



## Thuthuka coaching project at the University of Johannesburg

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### **The Department of Accountancy explores the benefits of life coaching on students' academic performance and overall wellbeing**

During 2011 the Department of Accountancy initiated a research project during which all third year B Com Accounting (CA Stream) Thuthuka students were invited to voluntarily participate in a life coaching research project. The life coaching involved ten one-on-one life coaching sessions effectively spread over a period of three months (September 2011 to November 2011). Of the 43 students on the Thuthuka development programme in third year, 27 students volunteered to form part of this research project.

SAICA (South African Institute for Chartered Accountants) established the Thuthuka development programme in 2002 to assist African and Coloured academically strong learners, who are from families that cannot support them financially during tertiary education. "Thuthuka" is a Zulu verb, meaning to "to develop".

#### ***Driving forces behind the life coaching research project***

During 2008 SAICA developed and approved a competency framework which outlines the competencies expected from a Chartered Accountant (South Africa) (CA(SA)) at point of entry into the profession (i.e. when one is eligible to use the CA(SA) designation).

Prior to the competency framework SAICA relied on a knowledge-based syllabus to inform its education and assessment programmes <sup>(1)</sup>. Thus university programmes were informed by the identification of outcomes, based on core experience requirements. Whilst the identification of outcomes is in no way suggested to be inappropriate, the competency framework does recognise that it is also appropriate to identify the competencies which a CA(SA) should possess when entering the profession. These identified competencies (see graph 1) are used to inform and detail the education and training programmes.

Universities were given freedom around how they constructed their relevant degrees in order for their students to achieve the said competencies. During this restructuring process it is however appropriate to explore some philosophical underpinnings of the approach to competency and the consequent implications



for education and assessment <sup>(1)</sup>. This restructuring process led to UJ's Department of Accountancy deeply reflecting on our course content and teaching and learning model, and ultimately developing and adopting a new teaching and learning model. The Department also ensured that their new teaching and learning model incorporated UJ's vision of "learning to be" rather than "learning to do". Also from this process the Bachelors of Accounting, a new degree, was developed with the purpose to develop the competencies required by the competency framework.

As part of restructuring our teaching and learning model, other interventions on pre-graduate level were also developed and implemented in order to enhance the achieving of, specifically, the pervasive skills required by the competency framework. One of these interventions was the life coaching research project.

In implementing the life coaching research project, recognition was also given to the fact that more than 50% of UJ's students are first generation learners within their family, and a significant portion of our learners have a low Living Standards Medium (as determined in the first year questionnaire which forms part of the First Year Experience project). These factors present unique personal barriers in life which may impact on academic performance.

**Graph 1**



*Source: SAICA Competency Framework*

### ***The life coaching research project***

The life coaching research project was thus launched in order to achieve two main objectives:



- to enhance the achieving of, specifically, the pervasive skills required by the competency framework as well as the skills of a leader; and
- to investigate the correlation of the effect of life coaching presented to students on their academic performance.

It is the Department's belief that 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 be delivered. All of these attributes are crucial in order to deliver a future CA(SA). Historically technical ability was the single focus of our educational programmes. It is clear however that the market expects much more from a CA(SA) than his/her technical ability.

According to Anthony Grant, life coaching can be broadly defined as "a collaborative solution-focused, result-orientated and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of life experience and goal attainment in the personal and/or professional life of normal, nonclinical clients" <sup>(2)</sup>. The purpose of coaching is to unlock long-term excellent performance within a client, whilst the client is able to self-correct and self-generate <sup>(3)</sup>.

For this particular research project, an integral life coaching approach was used. Integral life coaching explores all the constitutional elements of being human: spiritual, cognitive, emotional, relational and somatic <sup>(4)</sup>.

The Department partnered up with the Centre for Coaching at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business in order to offer the life coaching programme. The Centre for Coaching is South Africa's premier executive coaching organisation with local and international accreditation. The Centre for Coaching was contracted to provide five professional coaches who had undergone the rigorous training provided by the Centre for Coaching. The coaches' profiles were distributed to the participating students in order for them to choose a coach that they felt they could connect with best. Each student then underwent a life coaching programme which consisted of 10 individual sessions with their selected coach over a period of three months. The content of each student's life coaching programme was kept confidential in order to instill trust in the process.

### ***Feedback from students***

The general feedback from the students that participated in the coaching project was incredibly positive. An extract of some of the feedback from the students are as follows:

- "When you have someone to talk all your worries with, you have plenty of time to give attention to important things like studies".  
- Naledi Motlanye
- "Coaching has helped me a lot in dealing with my challenges. I am a very stressful person who wants to get things done quickly and sort out any problems. Who would have thought one would learn how to manage stress and postpone worry. There are some things or challenges in life that cannot be sorted now and worrying about them is a waste of time. I have learnt how to postpone that worrying to a future date where it can sort itself out or I can sort it out with ease. That has helped me to prioritise by concentrating on my work and not problems."  
- Vuyelwa Ntuli



- “The life coaching experience was phenomenal. Through this experience I was able to find deep insight about myself and how to become more comfortable with the idea of change in order to be able to study differently and effectively”.

- Mpho Mailane

### **Results and way forward**

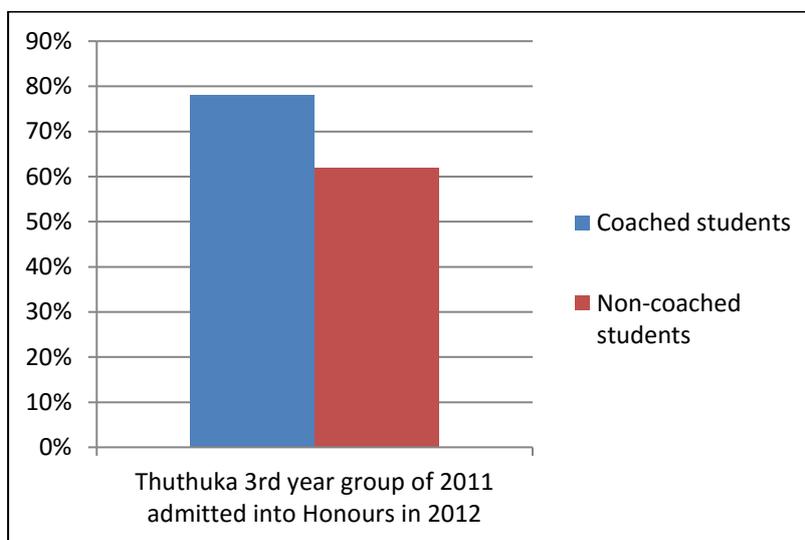
The detailed statistics on academic performance are in the process of being analysed with the purpose of being published as a quantitative research study.

As mentioned before, students participating in the life coaching research project indicated that they found their individual programmes extremely valuable from a personal point of view, and they believe it contributed to their academic success.

One of the inherent restrictions of this research study is the inability to isolate the effect that life coaching had on academic performance. Many variables may have contributed to the students’ academic success, and it might be that life coaching in combination with other factors lead to improved academic performance.

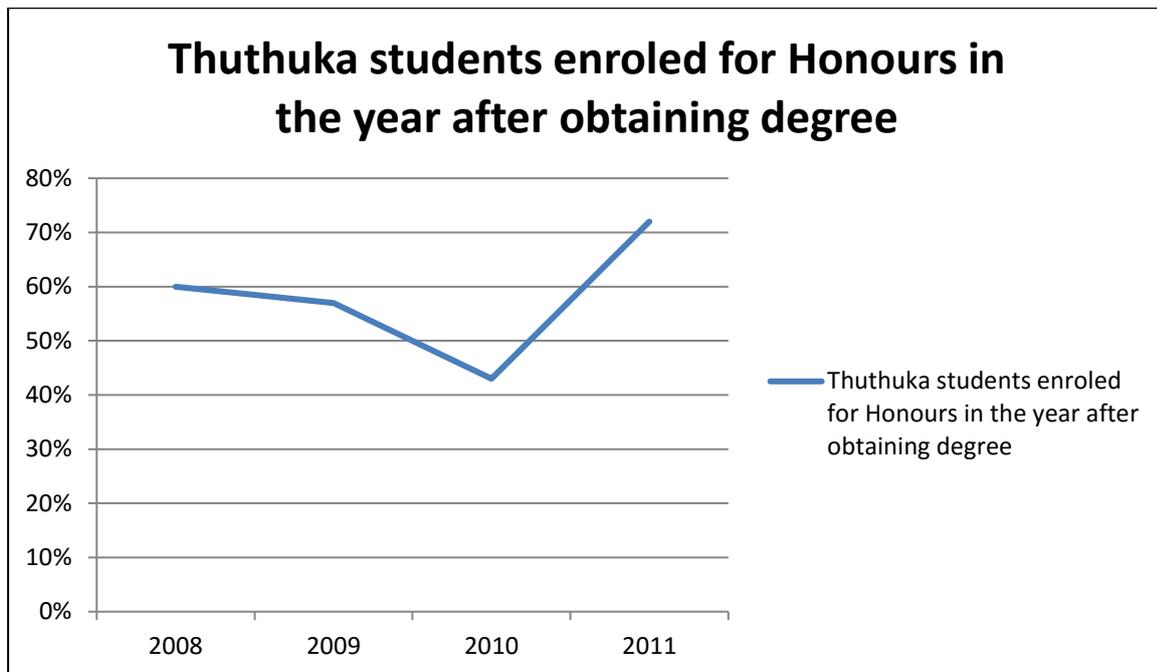
Of the 27 students that participated in the life coaching research project, 78% adhered to the stringent admission requirements of the B Com (Chartered Accountancy) Honours programme. Of the 16 students that did not participate in the life coaching research project, 62% adhered to the B Com (Chartered Accountancy) Honours programme. See graph 2 for a comparison between the students who did and who did not participate in the life coaching project.

### **Graph 2**



The combined rate of Thuthuka students admitted into the Honours class this year is 72%. This compares extremely favourably with prior year statistics (see graph 3).

### **Graph 3**



Upon the finalisation of the quantitative research study, the Department of Accountancy will consider ways to assist their student cohort with life coaching programmes, should the research study prove a positive correlation between academic performance and a life coaching intervention. Life coaching is however a very labour intensive and costly process, and these restrictions need to be taken into account when planning the way forward.

**Sources:**

- (1) SAICA (2008). Competency Framework
- (2) Grant, AM (2003). The impact of life coaching on goal attainment, metacognition and mental health. *Social behavior and personality*, 31(3), 253 - 264
- (3) Flaherty, J (2010). *Coaching, evoking excellence in others*. Third Edition. Elsevier