

What Access? Lived Experiences of International Post-graduate Students from Africa Studying in a South African University

Vitallis Chikoko¹, Daisy Pillay², Kathleen J Pithouse-Morgan³, Pholoho Morojele⁴ and Inbanathan Naicker⁵

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, P bag X03 Ashwood 3605

E-mail: ¹<chikokov@ukzn.ac.za>, ²<Pillaygv@ukzn.ac.za>,

³<Pithousemorgan@ukzn.ac.za>, ⁴<Morojele@ukzn.ac.za>, ⁵<Naickeri1@ukzn.ac.za>

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ABSTRACT This paper reports on a study that investigated lived experiences of international post-graduate students from African countries in one School of a South African university. The researchers saw a knowledge gap regarding how much the institution 'knew' about these students' experiences and sought to address the question: What can be learnt from these experiences regarding *access* to the institution? The study adopted a qualitative research approach involving two in-depth focus group interviews with the students, one at the beginning of the academic year and the other six months later. Data were analysed at two complimentary stages. First data were categorized into two, namely responses about institutional support and those about social and academic experiences. Second, data were further broken down into emerging sub-categories out of which meanings were made. Key observations from the study include that the support sectors of the university were perceived as inefficient and ineffective, academic staff performance was experienced as very good, the university's curricula were viewed as needing fine-tuning, and overall, in seeking to integrate with the institution, some students were more resilient than others. It was concluded that the apparent lack of cohesion between the sectors of the university was inhibitive to student integration. Therefore integrative and epistemological access was under threat.