



**Invitation to participate in research questionnaire and participant information letter**

23 May 2016

Dear First-year student

My name is Fenella Somerville and I am a Masters in Education student at the Wits School of Education. I am currently conducting a research project titled *An investigation of student capability in private higher education*. The study aims to investigate student's real-world experiences in order to identify and attempt to analyse those factors that may potentially be impairing student functioning and success. As a first-year student registered at a private higher education institution you are ideally positioned to comment on your individual experience at the institution.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. This would require you to complete an online electronic questionnaire, which you can access via an SMS link that will enable you to complete it on your computer or smart phone. The structure of the questionnaire is multiple choice and should only take about 15 minutes of your time. The purpose is to find out about your daily experience of higher education in order to identify factors that you feel are limiting your access, sense of belonging, participation or success in your academic processes. Should you wish to, there will also be the opportunity to participate in a second phase of the project at a later stage. This will entail an interview to explore your experiences in greater detail. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be able to indicate your interest in participating in an individual interview. You are not required to commit to phase 2 yet, nor does your participation in the questionnaire oblige you to participate in the interview. Interview participants would be selected randomly from among those participants who express an interest.

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate there will be no reward or payment, however, you would be required to indicate your understanding of the processes and conditions of participation, and your consent to participate. If you choose not to participate there will be no penalty. Neither participation nor non-participation will affect your course marks or academic progress in any way. If you choose to participate, you have the right to leave out answers to any of the questions. You also have the right to withdraw from participation at any time during the research process, with no negative consequences or penalty to yourself or your course marks. The data obtained by means of the survey will be used to identify student capabilities for further investigation.

Questionnaires will be completed anonymously and neither your name nor that of the institution will be revealed at any time or in any of the research documentation. Confidentiality will be maintained and you can be assured that the privacy of participants will be protected at all times. All data collected (including electronic questionnaires, audio recordings and hard copies of interview transcripts) will be kept securely in a locked cupboard, and will be destroyed by shredding or deleting within three to five years after completion of the study. The results of the research will be used for academic purposes only. This includes my Masters research project, and possible publications in academic journal articles, books and conference presentations. In any of these publications, I guarantee the participants' right to anonymity, and no names of participants, the institution, or any other identifying information will be used. There are no foreseeable risks to the students or the institution in participating in this project. The research project has been cleared by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Education) of The University of the Witwatersrand [Protocol Number 2016ECE001M]. I would expect that participation in the research would provide participants with an opportunity for reflection, and that the results of the study would further our collective understanding of higher education processes with the ultimate intention of improving student success.

If you are willing to participate in this component of the research project, please click on the link that you receive by SMS in order to access the questionnaire. If you have any concerns or queries regarding my research, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time, or contact my research supervisor whose details are below.

Thanking you in anticipation.



Name of student: Fenella Somerville

Wits Student number: 773116

Email: fenella@mweb.co.za

24-hour contact number: 083 288 7278

Research supervisor: Dr Elizabeth Walton

(Elizabeth.Walton@wits.ac.za)

011 717 3768 (office)