

The Selection of Academic Role Models by First Year University Students

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ABSTRACT The throughput rates of South African universities have been on the agenda of government and educational institutions for quite a while now. One of the factors that could impact university throughput rates positively is the influence of academic role models. Research has shown that adult role models sharing the same sex, race and/or age with the student could boost their academic performance. In light of this, this study aimed at exploring the differences between groups of first year sociology students at a South African urban university with regard to the criteria they use to select academic role models. The study was conducted at its main campus in 2011. A quantitative research methodology in the form of a self-administered survey was employed. It was found that the sociology first year students at the South African university considered academic qualifications/standing to be the most important criterion when selecting an academic role model compared to age and other socially ascribed statuses like race and sex. The findings of this study therefore diverge from the mainstream findings in the field of role models. This finding implies that the exclusive emphasis on making equity appointments within tertiary institutions in order to establish credible academic role models for university students should be revisited to make provision for a more complex approach, which goes beyond the focus on ascribed status.