of many peoples. With 11 different official languages, a multiplicity of traditions and skin tones ranging from ebony to sunburnt pink, we are, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu once put it, the rainbow nation of Africa" (SouthAfrica.info, 2008c). Race and culture are still important. For this research it is of significance as race links to language and this again links to culture which influence the way we behave (*Propositions 5*).

3.1.2.2. Language

The four languages spoken by most of the respondents are Sepedi (21), isiZulu (20), English (16) and Afrikaans (12). This represents 77% of the respondents (See Graph 1). The representation of the other eight languages is very low with no Tshivenda speaking students participating in the research. This is however not a true reflection of the student profile as there are Venda students who unfortunately did not participate in this research.

Graph 1:
Language distribution of respondents



SouthAfrica.info (2008) states that 21.5% of South Africans are either English or Afrikaans speaking with the other 78,5% speaking an indigenous African language at home. Taking into consideration that assignments and reports have to be written in either English or Afrikaans, it means that 75% of the respondents of this research have to hand in their written work in a second language.

Furthermore, given the reality that workshops and classes are conducted mostly in English, it is clear that 74 (82%) of the students, which include the Afrikaans speaking students, have to use their second language to communicate in class. This gives a natural advantage to the English speaking students and a disadvantage to the others.

3.1.3. Culture and general experiences

3.1.3.1. Culture

As mentioned in the previous chapter, according to Grobler et al (2003:9) and Efran et al (1988:28) the self is formed through all our perceptions and experiences as perceived from significant others and the environment (*Proposition 9*). The family is normally the first environment where a child gets exposed to "others". As families are part of extended families, the self of a person starts to form accordingly. Part of these experiences with the extended family brings a sense of culture that later expands to experiences outside the family. Carter and Mc Goldrick (1989:267) agree that culture is important by stating that "social class, education, *race, ethnicity*, (emphasis mine) sex and place of residence strongly influence the life cycle of families". Culture is a part of every human being. There are people who deny its importance, but even the language we speak, reveals something about our culture.

I tested the respondents' perceptions of culture by asking how different cultural groups view behaviour within specific contexts. The golden thread can be summarised in just one word: **RESPECT**. In all the culture groups it stands out that no matter what the context is, respect has to be shown amongst people. Respectful behaviour differs from culture to culture. In the black African cultures respectful behaviour between a man and woman is, for instance, for the man to enter a room before a lady, while in the white and brown culture the woman has to walk first. All respondents feel that respect towards older people and towards family members are very important. In the black cultures, not making eye-contact is a sign of respect, while this is exactly the opposite in the other cultures. Students also say that strangers have to be treated with caution, as they might pose a threat to you or to your community.

As the goal of this research is to help the Department of Social Work to know their students better, I asked the students what they think UNISA should know about their culture. Eleven of the 65 black students did not answer this question. The others feel that UNISA should be aware of their values and norms and the importance of the extended family. They emphasise the “ubuntu” principle: the group is of higher importance than the individual. Of the 12 Afrikaans speaking students only three give significant answers. These three say that the lecturers should know that they are proud of their culture and that they do not want to be stereotyped. Sixteen of the English respondents either did not answer the question or say that their culture is not important in terms of their studies. Two of the English respondents emphasise the importance of punctuality and say that this should be addressed. One of the students comments that she has no extended family, creating problems for her for workshops during school holidays, as she has no day care facility for her children while attending workshops. Another practical problem in terms of culture is expressed by a student of the Muslim faith. She mentions that workshops normally take place on a Friday, which is the holy day of her religion.

3.1.3.2. General experiences

In the early stages of this research project I realised that the development of a social work curriculum also needs to consider the experiential world of the students, as the “self” develops from this experiential world (*Proposition 8*). To what extent then were respondents exposed to similar experiences in their pasts? I identified a few possible experiences that I thought they might have had. This would give me an idea on how wide the experiences of this group of students are by the time they reached their fourth level. This can be useful in terms of the curriculum: if the lecturer and the students are not on the same page, it can be difficult to exchange information, especially when using metaphors in the learning process.

I tested 22 different experiences which vary from visiting a local library to travelling abroad. The data reflected does not indicate the cultural group of the students, as the aim is not to determine which culture groups has had the most exposure to the different experiences, but simply to determine how many students have been exposed to these different experiences.

The three experiences that most of the students have experienced, are dining in a restaurant (91%), travelling more than 500 kilometres from home (77%) and sleeping in a hotel with their own bathroom (76%). The three experiences that have scored the lowest marks are a visit to an arts exhibition (9%), a visit to the local fire brigade (14%) and a visit to a zoo (17%).

The two most significant experiences and results in terms of this research project are visits paid to the local library and the local police station:

- (1) The local public library has been visited by a mere 44% of the students. This can possibly indicate problems in terms of how to go about gathering information during the course of their studies, especially if this can be connected to visits to the UNISA library.
- (2) A total of 49% of the students have visited their local police station. Most of these visits were to report a crime. This is an alert sign in terms of safety and will be discussed further when discussing the students' perceptions of safety in their neighbourhoods.

3.2. THE "SELF" OF THE FOURTH LEVEL STUDENTS

3.2.1. Description of the "self"

The self can be described as the image a person has about him/herself. Yourdictionary.com ([s.a.]d) describes the self as "the identity, character, or essential qualities of any person or thing" and also as "one's own person as distinct from all others". Although it is possible to get a lot of information about someone from others who share his/her world, the only real person who knows the self will be that person. This is described by the first proposition of Rogers (1987:483) where he states that a person is the centre of his/her own universe. No-one else is at the centre of that universe, thus no-one else can understand it as well as that person. This world looks different from any all outside angles than from the inside (*Proposition 2*). So, what do these "selves" of the respondents look like?

3.2.1.1. Physical self

Sixty nine of the students start off by describing themselves physically. From the questionnaire it seems as if most of the students have a good image of their physical appearance. Only three students describe themselves as "**a bit overweight**", "**struggling with my weight**" and "**with a fat bum**". Many of them perceive themselves as physically attractive with statements like "**pretty**", "**charming**" (male), "**I have beautiful eyes**", "**well-groomed**" (male), and generally "**beautiful**" while one male student describes himself as "**a beautiful man and a woman can think of hunting him**".

Two remarks that stand out are the following:

- Although not negative, one older student says that: **“Being almost 50 I have reached that time where one becomes aware of not being able to fight the physical changes that occur.”**
- The most significant remark however comes from a student who describes herself as follows: **“I have a genetic condition which affected my face. This was surgically corrected and I look normal now, but inside I don't see it.”**

3.2.1.2. Will-power

According to Rogers (1987:487) a person strives to actualize and develop the self (*Proposition 4*). Each person has the right to self-determination to decide how and what they want to do when making choices. Of the 88 students who answered the question about themselves, 32 (36%) are of the opinion that they are very strong. To me this makes perfect sense: how else can a person be persistent enough to study a four year degree on a part-time base? Some of the words the students use to describe their personal strength are words like **“self-determined”, “self-motivated”, “confident”, “hard worker”, “committed”** and **“perfectionist”**. All of these students have very high expectations of themselves. The following remarks give me a good indication of their attitude towards their studies and life in general:

- **“I believe that I can achieve anything I set my mind to.”**
- **“I sometimes irritate myself with my striving to be perfect.”**
- **“I am absolutely ready to embark on my new journey of growth.”**
- **“I believe that life is an art and I need to be creative as an artist of my own life.”**

Two students who seem to be very strong on the surface, however, give me another picture of how difficult it sometimes is to be strong:

- **“I used to have a façade of being totally in control and a super woman. I had a nervous breakdown from all the stress.”**
- **“I tend to feel guilty very easily and have too many rules for my own life.”**

3.2.1.3. Emotional self

Emotions or feelings form part of the psychological self of a person and can only be detected by observing behaviour (*Proposition 6*). Yourdictionary.com ([s.a.]a) gives the following definition

for emotion: "a state of consciousness having to do with the arousal of feelings, distinguished from other mental states, as cognition, volition, and awareness of physical sensation" Another definition is: "a moving of the mind or soul; excitement of the feelings, whether pleasing or painful; disturbance or agitation of mind caused by a specific exciting cause and manifested by some sensible effect on the body" (Webster, 2003). Emotions concerning experiences vary from person to person as each person is unique. Even within the same person emotions will be unique from moment to moment due to the changing nature of his/her world (*Proposition 1*).

The emotional self as described by students vary over the whole spectrum from friendly and outgoing (five respondents) to shy and quiet (16 respondents); from happy (five respondents) to short-tempered (six respondents). A total of 15 respondents describe themselves as emotionally sensitive while 11 say that they are calm and even-tempered. Ten of the respondents say that they have a positive outlook on life. As no emotions are suggested in the questionnaire though, this does not mean that the other eighty respondents do not have a positive outlook on life.

3.2.1.4. Relational self

The term "ubuntu" means that the group is more important as the individual and also that man is a man through others. This is the exact same principle emphasized by *Proposition 9* of Rogers. Grobler et al (2003: 13) say that "no person lives in isolation". All of us are in constant interaction with others and our environment and through this interaction we build the idea (image) of who we think we are.

In the data collected on the question of how the respondents see themselves 78 (87%) describe themselves in relation to others. All of these descriptions indicate different roles in their lives. Except for the obvious role of student, all the students are also part of a family circle. These are described as sister, brother and sibling in terms of their families of origin and as husband, wife or partner by many of the respondents who are either married or in a special relationship with someone. Other family roles that can be distinguished are that of parent and also family member of an extended family. None-family roles are described as that of friend or employee. All these different roles give me a good indication of how difficult it is for these students to stay on track with studies amidst all their other responsibilities, linked to these different roles.

It is also clear that many of the students are taking on even more responsibility, which connects with the discussion in paragraph 3.2.1.2 of this chapter under the will-power of the res-

pondents where they describe themselves as being strong and sometimes even burdened by it. Some of the statements in this regard are:

- **"I took on being a major role figure in my family."**
- **"I have played from a very young age the role of an adult for my brother."**
- **"I am a very loving and protective mother – which is sometimes overbearing for my children."**
- **"I am a mother to my siblings."**

Other students feel that they are responsible for maintaining healthy relationships with others. This comes as no surprise to me since these students as future social workers all want to become relationship experts. This is evident in the following statements:

- **"I am particularly considerate of others around me."**
- **"I give too easily of myself and feel disappointed when others don't give as much back."**
- **"When I see there is an obstacle in the relationship, I will try by all means to overcome it."**
- **"Easily moved by the plight of others."**

3.2.1.5. Spiritual self

"Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person" (The Bible, Gen 2: 7). According to this verse man is the only creature that received the breath of God and together with this a spiritual quality. Augustine [s.a.] says that due to this spiritual characteristic, which he calls "soul", man forever yearns for his Creator: "How, then, do I seek Thee, O Lord? For when I seek Thee, my God, I seek a happy life. I will seek Thee, that my soul may live. For my body liveth by my soul, and my soul liveth by Thee." David expressed words with the same implication long before Augustine in the Psalms: "As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for You, O God" (The Bible, Ps 42: 1). All men are forever searching for the reason for their existence. Most of them find their reason for living in God.

No questions were asked in terms of the faith or belief system of the respondents, yet 42 (47%) of them indicate that spirituality and faith is part of the self. Thirty eight of these 42 (91%) indicate that they are of the Christian faith. The following statements indicate how important their faith is to some of the students:

- "I believe that God is the answer of everything."
- "I love God."
- "I am a solid Christian who takes God wholeheartedly."
- "I treasure my relationship with Jehovah God."

From the above statements it is clear that faith plays a major role in the coping mechanisms of these students in terms of their studies and personal life. I can see that many of them feel they have a calling to become a social worker and are inspired by a spiritual motivation to carry on and finish the task ahead.

3.2.2. Stability and change

An equally important aspect of the self and the world of an individual is that it is subjected to constant change (Grobler et al, 2003: 44; Rogers, 1987: 483). Change in our worlds always has an impact on us and on the image we have of ourselves and others around us. Although we are forever subjected to change, the core of the self will stay the same. Change will always be congruent to the self of the person and how he/she interprets the environment (Mariotti, 1999). This reflects the way we deeply inside see the self and want others to see us as well. Watzlawick et al (1967: 31) state that interpersonal systems may be seen as "feedback loops". This means that "input into such a system may be amplified into change or may be counteracted to maintain stability". If we look at an individual, the same principle can be applied. Any feedback a person gets relating to the self can be seen as "input". This input will either be amplified or counteracted to fit with the image of the self and thus will be congruent to the self and the environment. If negative input is received, the person will start to defend the self (*Proposition 16*) as it poses a threat to the self (*Proposition 14*), so the person will try to counteract the input.

In the case of these respondents this is a very important aspect as we expect of students to change during the course of their studies. Students have to gain new knowledge and implement it within a practical context. Yet the core of each student will stay the same while change will take place in congruence with the self concept.

3.2.2.1. The core self that will never change

What are the things these respondents identify as part of the core self that will never change? One student did not answer this question while seven of the others interpreted the question wrong. Of the remaining 82 respondents, 37 (45%) identify their belief system as something

unchangeable. This again reflects back to the perception of being strong in paragraph 3.2.1.2 of this chapter and connects with the description of the self in paragraph 3.2.1.5 of this chapter, which describes the student as a spiritual person.

Eighteen (22%) of the respondents refer to the importance of their families as unchangeable while a further 35 (43%) of them describe their unchanging core as caring, loving, respectful, kind and friendly towards other people in general. These characteristics probably also form the base of their choice of becoming a social worker (which will be discussed in Chapter 7), as all these implied messages can be read as being eager to help and assist other people.

3.2.2.2.Changes in the self and circumstances since onset of studies

Students had to identify three areas in the self and their circumstances that changed since they started with their social work course at UNISA.

In terms of the self and the personality of the students, a wide variety of changes are indicated. Some of these changes are in terms of self-esteem, shyness, finishing off emotional baggage, changing their attitude towards others and becoming more self-assertive. One student indicates that it is time to stop grieving after the death of dear ones and one student says that he/she came to the conclusion that he/she no longer wants to be a social worker. All of these responses are very individual and I, once again, realise how different the worlds of each of these respondents in reality are.

The main area of change in circumstances is the time management of the respondents. This is indicated by 44 (49%) of the students. As this was not a leading question, I see this as a very significant number, because this gives me an indication of how important their studies are to these students and how much time and energy they spend on this. Many of the respondents feel that this change is positive, but some also feel that they have to give up valuable time in terms of family and for leisure.

The following remarks indicate that students have learnt to take responsibility for their own studies:

- **“This has motivated me to carry on and do better in my studies.”**
- **“I realised I was not coping with my studies (and thus had to start managing my time).”**

- **"I started to consider each hour as important and am aware of how I spend my time."**
- **"I had to continue with my studies even though it was difficult."**

On the negative side, some of the respondents regret lost time with significant others like family and friends, as is evident in the following remarks:

- **"I did feel that I am neglecting myself and my family."**
- **"I no longer visit nor socialise."**
- **"It is keeping me away from my siblings."**
- **"I am no more playing the role of a mother (to my children)."**

One student sums it all up in one, short sentence:

- **"It was hard."**

Other changes that are mentioned are in terms of the physical context and environment of students. These include their work situation, financial situation, housing situation and learning to cope alone. Twenty three (26%) of the students mention at least one of these areas, with 15 (17%) of them indicating a change in their financial and work situation. Twenty eight (31%) of the respondents indicate that they had to move closer to a UNISA facility due to their studies. For all of them this is very hard and they comment as follows:

- **"I struggled to accept that I am alone and missed my family a lot."**
- **"Terrible. I miss my family and they miss me."**
- **"It depresses me to stay on someone else's property."**
- **"I had to move into a shack. It is very cold in winter and hot in summer."**

Thirty one (34%) of the respondents indicate that the content of the course changed their perceptions of people and the way they look at people. Again, the question was not of a leading nature, and therefore I am of the opinion that many of the other students also changed their perceptions of people, but there is no way of reflecting it in this report as this was not particularly asked.

These are some of the answers to this open question of how the self changed:

- **"I accept each person as unique."**

- "I became less judgemental and respect diversity."
- "I am able to understand people and not jump to conclusions."
- "I realised that people had good reasons to have their different perceptions."
- "It is easier to get along with other people who are different from me."

This is a very positive outcome, as this is exactly the striving of the Department of Social Work.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I introduced the reader to the respondents according to their age, sex, language and cultural backgrounds. I also had the privilege of sharing the "selves" of the respondents according to their own perceptions and in their own words. I have discovered that these students are of exceptional psychological strength, although many of them find it hard to cope with studies and find it difficult to balance their studies with their personal lives. I discussed how the students perceive their personal change since they started their studies. I found that the biggest change they had to make was their management of time and time spent with family and friends. Students also emphasise how their studies have changed their frame of references of people in general.

I now know how students see themselves and how they changed over the last few years. My next area of investigation will be to take a look at their family lives.

CHAPTER 4: FAMILY LIFE OF THE STUDENT

INTRODUCTION

The self is formed through interaction with significant others and the environment (Grobler et al, 2003: 13). In the previous chapter I explored how the respondents see themselves and the changes that occurred during their time of study.

In this chapter I will attempt to find out more about the significant others that influence this self (*Propositions 8 and 9*). These significant others are in the first place the family. The family of origin plays a vital role in the forming of the self. During this research some of the respondents still lived with their families of origin, while others have started their own families. Some of these new families have been in existence for a good number of years, while others were still new. All of these different factors have an influence on the self of the respondents and how they cope with their study situations.

4.1. THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

What is a family and what makes people a family in the psychological sense? In terms of this research, I will discuss three categories of families: the extended families, the families of origin and the nuclear families of the respondents.

Before discussing the family life of the respondents, I want to describe the family life cycle as presented by Carter and McGoldrick (1989). According to these authors, all families go through different stages of development. They describe the family as "a system moving through time" (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989: 4). All families go through different stages of development, which is dynamic and changing.

From a normative, westernized point of view a family starts when two people decide to begin a life together. From this union children are mostly born. These children eventually grow up and leave home. As they leave home, a whole new cycle starts all over again when these adult children start their own families, while the parents move onto the next family life stage of living on their own without their children. Each family life stage poses its own challenges and changes which impacts on the transition to the next stage. The family life cycle as suggested by Carter and McGoldrick (1989: 15) is characterised by the following stages:

- 1) Leaving home – the grown-up child leaves home to start a life on his/her own. Courtship and finding a spouse forms part of this life stage.
- 2) The joining of families through marriage when the young adult proceeds from being single into a new relationship with a spouse.
- 3) Families with young children when the next generation is born and educated.
- 4) Families with adolescents when children become teenagers and start to detach from the family.
- 5) Launching children and moving on for parents, while the cycle for the next generation starts all over again for the children.
- 6) Families in later life when the parents move on after the children have left home.

A summary of this cycle and its challenges is given in the following table (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989: 15):

**Table 3:
The Stages of the Family Life Cycle**

Family Life Cycle Stage	Emotional Process of Transition: Key Principles	Second-Order Changes in Family Status Required to Proceed Developmentally
1) Leaving home: Single young adults	Accepting emotional and financial responsibility for self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiation of self in relation to family of origin. • Development of intimate peer relationships. Establishment of self re work and financial independence.
2) The joining of families through marriage: The new couple	Commitment to new system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of marital system. • Realignment of relationships with extended families and friends to include spouse.
3) Families with young children	Accepting new members into the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusting marital system to make space for child(ren). • Joining in childrearing, financial, and household tasks. • Realignment of relationships with extended family to include parenting and grand-parenting roles.
4) Families with adolescents	Increasing flexibility of family boundaries to include children's independence and grandparents' frailties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting of parent-child relationships to permit adolescent to move in and out of system. • Refocus on midlife marital and career issues. • Beginning shift toward joint caring for older generation.
5) Launching children and moving on	Accepting a multitude of exits from and entries into the family system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renegotiation of marital system as a dyad. • Development of adult to adult relationships between grown children and their parents. • Realignment of relationships to include in-laws and grandchildren. • Dealing with disabilities and death of parents (grandparents).

6) Families in later life	Accepting the shifting of generational roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintaining own and/or couple functioning and interests in face of physiological decline; exploration of new familial and social role options.• Support for a more central role of middle generation• Making room in the system for the wisdom and experience of the elderly, supporting the older generation without over-functioning for them.• Dealing with loss of spouse, siblings and other peers and preparation for own death. Life review and integration.
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It has to be emphasised that this is a westernized model and refers to a “typical nuclear family” which consists of a father-figure and/or a mother-figure and their children. The nuclear family has changed over the last decades due to phenomena like divorce, remarriage and general acceptance of single-parent households, etcetera. The typical African family, where the extended family plays the most important role in a person’s life may, of course, experience the family life cycle quite differently. This difference will be addressed in some detail in the discussion that follows.

Looking back at the age distribution of the respondents, which vary from 21 (young adult) to 59 (families in later life), it is clear that the students are spread over all these different family life stages. This will make it very difficult for a lecturer or student supervisor to give support to the students as a group, concerning the life transitions and challenges in line with their family life stages. The only way this can be overcome, is if the lecturer or student supervisor rather looks at each student’s individual life stage with its challenges. This correlates with Rogers (1987:29) who places the emphasis on the individuality of each person that needs to be attended to instead of regarding the group as a cohort in terms of a specific family life stage. If a lecturer or student supervisor can be sensitive to each student individually, it will be easier to pick up transition crises and/or a family crisis rather than trying to attend to the group as a whole (cohort) in this regard.

4.2. THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

TheFreeDictionary [s.a.] defines family in general as “two or more people who share goals and values, have long-term commitments to one another, and reside usually in the same dwelling place”, while YourDictionary.com ([s.a.]c) describes it as “a social unit consisting of parents and the children they rear; the children of the same parents; one’s husband (or wife) and children.” According to Wikipedia (2008) the term “nuclear family” developed in the [western](#)

[world](#) and describes a [family](#) group consisting of parents (most commonly a [father](#) and/or [mother](#)) and their children". In this research the nuclear family refers to the parent(s) or parental figure(s) and the child(ren), if any, who form part of the respondents **present family** and the respondents' relationships with a special partner and/or children.

4.2.1. Marital or other special partner

4.2.1.1. Involvement with a special partner

Due to the fact that the ages of respondents' ages vary from 21 years to 59 years, I assume that most of them will be involved in relationships with a special partner. This special partner can be a spouse, a boyfriend or a girlfriend. The results confirmed my assumption. Thirty four (38%) of the respondents are either married or living with a partner while another 39 (41%) of them are involved in a serious relationship with a partner. Thus a total of 72 (80%) students are in a special relationship with a partner. Twenty of the remaining 15 respondents (17%) are not involved with someone, while three students (3%) did not answer this question. Of the 15 respondents who are not involved in a special relationship, two are divorced and one is a widow. Another respondent who is divorced has been remarried for fourteen years.

4.2.1.2. Duration of relationship with partner

Table 4:
Duration of relationship with partner

MARRIED OR LIVING TOGETHER	n	%	INVOLVED WITH SOMEONE SPECIAL	n	%	TOTAL RESPONDENTS INVOLVED IN SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP	N	%
0 to 5 years	11	31	0 to 5 years	24	61	0 to 5 years	35	48
5+ to 10 years	7	21	5+ to 10 years	11	28	5+ to 10 years	18	25
11+ to 15 years	5	15	11+ to 15 years	2	5	11+ to 15 years	7	10
16+ to 20 years	4	12	16+ to 20 years	0	0	16+ to 20 years	4	5
More than 20 years	7	21	More than 20 years	1	3	More than 20 years	8	11
TOTAL	34	100%	TOTAL	38	100%	TOTAL	72	100%

A total of 35 (48%) of the students who are involved in special relationships have been in these relationships for no longer than five years. Twenty four (27%) of them are only involved with the other person, not married and not living with their partner. The significance here is that this group of 35 students (39% of the total respondents) still need to put in a lot of extra effort to keep these relationships working. All relationships need work as to maintain it, but especially in the first years a lot of extra hard word is needed. Two people from two different backgrounds

both have to be involved in building trust and acceptance towards each other. Taking further into consideration that according to Table 4 a total of 72 (80%) of the respondents are involved with someone special, it becomes clear to me that all of them still have to put in a lot of time and effort to build and maintain these relationships. For a person studying at UNISA, it can be a stumbling block if their partners are not supportive of their studies. Those, whose partner on the other hand, is in favour of their studies, have an extra support system that can make a huge difference to their own attitude towards their studies.

4.2.1.3. Quality of relationship with partner

Two students give no indication of the quality of their special relationships. Of the other 67 respondents, 48 (70%) describe the relationships as **"very good"**. A further 19 (26%) say that their relationships are **"good"** and two (2%) say that it was **"reasonable"**. One respondent indicates the relationship as **"poor"** and one as **"very poor"**. As each person's perceptions differ from that of another person (*Proposition 2*), I needed to find out what students mean by **"very good"**, **"good"**, **"reasonable"**, **"poor"** and **"very poor"**.

"Very good" is described by many students as "respectful", "caring", "listening to each other" and "understanding each other" while a number of students also emphasise the importance of "space for each other". Some of these descriptions are:

- **"We are filling each others' lives with pleasure, joy and love."**
- **"He believes: Happy wife, happy life."**
- **"We can laugh together and cry together."**

The term **"good"** is very widely described. Some of the students describe it in much the same way as others describe **"very good"**, namely:

- **"A friend and everything to me."**
- **"He is loving, patient and understanding."**
- **"He is so easy to talk to. He understands me. We have most things in common."**

Other students give a clear indication of why their relationships are stated as **"good"** and not **"very good"** and make the following statements:

- **"He is mostly focused on his job. He does not provide enough time for me."**

(Married for nine years.)

- **“I have trouble dealing with his past. He is 10 years older than me. He was quite handsome when younger. He lived a promiscuous life. He wants us to live together once I complete my studies.”** (Involved in a relationship for two years.)

The students who say that their relationships are **“reasonable”** or **“poor”** describe their relationships in the following ways:

- **“We have some differences in life for a long time.”**
- **“We are currently experiencing serious marital problems.”**

The student who describes her relationship as **“very poor”** has actually been divorced for six and a half years. The fact that she still feels the need to describe the severity of her poor relationship with her ex-husband, gives me the impression that she may not have reached closure with regards to her pain and loss yet.

4.2.1.4. Support from partner

Only three of the 67 students involved in special relationships indicated that their partners do not support their studies. Support also means different things for the different students. For 36 of the respondents (54%) this means emotional support while 17 of them (25%) mention that they also receive financial support. Their partners either pay for their studies, or help them pay from tuition fees to books, to helping them with transport money to get to workshops. Seven of the students (10%) say that their partners help them with household chores. Six of them (9%) mention that their partners help with small children. Students also say that their partners give them the time they need for their studies while five students (7%) mention that their partners are physically involved in their studies. The following comments support the above statements:

- **“Always willing to help with research or to type my assignments.”**
- **“He brings me to classes.”**
- **“She helps me with some ideas and in terms of the compiling of my portfolios.”**
- **“I rely on him for some information.”**

4.2.2. Children

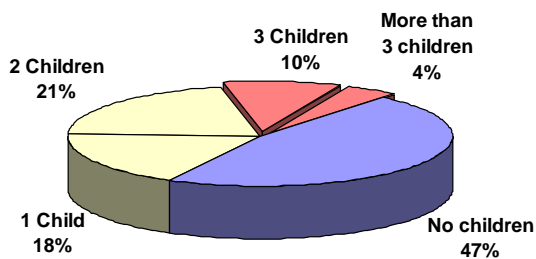
As discussed in the previous section, 75% of the respondents are involved in special relationships. Some of the other students, who are presently single, previously were involved in se-

rious relationships with some of them divorced or widowed. This information paves the way for the next area of exploration, namely: how many of the students are parents? Looking at family life in general, I also realise that many of the students who are involved with someone and not married or living with their partner, could also possibly have children, either from their present, or from a previous relationship. Results confirmed this: 48 (53%) of the respondents are indeed parents. These 48 parents have a total of 98 children, giving an average of 2 children per parent.

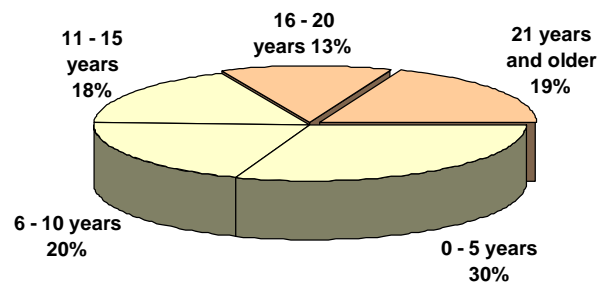
4.2.2.1. Number of children and their ages

Two important factors are the number of children each student has and the ages of these children. This will give an indication of the responsibilities that students have to face at home.

**Pie diagram 1:
Number of children per respondent**



**Pie diagram 2:
Ages of children**



According to Pie diagram 1 a total of (14%) of the respondents have three or more children and according to Pie diagram 2 the ages of children vary tremendously, with 68% of the children younger than 16 years. These two diagrams show that most of the students still have to be intensely involved with their children due to the ages of these children. "Parenthood... makes demands that vary considerably with the age of the child. Some parents find it comparatively easy to satisfy this need, but others are overwhelmed by such intense dependency requirements" (Specht & Craig, 1987:201). Where more than one child is concerned, it is just logic that parents need to give double or more the input than a parent of only one child.

4.2.2.2. Residence of children

Not all of these children are living with their parents. Where these children reside, also give me an indication of the extent to which the student-parents have to be involved with their children. Of the 48 students who have children, 32 have a total of 69 children living with them – an ave-

rage of 2.2 children per respondent. The other children who are not staying with the respondents are either independent (15 children), staying with other family members (10 children) or staying in hostels during school terms (4 children).

4.2.2.3. Relationship with children

All relationships with children, except one, are described as “**very good**” or “**good**”. As the self is formed in interaction with significant others (*Proposition 9*), it is clear that these students perceive themselves as good parents. It can be difficult to admit that things went wrong during the upbringing of a child, as described by only one student who says that her relationship with her son is “**poor**”: “**We don’t have a good relationship – maybe because I had him when I was still a teenager and never bothered to bond with him. He doesn’t respect me.**”

4.2.2.4. Concerns about children

It is normal for parents to be concerned and worried about their children. I asked respondents what these concerns are. Four of the respondents who answered this say that they are not worried. Their children are independent and doing well for themselves. Other parents of adult children are still concerned about them. These included concerns about health, workloads of children and their social and family life.

Parents of younger children place a very high emphasis education: a total of 32 (63%) of these respondents mention this. Fourteen of the parents are concerned about the future of their children, over and above their education. These are described as hope for a better financial situation and better opportunities than they had as parents. The respondents wish the following for their children:

- “**I am studying so that I can be in a position to care for them financially. I want to be a good role model to them so that they can see hard work pays off.**”
- “**I don’t want to support my children when they are grown up. I want them to be independent and be able to manage their own lives.**”
- “**I want her to have the things I never had, but without spoiling her.**”
- “**I wish that we will one day have a proper house together and be able to share our lives together.**”

Respondents are also worried what will happen to their children if they as parents would pass

away. No questions were asked concerning HIV/AIDS, but the devastation of this disease may be too real for some of these parents, as is clearly voiced in the following statements:

- **“I wonder what will happen to them when I die.”**
- **“I don’t want them to experience the pain of staying with other family.”**
- **“They miss their father so much. I think they have endured enough pain. I worry what will happen to them if something happens to me. Who will take care of them?”**

The following remarks are made concerning the safety of children:

- **“We do not see a safe future in South Africa. The lawlessness and crime and poor working conditions all adds up.”**
- **“I am very protective. I fear the world around them. I sometimes feel that they are not safe.”**
- **“I fear that South Africa might not be where they choose to settle.”**
- **“I would like my child to grow up in a safe environment not exposed to crime and abuse.”**

Students are also concerned about relationship problems. Five of the respondents are concerned how their own marriage and/or divorce influence their children’s relationships with the other parent. Eleven of the parents are concerned about their children’s relationships with peers.

4.3. FAMILY OF ORIGIN

The family of origin includes “all those claiming descent from a common ancestor; tribe or clan” (Your Dictionary.com [s.a.]). A very good description of the role and importance of the family of origin is given by Strong Bonds [s.a.]: “Family of origin refers to the significant caretakers and siblings that a person grows up with, or the first social group a person belongs to, which is often a person’s biological family or an adoptive family. Our early experiences provide a kind of blueprint, which forms our understanding of the world. They have a major influence on how we see ourselves, others and the world, and how we cope with and function in our daily lives.” Minuchin (1974:68) also emphasises the importance of the family: “In all cultures, the family imprints its members with selfhood. Human experience of identity has two elements; a sense of belonging and a sense of being separate. The laboratory in which these ingredients are mixed and dispensed is the family, the matrix of identity.”

For this research the family of origin refers to ***the family in which the student grew up***. This can be either a nuclear family as described above, or other family members with whom the student live in the same dwelling. This can thus include grandparents, aunts and uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins and in the case of re-constituted families also step-parents and other stepfamily members, or in other cases even foster and adoptive family members. In this study, the family of origin thus does not refer to the present nuclear family, as described in the previous section, but to the family in which they grew up.

Twenty one of the students indicate that their family situation changed during childhood and that they grew up in more than one type of family. This brings the total of responses (N) on this question to 111 instead of the expected 90.

Table 5:
Type of family respondents grew up in

Type of family	N	%
Both biological parents	60	54
Only one biological parent (single parent)	21	19
One biological parent plus step-parent	11	10
Adoptive parents	1	1
Extended family members	16	14
Not filled in	2	2
TOTAL:	111	100

A typical African phenomenon that is confirmed in this research is that many of the students grew up with extended family members, namely 16 of them. Nine of them stayed with both grandparents, four with grandmothers, one with an aunt and two with other extended family members. Most of the students (92 of the 111, equalling 83%), however, grew up with one or both of their biological parents, although some of them mention that they were living with or staying close to extended family members.

Respondents were asked to describe the families in which they grew up. The data received on this is very extensive. The descriptions vary from happy families (53%) with fond memories to terrible experiences and unhappiness during childhood (40%). Six of the respondents give no indication whether their families were happy or not.

A few of the happy experiences are described as follows:

- **“My stepfather was a wonderful man. We were a happy family and attended church together. We always had music in our home.”**

- **“We were nine grandchildren staying with my grandmother with our aunt as well. We enjoyed every moment of it.”**
- **“When we were young, we had regular outings on public holidays that helped us to get closer.”**
- **“We were very happy – it makes me think of starting my own happy family.”**

Unhappiness during childhood can be mainly linked to either strained relationships (15 students, equalling 17%) or poverty (14 students, equalling 16%) while some of the students encountered both poverty and strained relationships (five of the students, equalling 6%).

Strained relationships are described in various ways:

- **“My father left us for another stepmother. He forgot about us for some years.”**
- **“At ten years I moved in with my mother who stayed with my stepfather. This was the worst thing that happened to me.”**
- **“There was verbal abuse and sometimes physical abuse when my father was drunk.”**
- **“Too strict father. Over-expectation of academic achievements. A favourite child. An absent and workaholic father.”**
- **“It wasn’t a happy family: my stepfather abused us – my mother, me and my siblings.”**
- **“I grew up in an unpleasant environment. The family gossip and hate each other.”**

What is more heartbreaking for me though, is the difficulty some of these students went through due to poverty. The students describe it as follows:

- **“We suffered a lot – no food. We had to work for others to get mealie meal. We were chased away from school because we could not pay school fees.”**
- **“We stayed on a farm where my father had to work. His pay was a bag of 80 kg maize meal per month. My mother had to work in the house of the land owner. Her pay was to cultivate in the garden and use that for us as a family. We also had to work after school.”**
- **“We were eight children in my family. There were no things like birthday parties or cake.”**
- **“My mum slept with all the girls while my dad and brother had the other bedroom. It was so unfair.”**

- “We were sometimes left at home without food. The neighbours gave us food and we slept there.”
- “Our parents died and we had no choice but to live by ourselves. My elder sister was doing matric by then, but she managed to finish school and find a job so that she could take care of us.”
- “We ended up very poor and had to survive on my grandmother’s pension. My mother found a job as a domestic worker later and earned about R250 per month.”

With so many of the final year social work students having grown up under such difficult circumstances, I am wondering if this can be part of the reason why they want to become social workers – to try and prevent other from suffering the same way they did.

4.3.1. Parents

4.3.1.1. Parental figures

Three (3%) of the respondents never knew their biological mothers and 14 (16%) of the students their biological fathers. The father and mother figures are in 79% cases the biological fathers and 88% cases the biological mothers. Eight (9%) of the respondents grew up with a stepfather while three respondents (3%) grew up with a stepmother. Two respondents grew up with a brother as father figure and two with sisters as mother figures.

Other father figures include three grandfathers and one adoptive father while five students indicated that they have no father figure at all. Other mother figures are three grandmothers, three aunts and one adoptive mother. Five of the students indicate that they have more than one mother figure, bringing the total mother figures to 95 instead of the expected 90.

4.3.1.2. Relationship with parents

The quality of relationships with father and mother figures vary tremendously, as indicated in Table 6 on the following page.

Table 6:
Relationship with father and mother figures

QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIP WITH FATHER FIGURE	N	%	QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIP WITH MOTHER FIGURE	N*	%
Very good	44	49	Very good	63	67
Good	13	14	Good	18	19
Reasonable	9	10	Reasonable	9	9
Poor	4	4	Poor	0	0
Very poor	5	6	Very poor	2	2
Unknown	15	17	Unknown	3	3
TOTAL	90	100%	TOTAL	95*	100%

(* Five students indicated that they had more than one mother figure)

For me the sad fact is that less than 50% of the students feel they have a “**very good**” relationship with their father figure, with the total of both “**good**” and “**very good**” relationships a mere 63%. Most of the students who described their relationship with their father as “**very good**”, “**good**” and “**reasonable**” see it as love, respect, caring and describe it as follows:

- “I cannot spend two days without phoning him.”
- “I would sit on his lap and he would tell me stories. I was his little angel.”
- “We have grown closer as we both grew older.”
- “I don’t have a mother anymore – he plays the role of both father and mother.”

The students who see the relationship with their father figures as “**poor**” and “**very poor**” describe the reasons for this in many ways. Some say that their fathers abused or abandoned them. Some of the responses are as follows:

- “He drinks excessively. He let me down too many times to mention.”
- “He always promises things, but he does not fulfil his promises.”
- “The only time he spoke, was when someone did something wrong and he would smack you.”
- “He was not there when I needed him most.”

I asked the students who never knew their biological fathers what they think they ‘missed out on’ by not knowing him. Some of the comments are negative, like:

- “He was not there for me. I had no father figure.”
- “He left me at the age of three. Today I am suffering because of him.”

- **"It is as if he does not exist."**
- **"If he wanted to know me he would have made an attempt to see me by now."**

Other students are more willing to share a longing for the father they never knew and comment as follows:

- **"I would have liked to know what he looks like."**
- **"I miss love and care of a father and the support he would have given me."**
- **"I wish he could walk me down the aisle when I got married two years ago."**

In general the respondents see their father figures as the one person who is, or should be, there to support and care for them. Those who had to grow up without a father figure clearly show that they feel deprived for not having a father figure. Some of the students who never knew their biological father long for the father they never knew while others lash out at this person who, according to them, abandoned them.

According to Table 6 relationships with mother figures scores higher in terms of the quality of the relationships with a total of 81 (86%) stating the relationships as either **"very good"** or **"good"**. Mothers are described as loving, caring and comforting. A lot of emphasis is placed on the support students receive from their mothers, as can be seen in the following statements:

- **"She is always there for me – even in hard times."**
- **"She always takes her children's side."**
- **"She is interested in all aspects of my life."**
- **"She was there for me when I made difficult transitions in life."**

Some of the respondents also show appreciation for what their mothers sacrifice for them with the following statements:

- **"She taught us there is no reason for us to go hungry while we have eyes to see, hands to work what we can and the mind to think what we can do to better our situation."**
- **"She worked very hard to support us in times of difficulties after the death of our father. She sold fruits on the street."**
- **"She has been carrying a box of fruit to sell on the streets since I started school. She is still doing that. She is determined to get transport fee to university for me."**

One student summarises it all as follows in her description of her mother figure, who is her grandmother:

- **"She was the hero."**

Students who perceive the relationship with their mothers as **"poor"** or **"very poor"** describe it in the following ways:

- **"She used to swear at me, even if I tried to concentrate on my studies."**
- **"She was not someone I could confide in."**
- **"I am angry because she gave me to her sister when I was about two years old until seven years. Her sister abused me 110%."**
- **"I have not really bonded with her."**

Two of the three students who never knew their biological mothers, express their anger towards their mothers in the following way:

- **"She is a selfish mother."**
- **"She doesn't exist for me. I hate her for dumping me at the age of five."**

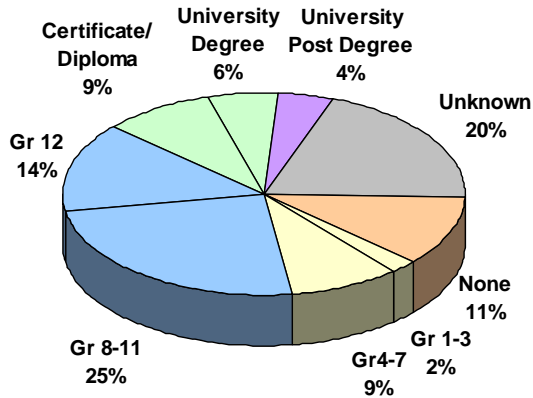
The other student responds more in terms of a missing relationship by saying:

- **"I miss a close mother–daughter relationship."**

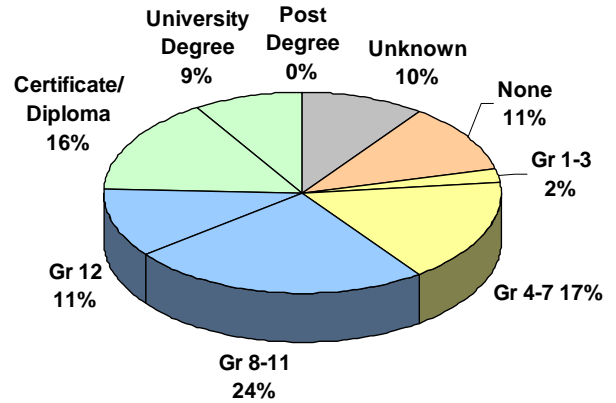
4.3.1.3. Education of parents

The education of the parents can give **an indication** of the income level of the parents, as this was not asked specifically. Higher education levels will probably indicate higher income levels. The education level can also give an indication of the extent to which parents are involved with the education of the respondents. Most of the respondents indicate that they receive emotional support from their families. The educational level of parents can, however, possibly indicate the level of financial support the parents can provide for their children. Pie diagrams 3 and 4 on the following page give a summary of the educational level of the parental figures of the respondents.

**Pie diagram 3:
Educational level of father figures**



**Pie diagram 4:
Educational level of mother figures**

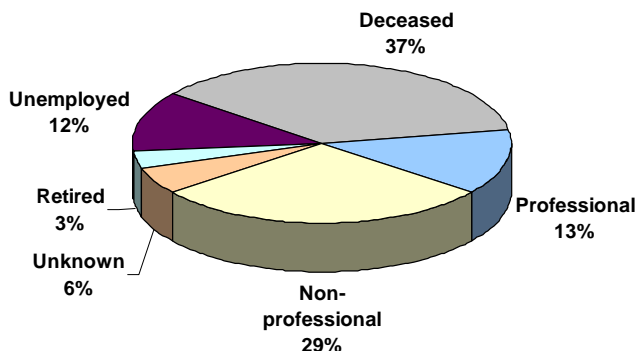


Unfortunately 20% of the students are unsure of their fathers' education levels and 10% of their mothers'. A total of 22% of the father figures and 30% of the mother figures have a qualification of primary school or lower with 11% of both the fathers and mothers having no school education at all. Most of the father (25%) and mother figures (24%) have a high school education of at least Grade 8, while 14% of the father figures and 11% of the mother figures completed their school education to Grade 12. Only 19% of the father figures and 25% of the mother figures have a post school qualification.

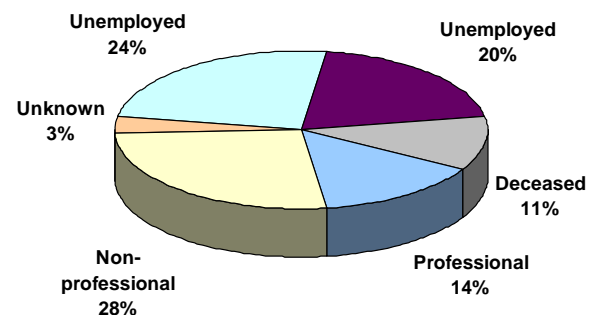
4.3.1.4. Employment of parents

From the previous data I suspect that most of the working parents are labourers. This will make it very difficult for them to support their 'student children' financially. Pie diagrams 5 and 6 illustrate the type of employment of parental figures.

**Pie diagram 5:
Employment of fathers**



**Pie diagram 6:
Employment of mothers**



Only 38 (42%) of the fathers and 37 (42%) of the mothers of respondents are still working. In both cases, less than 50% of both the fathers and mothers are employed in a professional capacity with 12 (32%) of the working fathers and 13 (38%) of the working mothers working as such. The other working fathers and working mothers are all labourers who work as domestic workers, messengers, machine operators, truck drivers, farmers, dress makers and the like. Nine of the 18 (50%) unemployed mothers are housewives.

These diagrams show me clearly the desperate financial position of many of the respondents. Parents are mostly in no position to support their children financially with their studies, and in many cases there are no parents whatsoever who can give support of any kind.

4.3.2. Siblings

4.3.2.1. Number of siblings

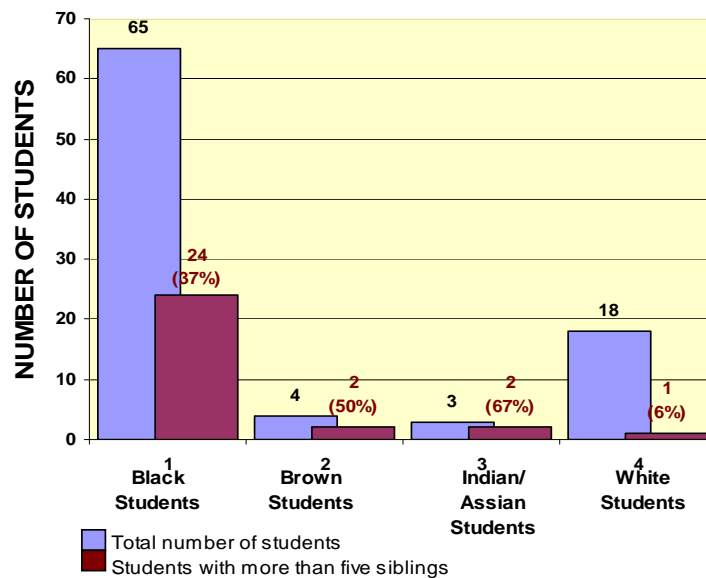
“Young adults face difficult decisions about whether to have children, when to have them and with whom, and how many to have” (Specht & Craig, 1987:201). The traditional African family has always been one where children are a measure of wealth. But as westernization became part of their lifestyle and with the cost of living rising daily, it is a fair assumption to think that families are not as big as they were in the past. This research, with more than 70% of the respondents coming from black African families, can possibly give me a good indication of the size of the present African family.

Many of the students still come from more traditional families where poverty is a huge problem, while others come from more wealthy families where they were much more advantaged. It is however important to remember that all of these students are actually part of a group of more privileged South Africans who receive the opportunity to further their studies, as most of the children in South Africa are not that privileged yet. It will thus be very dangerous to just assume that data can be generalised and therefore should be done with caution.

Of the ninety respondents only six have no siblings. Twenty five (28%) of the respondents have one or two siblings and 30 (33%) have three or four siblings. Twenty nine (32%) of the respondents have five or more siblings. This shows me that for this group of respondents, families of the present generation of students are still larger than the average family, because according to world statistics, the average South African family in 2005 had 2.7 children (Students of the World, 2005).

Graph 2 is a breakdown of the respondents with more than four siblings according to their racial groups. With this I attempt to determine if larger families are still a phenomenon that occur more under the black African family in South Africa in comparison to the rest of the population. As only four brown and three Indian/ Asian respondents participated in the research, their data can however not be seen as representative of their culture groups and I feel it cannot be a true representation of their culture groups.

Graph 2:
Race groups of respondents with more than four siblings



The most significant information comes from the group of black students. It is clear that, even in this very small representative group of students who I perceive as more privileged than the average black child in South Africa, more than a third (37%) still come from fairly large families.

I would like to refer the reader back to the ages of the respondents at this point. The average age of this group of respondents is 32,6 years with only 38 (42%) of them under 31 years of age. More than half of the respondents are thus over 30 years old and can be seen as children of an "older generation" where family planning might not have been part of their parents' life world. This is however my personal opinion, as this was not tested in this research in any way.

4.3.2.2. Relationship with siblings

Students indicate a total of 163 brothers and 158 sisters. A summary of the relationships with these siblings is reflected in Table 7 on the following page.

Table 7:
Respondents' relationships with siblings

RELATIONSHIP WITH BROTHERS	N	%	RELATIONSHIP WITH SISTERS	N	%
Very good	82	50	Very good	93	59
Good	39	24	Good	36	23
Reasonable	18	11	Reasonable	24	15
Poor	5	3	Poor	1	1
Very poor	8	5	Very poor	2	1
Unknown	11	7	Unknown	2	1
TOTAL	163	100%	TOTAL	158	100%

Once again I was confronted with the question of how the respondents describe the quality of the relationships. Some of the descriptions of **"very good"** and **"good"** are as follows:

- **"He is one of my pillars of strength. I cannot imagine life without him."**
- **"She is the best sister that I could wish for."**
- **"He offers great emotional support to me during my study."**
- **"Best, best friends."**

Only 16 of the relationships with siblings are described as **"poor"** or **"very poor"**. The nature of these relationships is in many cases more of a non-attachment nature than anything else, although a few of the students mention strained relationships. They comment as follows:

- **"His wife is not too fond of the family. We don't see each other often."**
- **"He has been overseas for 30 years – not much contact."**
- **"We only visit each other if there is something like parties or special occasions."**
- **"I feel she is my mother's favourite."**

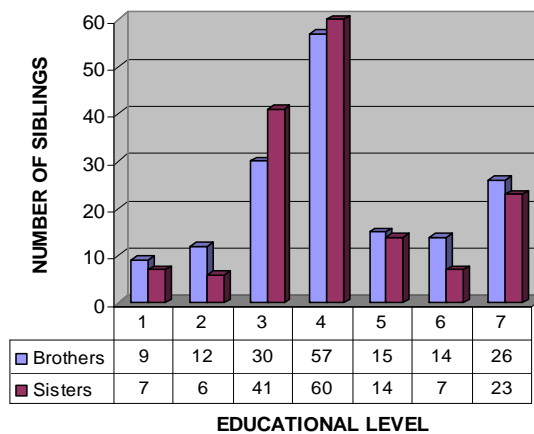
A more important tendency is the changes in family roles that took place. New "selves", both in the students and their family members, have developed due to these changes (*Proposition 15*). New roles automatically also change responsibilities and thus also relationships in the families. These changes are mostly due to death in the family:

- **"I am like a mother to him since my mother passed away last year."**
- **"He acted as father figure."**
- **"I now have to take care of his three children."**
- **"When my mom passed away, my sister took a role of being a mother to me."**

4.3.2.3. Education of siblings

One of the questions I asked myself is what the educational levels of the siblings of the students are. Do their brothers and/or sisters have the same opportunities as them, or are they the first “privileged” person in their family?

**Graph 3:
Completed educational level of siblings**



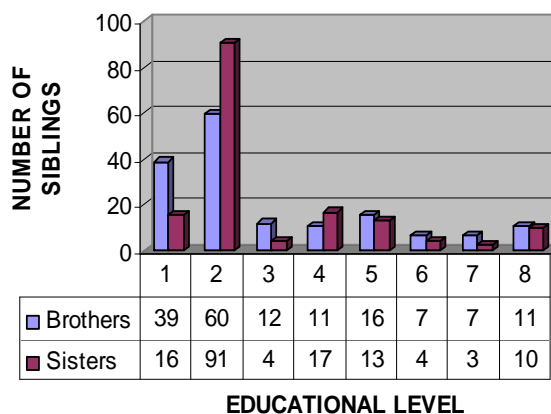
LEGEND: X-AXIS

1	Unknown
2	None
3	Primary School
4	Secondary School
5	University Degree
6	Post Degree
7	Other Post School

According to Graph 3 a total of 57 of the brothers (35%) and 60 of the sisters (38%) completed their high school education to Grade 12. Yet only 11% of the brothers and 28% of the sisters have completed a tertiary qualification. A total of 42 of the brothers (26%) and 47 of the sisters (30%) either have no education or completed their primary school education only up to Grade 7.

The results indicate that many of the students have siblings who are either still at school, or are busy with other education. Results on this look as follows:

**Graph 4:
Present educational level of siblings**



LEGEND: X-AXIS

1	Unknown
2	None
3	Primary School
4	Secondary School
5	University Degree
6	Post Degree
7	Other Post School
8	Deceased

As can be seen from Graph 4 on the previous page, 23 (14%) of the brothers and 21 (13%) of the sisters are still at school. Thirty (18%) of the brothers and 20 (13%) of the sisters are furthering post-school studies. A total of 53 (32%) of the brothers and 41 (26%) of the sisters are thus still busy with some or other form of education.

These two graphs show that most of the siblings do not further their studies after completing their school career, although most of them at least finish their school education. Several students indicate that some of their siblings have dropped out of school or studies. Reasons for this is mostly given as due to not being interested in their studies (16 brothers and 18 sisters) while a number of siblings had to terminate their education due to financial strains and having to take on the responsibility of bringing in an income for the family after parents were deceased or could not cope financially (16 brothers and 15 sisters).

4.3.2.4. Employment of siblings

A total of 146 of the 321 siblings of the respondents are working fulltime and 25 on a part-time base which bring the working siblings to a total of 171 (52%). Although this seem like a very low percentage, we have to remember that some of the siblings are still at school, while others are deceased, and the respondents are not sure if some of their siblings are working or not. The total number indicated as "not working" are 37 brothers and 53 sisters which add up to a total of 28% of all the siblings.

The average unemployment rate in South Africa was estimated at 24,3% in 2007 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2008). This is partially reflected in the data given by respondents where they indicated that 55 (34%) of the brothers and 61 (39%) of the sisters are not financially independent. A total of 55 (34%) of the brothers are financially dependent on other people. Twenty three of them are still at school which meant that the other 32 (20%) of them are not at school and yet still financially depended on family members.

These figures give me a good indication of the difficult situation under which some of these students are studying. They probably don't have access to the necessary resources to make the best of their studies due to financial strains, seeing that parents still have to provide for many of the students and for other children or even grandchildren. Those who are not part of their family of origin any longer can possibly have the advantage of a husband or partner helping them financially, or this also can be a straining factor in this new family's life.

4.4. THE EXTENDED FAMILY

The extended family is defined by YourDictionary.com ([s.a.]b) as “a nuclear family together with other relatives living with them or nearby.” (See definition of nuclear family under 4.1.4.) I agree with the part of the description of “together with other relatives”, but see the extended family rather as ***the nuclear family plus the family of origin plus all new family members married into the family***. This definition is supported by one of the other definitions from Your Dictionary.com ([s.a.]c) which describes family as “a group of people related by ancestry or marriage” and thus does not imply that they have to be living “with them or nearby”.

The importance of the extended family is very high in South Africa. Wikipedia (2008a) states that “in many cultures, such as in those of many of the [Africans](#), (emphasis mine) Korean, the [Middle Easterners](#), the [Jewish](#) family of central [Europe](#), the [Latin Americans](#), the [Indians](#), the [East Asians](#) and the [Pacific Islanders](#), extended families are the basic family unit”. Large families have their advantages in terms of emotional support and financial support during times when some of the family members go through difficult times. Carter and McGoldrick (1989: 559) also emphasise the importance of the extended family in the case of lower income families, stating that for the individual who moves away from this family it “can be disastrous”. If the whole family, however, live in poverty it can be of no advantage to anyone, especially not to the children.

In this section I want to rather focus on the relationships the students have with their extended family members. Significant relationships with extended family members stretch over the whole continuum and include grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and in-laws.

Most of these relationships are described in a very positive way by comments such as:

- **“My aunt is like a mother since my mother passed away.”**
- **“My grandparents loved me dearly. I went past them before going to school to drink tea or eat porridge.”**
- **“My maternal uncle was the one who helped me with funds to study as my biological father was unemployed.”**
- **“My uncle is a teacher. He motivates me in life.”**
- **“My aunt treated us equal to her own children. My cousins were like siblings.”**
- **“My aunt is like a mother to us. When I see her, it is like I see my mother and father at the same time.”**

According to some of the students' statements grandmothers seem to be the favourite ones, though:

- **"I sometimes think I love my grandmother more than my mother."**
- **"My grandmother made my clothes and bought me my first bra. We were very close."**
- **"We laugh together a lot."**
- **"She was the pillar of my strength."**

Some of the family members are not remembered in a positive way and students comments on this as follows:

- **"My grandmother would question everything I do."**
- **"My uncle sexually molested me when I was four and stayed with them."**
- **"My aunt never took care of us when we were suffering. She made us eat old stale food which smelled bad."**
- **"My uncle likes to drink and please his friends. He does things that make me angry."**

Nine of the students say that they have either no contact or no significant contact with extended family members. One student describes it as: **"No other family members – I am not big on family."** Many of these family members stay far away from the respondents and the relationships thus faded into the background.

4.5. LOSS IN THE FAMILY

Loss comes in many forms. It can be the death of a loved one, divorce, loss of income, financial loss, and loss of health or even something as seemingly insignificant like a pet or a good friendship. Loss can also occur when a person has to move house (loss of environment) or start a new job (loss of colleagues and working environment). All people experience loss in their lives. How we deal with it, depends on how significant the loss is. The Gloucestershire Hearing Voices & Recovery Groups (2007) gives a list as indication of the stress accompanying loss in a person's life. (See Table 8 on the following page.)

Table 8:
Stressful life events

Rank (Most at the top)	Life event
1	Death of a child
2	Death of a partner
3	Being sent to prison
4	Death of a close family member
5	Serious financial difficulty / moving house
6	Miscarriage or stillbirth
7	Court appearance for serious offences
8	Business failure
9	Marital separation due to arguments
10	Unwanted pregnancy
11	Divorce
12	Fired from a job
13	Death of a close friend
14	Serious illness of family member
15	Unemployed for one month
16	Serious personal physical illness

The ones marked in yellow are the life events I could identify from the data I collected. This does not mean that some of the others are not present, as it was not asked per se. Loss of close family members are some of the highest ranked losses a person can go through; according to the above table this sort under the first four most stressful events a person can go through. I focussed on these and on divorce in the family.

The sequential stages of the grieving process include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, which are commonly referred to as the "[grief cycle](#)" (Kubler-Ross 1969:37). How long it takes is a very individual matter. In general, though, it usually takes about two years to recover from a major bereavement (Bupa, 2007).

4.5.1. Loss of children

Only one student indicates this painful experience. What makes this extra painful is that her daughter (aged 25) died in a car accident only 10 days prior to participating in this research. Her loss was still raw and I can just imagine how difficult it must have been for this respondent to write the following:

- **"She died in a car accident ten days ago. We were very close. We as family are totally devastated by her tragic death."**

I am grateful to report that the Department of Social Work attends to her and supports her through this very difficult time.

4.5.2. Loss of partner

The loss of a partner can take the form of the death of a spouse or loss through divorce. Again only one student indicates that she went through the death of her spouse, which happened two years prior to this research. This student does not mention anything concerning the impact of this in her own life, but only the impact this has on her children's lives with the following comment:

- **“They miss their father so much. I think they have endured enough pain.”**

Although only graded as number 11 in Table 8, the impact of loss of a partner through divorce cannot be underestimated. Three of the respondents went through divorce. These divorces happened 16 years, 11 years and six years prior to this research. Both students who were divorced for longer than 10 years did not give any indication of how the divorce impacts their lives. One of them remarried two years after the divorce. What is positive for me is that both of them indicate clearly that they have moved on.

The other student who has been divorced for six years is still angry with her partner. Anger is part of the normal grieving process, but a person should, typically, after the stage of anger move on to the stage of bargaining and depression and after that come to terms with the loss. The fact that this student is unable to move forward gives me the impression that she is either stuck in the bereavement process, or re-traumatised each time she has contact (directly or indirectly, through her children) with her ex-husband and I wonder how she will be able to assist others going through the same painful experience if she cannot let go of her own pain.

4.5.3. Loss of biological parents and/or parental figures

Many of the respondents' biological parents or parental figures have passed away. Thirty nine percent of the respondents have lost their fathers and 12.2% have lost their mothers. Death of a parent during childhood is not indicated in Table 8 at all. I assume that for a child the loss of a parent will be more or less equal to losing a child during an adult stage of development. Growing up without one parent can be very difficult. “As a child, the death of a parent, without support to manage the effect of the grief, may result in long term psychological harm” (Wikipedia [s.a.] b). Six of the respondents were younger than 18 when their father figure passed

away while one student lost a mother figure at the age of seven. This student lost both her parents at the age of seven when her father died in a car accident and her mother shortly after that of a heart attack. Most of these respondents refer to the death of their parents as very significant in their lives, which is clearly indicated in the following comments:

- **"He was the breadwinner, so my life was turned upside down when he died."**
- **"Our parents died and we had no choice but to live by ourselves."**
- **"I miss her everyday. I missed her smile, everything about her."**
- **"I used to have dreams being with her at night."**

The impact of the death of a parent should become less as a person proceeds along in the life cycle (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989:463). Ten students lost their mothers between the ages 20 and 38, and a total of 24 students between 20 and 56. Most of the respondents were between 20 and 30 when their fathers passed away. Although all the students miss their parents, some are still caught in the grieving process. This is depicted in the following statements:

- **"I was still learning a lot from her about being a parent."**
- **"Sometimes there is an intense longing in my heart just to speak to her."**
- **"My home is not the same since he passed away."**
- **"I felt like I lost part of myself."**

4.5.4. Loss of siblings

The loss of a sibling can also be very painful if the sibling played an important role in the person's life. If the sibling's death took place when the person was still very young, or even before the birth of the person, the impact is normally lower. Also, if the bond between the siblings were not very strong the impact of the death will not be as high as in the case of a stronger bond.

Twenty one of the respondents have lost at least one sibling and, indeed, some of these experiences are not seen as very traumatic to some of the students. These are some of their comments:

- **"He died in 1984. He had a personality disorder and behaved in a dysfunctional way."**
- **"He passed away when he was still a baby."**
- **"He used to scold my mother and abused my aunt sexually. He had no respect**

for human life and always threatened to kill us. We felt bad when he died, but relieved at the same time.”

Others had very strong bonds with siblings and miss them tremendously. They comment as follows:

- “She was a very special person. Her death left me with emptiness and a feeling of great loss.”
- “She died tragically in a car accident – I was devastated. I looked up to her for advice and support.”
- “She was my closest friend. I could share many experiences with her that I could not with many others. I am still mourning her death even though it is two and a half years.”
- “I am still grieving for her untimely death. It is very hard to talk about this. I know we will all die, but still the pain is unbearable.”

4.5.5. Multiple family losses

Eighteen (20%) of the students have lost either both parents or at least one parent and one sibling or more than one sibling, and thus have been exposed to multiple family losses. This is indicated in Table 9.

Table 9:
Multiple family losses

FAMILY MEMBERS DECEASED	N
Both parents / parental figures (2 family members)	5
Both parents / parental figures + 1 sibling (3 family members)	3
Both parents / parental figures + 3 siblings (5 family members)	1
1 parent / parental figure + 1 sibling (2 family members)	7
1 parent / parental figure + 2 siblings (3 family members)	1
4 siblings (4 family members)	1
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS:	18

The family that lost five members shrunk from nine members to only four. All these family members passed away from 1994 to 2004 – within a ten year period. The student that lost four siblings comes from a family of nine children. This means that almost half of the siblings are deceased, while both parents are still alive. As the age of the student who completed this

specific questionnaire is 38 years and she is the eldest sibling, I assume that those that have passed away were still relatively young. The student who lost five family members of whom three were siblings, lost these siblings when they were 40, 34 and 32 years of age. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (2008) the life expectancy for South Africans was 42,37 years in 2007. The possibility that many of the siblings died from AIDS is very high as "HIV death rates have a distinctive pattern by age in which there is an increase to a given age and then a rapid decline at older ages. This peak occurs at 30-34 for females and at 35-39 for males" (Statistics South Africa, 2005).

The influence of loss on the self can never be underestimated. These are the type of experiences that deeply impact the self and the coping mechanisms of the self. I strongly believe that many of the respondents feel that they can use these difficult life situations to help others to overcome difficulties in their own lives. They can step out from being victims to being survivors and conquerors by helping others who also went through difficult times.

SUMMARY

This chapter focussed on the families of the respondents. These included the nuclear family (present family), family of origin (family in which they grew up) and the extended family (all family members which also include in-laws). I also looked at the family life cycle and found that the respondents are represented in all six the life stages of the family life cycle. Families are significantly varied in terms of size, ages of family members, number of children and important family members. The most prominent theme that could be identified is a theme of loss. The varied nature of family life poses a very difficult task to the lecturers and student supervisors in terms of how to assist students in terms of family life crisis and each student needs to be assisted individually according to their individual situation. This is in line with the Person-Centred Approach that is used in the training of students at the Department of Social Work and can thus be seen as a useful tool where students can observe how to work in a person-centred way.

The next chapter will shine more light on distance learning as a phenomenon and how students perceive their studies at UNISA.

CHAPTER 5: UNISA AS LEARNING INSTITUTION

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4 I explored the family life of the respondents. This gave me a clear idea of the circumstances under which the students grew up and what their present family lives look like. Apart from family life, it is also important to look at the respondents' circumstances surrounding their studies. I want to explore this on two levels: the learning institution and the learning conditions. This chapter is devoted to the first of these two levels, namely the learning institution, while the next chapter will look at the living and study conditions of the respondents.

In this chapter I will try to answer the questions of why students decided to study through UNISA, what their experiences of UNISA are and how they perceive the Department of Social Work. I know that according to Proposition 2, each student has his/her own ideas on these, but I will try to connect the different perceptions in such a way that it will be possible to identify themes. From these themes it should be possible to identify the needs and problems students have around UNISA as learning institution and the Department of Social Work, as a part of UNISA as the larger institution.

5.1. DISTANCE EDUCATION

According to Lawlor (2007:19) distance learning is "any learning which takes place either in part or in full through correspondence." The characteristics of distance learning is further defined by Osborne (1985:40) as "the use of technical media, usually print, which carries the educational content; two-way communication between tutor and student; and the possibility of occasional face-to-face meetings of tutor and student and of tutor and groups of students."

Osborne (1985:47) discusses the advantages of distance education which can be summarized as follows:

- Students are mostly better prepared for their tutor sessions, as these are few and opportunities need to be used to the full extent.
- Students can work at their own pace, as long as they finish with assignments at set times.
- Correspondence learning is an individualized form of learning. Each student gets his/her personal feedback from tutors.

Osborne (1985:47) also discusses some of the disadvantages as mentioned by Childs, namely:

- In a classroom there is better personal attention.
- More group activities can be utilized.
- There is immediate help available when problems arise.
- The tutor can make better use of supplementary aids like films and slide presentations.

Hoffmann (1990:210) states that an imbalance can occur when most of the students come from different communities from where the university is based, as many of them will eventually not work in the community where they studied, thus being unprepared for a new, unknown community. My interpretation of this is that the distance learning institution here can be to the advantage of the student as the students mostly do not move to a new community during their time of study. The distance learning institution has to make provision for all sorts of different communities where students are situated. This will prepare students better for future work in different kinds of communities.

Osborne (1985:52) further emphasises that learning should evolve by means of dialogue between the learner and the tutor which he described as "instruction". Most teaching still, however, takes place on a one-directional monologue, described as the "transfer of information". For a programme to be instructional it "must be complemented by media which ensure dialogue such as telephone conversation, written answers, direct face-to-face seminars and tutorials" (Osborne, 1985:52).

5.2. UNISA AS DISTANCE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

Lawlor (2007:36-37) gives a brief history of the origin of UNISA as an institution. UNISA started off as the University of Good Hope in the late 1880's. In 1916 the institution relocated to Pretoria and changed the name to the University of South Africa (UNISA). It was the first and only university in South Africa to offer correspondence courses on a tertiary level for more than 50 years. The institution merged with Technicon Southern Africa and the distance education leg of Vista University in 2004, paving the way for the only distance educational institution for tertiary education in South Africa.

5.2.1. Reasons for studying at UNISA

The question immediately arises as to why it is necessary to have a facility of distance educa-

tion, especially on an undergraduate tertiary level? Osborne (1985:43) answers this question by stating that "in most developing countries the demand for education has consistently run ahead of resources so that traditional classroom methods have only ever been the monopoly of the elite and the prosperous." Distance education thus opens up an opportunity for many people who come from a more disadvantaged background to further their education once they finish their school careers.

Seven students say that UNISA is **convenient** for them. This is described by three respondents as "close to where I live" while others don't really describe what they mean by the term "convenient". One of the two reasons for studying at UNISA that stand out is that students find it more cost-effective than other full-time institutions. The other is that they can work while studying on a part-time base. A total of 40 (44%) of the students indicate that they decided to study at UNISA because they were **working** when commencing with studies, although some of them have stopped working for an income due to the demands of the course. Thirty (33%) of the respondents say that they opted for UNISA due to the high **cost** at other institutions while some of them also mention the financial assistance they get through UNISA. These are some of their responses:

- **"I didn't have enough money to study fulltime."**
- **"I could not afford a residential university."**
- **"It was the only institution which offered me financial assistance covering all expenses."**

Osborne (1985:54) mentions that the World Bank found that programmes offered by distance learning institutions are highly cost-effective as long as there are enough students enrolling for these programmes. UNISA, with a student total of more than a quarter of a million is understandably in such a position, especially in areas where costs can be shared by different departments, like the printing and despatching of study material.

Another reason why students prefer to study at UNISA is that students enjoy the freedom and **flexibility** they have when studying at UNISA. This gives the students time for their other responsibilities as well. Twenty-one of the students (23%) say that they prefer to work on their own and to take responsibility for their own studies. These are some of their comments:

- **"Because of the fact that I could do it in my own time."**
- **"Part-time is better for me – I don't have to travel everyday."**
- **"Distance learning could accommodate my family and our life circumstances."**

- **“I started to study as a mature student.”**

Eleven (12%) of the respondents also indicate that UNISA was their **“only option”**. These respondents say that this is due to the fact that they either did not qualify for other institutions or applied too late at other universities, while others say that there is no other distance learning institution that offers social work as a course. A total of 10 (11%) respondents say that UNISA is internationally recognised and that the standard and **quality of the education** is high.

Although most students see their studies at UNISA as positive, there are a number of concerns as well.

5.2.2. Challenges of studying at UNISA

Twenty four (27%) of the respondents indicate that they see the **administration** and organisation at UNISA as a problem. These problems vary from frustrations with the switchboard not responding, to problems in connection with study material and problems with too little study space at the regional facilities. The following table gives an indication of how students see the situation with regards to the general administration and the enquiry services in general. I also indicate possible solutions that they suggest:

Table 10:
Challenges concerning the administration at UNISA and solutions as seen by respondents

CHALLENGES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Administrative problems.” • “The administration is very poor.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Management need to ensure that administration functions efficiently.”
SWITCHBOARD AND TELEPHONIC SERVICES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To try and phone UNISA when I need help with a problem is a nightmare. The switchboard is very slow – I usually wait about twenty minutes to get through.” • “It is difficult to solve problems over the phone.” • “Phones just ring while trying to get hold of ad-min staff.” • “Difficult to sort our problems over the phone.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “More switchboard operators and better training for switchboard operators needed.” • “Having answering machines put in place and returns messages.” • “People should answer their phones.”

STUDY SPACE AT UNISA	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The library does not have enough space.” • “It is getting too full at UNISA for studying.” • “There is a shortage of study space.” • “There is limited space to study at the campus and students are too many.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Another library would help. Some of us cannot study at home due to noise and other reasons.” • “To address overcrowding, there should be a limit to the number of students who register.” • “The buildings need to be extended to make space for more students.”

Most of the students, however, state that their biggest challenge is to **study on their own** with no easy access to lecturers, classes and co-students. This is stated by a total of 71 (79%) of the students. Many of these students also indicate that it is difficult to be self-disciplined and to keep up with studies amidst all their other responsibilities. These students see the solution in more tutorial classes and workshops while some also say that they have formed study groups with co-students.

Several challenges are mentioned in terms of the **content of the course** as well. Fourteen (16%) of the students complain that lecturers are not available or have a negative attitude when they contact them, while other frustrations are more around personal financial strains.

The challenges concerning the programmes at UNISA and possible solutions are listed in the table below:

Table 11:
Challenges concerning the programmes at UNISA and solutions as seen by respondents

CHALLENGES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
ACADEMIC STAFF	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Lecturers are not available during the day – the phone keeps on ringing.” • “It is sometimes difficult to get hold of the lecturers telephonically.” • “Lecturers are not easy to find on the phone.” • “Contact with lecturers – they mostly don’t answer their phones.” • “I get no reflective feedback on my work which disappoints me.” • “Contact with lecturers – lecturers are unhelpful.” • “Although lecturers have cell phones, students cannot always afford to call them.” • “Not being informed of issues that concern me.” • “Ever changing rules.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Lecturers should be available for a specific period of time during the day.” • “Lecturers should have classes once or twice a month with students.” • “I keep all correspondence and keep up with what is expected of me.” • “Lecturers must visit the regions from time to time.”

FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As a fourth year student you are placed at an organisation and cannot work to earn money.” • “Costly practical work modules with no income.” • “Not having a computer to enable myself to have access to internet.” 	(No solutions were suggested here)

5.2.3. Support services at UNISA

Three areas of support services are tested in this research, namely: services during registration for modules, the library services and services concerning study material.

5.2.3.1. Registration

Nineteen (21%) of the respondents indicate that they have had problems with registration for modules. Some of the comments concerning this are the following:

Table 12:
Challenges concerning registration at UNISA and solutions as seen by respondents

CHALLENGES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
REGISTRATION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Long queues.” • “Staff not knowledgeable how to help.” • “Difficult to find someone who cares.” • “Being refused to register for certain modules while other students were allowed to.” • “People don’t answer their phones and if they do, they can’t solve your problems.” • “I was not on the computer system of UNISA.” (A fourth level student!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Bring in more staff during registration.” • “Ground staff should be informed and trained.” • “No favours should be shown to some students.” • “It would be better if we could receive a tutorial letter during the middle of the third year to explain how it works.”

This comment of one of the respondents in particular touches me:

- **“It was heartbreaking and I could not understand why I was given such a hard time.”**

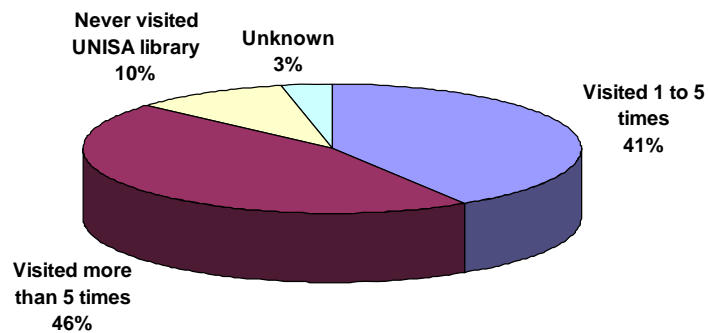
5.2.3.2. Library services

UNISA has five regional libraries. There are also speciality libraries, but these do not concern the respondents of this research. The regional libraries are situated in Pretoria (the largest

library in South Africa), Johannesburg, Polokwane, Durban and Parow (Cape Town).

As these respondents are all senior students, I wanted to know how often they make use of the services rendered by the regional libraries. The following pie diagram gives an indication of how often the students use the library:

**Pie diagram 7:
Visits paid to UNISA libraries**



I am quite surprised that nine of the respondents have never visited a regional UNISA library. Three of them say that it is too far. Two of these are students from Bloemfontein. The closest regional library for them is the one in Johannesburg – a distance of about 400 kilometres. The other six students did not indicate why they have not visited the library. Up to the third level students can still get away without visiting the library, but I am concerned about how these students are planning to carry out their research projects on the fourth level if they are too far from a library, or don't bother to visit the UNISA library.

Most students (69%) give positive feedback on the libraries. They feel that the service is good, that it is nice and quiet and that they can study there. They are generally impressed with the service. There are, however, 17 (19%) of them who are not positive about the libraries. Seven of these students feel that there are not enough books, or that books are outdated. Three of them visit the Polokwane library and three the Durban library while the other one visits the main library in Pretoria. Seven of the students complain that the libraries are too full and noisy to study. Two students have a problem with the staff and two have problems in finding books. One of the latter two has a B.Bibl (Library Science) qualification herself and feels that the system in Johannesburg is not working well.

5.2.3.3. Study material

Twenty eight (31%) of the respondents indicate that they experience problems with study material. Some of them did not receive all their material in time, while other students complain that they did not receive some of the material at all. Concerning prescribed books, thirty six (40%) students indicate problems to get hold of their prescribed books. These two areas are reflected in Table 13:

Table 13:
Challenges concerning study material at UNISA and solutions as seen by respondents

CHALLENGES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
STUDY MATERIAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Study material not always available." • "Study material is delayed and that makes things very difficult to do." • "UNISA takes long to give us tutorial letters." • "Wrong material is sent." • "Study material was out of stock." • "I had to copy the study guide." • "In 2005 I wrote a paper on developmental tasks without ever having received my study guide." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Include all necessary information and material in the tutorial and package." • "Proper planning and follow up." • "Using email and the internet more effectively." • "UNISA need to do something about their system – it confuses students and cause conflict with our facilitators." • "They should put good structure in place."
PRESCRIBED BOOKS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Sometimes the books are out of stock and not available at another bookstore." • "The bookshop had to order the book and I had to wait a very long time for it." • "Bookshops did not receive lists with prescribed books from UNISA." • "Titles and prescribed books are incorrect in some of the tutorial letters." • "I had to travel to Pretoria to get the books – it was very expensive." 	<p>(Students give no possible solutions)</p>

5.3. THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

What is the difference between training and education, and in which category does social work teaching fall? Osborne (1985:20) refers to a metaphor used by Romiszowki: "Training is akin to following a tightly fenced path in order to reach a pre-determined goal at the end of it. Education is to wander freely in the fields to left and right of this path – preferably with a map" (sic). Social work cannot be carried out according to prescribed "recipes". There are no "tightly fenced path(s)" that can be followed as each client is individual and unique. The profession is practised according to a "map" and not a "pre-set path" and can therefore be seen as a form of

education. As opposed to Romiszowki I define training also as the acquiring of skills within a practical setting. Social work is a career where both theory and practice needs to be taught, and where the practice needs to be integrated with the theory. I would therefore describe social work teaching as both education and training, but define training different from Romiszowki.

According to Lawlor (2007: 37) the four-year degree in Social Work at UNISA is registered as a "Level 7" qualification with the National Qualification Framework of South Africa. Social Work has formed part of the UNISA course offering for more than 50 years. Looking back at *Proposition 1* (Rogers 1987:483), the world around us is continually changing. Social Work as a subject and the Department of Social Work have changed accordingly over this period of 50 years (Lawlor, 2007:38). "In constant flux throughout its own growth changes, it seeks balance and equilibrium which is achieved momentarily, only to be broken up again into new movement by energy or impulse contributed by change within or by the impact of force impinging from without" (Robinson, 1978:199). The Department of Social Work also keeps changing according to the needs of the community; the community being the larger UNISA community with its demands, the student population and the developmental trends in South Africa as a country. At present emphasis is placed on the development of the individual and the community. The Department of Social Work also places its focus on the development of the student – and through their students on the development of all communities where the students make an impact.

Due to the unique nature of distance education in social work, the Department of Social Work has to keep creating new ways to fulfil the requirements for the education of social workers. Students are not geographically located at the Department of Social Work. Due to this the Department has to make use of other responsible people to assist them with the training in all geographical areas where the students reside. Abels (2005:5) states that "Social work's historic vision and understanding of the importance of social connections in both social work practice and education make the task more complex than might be required by other professional programmes." Mutual expectations have to be reached and responsibilities shared. The Department of Social Work recruits student supervisors and facilitators all over the country to assist and guide students, while students have the responsibility to attend workshops and supervision sessions where and as arranged by lecturers and supervisors. All these encounters are of a participatory nature where students and lecturers, again, take mutual responsibility for learning. Due to the nature of this course, the only limitation is that no students can be accommodated outside the borders of South Africa once practical work takes an onset from the second year onwards, except if the students are in a position to travel to a student supervisor and group facilitator on a regular base.

At the Department of Social Work of UNISA students are trained according to the Person-Centred Approach of Carl Rogers. According to this theoretical model each person is a unique individual and thus needs to be dealt with accordingly. "His acceptance of not only the ability of persons, groups and communities to grow and develop independently, but also the inevitability of independent growth and development, ties in with the tenets of the developmental approach adopted by the Department of Social Development in South Africa as the theoretical paradigm for service delivery" (Lawlor, 2007:35). Independence and self-determination is of the utmost importance. According to Osborne (1985:29) Rogers uses the term "facilitation of learning" instead of the word "teaching" which means that the student is the one controlling the learning process. He also describes it as "self-initiated", "pervasive" and "evaluated by the learner" (Osborne, 1985:29). In distance education students are more in control of their studies. They can decide what the pace of learning has to be and plan their studies according to their own needs. The only non-variable aspect here is that certain goals need to be reached within a set period of time. If not, students will be forced to repeat modules until the work is completed and specified standards are achieved.

5.3.1. Opinions about the Department of Social Work

The Department of Social Work prides itself in its student-centred approach, which is in line with the theoretical model they teach. I asked respondents to what extent they think this is true. I tested the respondents' opinions on the academic staff and student supervisors to find out what they think are positive and negative aspects about the Department of Social Work.

Table 14:
Respondents' opinions on academic staff and student supervisors

SCALE	ACCESSIBILITY		AVAILABILITY		ATTITUDE		FEEDBACK	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Excellent	22	25	17	19	20	23	23	26
Good	39	43	33	37	36	40	34	37
Reasonable	22	25	26	29	22	24	22	25
Not good	5	5	9	10	6	7	4	4
Very bad	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Unknown	2	2	5	5	5	5	7	8
TOTAL:	90	100	90	100	90	100	90	100

Feedback is generally in favour of the Department of Social Work's staff. Most of the respondents rate the accessibility, availability, attitude and the feedback from academic staff as "excellent" or "reasonable" with most students indicating "good" as their rating. Ten percent of the respondents indicate that the availability of the staff is "not good". This is the only

rating lower than **“reasonable”** with double figures. This gives a very good outcome to the Department of Social Work and also gives me the impression that students see the staff of this Department as more student-centred than some of the other departments at UNISA.

Out of the 90 respondents 81 (90%) respond on what they see as positive at the Department of Social Work. Eighteen of the students comment that lecturers and student supervisors are mostly available and that workshops help them to feel less isolated and more in contact with lecturers. They comment as follows:

- **“You can go to the Department when you have an appointment.”**
- **“They sometimes arrange video-conferences” (Polokwane student).**
- **“My lecturers respond to my emails and are available.”**
- **“Workshops during the module period. At other departments we attend a discussion class only once a year and the lecturer tries to cover the whole syllabus.”**

Fifteen students are impressed with the standard and “user-friendliness” of study guides and tutorial letters and the way in which the Department of Social Work is structured. Some of their comments are as follows:

- **“Study guides are good – you follow the lecturers when you work through them.”**
- **“Study guides are user friendly.”**
- **“We receive our tutorial letters on time.”**
- **“Well-structured course.”**

Students enjoy the content of the course very much. Thirty of the students indicate that they feel that the Department of Social Work goes out of its way to make the course interesting and think that the content is relevant and very practical. The following comments are made in this regard:

- **“They know PCA. We learn from them.”**
- **“They help students to integrate theory into practice.”**
- **“Try to accommodate diversity amongst different cultures of students.”**
- **“The wonderful growth process as from day one – I loved every process!”**

Students also think that the Department of Social Work is the one department where lecturers go out of their way to assist students when they need help. Thirty of them respond positively in

this regard. Some of the responses are as follows:

- **“Helpful, friendly and considerate staff.”**
- **“I think it is much friendlier than other departments.”**
- **“The staff at the Department practice what they teach. I still have to come across a lecturer who is mean or nasty.”**
- **“The head of the Department and senior staff take time to listen and understand us. They know who they are talking to when I phone them.”**

On the negative side there are 52 (58%) respondents who are of the opinion that the Department of Social Work has areas in which they can improve. Students are especially unhappy with the fact that the Department decided during their third level in 2006 that students whose average mark for social work is under 60% will not be allowed to register for certain modules for the forthcoming fourth level and that these students will have to complete the fourth level over a two year period. Sixteen students comment as follows on this:

- **“They set rules without doing research on how those rules will impact on students’ lives. They don’t make sure if the rules are more helpful or more harmful.”**
- **“They change rules anytime they want. We were supposed to be informed of this during our first year, not at third year level.”**
- **“Not allowing students to carry modules over to the fourth level and not notifying students about this new arrangement in time.”**
- **“Sometimes the rules are not well-defined.”**

All these students suggest that a solution for this is to have meetings with the students and involve the students in the planning.

Thirteen of the students want the lecturers to be available to help them with problems concerning their course. They sometimes feel that the lecturers do not see them as important enough and comment as follows:

- **“They don’t have time to discuss our assignments or exam results.”**
- **“Having our assignments with them for a long time.”**
- **“It hurts to lose money when you call and gets put through to someone else and again to someone else – they are shifting responsibility.”**

According to 13 students there are problems concerning the administration and organisation of different aspects at the Department of Social Work. They make the following comments:

- **“Administration stumbling blocks at times.”**
- **“They sometimes give us wrong dates for workshops which shows not good planning.”**
- **“The reception is not so good – I have often been made to wait a long time before being attended to.”**
- **“Video-conferences sometimes gets postponed.”**

From the students' comments I could identify three more negative themes, namely:

- (1) Students feel that the workload for the fourth year is too heavy (15 students – equalling 17%);
- (2) Some are very unhappy with the arrangements made for their practical work and feel that they were treated rudely (five students – equalling 6%);
- (3) Seventeen (19%) students mention negative encounters with the staff and are of the opinion that they are either not treated in a person-centred way or that the staff show favouritism towards certain groups of students.

5.3.2. Workshops

Students in social work need an environment where they can practise skills and learn how to communicate in an empathic way as part of their training. “Face to face sessions ... should be for the purpose of: practising verbal skills of personal communication (and) facilitating the understanding of the communication process and human behaviour” (Osborne, 1985:45).

Students are in general positive about the workshops run by the Department of Social Work. Only a few negative remarks are made in this regard. Some students comment on the workshops itself while a few also address the challenge they have in finding suitable accommodation during workshops. A summary of the challenges and possible solutions is reflected in Table 15 on the following page.

Table 15:
Challenges concerning workshops and solutions as seen by respondents

CHALLENGES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
WORKSHOPS AND THEORETICAL DISCUSSION CLASSES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Poor organisation of workshops." • "I sometimes experience problems at home and cannot attend the practice sessions." • "Finding time to attend workshops." • "Far to attend workshops." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Start workshops on time." • "Organise the venues properly." • "Lecturers should listen to students and their problems."
ACCOMMODATION DURING WORKSHOPS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "There are no hostels for accommodating students in Polokwane – travelling is challenging." • "Accommodation when I go to work-shops." • "There is no student accommodation. I have been struggling with this all along." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Building flats for the far travelling students." • "Having accommodation for students at a reasonable price would be great."

Students were asked about their attendance of workshops. Only four indicate that they do not attend all the workshops. Three of them say that they attend all the compulsory workshops while the fourth student say that he/she could not attend all the workshops due to a clash with discussion classes of one of the other departments.

Twenty seven of the students (30%) have to leave home in the morning before 06:30 in order to get to the workshops on time. One of them leaves at 04:30 and one as early as 02:45. All the other students leave home between 06:30 and 08:00. During half-day workshops most of the students get home before 15:00 while 12 of them (13%) reach home after 15:00. Thirteen students indicate that they get home after 18:00 during full-day workshops. At least one of these students indicates that he/she has to sleep over before going home the next day. From this it is clear to me that some of the students spend as much time, or even more, travelling to and from the workshops than at the workshops themselves.

As students will only start with their fourth year practical work after data for this research was collected, I did not ask them how much time they spend travelling for supervision sessions. I can just hope that student supervisors are located closer for all of these students, especially the ones who have to travel the farthest to get to the workshops.

SUMMARY

Glancing back at this chapter, I have to admit that students seem to have reason to be concerned about many aspects of their studies that were out of their personal control. There is

virtually no area that seems to be problem-free where UNISA cannot in all honesty say that students are **not** carrying an extra burden due to the incapability of the university to assist them with support services. Although students feel more positive about the Department of Social Work, there are also some areas that need attention, especially around planning and administration and the attitude of some of the lecturing staff and student supervisors.

In the following chapter I will look in more detail at the personal situations (living conditions and study conditions) around the studies of the respondents.

CHAPTER 6: LIVING AND STUDY CONDITIONS

INTRODUCTION

The focus in the previous chapter was on the learning institute and how this impact on the life of the student. In this chapter I will continue with the theme of the learning conditions by looking at the living and study conditions of the students. In the living conditions I will focus on the physical place where students are staying and how this contributes or hinders their learning, while the study conditions zooms more into personal issues like work situation, time for study, financial strains and other personal issues.

6.1. LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions can have a huge impact on the study conditions of a student. The environment influences many different aspects concerning the study life of a student. It determines what the study atmosphere is like, how much time there is for studies and eventually also how motivated a student is to study.

Students who study at a residential university are in a physical environment where they are mostly amongst other students. This give them the advantage to “feel” like a student and not as isolated as the student enrolled at a distance learning institution like UNISA. Students enrolled at UNISA come from many different backgrounds and areas – from the richest of the rich to the poorest of the poor. All students studying at a distance learning institution have the disadvantage of having to keep themselves motivated as contact with other students is limited. Having the extra burden of staying in a place that is not study-friendly can make their efforts even more difficult.

In terms of this research I am wondering what the neighbourhoods where the respondents come from look like. Do they mostly stay in cities or do they come from smaller towns and rural areas? What are their perceptions of these areas? What is positive and negative for them about these areas, and how do they experience the safety in their neighbourhoods?

6.1.1. Neighbourhood

A total of 55 of the respondents (61%) live in or around cities. This ranges from suburbs within city boundaries, to townships and informal settlements around the cities. Some of them stay in

suburbs more towards the outskirts of the cities, while others stay in the hearts of the cities. Housing also varies according to the areas where they stay: some stay in properly built houses and others stay in informal housing. The different types of housing will be discussed further on in more detail.

Twelve (13%) of the respondents live in and around smaller towns and townships and 18 (20%) come from rural areas. Rural areas consist basically of two types of areas: some students come from rural, under-developed areas, while others stay on small holdings or farms closer to larger towns or cities. Two of the other nine students stay in homes provided by prison authorities for prison staff. Three of the students did not answer this question.

Students were asked what they see as positive and negative in their areas. Most of the students who stay in and around cities said that they enjoy the fact that there are many resources available and also the diversity within the communities. These are some of the remarks:

- **“It is a decent neighbourhood with formal housing structures. There are well planned roads. We’ve got schools nearby and a university.”**
- **“Relative big family homes with pretty gardens and trees along the road. I live in a quiet street – I can hear children playing outside.”**
- **“Multi-cultural.”**

Students who come from smaller towns and areas emphasise the unity in the community, which is also described as “ubuntu”. Some of the comments are:

- **“Respect for each other and each other’s decisions.”**
- **“Supportive community. Strong group identity. Strong cultural activities.”**
- **“The community stand together. There are lots of resources and diverse members. Finances are available most of the time. People are friendly and kind.”**

The group of students who come from the rural areas and small holdings identify the safety of their areas and farming possibilities as positive aspects in their communities with the following comments:

- **“Quiet place which is very safe. There are farming possibilities.”**
- **“Home based care that visits the ill people. Renovating the street has created jobs.”**

- “Peaceful on the small holdings. Lots of trees and birds.”
- “When a storm strikes a shack, everyone will come to help rebuild immediately.”

The two students who stay in prison provided housing say that the multi-cultural nature of the community is a positive aspect for them.

The negative things in the community that students say should receive attention are listed in Table 16. The data I received is divided into themes and reflected accordingly.

Table 16:
Negative aspects in the different communities where respondents stay

NEGATIVE ASPECT	AREA	n	N=87*	%
<u>Crime</u> : All reference to crime, security, theft, hijacking, etc. is placed under this theme	Cities	55	55	100
	Towns	7	12	58
	Rural	6	18	33
	Prison	0	2	0
<u>Lack of municipal services</u> : Non-maintenance of services, lack of sanitation, electricity and running water, lack of infrastructure like proper roads, transport and resources, etc.	Cities	23	55	42
	Towns	4	12	33
	Rural	14	18	78
	Prison	2	2	100
<u>Lack of recreational facilities</u> : All recreational facilities, youth empowerment and youth groups.	Cities	13	55	24
	Towns	3	12	25
	Rural	7	18	39
	Prison	2	2	100
<u>Youth problems</u> : Alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, gangs, school dropouts, orphans, youth crime, street children and delinquent behaviour.	Cities	21	55	38
	Towns	3	12	25
	Rural	6	18	33
	Prison	0	2	0
<u>Poverty</u> : Low income, unemployment, lack of skills, dependency on state grants.	Cities	18	55	33
	Towns	2	12	17
	Rural	6	18	33
	Prison	0	2	0
<u>Over-crowding</u> : General over-crowding and inefficient housing, pollution and littering, high volume traffic.	Cities	11	55	20
	Towns	3	12	25
	Rural	3	18	17
	Prison	0	2	0
<u>Substance abuse</u> : Alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence.	Cities	6	55	11
	Towns	2	12	17
	Rural	3	18	17
	Prison	0	2	0
<u>Aids</u> : People with HIV and Aids, high mortality rate, high pregnancy rate, prostitution.	Cities	9	55	16
	Towns	2	12	17
	Rural	3	18	17
	Prison	0	2	0
<u>Illegal immigrants</u> : Immigrants, xenophobia.	Cities	3	55	6
	Towns	1	12	8
	Rural	2	18	11
	Prison	0	2	0

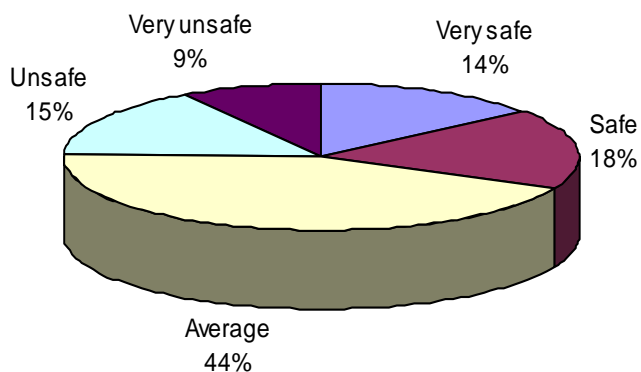
(* Three of the 90 respondents did not answer this question.)

Safety is still one of the biggest burning issues in South Africa. According to De Kock in South Africa.info (2007a) aggravated robbery accounted for 15% of contact crime in South Africa in 2006/2007. House robberies where the residents were confronted by burglars formed another 10% of the aggravated robberies. Hughes (2007) confirms this by saying: "the big cities such as Johannesburg have become seedbeds for robbery and violent hijacking, making crime South Africa's biggest problem. Sometimes it is the work of individuals; sometimes the work of organized gangs."

The South African Police Services state in their report (SAPS, 2007:13): "These phenomena touch the very essence of personal privacy and security of every individual in the RSA. Whenever somebody, wherever in the world, walks or drives around in streets and public places, he/she accepts a degree of security risk and should ideally take this risk into consideration. In most countries foreign tourists are also warned not to go to certain places at certain times of the day. However, one's home (whether it be a shack in Khayelitsha or a three-storey mansion in Sandhurst) is one's castle and forms the centre of one's privacy and personal security. People want to enjoy their gardens, the shade of the trees on their properties, using their driveways and sometimes also additional amenities such as pools or other recreational features. According to docket analysis by the CIAC of the SAPS, it seems as if most carjacking (70%+) occur either on residential premises or in front of residences during the first semester of 2007/2008" (sic).

The respondents of this research were asked how safe they think their neighbourhoods are. The result is given in Pie diagram 8.

**Pie diagram 8:
Student perceptions of safety of neighbourhoods**



As 44% of the students are of the opinion that the safety in their area is "average", I had to find out what they mean by this. To my surprise all of the 44% respondents are in some way or

another concerned about their own safety, or about the safety of their property. Some of them mentioned small incidents like **“washing on the line”** being stolen, or a window of a house being broken, but many of them also indicate larger issues, for example:

- **“Hijackings, house breaking, armed robberies. You cannot walk alone freely, especially at night. But we are near the police station and there are security and alarmed response units in the area.”**
- **“Staying in a township, you get used to the lifestyle. We discourage people to walk alone at night.”**
- **“Safe? Where is one safe in South Africa?”**
- **“We had numerous attempted break-ins.”**
- **“It is safe if you stay indoors or interact with neighbours during daytime. It is not safe at night – you can be mugged and there are housebreaking.”**
- **“Living in a city is dangerous. We have been blessed to not have been touched by crime.”**

South African citizens are truly desensitised for crime. How bad does it have to become for these students before they indicate the situation as “unsafe” or “very unsafe”? The fact that safety and security lay in things like alarmed response units, staying near a police station and police forums indicates that people are actually not feeling safe; why else do they need these measures? One student mentions that he/she feel “blessed” for not having had any encounters with crime. Shouldn’t all citizens feel safe irrespective, and not only if they are being “blessed”?

All these remarks clearly showed me that the UNISA student has to cope with an extra burden that normally is not taken into account: they are burdened with their own safety. These students are studying at home where they have to lock themselves in for safety reasons. They have to travel to UNISA, fearing that their cars might be hijacked or that they might get mugged when using public transport. They have to watch out for people loitering around at the UNISA campuses and there is no safety in visiting other students for moral support.

6.1.2. Housing:

6.1.2.1. Resettlement

Twenty eight of the respondents indicate that they have to move closer to a UNISA facility for the sake of their studies. This seemingly unimportant question indicates that almost a third of the students (31%) were obliged to change their stability in terms of their physical area and

resettle in a new area. For some students this change is very traumatic, which is clearly indicated by the following comments:

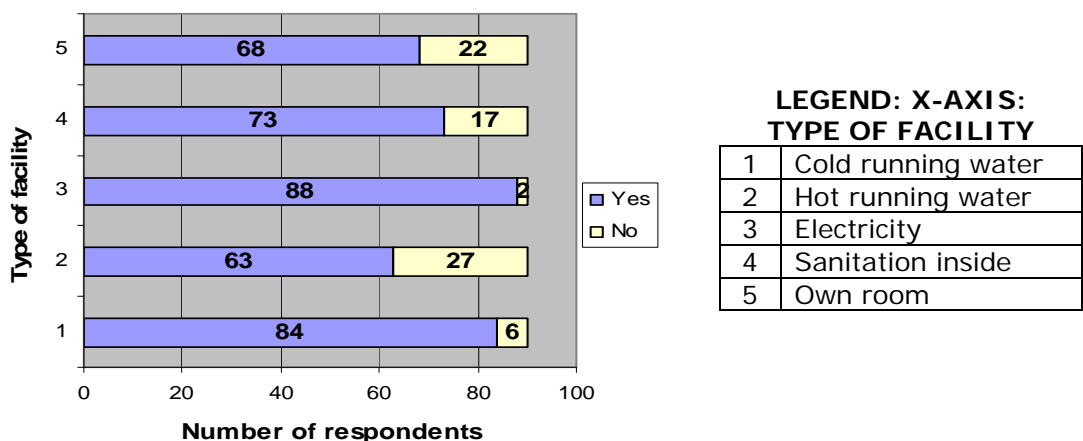
- **“I struggled to accept that I am alone and missed my family a lot.”**
- **“It was hard for me.”**
- **“I had to move into a shack. It is very uncomfortable – cold in winter and hot in summer.”**
- **“It depresses me to stay on someone else’s property.”**

6.1.2.2. Physical setup at home

The type of housing students live in, vary over the whole spectrum as found in South Africa: 26 students stay in large brick houses, 20 in smaller brick houses, seven in RDP houses, five in townhouses and 13 in apartments. Seven of the other students stay in informal houses (“shacks”) and seven rent rooms, while another student stay in a convent hostel and one rents a garden cottage. Three students did not answer this question.

Many of the respondents indicate that they are not happy with the municipal services rendered in their neighbourhoods and I wanted to know what type of facilities they have at home. I also wondered how many of them have the privilege of an own bedroom as this would give them an advantage over those who do not have such a personal haven.

**Graph 5:
Facilities at home**



These results came as a surprise to me. I thought that there would be more students without some of the facilities mentioned above. The aspect which surprised me most is that only two of the respondents say that they do not have electricity at home. The fact that 27 students say

that they have no running hot water, while only six of them don't have running water at all, indicates that most of these 27 respondents' residences probably are not fitted with a water heater (geyser). The most negative outcome in terms of the students' study situations is the fact that 22 (24%) of them do not have an own bedroom or private space where they can study, especially since 86% of them indicate that they mostly study at home.

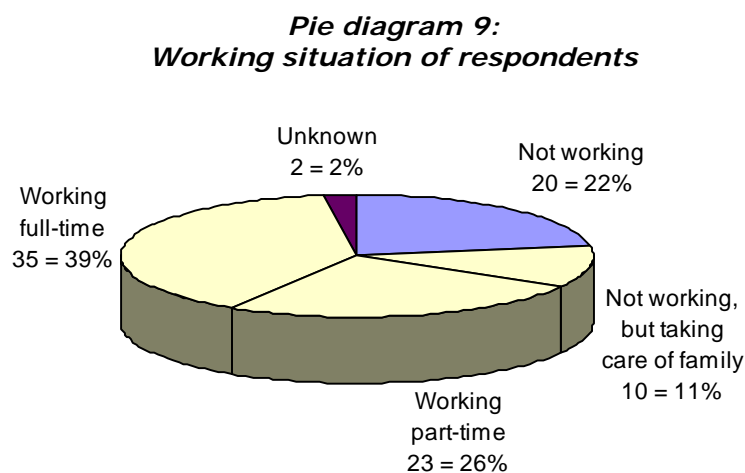
6.2. STUDY CONDITIONS

In this section I concentrate on the conditions around the studies of the students and not there physical environment as such. The aspects covered here consist of practical and personal issues around their studies. On the practical side I want to know how much time the respondents have available for their studies, whether they are working and what other responsibilities they have at home. I am also wondering who is responsible for the payment of their tuition fees and how long they have been busy with their studies. On a more personal side I want to know what their support structures look like and how they stay motivated to study.

6.2.1. Practical issues

6.2.1.1. Time for study

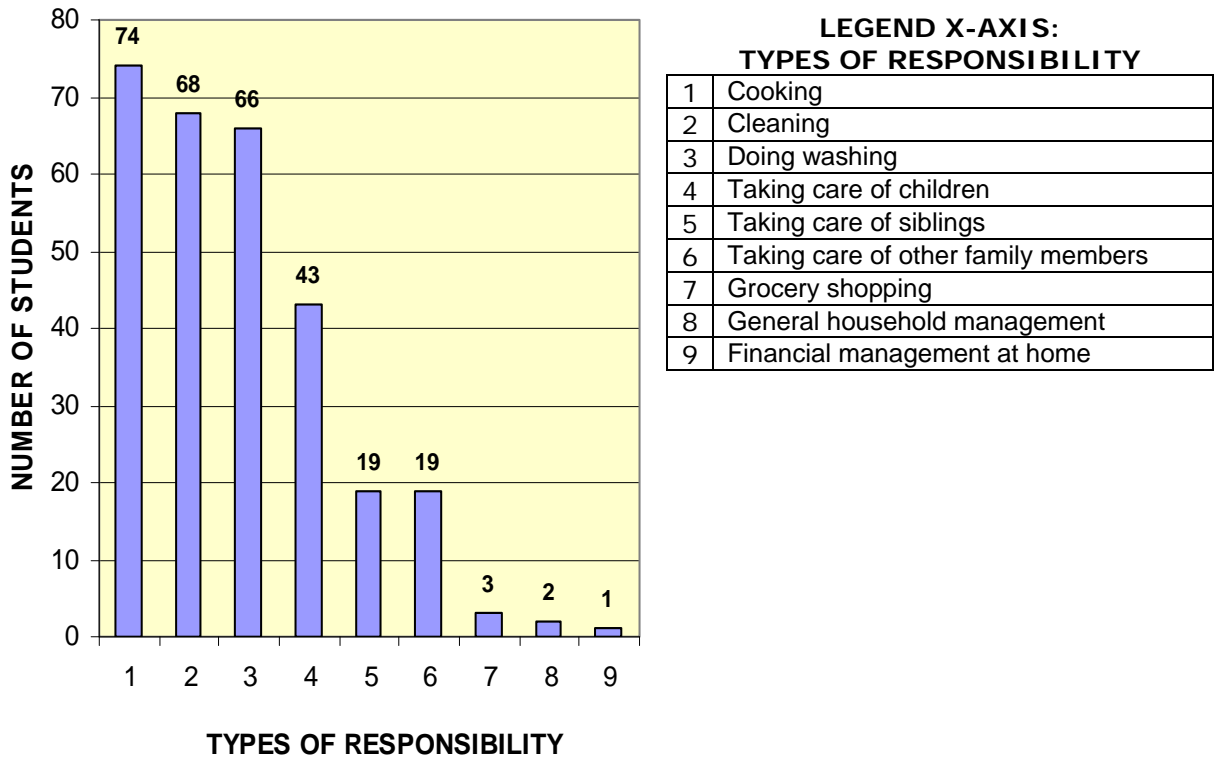
With UNISA being a distance learning institute, it would be correct to assume that many of the students are working while studying on a part-time base. The following pie diagram gives an indication of the working situation of the respondents:



Fifty eight of the students are working with 35 of them working fulltime and the others on a part-time base. Another ten respondents who are not working have the responsibility of taking

care of family members, either children or other family members. This means that a total of 76% of the students have other responsibilities over and above their studies. Some of the 22% who are not working and not taking care of family members still have other household responsibilities. Graph 6 gives an indication of the responsibilities students have, over and above their studies.

Graph 6:
Type of responsibilities of respondents

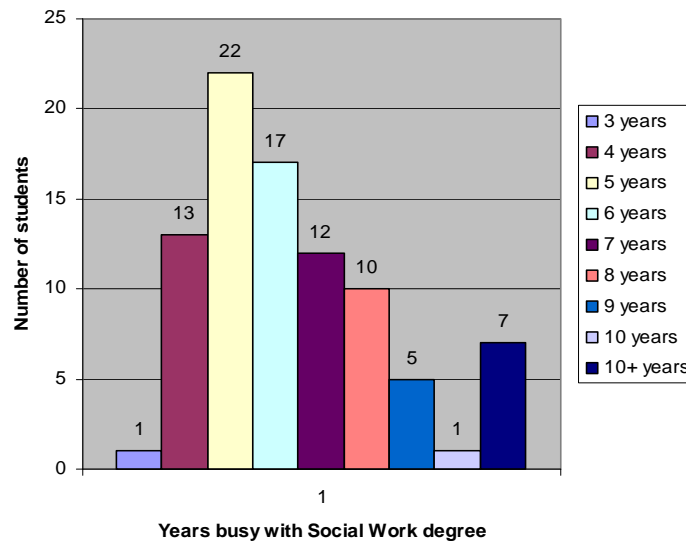


It is clear that the UNISA student have more than their studies to consider in terms of their time. From this small group of respondents at least 82% have other responsibilities to fulfil, which ranges from bringing in an income, to caring for children and taking responsibility for a household.

6.2.1.2. Study timeline

The previous paragraph clearly shows that most of the respondents have limited time for their studies. This links to my preliminary conclusion in Chapter 3 where I made the statement that I assume that many of the students cannot complete their degree within the four year allocated period. I asked students how long they have been busy with their degree and if they have taken any breaks in their study timeline.

Graph 7:
Timeline of studies in Social Work (N=88)



According to Graph 7, only 14 (15%) of the respondents are aiming to complete their studies within four years. Most of the respondents (24%) hope to complete within a five year period and another 19% within a six year period. Seven students have been busy with their studies for longer than 10 years. The average time the students take to complete the degree is 6½ years. This confirms my first assumption in Chapter 3, namely that most students cannot complete their degree within the minimum allocated period of four years.

The other assumption in Chapter 3 was that students do not start with studies directly after leaving school. If students do start directly after finishing school, at an average of 18 years of age during their first enrolment, they should not be older than 25 years when completing the degree after 6½ years. As the average ages of the respondents are closer to 33 years, my second assumption is thus also confirmed.

Both of these confirmations show me that it is extremely difficult for these students to find the necessary time for their studies, especially as this data has been collected at the beginning of their fourth year, which is traditionally the most difficult year for the student in social work.

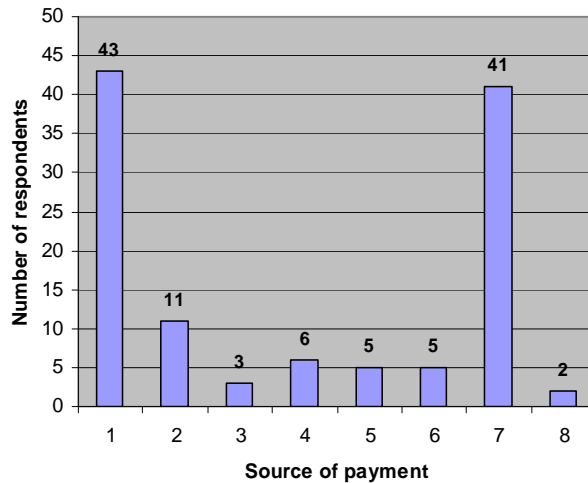
A total of 31 of the respondents also indicate that they have taken a break of at least one year since they started their studies. Nine of them interrupted their studies due to financial difficulties and two due to work obligations. Three of the respondents went through a difficult time due to death in the family, while another four of the ladies interrupted their studies due to a pregnancy. The other 13 students had problems with the course, for example not meeting the requirements to register immediately for the next level, or not registering in time.

6.2.1.3. Payment of studies

As mentioned in the previous section, nine (10%) of the respondents have interrupted their studies due to financial difficulties. This makes perfect sense, since I discussed the fact that parents are in general not in a position to assist the students financially with their studies in Chapter 4 (paragraph 4.3.1.4). This being the case, and with 37% of the respondents either married or living with a partner, I wondered how many of the respondents are financially supported by their partners. As for the other respondents, who then are responsible for payment for their studies?

The data reflected in Graph 8 shows that most of the students pay for their own studies, with almost as many of them relying on a study loan. Parents and other family members pay for 14 of the respondents' studies, while only three of them are assisted by their husbands. Ten students are financially sponsored by either a bursary, or their employer who pay for the studies. Twenty six of the respondents have more than one way of paying for there studies, bringing the total (N) to 116.

Graph 8:
Payment of studies



LEGEND X-AXIS: SOURCE OF PAYMENT	
1	Self
2	Parents
3	Husband
4	Family members
5	Employer
6	Bursary
7	Study loan
8	Other

6.2.2. Personal situation

Each person is unique with unique perceptions (*Proposition 1 and 2*). Each person is also a whole being with the sum of the total more than the sum of the different parts (*Proposition 3*). With each of the respondents entering the social work curriculum from a different background and unique context, it speaks for itself that the personal situation of each student is also unique and each student has to be considered within their different contexts.

This next area of exploration is the personal situation of each student. Who are their support structures and what are their concerns around their studies and futures? I, once again, will look for themes from the gathered data to present to the reader.

6.2.2.1. Support structure

Table 17:
Support systems of respondents

SUPPORT SYSTEM	N*
Partner	44
Family	31
Parents / mother / father	27
Siblings	10
Children	10
Friends / colleagues	22
UNISA personnel / co-students	17
God / faith	2
No support system at all	4
TOTAL:	167*

(* Respondents could fill in more than one source of support)

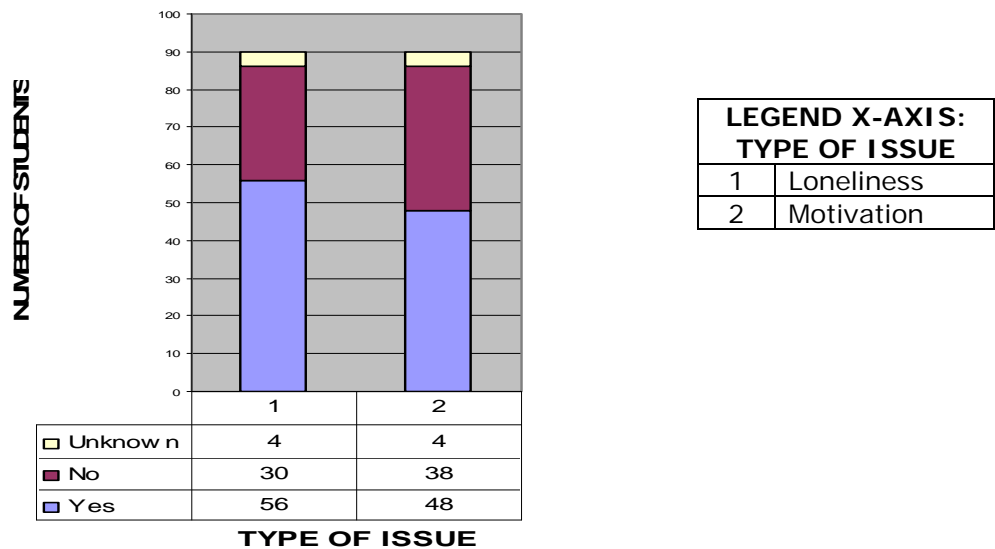
As can be seen from Table 17, most of the respondents find their support from people close to them. These are mostly indicated as partners and their families. The students state this support in many different ways. The main description is emotional support, help in and around the house (especially partners), financial assistance and encouragement from others to complete their studies. Man is not an island (*Proposition 9*) and especially if you are a part-time student, life can get very difficult with high demands.

My concern is thus alerted by the fact that four of the students say that they have no support systems whatsoever. These respondents will possibly feel very lonely and isolated, especially if they cannot even find support in their co-students or student supervisor. I am a bit concerned about how, and if, they will be able to work in a team once they complete their studies, as my perception of the career of a social worker is one of teamwork. Hoffman (1990: 164-165) emphasises the need of the fourth level student for support from the field practice teacher and the course co-ordinator. The respondents of this research project have just started their fourth level. I can just hope that the four students who presently have no support systems will, during the course of their fourth level, find support from their field practice teachers (student supervisors) and the colleagues they work with at the social work settings where they are placed for their practical training.

6.2.2.2. Personal issues

Through all my conversations with UNISA students over the years, the one message I heard over and over again, was that it is difficult to stay motivated if you have to study on your own. I thus asked the students how they feel about this and if they sometimes feel lonely. On both these questions I asked them how they deal with this and what they think can be done in this regard.

**Graph 9:
Personal issues**



In both cases more than half of the respondents indicated that they sometimes struggle with motivation and loneliness, although a higher number struggle with feeling lonely.

Students mostly indicate that loneliness should to be addressed by UNISA (34 students). They feel that it is the university’s responsibility and not theirs. They suggest more workshops, more visits from lecturers to regional offices, more video conferences and tutorial classes over week-ends or in the evening. Two students see no solution for this problem while nine think it is their own responsibility as students to do something about this. They say that students have to form study groups, contact lecturers more often and visit UNISA more often. One student says that the Department of Social Work is doing enough in this regard while another student says that students should not enrol for this course if they know beforehand that correspondence is a lonely process, and thus should be prepared to deal with it.

All students accept the responsibility to keep motivated. Most of them indicate that they are focussed on their goal to complete their studies. Some of the descriptions are as follows:

- **"I always remind myself about what I want to achieve in life."**
- **"I interact with positive people and read motivational books."**
- **"I tell myself that other students have completed their studies."**
- **"I stick to my life philosophy that life is art and I am the artist myself."**
- **"By going to the library I get motivated."**

I believe that all students go through times when they feel less motivated. In the case of the UNISA student the difference is, however, that there are no other students around them to help them to keep motivated. They have to find the strength in themselves. This is also a confirmation of the will-power and strength of the UNISA students, as discussed in Chapter 3.

6.2.2.3. Language problems

In Chapter 3 I discussed the fact that 75% of the students have to hand in their written work in a second language, while 82% of them have to participate in class in a second language. With English being the predominant language in South Africa at the moment, students were asked if they have problems to communicate either orally or in their written work. Twenty two of them have indicated that they do indeed have problems with this. Another 11 of the respondents say that they have no problems, but my perception, from the standard of their feedback in the questionnaires, proofed differently.

Being in the position of writing this research report in my second language as well, I can very well identify with most of the students who struggle with this issue. I asked them what they do to better their English. Eight of the students say that they read more English and another eight that they make use of a dictionary. The others say they try to speak more English, ask people to proof-read their work before submitting, listen to English radio stations and use the spell checking facility on a computer. One student suggests that the UNISA lecturers should use simpler vocabulary, thus again making this UNISA's problem.

6.2.2.4. Concerns around studies

In the last section of this chapter I want to address the concerns the students have about their futures. What will happen if they do not complete their course? On the other hand, what are their concerns once they do complete their studies?

Table 18:
Concerns of respondents if they do not complete their studies

CONCERN	N*	COMMENTS OF STUDENTS
Having to pay back a loan or bursary	62	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I am struggling financially already." • "It is the last year I am getting a loan, so I will have to pay it back."
Being a financial burden on family or a general financial setback.	46	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I will feel that I have wasted a lot of time an money and haven't achieved anything." • "I will have to work as an auxiliary worker." • "I will have to stay in the backyard of other people for a longer period of time." • "I am a financial burden to my husband."
Disappointing family members or other important people.	31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My family expects me to complete my studies this year." • "My family is depending on me – I cannot let them down." • "My mom always says she doesn't want to pass on before I have graduated." • "I promised my wife that I will complete my studies now."
Disappointing the self.	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My life will be devastated." • "I will become depressed, because I don't like the life I am now living." • "I have been studying for so long now. I am desperate to become a social worker and reach my goal."
No being able to make a difference in people's lives.	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "If I don't complete my degree, I will not be able to help people with their problems, as I want to." • "I really want to practice as social worker and my dream will never come true."
No real effect.	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It will have no effect on my life." • "It will not be that bad if I fail. I will just have to pick up and move on."
Students state that they will not fail.	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I will not fail. I am a hard worker. I will pass with good results."

(* Students could give more than one concern)

Table 18 clearly shows that the respondents' greatest concerns are around their financial situation, paying back their study loans (108 comments in this regard) and disappointing their families and themselves (77 comments).

The concerns of the respondents once they complete their studies can be seen in the Table 19 on the following page.

Table 19:
Concerns of respondents after completion of studies

CONCERN	N*	COMMENTS OF STUDENTS
Having to pay back a loan or bursary	69	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I will not be able to afford the things I want if I have to pay back my loan." • "Some people say paying off your loan is like a life sentence." • "I will have to pay back half of my bursary which will be hard." • "I feel I don't want to work for the Health Department anymore, but will have to because of my obligations."
Earning a small income while trying to make ends meet	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I would like to be independent." • "I am scared that my salary will not be able to support my own family and my younger sister's studies." • "With a small salary I will not be able to achieve my goal like to give back to my parents." • "I am not sure if I will be able to buy a car and a subsidised house with the small salary."
Having to find a post as social worker	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I am not 100% sure that I will be a social worker by 1 January next year. I have to be marketable enough to find a job." • "I wonder if I will ever be good enough to be hired by an organisation."
Feeling scared to start working	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I will have to work with problems." • "I don't want to rust." • "My employer would expect me to apply my knowledge." • "I am worried if I will be a good social worker and be able to use all the theory I was taught."
Achieving high enough marks to further studies	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I want to start with my Masters Degree."
No concerns	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I am not worried about anything." • "I am looking forward to being in the field." • "I will enjoy working and am looking forward to it." • "I am already in my line of work."

(* Students could give more than one concern)

Once again most students are concerned about their financial situation. Sixty nine of them have to either pay back loans, or work back bursaries. Sixteen of the respondents are concerned whether their income will be enough to support them fully, while some of them also want to contribute to their families. Some students are also concerned if, and where, they will find work once they complete their studies.

SUMMARY

Looking back at this chapter, I became aware, once again, of how difficult, or even desperate, the personal situations of some of the students are. Although there are certainly many positive things around their circumstances, especially in terms of their support systems, we cannot overlook the fact that so many of the students are actually affected by:

- Crime;
- Poor housing situations;
- Working responsibilities;
- Household responsibilities;
- Very difficult financial situations; and
- Sometimes bleak futures due to the low remuneration of social workers while being burdened by study loans.

The following chapter will be the last one where I will discuss data collected from the respondents. At this stage, the main theme that I feel has not yet been addressed, is their feelings about social work as a career. Why did they want to become social workers in the first place? Do they still want to pursue this career? And how do they see the future of social work for themselves?

CHAPTER 7: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL WORK AS PROFESSION

INTRODUCTION

In the previous three chapters I discussed the study and personal life situations of the fourth year social work students at UNISA. In this chapter I will concentrate on how they perceive social work as a profession, why they want to become social workers and how they see the future of social work as a career for themselves.

7.1. SOCIAL WORK STUDIES

7.1.1. Motivation for studying social work

Why did these respondents want to become social workers in the first place? Do they still want to be social workers now, after more than three years of study? Most of the students indicate that they initially wanted to become social workers to make a difference in other people's lives. This is mentioned by 59 of the students (63%). Some of their responses are as follows:

- **"I wanted to help people – young and old – to cope with their different experiences."**
- **"I hoped that I could make a difference to my community."**
- **"I wanted to work with people in a practical hands-on way. I studied psychology, but found it very theoretical and abstract."**
- **"I felt social workers do a great job. It is all I ever wanted to be."**

Nineteen of the respondents (21%) say that they were unsure what social work was about when they started the course and thought that it would be an easy course to study. They comment as follows:

- **"I didn't have a clue what social workers do, except that they remove children."**
- **"I thought it would be easy and I would just pass, but I realised it needs dedication and hard work."**
- **"I had a different view of social work than now."**

Five of the students say that they actually wanted to study something else and ended up studying social work. All of them, however, admitted that they enjoy social work and commented as follows:

- **“I did social work by default. I wanted to do clinical psychology, but was advised that I was too old. I think social work was a better option.”**
- **“I had no choice because of the general subjects from Grade 12.”**
- **“Social work was not my career at all. My cousin suggested it to me. Along the way I discovered that I had a passion for people and enjoyed doing the course. It is the best choice that I ever made in terms of my future.”**

Two students say that they are not interested in becoming social workers any longer. The one decided to complete the course because he/she feel it would be an unaccomplished goal if left incomplete, while the other one wants to use social work as a stepping stone in another direction.

All the other students indicate that they still want to be social workers. All of them say that the present reason for this was because they feel they are equipped to help people and want to plough something back into their communities. Everyone wants to make a difference wherever they stay and work. This ties up with the statement of Hoffman (1990:217): “The age and background experience with which students enter social work study vary greatly from country to country and between university and university. The career development goals students strive for influence their expectations of the social work education they receive. Yet for some students, especially those who come from disadvantaged societal groups or who have been educationally unprepared for university education, goals and expectations are inextricably bound up with a personal commitment to societal change and development. Whereas their fellow students from different milieu may not necessarily share the commitment to the same degree, they themselves demand relevance in social work education.”

7.1.2. Influence of background on decision to study social work

Twenty one of the students say that the environment where they grew up had an influence on their decision to study social work. They comment as follows:

- **“I chose it because I wanted to help my neighbours. The lady next door was abused by her husband and I wanted to help her.”**

- **“I live in a rural area and want to make a difference at home. There is a lot of alcoholism and domestic violence.”**
- **“Many orphans in the community who need help.”**

Twenty nine of the respondents say that they had negative past experiences, which varied from poverty to sexual abuse. All of them want to prevent others from going through the same difficulty and hope that they will be able to make a difference by helping others who go through a difficult time. They comment as follows:

- **“I had marital problems before I studied social work. I thought I would be able to sort out my problems and find answers.”**
- **“My one brother is HIV positive.”**
- **“I was in an abusive relationship with my ex-boyfriend.”**
- **“We were so poor and there was no social worker who came to our rescue.”**

Twenty three students had positive past experiences of the helping profession and respond as follows:

- **“I grew up in a family that cared for the needy.”**
- **“Where I come from, there was a social worker who was a close friend of my mother.”**
- **“As a nun my first mission is to love and care for people.”**
- **“I saw what social workers do in rural areas so I thought I can bring light into my community.”**

Most of the respondents surely have a story to tell and these comments give just a glimpse of why students want to pursue a career in the helping professions. These stories also indicate how their past experiences contribute to these decisions.

7.2. SOCIAL WORK AS PROFESSION

7.2.1. Social work methods

Social work is a profession with a wide spectrum of work. Although all work implicates working with people, the scale on which this takes place differs tremendously, depending on the type of work a social worker is employed to do. With 88 of the 90 respondents still eager to enter the

social work profession, I wanted to know what kind of work they prefer to do. Answers to this question are given in Table 20.

Table 20:
Preferred methods of social work

METHOD	N*
Case Work (work with families and individuals)	49
Group Work (work with small groups)	21
Community Development (work with smaller and larger communities)	30
Statutory Work (preventative, statutory intervention, after care and rehabilitation services)	11
TOTAL:	111*

(* Some students have indicated more than one method as their first choice)

The students who prefer casework as primary method mostly say that they prefer to work on a one-on-one base on a more intimate level. Some of the reasons why they prefer this, is as follows:

- **"To help individuals and families to heal their emotional experiences."**
- **"Help people rediscover the meaning of life."**
- **"Seeing the personal growth of a child in distress."**
- **"To make people realise that they are the experts and can make the change they wish for."**

Most of the students who say they will like to do groupwork, say that they like the idea of the group members who can support each other in the group. They mention the following:

- **"There is a lot of sharing and learning from each other."**
- **"People will feel safe and see that they are not alone."**

Students also mention that the group members will be a helping aid to the group worker by making the following comments:

- **"When you get stuck, you can be rescued by group members."**
- **"I want to get more opinions from different people."**

Community development is the favourite of many students, due to the fact that they will be able reach a large group of people. They believe that it will be possible to change the whole community through community development. These are some of their comments:

- **“I will not be empowering one person, but developing the whole community.”**
- **“Helping people realise that they have the potential to change their lives for the better.”**
- **“Seeing community members participating in projects that they have identified. Seeing that they are self-reliant and sustainable.”**
- **“Being part of a collective action process.”**

Up to the third year students are not exposed to statutory work on a practical level. It is normally only during the fourth year that students are confronted with the daunting task of undertaking court investigations after being involved in preventative work. This is also their first opportunity to work through the whole process, which also includes the court investigation, court proceedings and planning for the after services. In spite of their uncertainty of what this exactly entails, 11 students say that they will like to be involved in this for the following reasons:

- **“To give a better life to those in need.”**
- **“To stand in the middle and help people resolve their disputes.”**
- **“To help minors facing criminal charges and to investigate their backgrounds.”**
- **“The fact that someone who is in conflict with the law is given a second chance.”**

7.2.2. Learning needs of respondents

At the beginning of the fourth year students should feel equipped to start with their practical work at the social work settings where they are placed. As part of this research students were asked what they think they still need to know before they can enter practice as qualified social workers. This will give an indication of what they think the gaps in their knowledge base are that still need attention during their final year of training.

Table 21:
Learning needs of respondents

NEEDS OF RESPONDENTS	n*
Working in a practical setting with real clients	35
Statutory work	13
Implementing theory into practice	6
Office administration and planning of work	5
Learning to work with children and working in a more creative way in general	5

(* These numbers are only those that I could interpret as themes from the qualitative data I received on this question.)

Two students say that they need to sort out their personal lives before they can be ready to enter practice. Eight students say that there is nothing more they need to know. They say that they believe that they will be ready by the end of their practical work of the fourth year. Some of the other needs that students mention are the following:

- **“I still need to learn how to work with people who don’t want to co-operate.”**
- **“I still want to work with the offender in prison and with prostitutes.”**
- **“To be able to practice in the private sector as a social worker in private practice.”**
- **“How do I stop a person who wants to commit suicide?”**
- **“Dealing with people who are sick – I don’t know how to work with them.”**

Needs are individual according to the individuality of each student (*Propositions 1 and 5*). The needs of the students will also change during the course of their fourth year. New needs will surface while some of the needs mentioned here will be met during the course of the fourth year and others will fade into the background.

7.2.3. Respondents’ views of the working conditions of social workers

Child Welfare South Africa embarked on a research project in 2003/2004 to gain information on the working conditions of social workers employed by the respective Child Welfare organisations in South Africa. The results were described as “shocking”. Eighty two percent of the social workers earned an income of below R7000 per month, of which 49% earned less than R3500 (Child Welfare South Africa [s.a.]). According to the same research findings, the salaries of social workers in the Gauteng Department of Social Services were 20% higher on average, thus still being under R9000 per month.

Students largely agree with these results. Sixty four of the 77 respondents who answered this question (83%) agree that the salaries are poor. Some of the remarks are quite harsh:

- **“It is a crime. Social workers are professionals who went through tough training for four years. When it comes to salaries, this is not recognised.”**
- **“It seems that the government does not appreciate the work we are doing as social workers.”**
- **“Without a good salary, they will fall into the trap of unmotivated workers.”**
- **“Ridiculous – they should be paid more.”**
- **“Realistically speaking: pathetic.”**

Four of the students are not negative about the salary. They say that they want to be a social worker and do not care that the remuneration is low.

Working conditions are not seen as great either. According to Child Welfare South Africa [s.a.] 36% of their workers carried a caseload of more than 100 and 63% a caseload of more than 60. Another negative factor that was pointed out by this research, is that 61% of the workers had less than five years experience, thus indicating a high staff turnover. Students were asked what they think of the working conditions of social workers. Eighty five of the respondents answered this question of whom 66 (78%) feel that the working conditions are not favourable. Reasons for this differ again according to the perceptions students have about the working conditions of social workers. Students mentioned high caseloads, high stress levels with burnout, difficult working situations and poor resources as negative aspects.

7.2.4. Respondents' views of the working opportunities for social workers

Although the respondents still have a final year of study ahead of them, I am wondering how they see their working opportunities. I am also wondering how many of them plan to find work in South Africa and how many of them want to leave the country and look for work elsewhere.

Eighty two students answered the question on how they see working opportunities in South Africa of whom only nine (11%) are negative about the possibility of work in South Africa. Although the others are positive, many of them mention the low salaries as a stumbling block.

Some of the positive comments are the following:

- **"Social work is a scarce profession."**
- **"Opportunities are very good – social workers are in demand."**
- **"There is currently a huge need for social workers because of HIV Aids."**
- **"There is a lot of opportunities but the salary level is low."**
- **"Extremely needed, but salaries are low."**

Eighty students give an opinion on how they feel about working opportunities outside South Africa. Fourteen of these respondents (18%) said that they are unsure about this or are unsure what the overseas working opportunities look like. Of the other 66 respondents, 10 (15%) said that opportunities are good, but they do not consider moving overseas. Two of the respondents indicate that they have already started to make enquiries to go overseas, while the others did not mention whether they will consider it or not.

SUMMARY

This last data chapter looked at the student as future social workers. Most of them still want to be professional social workers so that they can make a difference to their clients' worlds, be that an individual, a family, a group or a community. Students feel, in general, sufficiently equipped to start with their practical work for the fourth year and many of them also believe that they will be knowledgeable enough to start working once they complete this difficult leg (the fourth level) of their studies.

The working conditions of social workers have long been a point of concern and discussion within the social work profession and it seems to be improving only very slowly indeed. This impact negatively on the prospects students have about social work. Almost all of them feel negative about their future salary and working conditions, although they are positive about working opportunities in South Africa. With poor working conditions and poor salaries, there is a real possibility that many of the students will eventually find themselves abroad, or may leave the social work profession.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

At this stage, all that is left is to review the process and give reflections on my findings, trying to indicate a piece of the road forward. In this final chapter I will try to reflect on the research process as a whole, where I will evaluate the validity and reliability of the outcome of the research. I will also give conclusions and recommendations concerning the data I received as a means to try and direct a way forward.

Reflecting back on the whole process, I am very much aware of the following:

- This specific research project only includes a very small number of respondents, compared to the total number of students studying social work at the Department of Social Work at UNISA.
- This group of respondents only represents the final year students and the findings will have to be generalised with caution. No level one to three students participated in the project and results may deviate when using these students as respondents.
- This group of respondents are the final year students of only one specific year and it will also be unfair to assume that fourth years over the coming years will all respond in the same way.
- This research project could only touch very lightly on the lives of these respondents. All respondents will have much more to say if further research is carried out, focusing more in depth into some of the aspects I have tried to cover.
- All qualitative data that I discuss is only a tip of all the information I received.
- All interpretations are my personal interpretations and all themes are organised the way I decided to do it.

8.1. REFLECTIONS

8.1.1. Motivation for research

The motivation for this research was to explore the personal contexts of the fourth level students in social work at UNISA. At the Department of Social Work there is a lack of information concerning the personal contexts of the undergraduate students. Without this knowledge, it is impossible for the Department of Social Work to try and render support to students and to

accommodate and utilise the unique life experiences of students to the benefit of all learners.

The findings of this project brought a lot of information that gives only a glimpse of the personal contexts of the students, which can hopefully be put to use in the future planning of the Department of Social Work.

8.1.2. Research goal and objectives

In revisiting the research goal, I refer the reader back to paragraph 1.2 in Chapter 1. My main question was: "What does the personal context of the undergraduate student in social work at the University of South Africa look like?" The answer would be found in a study of as many as possible different aspects of their lives. This would give me a picture of "wholeness" (*Proposition 3*). These aspects include their family backgrounds, present family situations and accompanying responsibilities, their study and living conditions, the conditions at UNISA and how they perceive themselves and their future as social workers.

I believe that most of these questions are answered, although I am of the opinion that I could explore only the most basic issues of each aspect focussed on. Each of these aspects can be a field of study on its own. Through this study I only try to make the Department of Social Work aware of the needs and strengths of these students, hoping that this will trigger further research and hoping that some of this information will be taken into consideration when planning new curricula in future.

The objectives as discussed in paragraph 1.2.2 in Chapter 1 are partially met, namely:

- I believe that the data gathered and interpreted is far more than is needed for a study of limited scope. Yet I believe that I managed to present the relevant data in a concise and understandable format.
- Concerning the literature study, I only managed to find very limited information at the UNISA library and thus had to expand my search much wider to the Internet, which was a wonderful new experience to me.
- I also tried to withhold myself from using too much literature, as the focus of this research was on exploring a very wide variety of aspects which I needed space for in this report.

- I have shared my new understanding with the Department of Social Work at this stage of the research only as far as I have handed in the different chapters of the report to my study leader. I believe that the Department of Social Work will take broader notice of its content once the final document is handed in. I believe that I will also get the opportunity to share a summary of the content of this report verbally with the lecturing staff at the Department of Social Work. I understand that UNISA, as a larger institute, is also awaiting the results of this report and am thrilled to say that this is exactly what I meant when discussing “multiple binocular vision” in paragraph 1.2.1 in Chapter 1.

In paragraph 1.2.3 (Chapter 1) the value of this research was indicated as the broadening of my own knowledge-base of the undergraduate student in social work, and through sharing this new knowledge with the academics in the Department of Social Work, I also hoped to broaden their knowledge-base. I believe that this will be the case once this report is finalised. An even broader knowledge-base will be created when this information is shared with UNISA at large; thus placing an even higher value on this research project.

8.1.3. Research method and sampling

The research design for this project is indicated as basic research of a qualitative and quantitative nature according to exploratory and descriptive methods within a limited time dimension. All of these criteria are met.

I believe that the sampling and data collection were executed in a scientific way. The probability sampling, resulting in a 79% response, is extremely high and I believe that this makes the interpretation of data as valid and reliable as can be expected in this kind of research.

8.1.4. Difficulties encountered

Although not all fourth level students had the opportunity to participate in this project, due to administrative problems concerning the registration of students, I believe that those who did participate give a good indication of their personal contexts and make this a useful sample for the research project.

Concerning finding appropriate literature, as described in paragraph 8.1.2 (Chapter 8), as well as the fact that I could not visit the UNISA library as often as I would have liked (having relocated to the United Arab Emirates early in my studies), this presented its own challenges I had to overcome.

8.2. CONCLUSIONS

In order to reach meaningful conclusions, I once again take the liberty to theme certain data I received together. First of all I want to evaluate the use of the theoretical model I used. After that I will revisit the different themes I identified. As these are my own perception of the themes, I am sure that someone else will be able to identify other themes which can be just as relevant as the ones I choose to discuss here.

8.2.1. The theoretical model

Starting off my conclusions I want to evaluate the use of the theoretical model I chose for this research project, which is the Person Centred Approach of Carl Rogers (1951). This model has shown itself reliable and applicable to the study. By using this theoretical model as a foundation, I could bring the personal contexts of the students in perspective according to my own frame of reference and my personal reality. This theoretical model also made it possible for me to break the information down into more manageable pieces.

8.2.2. Responsibilities

Analysis of the data clearly shows the overwhelming load of responsibilities the respondents are carrying. Responsibilities go far beyond responsibilities around their studies. Students are burdened with other personal responsibilities as well. This is a different picture from the responsibilities of most of the students at residential universities where most of the students can devote all their time to their studies.

The following conclusions can be made regarding the extra responsibilities the respondents are carrying:

8.2.2.1. Responsibilities at work

Most students study through UNISA because they are working. This group of respondents are no exception. Almost two-thirds of the respondents are working, most of them fulltime, leaving them relative little time for study.

8.2.2.2. Responsibilities concerning children

With more than half of the respondents being parents, a large group of students there-

fore also have the responsibility of parenthood to carry, together with their study responsibilities. As discussed in paragraph 4.2.2.1 (Chapter 4), most of these student-parents have to take care of children who are still fairly young. Most of the children are either still at school or pre-schoolers. The input in terms of responsibility for these children is understandably higher than those of students with grown-up children.

8.2.2.3. Household responsibilities

As discussed in paragraph 3.1.1 (Chapter 3), 78% of the respondents are female. Combining this information with the fact that the average age of these respondents is about 33 years, I assumed that most of the respondents have another responsibility, namely to take care of a household. This was confirmed in paragraph 6.2.1.1 (Chapter 6) where students indicated that at least 82% of them have responsibilities at home in terms of household tasks.

8.2.2.4. Responsibilities concerning other family members

Other personal responsibilities include taking care of other family members, especially siblings or sick family members. This tendency gives me a very small glimpse of the terrible effect HIV/AIDS presently has on the South African population. The UNISA student is not excluded from the effect of this rampant disease that throws a shadow of death over the largest part of the population of South Africa.

Looking at all these extra responsibilities the UNISA student has to carry, it was no real surprise to discover that students can mostly not complete their studies within the minimum period given. The average UNISA student in social work takes 6½ years to complete his/her degree – well over the four-year minimum period.

8.2.3. Difficulties

A heart-breaking theme that emerged over and over again is the difficult circumstances under which many of the students have to study. Some of them experience difficulties purely due to their study conditions, while others have to work through much more traumatic difficulties they were exposed to in recent times or in the past.

The following conclusions can thus be made regarding the difficulties the respondents are experiencing:

8.2.3.1. Time management

Students have to change their daily programmes to incorporate their studies into their lives with the result that they have less time to spend with family and friends and even less for recreation which is very difficult for many of them.

Some of the students are forced to interrupt their study for different reasons, like death in the family, pregnancies and birth, work obligations and financial difficulties as discussed in paragraph 6.2.1.2 (Chapter 6). This automatically implies that in these cases students will not be able to complete their studies in the minimum allocated time of four years. This results in less time for family and friends over a longer period of time.

8.2.3.2. Loneliness

To study on their own with no lecturers or co-students readily available is one of the largest difficulties encountered by students. It is difficult to keep motivated when you feel lonely. Most of the respondents say that they focus on their goal to keep them going. As these students are presently in their final year, or at most only one extra year away from completing their studies, this goal is within reach for most of them and this keeps them motivated. Most of the students have by now also formed strong bonds with co-students during workshops, which lift the loneliness for many of them.

8.2.3.3. Death of loved ones

Many of the respondents have experienced family loss, as discussed in paragraph 4.5 (Chapter 4). Although many of these losses are the loss of a parent which can be seen as a normal event in the life of an adult, many of the losses occurred much too soon. Students experienced loss of parents during childhood, loss of siblings who were still young adults, one of them lost a child in a car accident and one lost a spouse. Many of these losses have taken place while the students were busy with their studies, placing very high stress on their studies. No wonder many of these students are still grieving.

Many of the respondents are worried about what will happen to their children if something happens to them as parents. Living in a society where HIV/AIDS takes lives daily, it is fully understandable that these respondents are all affected by the disease and I have to assume that much of the grief and concerns sprout from this realisation.

8.2.3.4. Strained family relationships

Strained relationships are spread over all family relationships of the respondents. These include relationships in present families as well as families of origin. Poor relationships with families of origin hint at physical and sexual abuse by parental figures, abuse of alcohol by parents and also to verbal abuse between family members. Some students also describe their present family situations as strenuous. Three of the students' marital relationships ended in divorce with other indicating that their marriages are in trouble. This means that students have to cope with extra work on their personal relationships with significant others, whilst trying to cope with studies.

The reality is however that all relationships have their better and worse times. Whether one wants to work through difficulties in order to cherish the better times is a personal matter. These relationships can thus either contribute towards supporting the student, or work against this.

8.2.3.5. Poverty

As can be seen from this study (paragraph 4.3.1.4, Chapter 4), most of the parents of the respondents are or were employed as labourers, working as domestic workers, messengers, machine operators, truck drivers and the like. From this I conclude that many of the students grew up in homes where money was a luxury; many of them grew up in poverty. This statement is confirmed and also amplified by the fact that many of the students indicate that they study through UNISA because it was less costly than the residential universities in South Africa.

What is concerning is the fact that the fourth year is more costly for students due to the practical aspect thereof. Students are mostly responsible to cover the expenses of their practical work, except when they are placed at organisations that assist them with this. Students also rely heavily on the financial support they receive in terms of loans. The downside of this is that these loans need to be paid back once students start working. Taking into consideration the relative low income of professional social workers entering the job market, I have to conclude here that the poverty cycle for many of the students will not be broken for a long time after they start working.

8.2.3.6. Safety and security

Safety and security is a huge problem in South Africa, as discussed in paragraph 6.1.1 (Chapter 6). People don't feel safe and therefore have to take drastic measurements to protect themselves. Many of the students admit to having been exposed to crime on either a primary or secondary level. What I see as a red light though, is the fact that South Africans, according to the respondents in this research, don't even know anymore what a safe community entails and look like. People are taking matters in their own hands to create safety by building high walls, installing electrical fencing and security gates and joining community safety groups. Respondents also indicate that they fear the safety of their families and especially their children. All these factors place extra stress on people – and the UNISA student in this case is also not the exception.

8.2.3.7. Relocation

Almost a third of the students had to move closer to a UNISA facility for the sake of their studies while some of them have moved closer only for their fourth level. They have to be closer to their practical placement setting and to their student supervisor as weekly and sometimes daily obligations to these are expected. For many of the students this is very difficult – they are far from their support systems and some of them are living under dire conditions.

8.2.3.8. Difficulties posed by UNISA

Students experience several difficulties related to the UNISA context:

- **Telephonic service**: Students say that they struggle to get hold of UNISA staff by phone. Phones are either not answered, or students struggle to get through to the right person.
- **Registration**: Students are frustrated with the long queues at registration. They also feel that the support staff cannot help students to sort out their registration enquiries.
- **Despatch**: Students do not receive their tutorial letters and study material on time; some of them never received some of the material and had to write their examination papers borrowing material from other students.

- **Prescribed books**: Prescribed books are not always in stock at the bookstores.
- **Library services**: Students at the Polokwane, Durban and Cape Town branches said that books are outdated and need to be replaced. Another finding is that 10% of the students have never visited a UNISA library, which should be of great concern to lecturers.
- **Study space**: Students say that there is not enough study space allocated for them at the respective UNISA campuses. I observed very long queues of students myself who waited to be seated at the main library in Pretoria. Students are actually only allowed to study in sessions. One group has to wait for another group to leave the library before they are allowed to enter.

8.2.3.9. Language difficulties

Communicating in a second language seems to be a difficulty for many of the students. Seventy five percent of the respondents have to hand in their written assignments in their second language (English). An even higher percentage, namely 82% of the respondents, is obliged to use their second language to participate in the workshops.

Research results indicate that more than a third of the respondents are struggling with English. Students struggle with expressing themselves verbally and in writing. This can sometimes seem as if some of the students do not understand the work, while the problem may in reality lie with communicating their knowledge, either verbally or in writing.

8.2.3.10. Difficulties posed by the Department of Social Work

The research results show both positive and negative aspects concerning the Department of Social Work.

On the positive side, I conclude the following from the data received:

- **Person-Centred Approach as theoretical model of training**: Respondents are in general very positive about the Person-Centred Approach as tutored theoretical model. Many of them say that this model changed their perceptions of people. For the Department of Social Work this is a very positive outcome, as this is a crucial

part of their goal in training students in the Person-Centred Approach.

- **“Practice what you preach”**: The Department of Social Work is generally praised for the fact that their lecturing staff practices what they preach in that they reach out to students in line with the Person Centred Approach. There are some students who do not share this view, but most of the students describe the attitude of lecturers and supervisors as person-centred, or then in the case of this research, student-centred.
- **Availability**: Lecturers and supervisors are readily available, although some students feel this can be improved.
- **Study guides and tutorial letters**: These are described by respondents as “user-friendly” and well-structured.
- **Personal assistance**: Students feel very positive about the way the Department of Social Work reaches out to them in difficult times. They praise the assistance and understanding they receive and say that this is the only department at UNISA, as far as their experience goes, that goes out of their way to support and assist students.
- **Workshops**: The respondents appreciate the workshops presented by the Department of Social Work. They appreciate the fact that there are so many workshops which make them feel less isolated and also introduced them to co-students. They also appreciate the content, which is of a very practical nature.

According to the data received, most of the negative comments concerning the Department of Social Work centre on administration and planning:

- **General administration**: The Department of Social Work is criticized for its planning and administration. Students are unhappy about the reception at the Department when they go there to discuss issues, as well as the fact that they do not know where to go in the Department. They also have to wait very long to see someone about problems with their course. They are further of the opinion that rules change without considering the implications for students.
- **Punctuality**: Some students feel that some lecturers in the Department of Social

Work do not show respect for students by not being punctual in their appointments. Some workshops started later than planned and some video conferences were cancelled without notice, which frustrate them.

- **Telephonic help**: A large number of students say that some of the lecturers do not answer their phones or do not respond to messages they leave for them.
- **Feedback on written assignments**: Respondents are unhappy that they do not get individual feedback on their assignments and say that they sometimes have to wait too long for the assignments to be returned to them.
- **Workshops**: Organisation of workshops is not always up to standard. There are also some problems with the timing of the workshops. One student has problems with day care during school holidays for her children and another student has a religious problem with attending workshops on Fridays. Students also say that they have to travel very far to attend the workshops and that there is no accommodation within reach for them.

The Department of Social Work is mostly seen as positive by the respondents, but there are some areas that need attention. By addressing these relative few issues, the Department of Social Work can contribute to a more positive study experience for their students.

Most of these difficulties I discussed here are unique to the UNISA study context while a few are to be evaluated against general life experiences. Where possible these should be addressed by all parties involved, namely UNISA as institution, the Department of Social Work and the students as individuals. Recommendations on how some of these can be addressed will follow in paragraph 8.3 of this chapter.

8.2.4. Motivation

Students are generally motivated by two aspects: their support systems and their own inner strength. These two sources of motivation are the driving forces behind their studies. On the one hand the support systems, which mostly consist of significant others (*Proposition 9*), have certain expectations of the respondents and on the other hand students are their own dictators of fate, driving them towards the fulfilment of their dreams.

8.2.4.1. Support systems

Almost all the respondents have support systems in place. These mostly consist of family members, friends and co-students. These support systems keep the students on track by checking the progress of students on a regular base. It is clear that some of the support systems are walking an extra mile by sometimes rendering physical support in the form of assistance with tasks. Students who formed study groups also find that they are less lonely and feel encouraged by others who are going through the same process as them.

8.2.4.2. Strengths of students

The research data clearly points out how emotionally strong these students are (paragraph 3.2.1.2 in Chapter 3). They describe themselves as confident, hard-working and committed. This strength forms part of the unchangeable "self" (*Proposition 8*). Many of the respondents had to become stronger over their period of study due to the demands of their course. As the new selves evolve through this process, new values also form (*Propositions 15 and 19*). Many of the respondents indicate that their belief systems, and together with that, a belief that social work is a calling for them, motivate them to complete their studies, which make them emotionally stronger.

I thus salute the dedication and will-power of these students who wish to fulfil a dream and work towards it, no matter the cost in terms of time and responsibility they have to sacrifice.

8.2.5. Social work as future career

With these respondents well on their way to complete their studies, this research also collected information on how they perceive social work as a career.

8.2.5.1. Reasons for studying social work

Almost two-thirds of the students indicate that they want to become social workers to make a difference in other people's lives and within their own communities. They feel that their studies equip them with skills and knowledge to go out and do that.

8.2.5.2. Social work as career

From the data received I conclude the following concerning the respondents' perceptions

of social work as career:

- **Social work methods:** With a few exceptions students have up to now only had practical exposure within a laboratory setup in the three primary methods of social work, namely working with individuals/families, working with small groups and community development. In South Africa emphasis is presently placed on community development, yet most of the respondents still prefer to work with individuals and families, although a number of them also say that they want to work with larger communities.
- **Salaries of social workers:** Respondents agree with research, carried out by Child Welfare South Africa in 2003/2004, that salaries of social workers are far too low, with most social workers still earning less than R10 000 per month.
- **Working conditions:** Respondents realise that working conditions are mostly poor with little resources and high case loads, which leads to burnout.
- **Working opportunities:** Most of the respondents are of the opinion that working opportunities for social workers both in South Africa and overseas are good.

Respondents who participated in this research project are in general very positive about social work as a career. They are aware of the realities of practice and most of them are looking forward to start working as professionals, in spite of the negative issues they are aware of.

8.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

This research is primarily aimed at exploring the background and personal context of the fourth level students in social work at the University of South Africa. Due to the fact that each student is unique (*Proposition 1*) and each of them comes from a different background (*Proposition 9*) I find it very difficult to make recommendations at the end of this process. Each group of students is also unique, thus making it even more difficult to generalise recommendations. The following recommendations can thus only be seen as a general guideline and a starting point. I hope that this will inspire the lecturers at the Department of Social Work, in particular, and at UNISA, as institution in general, to pay more attention to the individuality of each of their students and really see them as unique persons who each enrol at the university with dreams and hopes in their hearts.

The questions that need to be answered in making recommendations are:

- Who should take the responsibility to change the present patterns that create the frustrations and difficulties as communicated by the respondents?
- What changes need to be made to change these patterns?
- How can this change be introduced without creating too much instability for any of the role players?
- Is a change in existing patterns always needed?

Change in one part of a system will always bring change in the other parts, but change needs to be introduced by someone, either within, or from outside the system. Without involving any outside party, I thus state that all the role players will have to take responsibility for the change: the students, UNISA at large and the Department of Social Work. Each of these systems can, however, only take responsibility for its own behaviour and its own role within the system.

Bateson (2002:50) makes the statement: "Sometimes small is beautiful" which implies that small things in proportion are better than large things out of proportion. Change on a small scale can sometimes create more beautiful patterns than change on a large scale. Smaller changes will also keep the stability of the system intact.

I thus present the following recommendations; some of which are smaller and others that are larger:

8.3.1. Personal life of the student

Most of the students who acted as respondents for this research indicate that they go through difficult times and are under stress concerning their personal situation. They have to cope with responsibilities at work and home and try to keep motivated while working through traumatic experiences and trying to cope with financial difficulties.

8.3.1.1. Loneliness and motivation

Students will mostly have to take the responsibility of dealing with loneliness and staying motivated. UNISA can help this process by preparing students one way or another for this lonely process in different ways.

- **Contact with co-students:** Bringing students into contact with others who are studying the same modules can help students to feel less lonely. I can remember well that I was asked if I would like to have contact with other students when I enrolled for some modules over the last number of years. Although I indicated that I would like contact, nothing ever came of that. This route can be explored further and brought to life again.

Workshops earlier in the year, where students are introduced to other co-students, will help them to overcome shyness and to make contact with other students. Students who are in a position to travel to UNISA more often have to be encouraged to form study groups with others who study the same course.

- **Support structures:** Most of the respondents in this study indicate that they have support structures in place in the form of family and friends who encourage them. Students have to be encouraged early in their study process to create support structures at home. I can in all honesty say my support structure is seeing me through this research process – without the encouragement of my fellow-researcher, co-students, my family, my friends and my study leader, this process would probably never have reached a point of completion.

8.3.1.2. Extra responsibilities

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the UNISA student is burdened with a lot more responsibility than the fulltime student at a residential university. Again each student's situation will be unique and it is very difficult for UNISA or the Department of Social Work to intervene and change this for the student. I stated earlier that small changes can sometimes be enough and in this section I think that small things can make a huge difference to make easier for the students, but for most of these situations it stays the students' responsibility to make life easier for them.

- **Time management:** Students should be guided on how to properly manage their time. Most of the respondents indicate that this was the biggest change they had to make – adjust their time to incorporate their studies. Yet, many students still struggle with this. I have come across many students in their final year that do not possess a diary of any kind.

They also struggle to plan their work properly, and especially on fourth level, this

will become a problem. Those that have not learnt to do proper planning will struggle to keep up and will also struggle to keep up with time schedules and to plan their work once they start working as professional social workers. If this can be addressed in the early stages of their studies, I believe that less of them will struggle to manage time more efficiently.

- **Household responsibilities and responsibilities concerning children and family members:** There is not much that UNISA or the Department of Social Work can do to help students concerning this. Students can only be encouraged to use their support systems at home to assist them with their tasks at home. It is, of course, also possible to arrange an "open day" where parents, spouses and older children can be invited to UNISA. At such a meeting the social work lecturers can explain the demands more fully. Such information sharing and reaching out to the significant others can make a world of difference in the life of the student.
- **Work responsibilities:** Again, this is an area where students have to work out something workable for themselves. It will, however, help students if the Department of Social Work can inform students how much time will be needed for practical work. Some students indicate that they have stopped working for an income because they realise that the fourth year will be a very full year. The only other input that the Department can do is to ask students to spread their final year modules over a two year period. This was done to a certain extent during 2006 and was received with very little enthusiasm from students.

8.3.1.3. Traumatic experiences

Looking back at the family life cycle, as discussed in paragraph 4.1 (Chapter 4), it is clear that most people go through stages where there will be loss and trauma in their lives. The UNISA student is no exception, and all too often these painful experiences occur during their time of study. How to deal with this is an individual matter, and fortunately most people manage to get through these experiences by themselves. Others need input from outside, and, depending on the intensity of the experience, it will influence the study life of the student.

Although these experiences all lie on a personal level, there are certain actions UNISA can do to support these students through difficult times.

- **Professional help:** Where, and when, necessary students should be referred for professional help to work through trauma. This trauma can entail death in the family, exposure to violence (hijacking, family violence, armed robberies, etc), family breakdowns and personal trauma, like news about a terminal illness. Most students cannot afford professional help and thus will need assistance via UNISA for this. Lawlor (2007: 113) suggests that UNISA students be referred to other university's counselling services for this to ensure confidentiality. I have to disagree with this, as this is to my opinion something UNISA needs to address, and the cost involved in using other universities can be too high, plus it will be impractical for students to get to other universities.
- **Family bereavement and family crisis:** With the present situation of so many of the students losing family members due to illness and specifically HIV/AIDS, certain recommendations concerning this is necessary. Students are mostly allowed to attend funerals of close family members. But "close" is an individual perception and can be interpreted differently by different people (*Proposition 2*).

I am not sure that UNISA has any official policy in place for how to deal with family crisis and family loss of students, and therefore recommend that UNISA should create such a policy. Seeing that a tertiary institution is the preparation ground of a working environment for students, students should be treated in the same manner as employers would treat their employees under these circumstances. Policy concerning family loss should thus be drawn concurrent with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997. This will create safety and boundaries for both lecturers and students.

8.3.1.4. Poverty

Many of the UNISA students grow up in poverty-stricken families. This is one of the main reasons why many of the students enrol for social work at UNISA. As can be understood, there is not much UNISA or the Department of Social Work can do to change this reality for students. There are however a few things that can make life easier for these students.

- **Practical work:** On the fourth level students have to undergo practical training at welfare agencies within reach of the student. At most of these agencies the expenses for the practical work are paid by the students. Students should receive a small remuneration for the work they perform at the agencies, as these agencies benefit

from the work done by students. Some of these agencies pay the students a small honorarium per month or per year, while others don't reimburse them in any way. This creates a lot of disparity and unhappiness. This should be addressed by the Department of Social Work and a policy concerning this have to be drawn up. The present situation has to be discussed with all agencies involved in student training and consensus reached on how to deal with this.

The different Departments of Social Work of all the universities in South Africa face the same problem here and I think that this is something that should be discussed by the Joint Universities Committee for Schools of Social Work, which represents all the Schools of Social Work of the different universities in South Africa. The South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP) has started to address this matter as far back as 2005, but to date this has not been finalised.

- ***Accommodation:*** Students come from all walks of life, and all over the country, to study at UNISA. Although many of them stay close enough to the respective regional offices so that no problems arise when they have to attend workshops, other students really struggle with overcoming the distance from a UNISA centre. UNISA is not a residential university, and yet we see a crying need that some of the students have here. Students ask for student accommodation during workshops. I think it can be to the benefit of the student and the university if UNISA can provide accommodation at a reasonably low cost for students who have to travel for workshops, and especially the senior students who have to attend workshops on a regular base. Social work is a practical course that expects fourth level students to attend workshops on a very regular base in their final year. Low cost accommodation for these students can make life much easier for many of them.

8.3.2. Study life of the student

The study life of the students who participated in this research project includes the student with his/her personal situation, UNISA as learning institution and the Department of Social Work. In this paragraph I want to address the needs of students concerning their study environment.

8.3.2.1. Language

I have discussed the problem that many of the students are not fluent in English as their

second language and also discussed the fact that English is used as official language in workshops. I thus would like to make the following recommendations concerning this.

- **Language proficiency test:** Students should be tested for language proficiency before enrolling for any course at UNISA. This will automatically rule out students whose language capabilities are under a specified standard. The reader may think that the language proficiency of a student who enrol at a tertiary institution is on a certain standard, seeing that they have all passed their school language tests, yet it is shown over and over again that many of these students' language proficiency is so low that they struggle to make sense out of study guides and cannot express themselves verbally or in their written work at all.
- **Extra language classes:** Students have to be encouraged to take practical language classes if lecturers see that their language abilities are not on standard. I am aware of cases where students were asked to do this and simply ignored this – with the result that some of these students kept failing their modules over and over again.

8.3.2.2. UNISA

The data received from the respondents show many areas where UNISA can better their services. I also find that students are not really ready for what wait for them when they enrol at UNISA. The following recommendations touch on both these areas.

- **Bridging courses:** To study at UNISA is more difficult than studying at a residential university due to the fact that there are no formal classes. Many students also only start their further studies a number of years after completion of school education. Bridging courses at the different departments will give students the opportunity to attain a minimum standard before enrolling for a course that will cost them a lot of money and is left incomplete in the end. Some of the departments already have these in place and I recommend that this be expanded to the other departments as well.
- **Limited modules:** Students should be encouraged not to register for too many modules, especially when they start with their studies. I realise that this will be difficult though, as the abilities of students differ from person to person. Further research into this matter will probably also hint on possible solutions for this.

- **Registration:** There are many concerns around the registration process. Students recommend that more staff have to be appointed for the registration periods to prevent long queues during this time. It is also recommended that staff be adequately equipped to assist students during this process so as to prevent students being sent around from pillar to post.
- **Enquiry service:** The switchboard operators handling incoming calls at UNISA are highly criticized by the respondents. It is thus recommended that staff be properly trained and that enough people be appointed to handle the UNISA switchboard.
- **Despatch:** It seems as if there is sometimes a communication gap between Despatch and the teaching departments. This can be addressed by meetings between Despatch and the contact persons from the different teaching departments. Both the departments and Despatch also need to ensure that all necessary study material are ready in time and that enough study material is printed and stocked at regional offices. At the start of the academic year of 2006 the Department of Social Work was obliged to copy and send out stacks of photo copied study guides, due to the fact that the guides were not ready in time for students. It is unfair to enrol students for modules and then not provide them with the necessary printed study material for it.
- **Prescribed books:** Students struggle to get their prescribed books as dealers do not have enough in stock, or do not receive the lists of necessary study material. This has to be addressed by each responsible lecturer in the first place. They have to make sure that the prescribed books are on the list of that specific department. From there, it is the responsibility of UNISA to make sure that the requests are sent to the bookstores in time.
- **Libraries:** Students say that books at some of the libraries are outdated. These have to be replaced with more recent literature, especially at the smaller libraries in Polokwane, Cape Town and Durban. All students pay the same fees for the same courses and thus have to receive the same benefits.
- **Study space:** There is a definite need for study space for students. I am aware that the Sunnyside campus in Pretoria is presently converting and adding study space for students. This will still not be nearly enough, though. The reality is that,

although UNISA is a distance learning institution, many of the students study fulltime. They go to all the UNISA regional offices every day as they don't have enough space at home to sit and study and they prefer to be in an atmosphere that contributes to their studies. This is a very difficult situation and I believe that long-term solutions will eventually be found.

- **Workshops:** Workshops have to be scheduled to start earlier in the year. This will introduce students early in the year to their lecturers and create less distance between them. Students complain that many of the modules have only one workshop scheduled for the year. This needs to be increased to at least two – one towards the beginning of the module term and one more towards the end for examination preparation purposes.
- **Video conferences:** Another option is to conduct more video conferences with students who cannot visit their lecturers on a regular base. These are experienced very positively by students, although they are very dissatisfied that some of the video conferences were cancelled without warning. Students put in a day's leave at work and travelled to the closest UNISA regional office, only to discover that these video conferences were cancelled.

8.3.2.3. The Department of Social Work

The Department of Social Work at UNISA receives very positive feedback, as discussed in paragraph 8.2.3.10 of this chapter. The recommendations to sustain this positive situation are as follows:

- **Reception:** Students complain that the reception at the Department of Social Work is not up to standard. I have to agree with that. There is no proper indication of where the reception desk is, or who to talk to when entering the Department. The reception area is adjacent to the office of the Head of the Department, which I think is well-planned, but there is no receptionist within sight. I recommend that one of the administrative staff members move into the reception area, while reducing the size of the waiting area at reception. This will give the immediate image that someone is willing to assist students when visiting the Department.
- **General administration and planning:** Students feel that this area needs attention. The Department of Social Work seems unorganised to them. Students com-

plain that dates for workshops and assignments in the tutorial letters are sometimes wrong. This is something each lecturer will have to sort out for their specific modules. Students also get confused with the many different tutorial letters sent out by the Department. It will be a great help if the Department can create one administrative tutorial letter, which include all administrative aspects of the Department, thus guiding the students who they are to contact for what enquiries and exactly what happens at what stage of their academic year at the Department of Social Work.

- **Phone calls**: Many of the students feel that they are ignored by lecturers. Phones are not always answered and messages are not always returned. This is not applicable to all lecturers and each lecturer will have to evaluate their personal situation for themselves. UNISA has a telephone answering facility where lecturers can set their office phones to receive messages and I recommend that each person arrange for this to be done.
- **Feedback on written assignments**: The two things that students feel need attention here is in the first place that their assignments are returned very slowly. They sometimes have to start preparing for workshops, or even examination papers, without having received their assignments back. I realise that it is sometimes very difficult to mark and return all the assignments in a short period of time. Hopefully the change to year modules instead of semester modules will contribute to bettering this situation. The Department of Social Work make use of contract personnel to assist them with this task and I also recommend that they expand this further.

The other complaint is that students do not receive personal feedback on assignments. Students feel that they put a lot of work and effort into the assignments and then it doesn't even get marked properly. This is very difficult to address and I don't really see an answer for this. The only possible recommendation is to use contract workers for this again, instead of just sending students a standard model answer sheet back.

- **Workshops**: Although students feel very positive about the workshops, they say that it is sometimes unorganised. The first workshops of the year are always a challenge, as lecturers are never sure how many students will turn up. These first workshops are mostly conducted before Student Administration can give a final

indication of the student numbers. Workshops cannot be extended to later dates, as this will shorten the academic year for students. Thus, the recommendation is made in terms of the registration. Seeing that all undergraduate students are allowed to register up to a certain cut-off date, it will be impossible to set the date for social work registration earlier. The only thing that lecturers can do is to determine the tentative student numbers the day before the workshops are presented.

A few students have a problem with punctuality of workshops. This should be easy to address, and yet it brings on so many frustrations. Lecturers and facilitators have to stay with the times they set for workshops. If students come late, it needs to be dealt with. I recommend that facilitators use this as an example of a group process for students by allowing students to decide how to deal with co-students who arrive late.

The last thing concerning the workshops is that one student asked for workshops not to be arranged for Fridays, due to problems with her religious belief. This student is a Muslim and Friday is their holy day. I realise that it is impossible to accommodate all students in terms of their different situations, but staying in a Muslim country myself, I realise how important this is for her. I also assume that there will be many more Muslim students in the Durban area in future and thus recommend that the facilitators try to accommodate this early in each academic year and deal with this.

- **Changes in registration allowance:** Some of the students are very unhappy that the Department of Social Work decided that those with an average of less than 60% in Social Work at level three will not be allowed to enrol for all ten their fourth level modules. They say that they would have like to be part of the decision process.

8.3.3. Future as professional social worker

The fourth level student is almost ready to enter the profession of social work. At this stage, what do they need to know before entering the profession? And how can the Department of Social work address these needs?

8.3.3.1. Learning needs

At the start of the fourth level academic year there are many anxieties concerning their practical work for the students and they wonder if they will be able to cope with the expectations of that.

- **Practical work**: Students are looking forward to start with practical work, although some of them are wondering if they will be able to cope with this. The only exposure to practical work up to the fourth level is role plays in a laboratory setup. The fourth year for the student is usually only about eight months long. As mentioned earlier, this is also a very expensive year for students. This can be overcome by helping students to start with their practical work as soon as possible. I have already discussed the issue of remuneration of students and thus no further recommendations are made here.
- **Statutory work**: Students have a need to know more about statutory work. All of them have done a basic module in general welfare law by the time they reach their fourth level, but most of them feel that they are still unsure what it entails in practice. I recommend that workshops in the third level also include aspects of statutory work to ensure that students feel more equipped for this at the onset of their fourth level.
- **Other learning areas**: As can be expected, each student still has different learning needs by the time they start their fourth level. Some of these needs are how to work with children, with physically ill clients and with difficult clients. Lecturers have to ensure that facilitators include all these different scenarios in the practical workshops and also find out from students what they feel they should know more about.

8.3.3.2. Social work as career

I can actually recommend very little in terms of social work as career. This is a field of research on its own and thus I just want to emphasise the following:

- **Working opportunities**: Students have to be made aware of the different working opportunities for them in social work. This includes the different types of work they can do and also the different contexts in which they can work. I recommend

that welfare organisations be invited to tell students about the work at the different organisations. This should also include recruitment companies who recruit social workers for work overseas. This will give students the opportunity to make informed decisions about their own futures.

8.3.4. Further research

Change in one part of a system will bring change in another part. This means that by changing the study conditions of students, the Department of Social Work at UNISA will also undergo change. As new patterns evolve from this research, further research will be necessary.

The Department of Social Work have to evaluate their students and their own progress and growth on an ongoing base. Students mention that they find this research very helpful and express the need to participate in more research projects like this one. They say that this gave them the opportunity to express their needs and concerns. I thus recommend that the Department make use of the feedback students give at the end of each module and build this information into something useful for both the Department and its students. Other forms of informal research can be done by observation and feedback on the observation, like for instance by handing out forms with two or three questions every now and then during workshops and by listening to students and colleagues.

I also believe that this project is only the starting point of many other projects to follow. These can include further research on each aspect I touched on. Two other very important studies will be to look at the personal context of other undergraduate students in the Department of Social Work. I also recommend that the Department of Social Work repeat this same study within a five year period as to determine how these results changed and to determine how someone else might interpret data similar to this study.

8.4. Recursive patterns

I started off this research explaining that this process is from a personal stance. I thus want to conclude my experience by returning to the place I started: my personal stance in this whole process.

Reaching the end of this research process, I am turning around to look at the road I came. The road is marked with a huge amount of information that I had to sift through and organise. It is also marked with a large spectrum of emotions for both me and the respondents. These vary

from thankfulness to anger, from joy to tears, from laughter to tear stains. And all of these emotions once again make me aware of the importance of the fact that research in the human sciences can never exclude the humanness of the people we are interacting with. I am humbled by this experience and realise that the responsibility of research may be much larger than we sometimes give credit to.

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APPENDIX 1:

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

January 2007

Dear student

You as a student are very important to the Department of Social Work. We are striving to render the best possible training to you so as to ensure that you are an efficient, effective and ethically competent entry level social worker once you finish with your studies.

In order for quality training to continue, we need to know who our students are and how best we can improve our curriculum to suit your expectations (as student of the course), our expectations at UNISA (as formal training institute) and also the expectations of the practice settings (as your future employers) where you are placed to complete the practical component of your degree.

In order to enable us to do this we need to gain information on four things:

- 1) We are interested in your **present personal context** – which this particular questionnaire is about;
- 2) Your experience of your **practical placement** and whether you felt equipped for your social work setting – which forms part of a second questionnaire that you will be requested to complete later during the year;
- 3) The working environment of social workers and their expectations of newly qualified social workers, as well as their expectations of the fourth year UNISA students placed with them for the completion of the practical component of the BA (SS). We are investigating this as part of the **work context** – this will be obtained from your practical settings and their social workers.
- 4) The **present curriculum** – which we already have at hand.

We will be very grateful if you would assist us by completing the following questionnaire.

This is a lengthy questionnaire. Please take your time and try to be as **thorough** and **accurate** as possible.

This questionnaire is filled in **anonymously**. This is to protect your identity.

If you feel that some of the questions open up old wounds, please feel free to contact Prof Schenck to make an appointment with someone who can assist you working through these.

• **Please fill in all the dark sections:**

• **Where you have to choose, please mark your choice with a cross:**

• **Where not applicable, indicate as:**

N/A

• **Please read all questions carefully.**

I want to thank each one of you for participating in this research. I believe that the information we gather from this will assist us at the Department to gain a better understanding of who our students are and set a high standard of education.

Kind regards

RULENE LINTVELT

YOU AND YOUR CULTURE

Tell us who you are:

1. Are you male or female?

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. What is your year of birth?

3. Have you ever had the opportunity to do the following?

	YES	NO
Travel somewhere that is further than 500 kilometres from home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Travel to the coast and see the sea	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Travel overseas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Go on a game drive to watch animals in the wild	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visit an airport	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take a trip on a boat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ride a horse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend a night in a hotel in a room with your own bathroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attend a function where you had to wear a formal outfit (tuxedo or formal suit for men and evening dress for ladies)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eat in a restaurant where you could order from a menu	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visited an arts theatre (like State Theatre)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tell us about your culture:

4. To which race group do you belong?

Black	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indian / Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>
White	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. What is your home language(s)?

6. What do you think is important for the lecturers at Unisa to know about your culture?

7. As you are a future social worker, it is important how you interact with others. Please give a brief description of respectful behaviour in your own culture in the following situations:

Males and females interacting	
Younger and older persons interacting	
Family members towards each other	
Interaction with strangers	

FAMILY CONTEXT

Tell us about your family of origin (extended family):

8. Which description suits the family in which you grew up best:

My biological parents and siblings			
My biological father and siblings		My biological mother and siblings	
My maternal * grandparents and siblings		My paternal ** grandparents and siblings	
My maternal grandmother and siblings		My paternal grandmother and siblings	
My maternal grandfather and siblings		My paternal grandfather and siblings	
My maternal aunt, her children and my siblings		My paternal aunt, her children and my siblings	
My maternal uncle, his children and my siblings		My paternal uncle, his children and my siblings	
With a step-mother		With a step-father	
In a foster family		I was adopted	
In a child-headed household where I was the eldest child who had to take responsibility for my siblings		In a child-headed household where I was taken care off by one of my elder siblings	
Other – describe			

* Maternal – from my mother’s side

** Paternal – from my father’s side

9. If you have not grown up with both your biological parents, why not?

10. Please tell us about the family you grew up in. Would you describe them as a happy family? Why do you say so? Who were the important members of this family and how did they impact your life.

Tell us about your biological father:

11. Is your biological father known to you?	YES	
	NO	
12. If <u>YES</u> , what are the most important things you will always remember about him?		
13. If <u>NO</u> , what are the things you miss most about not knowing him?		

Tell us about your actual father figure:

14. In which category does he fall?

Biological father	
Step-father	
Adoptive father	
Foster father	
Grandfather	
Uncle	
Older brother	
Other (explain)	

15. General:

Is your father figure still alive?	
If <u>YES</u>, how old is he at present?	
If <u>NO</u>, how old were <u>YOU</u> when he passed away?	
If <u>NO</u>, how did your life change since he passed away?	

16. Work and education of your father figure:

What is/was his level of education?	
If still alive, is he working at present?	
If he is still working, what type of work does he do?	
If he is not working, what type of work did he do whilst still working?	

17. You and your father figure:

If still alive, do you still have contact with him?	
---	--

How would you describe your relationship with your father figure?	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Poor	Very Poor
Motivate your answer					

Tell us about your biological mother:

18. Is your biological mother known to you?	YES	
	NO	
19. If <u>YES</u> , what are the most important things you will always remember about her?		
20. If <u>NO</u> , what are the things you miss most about not knowing her?		

Tell us about your actual mother figure:

21. In which category does she fall?

Biological mother	
Step-mother	
Adoptive mother	
Foster mother	
Grandmother	
Aunt	
Older sister	
Other (explain)	

22. General:

Is your mother figure still alive?	
If <u>YES</u> , how old is she at present?	
If <u>NO</u> , how old were <u>YOU</u> when she passed away?	
If <u>NO</u> , how did your life change since she passed away?	

23. Work and education of your mother figure:

What is/was her level of education?	
If still alive, is she working at present?	
If she is still working, what type of work does she do?	
If she is not working, what type of work did she do whilst still working?	

24. You and your mother figure:

If still alive, do you still have contact with her?	
---	--

How would you describe your relationship with your mother figure?	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Poor	Very Poor
Motivate your answer.					

Tell us about your biological brothers:

25. General information:

	Brother 1	Brother 2	Brother 3	Brother 4	Brother 5
Is your brother still alive?					
If YES , how old is he now?					
If NO , how old was HE when he passed away?					
If NO , how old were YOU when he passed away?					

26. Tell us about your relationship with your brothers.

		Brother 1	Brother 2	Brother 3	Brother 4	Brother 5
How would you describe your relationship with your brothers?	Very good					
	Good					
	Reasonable					
	Poor					
	Very poor					
Please motivate your answers. If your brother has passed away, please tell us about your experiences concerning that and how it affected your life.						
Brother 1						
Brother 2						
Brother 3						
Brother 4						
Brother 5						

27. Education:

What level of education did your brother COMPLETE?	Brother 1	Brother 2	Brother 3	Brother 4	Brother 5
I am not sure					
Not in school yet					
Finished primary school					
Finished secondary school					
Finished university undergraduate studies					
Finished university post-graduate studies					
Finished other post school education					
Other (explain)					

Is your brother still studying?	Brother 1	Brother 2	Brother 3	Brother 4	Brother 5
I am not sure					
No, he is not studying					
Yes, he is studying:					
= Busy with primary school					
= Busy with secondary school					
= Busy with university					
= Busy with post-graduate studies					
= Busy with other post school education					
= Other (explain)					

	Brother 1	Brother 2	Brother 3	Brother 4	Brother 5
If he is still studying, who is paying for his studies?					

	Brother 1	Brother 2	Brother 3	Brother 4	Brother 5
If he is <u>NOT STUDYING</u>, has he completed the studies he started?					

If he has <u>not completed</u> his studies, why not?	Brother 1	Brother 2	Brother 3	Brother 4	Brother 5
= There was no money available					
= He was not interested in his studies					
= He had to start working to provide for the family					
= He got involved with drugs / alcohol					
Other - explain					

28. Work:

	Brother 1	Brother 2	Brother 3	Brother 4	Brother 5
Does your brother work?					
If he does work, does he work <u>FULL-TIME</u>?					
If <u>YES</u>, what type of work does he do?					
If he does work, does he work <u>PART-TIME</u>?					
If <u>YES</u>, what type of work does he do?					
If he is not studying, is your brother financially independent?					

Tell us about your biological sisters:

29. General information:

	Sister 1	Sister 2	Sister 3	Sister 4	Sister 5
Is your sister still alive?					
If YES , how old is she now?					
If NO , how old was SHE when she passed away?					
If NO , how old were YOU when she passed away?					

30. Tell us about your relationship with your sisters.

How would you describe your relationship with your sisters?		Sister 1	Sister 2	Sister 3	Sister 4	Sister 5
	Very good					
	Good					
	Reasonable					
	Poor					
	Very poor					

Please motivate your answers. If your sister has passed away, please tell us about your experiences concerning that and how it affected your life.

Sister 1	
Sister 2	
Sister 3	
Sister 4	
Sister 5	

31. Education:

What level of education did your sister COMPLETE?	Sister 1	Sister 2	Sister 3	Sister 4	Sister 5
I am not sure					
Not in school yet					
Finished primary school					
Finished secondary school					
Finished university undergraduate studies					
Finished university post-graduate studies					
Finished other post school education					
Other (explain)					

Is your sister still studying?	Sister 1	Sister 2	Sister 3	Sister 4	Sister 5
I am not sure					
No, she is not studying					
Yes, she is studying:					
= Busy with primary school					
= Busy with secondary school					
= Busy with university					
= Busy with post-graduate studies					
= Busy with other post school education					
= Other (explain)					

	Sister 1	Sister 2	Sister 3	Sister 4	Sister 5
If she is still studying, who is paying for her studies?					

	Sister 1	Sister 2	Sister 3	Sister 4	Sister 5
If she is <u>NOT STUDYING</u>, has she completed the studies she started?					

If she has <u>not completed</u> her studies, why not?	Sister 1	Sister 2	Sister 3	Sister 4	Sister 5
= There was no money available					
= She was not interested in his studies					
= She had to start working to provide for the family					
= She got involved with drugs / alcohol					
= She fell pregnant					
Other - explain					

32. Work:

	Sister 1	Sister 2	Sister 3	Sister 4	Sister 5
Does your sister work?					
If she does work, does she work <u>FULL-TIME</u>?					
If <u>YES</u>, what type of work does she do?					
If she does work, does she work <u>PART-TIME</u>?					
If <u>YES</u>, what type of work does she do?					
If she is not studying, is your sister financially independent?					

Tell us about your other family members

33. Briefly describe your relationship with other important family members in your life, e.g. grandparent, uncle, aunt, cousin. Motivate your answer.

Family member	Relationship

Tell us about your present nuclear family:

34. Tell us about your marital status:

			YEARS	MONTHS
Never been married – not involved with someone				
Never been married – but have someone special		For how long?		
Married (traditional marriage)		For how long?		
Married (officially married)		For how long?		
Staying with partner		For how long?		
Divorced		For how long?		
Widowed		For how long?		
Remarried after divorce		How long are you remarried?		
If you are remarried after a divorce, how long were you divorced before getting married again?				
Remarried after widowed		How long are you remarried?		
If you are remarried after being widowed, how long after the passing away of your partner did you get married again?				

35. If you do have a special partner / husband / wife, tell me about him / her:

How would you describe your relationship with your partner / husband / wife?	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Poor	Very Poor
Motivate your answer.					
Is he/she <u>in favour</u> of your studies?					
Do you think he/she <u>supports</u> you in your studies?					
Motivate your answer.					

36. Tell us about your children:

	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5
Boy or girl?					
Age?					
Does your child stay with you?					
If <u>NOT</u> , with whom does the child stay?					
If the child does NOT stay with you how often do you see him/her?					

37. Briefly describe your relationship with each of your children. Motivate your answer.

How would you describe your relationship with your children?		Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5
	Very good					
	Good					
	Reasonable					
	Poor					
	Very poor					
Please motivate your answers:						
Child 1						
Child 2						
Child 3						
Child 4						
Child 5						

38. What are your concerns around your children's present situation and their future?

Tell us about your family responsibilities at home

39. For which of the following tasks are you responsible concerning your home and family?
(You may mark as many as you want to)

Bring in an income	<input type="checkbox"/>
House cleaning	<input type="checkbox"/>
Washing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cooking	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taking care of children	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taking care of brothers/sisters	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taking care of old/ill parents/family members	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other – describe:	<div style="background-color: #cccccc; height: 80px;"></div>
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ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

Tell us about the neighbourhood where you stay while studying at Unisa:

40. How would you describe your neighbourhood?

Suburb in a city	
Township on the outskirts of a city	
Informal settlement on the outskirts of a city	
Small town	
Township on the outskirts of a small town	
Informal settlement on the outskirts of a small town	
Rural area	
Farm	
Agricultural holding ("plot")	
Other – describe:	

41. How safe on a scale from 1 (most safe) to 5 (least safe) would you describe your neighbourhood?

1 →		2 →		3 →		4 →		5 →	
<p>Motivate your answer:</p>									

42. Give a brief description of your neighbourhood. (If you have to describe your neighbourhood to a blind person, what would you say about it?)

43. Which of the following facilities does your town/city have? Have you ever made use of these facilities?

	In town/city – YES/NO	Used – YES/NO	If used – when was the last time?
Shopping mall			
Public Library			
Museum			
Zoo			
Restaurants			
Movie theatre			
Arts theatre (Like State Theatre)			
Arts exhibition centre			
Primary school(s)			
Secondary school(s)			
Tertiary institution(s)			
Police station			
Medical centre / hospital			
Fire brigade			
Social workers			

44. SWOT analysis of your community: Please fill in the following concerning your community – according to your own opinion (list as many as you can think of please)

<p>Strengths of your community (What are the good things about your community that you would like to tell others about. Why should they stay there?)</p>	
<p>Weaknesses of your community (What are the things lacking in your community that you would like to be attended to that could put people off to stay there?)</p>	
<p>Opportunities in your community (What are the potential in your community that needs attention?)</p>	
<p>Threats in you community (What are the things the community is worried about that also needs attention?)</p>	

Tell us about where you stay while studying at Unisa:

45. Did you have to move closer to a Unisa centre for the sake of your studies?

YES	NO
-----	----

46. With whom do you share your home (where you stay while studying) at present?
(You may mark more than one)

	Mark if applicable	How many people?
Parent(s)		
My siblings		
Partner / husband / wife		
My child / children		
Other family member(s)		
Friend(s)		
On my own		
In a hostel with other students		
In a flat with other students		
Other - describe		

47. Describe your home

Large brick house (at least two bathrooms and a double garage)	
Medium brick house (at least two bedrooms, a bathroom and a garage)	
Small brick house (e.g. RDP size)	
Townhouse in a security complex	
Flat in a block of flats	
Rented room	
Informal home (temporary building, like shack)	
Hostel with other students	
Other - describe	

48. Describe the following facilities at your home

Does it have cold running water?	
Does it have hot running water?	
Does it have electricity?	
If no electricity, what do you use as a source of power?	
Does it have sanitation (bathroom and flush toilet) inside?	
Do you have your own bedroom at home where you can study?	
If <u>NO</u> , who do you share your room with?	

Describe the study conditions at your home

49. Where do you mostly do your studying? (You may mark more than one)

At home	
At a Unisa learning centre	
At my local public library	
Other - describe	

50. When do you mostly do your studying? (You may mark more than one)

Very early in the morning	
Morning	
Afternoon	
Evening	
Late at night	
Any time	
Mostly over weekends	
I struggle to find time for my studies	

51. Please explain why you marked the appropriate blocks in the previous question.



UNISA IN GENERAL

Tell us how you feel about Unisa:

52. Why have you decided to study through Unisa?

53. What are the most difficult challenges about studying through Unisa?

54. How do you suggest these problems could be addressed?

Tell us how you feel about the Department of Social Work

55. What is POSITIVE about the Department of Social Work?

56. What is **NEGATIVE** about the Department of Social Work?

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57. How do you think these problems can be addressed?

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58. How do you feel about the lecturers at the Department of Social Work in general?

	Excellent	Good	Reasonable	Not good	Very bad
Accessibility					
Availability					
Attitude					
Feedback to students					

Tell us about your ability to study at Unisa:

59. Have you done any correspondence course before you enrolled at Unisa for the social work degree that you are busy with?

YES	
NO	

60. If **YES** did the previous course help you with your present studies?

YES	
NO	

61. Do you sometimes feel lonely and miss regular classes and contact with lecturers and co-students?

YES	
NO	

62. If YES what do you think can be done to overcome this?

63. Do you sometimes struggle to keep yourself motivated for you studies?

YES	
NO	

64. If YES what do you do to keep yourself motivated?

65. Do you struggle with language issues (e.g. get comments that you have to work on your spelling or grammar?)

YES	
NO	

66. If YES what have you done to try and correct this?

67. Do you attend all workshops offered to you for your course?

YES	
NO	

68. If NO why not?

69. If you do attend workshops, please answer the following:

At what time do you leave home to attend the workshop?	
At what time do you normally get home after the workshop? (Full-day workshop)	
At what time do you normally get home after the workshop? (Half-day workshop)	
Do you participate to your full extent during the workshops?	
If NO what do you think is hampering your participation?	

Tell us about the resources at Unisa:

70. The library

Have you ever visited the Unisa library?	YES		NO	
If YES , how often?	1 – 5 times		More than 5 times	
If YES , which library of Unisa did you visit?				
If YES , what did you visit the library for?				
If YES , what was your experience of the library?				

71. Study material and prescribed material

Have you ever had difficulties with receiving any <u>study material</u> ?	YES		NO	
Did you ever have difficulties finding the <u>prescribed books</u> ?	YES		NO	
If you did have difficulties, give a description of your problems and how you dealt with it.				

72. Registration for modules

Have you ever had difficulties with registration for modules or finding the right information to register for modules?	YES		NO	
Give a description of your problems and how you dealt with it.				

73. Loans

Have you ever had difficulties finding a loan for your studies?	YES		NO	
Give a description of your problems and how you dealt with it.				

YOUR STUDIES AT UNISA

Tell us more about you and your studies:

74. Your work situation: Do you work?

Not at all			
Part time		If <u>YES</u> , how many hours per week?	
Full time		If <u>YES</u> , how many hours per week?	
Volunteer work		If <u>YES</u> , how many hours per week?	
No, but I have to take care of household chores and/or children		How many hours per week?	

75. Your place of work:

Are you employed at a social work setting?	YES		NO	
If <u>YES</u>, indicate the name of the organisation:				

Your study time-line for BA(SS):

76. In which year did you:

<u>Enrol</u> for your social work degree?	
Complete your <u>first year</u>?	
Complete your <u>second year</u> social work?	
Complete your <u>third year</u> social work?	
<u>Start</u> with your <u>fourth year</u> social work?	
When do you hope to <u>complete</u> your studies in social work?	

77. Breaks in your studies:

Did you have breaks in your study (Not enrol for a period?)	YES		NO	
If <u>YES</u> , which year(s) did you <u>NOT</u> enrol?				
If <u>YES</u> , please give the reason for this break(s):				

78. Previous qualifications

What is your highest <u>COMPLETED</u> educational qualification?	
When did you reach this?	

79. Who finances your studies in Social Work at Unisa? (You may mark more than one)

I pay my studies myself			
My parents pay for my studies			
My whole family contributes to pay for my studies			
My employer pays for my studies		Who is your employer?	
I am studying with a bursary		Who is sponsoring this bursary?	
I am studying with a loan		With whom do you have this loan?	
I have another means of paying my studies		Explain this please	

80. What will happen to your studies if you fail this year?

I will have to repeat my studies next year	
I will have to save money and repeat it later	
I will have to stop my studies altogether	
None of the above – please explain	

81. What worries you most if you do not complete your degree? (You may mark more than one)

		Describe how this would affect your life
I will have to pay back my loan		
I will have to pay back my bursary / sponsor		
I will have to tell my family that I have failed		
I will become a financial burden to my family		
I will have to admit to myself that I have failed		
I will not be able to find a proper job		
I will never reach my dream		
Other (describe)		

82. What worries you most if you do complete your degree? (You may mark more than one)

		Describe how this would affect your life
I will have to pay back my loan while earning a small salary		
I will have to work back my bursary for a certain period		
I will earn a very small salary to live on		
I will have to find a job as a social worker		
Other (describe)		

83. Tell me about your support system(s). Who renders you the most support with your studies? This can be family, partner, friends, someone at Unisa or more than one person. Motivate your answer.

YOURSELF AS A FUTURE SOCIAL WORKER

Tell us how you see yourself as a social worker:

84. In your first year you had to think about why you wanted to become a social worker. Please give a brief explanation of how you felt about social work when you STARTED your studies.

85. Now that you are in your fourth year you know exactly what social work entails.

Do you still want to become a social worker?	YES		NO	
If <u>YES</u> , why do you want to become a social worker?				
If <u>NO</u> , why do you still carry on with your studies?				

86. Your personal circumstances and social work as a choice.

What in your background or present circumstances contributed to your decision of becoming a social worker originally?				
Has this changed?	YES		NO	
If <u>YES</u>, describe how it changed				

87. Your family and social work

What was your family's response when you decided to study social work?				
What do they say about your studies now?				

88. If you still want to become a social worker, why do you think you are a suitable person for this profession?

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**89. What type of social work would you prefer to do?
(Mark in order of preference, e.g. most desirable as 1 up to least desirable as 4)**

		What would you enjoy about this most?
Community development		
Group work		
Casework (therapy)		
Statutory work (court work)		
Other – describe what		

90. In being a social worker, what would be the most difficult things for you to cope with?

91. In being a social worker, what would be the most rewarding things for you?

92. Being a social worker

<p>What is your opinion of the salaries of social workers?</p>	
<p>What is your opinion of the working conditions of social workers?</p>	
<p>What is your opinion of the working opportunities of social workers in South Africa?</p>	
<p>What is your opinion of the working opportunities of social workers outside South Africa?</p>	

YOURSELF AS A PERSON

Tell us about yourself as a person:

93. Describe yourself as a person in terms of your appearance, behaviour, attitudes, emotions, roles, relationships and belief system (Your “self”)

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94. Describe the three things will NEVER change in yourself, starting with the most important as No 1.

No 1	
No 2	
No 3	

95. Describe the three things that had to change about YOURSELF as a person since you started with your studies, starting with the most important as No 1.

		Describe how this affected your life
No 1		
No 2		
No 3		

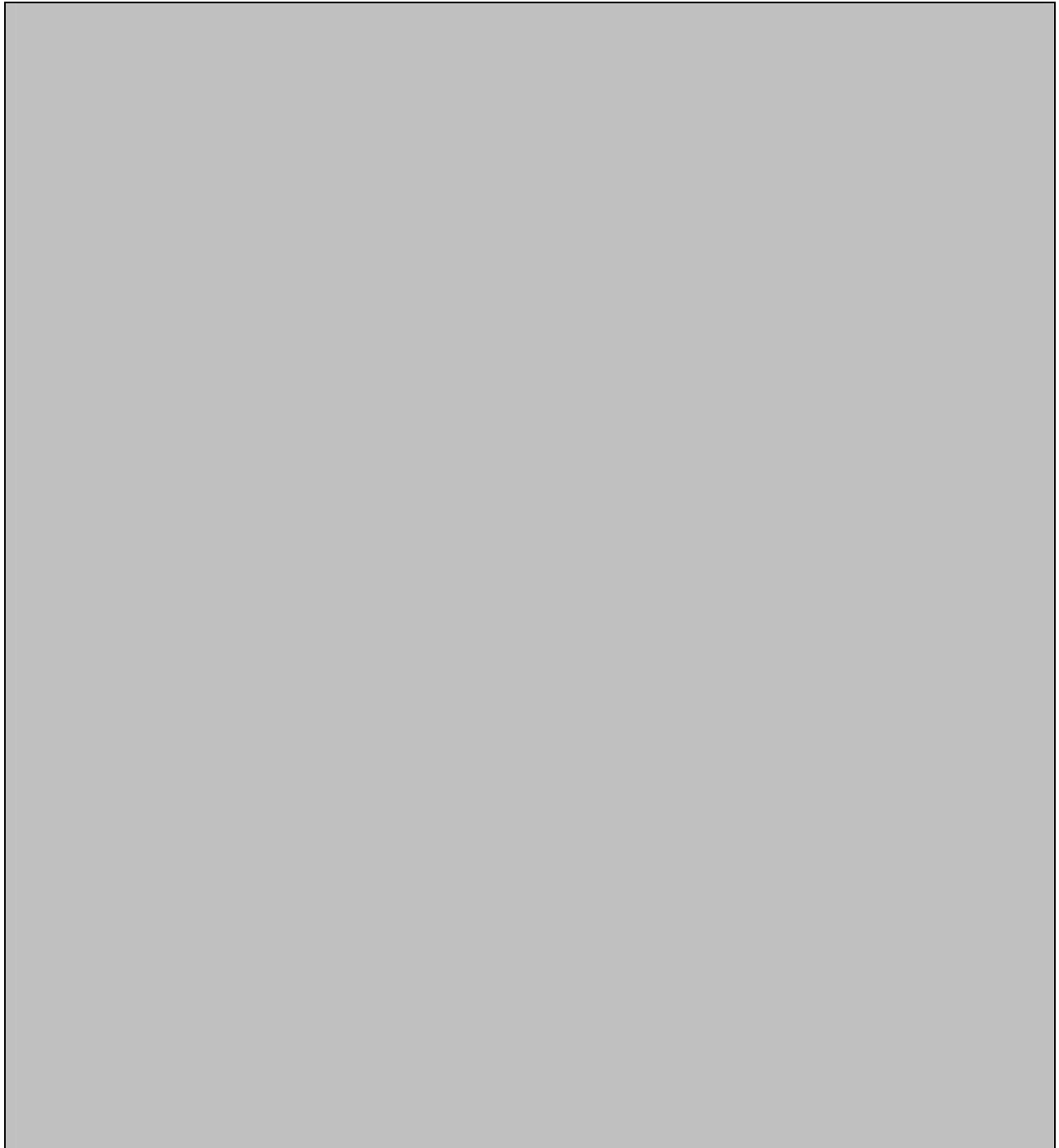
96. Describe the three things that needed to change in YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES since you started with your studies, starting with the most important as No 1.

		Describe how this affected your life
No 1		
No 2		
No 3		

97. What do you think you still need to know or experience as a social work student before you can start working in practice?

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98. Please add anything you feel you would like to tell us about yourself as a person, a social work student and a future social worker:



We really want to thank you for your participation in this research. May you be blessed and really reap the harvest from your hard work.