



## University students face invisible barriers

Initiating dialogues with students can remove the barriers that prevent them from succeeding.

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*Universities can remove barriers that hinder students from succeeding.*

Universities want each student who enters their doors to complete their degree and succeed in their career. However, South African universities have very low student pass rates.

In response to these low pass rates, universities have created a classification system that identifies “at-risk students”, which are those

who may fail at university. This way of thinking shifts the blame and the duty to change to the students. It becomes their responsibility to ensure that they are university-ready and can fit into the university.

As a consequence, students get placed in remedial programmes that lengthen the time they spend obtaining their degree, or they are

redirected to lower qualifications. These students feel like they don’t belong or that they are unable to cope at university.

“Students and universities have the same goals, but seem to be working against each other,” says Dr Angelo Fynn.

Researchers at UNISA have looked at the idea that universities inadvertently place obstacles in the way of students through their rules, policies and procedures. Students at one university were asked whether they found the rules disabling in their learning journey.

“They made it clear that the rules and procedures around examinations need to be more transparent, and that lecturers must take the time to make the link between the coursework and the exam.” Students also said that the use of the learning management system also poses significant barriers.

“The question we raised was whether we needed to start a conversation about ‘at-risk institutions’. These are institutions that are not equipped to meet the learning needs of their students.”



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