

LIFE COACHING: Disadvantaged students get new skills

PROJECT AIMS TO DETER DROP-OUTS

Special Correspondent

THE HIGH drop-out rate among black South African students has been a concern in education circles for many years, but a novel approach involving the Centre for Coaching at the UCT Graduate School of Business offers a practical solution – life coaching.

Their research, in conjunction with the University of Johannesburg (UJ), shows that students who are academically bright can still struggle in their studies not because of a lack of ability or academic input, but because of a lack of emotional support.

This offers a fresh perspective on alarming recent research by the Human Sciences Research Council, which revealed that up to 40 percent of SA students drop out in their first year at university. Only 15 percent finish their degrees in the specified time and black students make up the biggest percentage of drop-outs.

In many top professions – such as

medicine, engineering and chartered accountancy – black membership is low.

The UJ research targeted chartered accounting bursary students in their final year and set out to establish whether an innovative life coaching project could help improve academic throughput. They invited third-year CA students, who were all holders of a Thuthuka bursary, to volunteer.

Thuthuka students all had strong academic potential, but came from rural, underperforming schools and families with severe financial needs.

“Students are trained well technically, but not much has been done to date to help them cope with their own unique issues and problems on a personal level,” said Erica du Toit, senior lecturer in the Department of Accountancy in UJ’s Faculty of Economic and Financial Sciences Department.

“By teaching students the ability to self-correct and self-regulate within each of their unique life contexts, a well-rounded student with leadership abilities, ethics and a drive for life-long learning can emerge,” says Du Toit. “So we wanted to test this belief.”

Their results speak for themselves. Of the 27 students who had coaching, 78 percent gained admission to the prestigious CA honours programme. Only 62 percent who chose not to receive coaching managed to qualify. The combined rate of students admit-



PRESSURE
Stress or anxiety can cause students to fail or quit
PICTURE: SHUTTERSTOCK

ted into the honours class was 72 percent – a 30 percent improvement on last year.

Each student underwent a coaching programme that consisted of 10 individual sessions with their selected coach over three months.

One of the success stories of the project was Nosipho (not her real name), a bright student from the Vaal Triangle who was battling personal problems, financial issues and a heavy academic load. Raised by a mother who was a domestic worker, Nosipho was feeling guilty about being financially dependent on her mother. She

became emotional and lost focus in her studies. After a few sessions with a life coach, she learnt to manage her emotions better, find structure in her studies and was selected for the Honours and CTA programme.

Janine Everson, academic director of the Centre for Coaching, said: “This research project illustrated that coaching can play a major role in improving the success rates in the higher education system, especially with students who come from disadvantaged and troubled backgrounds, and who have been exposed to sub-par education.”

**TEACHING THE
ABILITY TO SELF-
CORRECT AND
SELF-REGULATE**