

Designing New Undergraduate-Level Statistics Programmes in Present South Africa: The Unitra Model

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SUMMARY

Since the formal birth of new political order in South Africa in May 1994, the Department of National Education (DNE) has been engaged in a complete overhaul of the country's educational system.

In relation to the transformation of University education, argument has been advanced that the present degree structure at South African universities does not adequately prepare graduates for the world of work as well as the developmental needs of the country. The argument goes that, many students graduate after accumulating the required number of courses, but still lacked the sort of knowledge enabling them to relate this knowledge to the work situation.

DNE has responded with wide-ranging policy initiatives culminating in several Acts of Parliament and Education White Papers.

One of these Acts is the South African Qualifications Authority Act (SAQA) No. 58 of 1995. Its purpose, stated at p.2, is *to provide for the development and implementation of a National Qualifications Framework ... and matters connected therewith*. Included among the five objectives of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) are:

X to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements (objective 2(a))

X to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large (objective 2(e))

Complimentary to this legislation, as far as higher education is concerned, is the GENERAL NOTICE 1196 of 1997: Education White Paper 3, which sets out a programme for transformation of higher education. In this Paper it is stated on p.9, section 2.1 that *AHigher education must be planned, governed and funded as a single national co-ordinated system ...* adding in section 2.4 that *AThe most significant conceptual change is that the single co-ordinated system will be premised on a programme-based*

definition of higher education. The letter means that each degree curriculum must be purposefully planned to combine a strong theoretical foundation in one or more academic disciplines with practical skills required in world of work. In other words, each programme must be deliberately explicit about the educational outcomes that it seeks to realise in terms of (a) career options and (b) postgraduate study options.

The background sketched above is intended to provide the reader with (i) the factors which have prompted the curriculum change, and (ii) the context in which these changes have had to be made. In the rest of the paper, we briefly review the bachelor of science degree that is being phased out and examine in detail the programme that is replacing it. We end the paper with a discussion, the main purpose of which is to share with the reader the somewhat fresh and innovating way we think that we have responded to a national challenge of the kind discussed in this paper.