



CLOSING THE GAP FOR THE MISSING MIDDLE STUDENTS THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ISFAP AND CUT

Overview:

The Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Program (ISFAP) and the Central University of Technology (CUT) relationship began in 2018, where ISFAP piloted its *wrap-around* support programme on 37 Bachelor of Engineering Technology Mechanical Engineering students registered at the CUT. Upon the adoption of ISFAP into the CUT structures, it was placed under the Registrar's supervision where it was managed by the Deputy -Registrar: Academic Administration, Miss Ntokozo Dlamini, with the assistance of a project administrator, Siphe Zenani who is now the CUT ISFAP programme manager.

Student intake:

To date, a total of 67 students have been on-boarded for the ISFAP wrap-around support programme at the CUT.

- 37 students were on-boarded in 2018;
- 17 students were on-boarded in 2019; and
- 13 students were on-boarded in 2020.

Project challenges and lessons learnt:

It is important to note that the relationship between ISFAP and the CUT kicked-off with several threats to sufficient support for student success. The qualification was new, and the students did not have seniors or peers they could reach out to for guidance.

For these reasons, ISFAP is currently funding 38 remaining active ISFAP/CUT students from all cohorts, citing the following factors for the decline in student numbers:

- ISFAP's contractual obligations that require students' excellent academic performance;
- Internal university academic exclusions;
- Development opportunities; and



- Other factors beyond the control of the funder and the university.

Project successes:

ISFAP's wrap-around support proved to be a silver-lining for students, who have raved about the engagements with relevant offices and support structures that enabled greater support through consultations with the ISFAP head office personnel and the Education Advisor. The support structures that have proven to be of biggest help within the institution are the Student Accounts office, Assessment and Graduations office, Academic administration, Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, Teaching & Learning Unit, the Wellness Centre, and the Student governance office. The above units within the institution were important in the crafting of activities for supporting the students and honing their voice and developmental skills to make them responsible individuals and increase their agency.

The relationship between ISFAP and CUT has yielded positive gains for the institution in terms of capacity development through workshops for programme managers as well as student holistic support. Through curated activities and availed support, ISFAP has:

- Improved the employability of students on the programme;
- Reduced drop-out rates; and
- Improved the skills profile of the community and country at large.

These activities and initiatives, geared towards student psychosocial support and the attainment of some CUT graduate attributes, include:

- The financial literacy workshops ISFAP provided for students at CUT;
- The Engineering Industry day for ISFAP students;
- ISFAP students donating over 50 pairs of school shoes at a local school;
- All round participation in on-campus student development activities (peer mentor & student instruction/tutoring);
- Engagements with lecturers and other CUT personnel on student issues;
- Participation on entrepreneurship activities;
- Reflection sessions every term;



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- Motivational talks and life coaching between regional project manager & students;
- The distribution of laptops;
- Coffee talks with Mo Malele;
- Student awards; and
- Team building activities.

Student feedback

“Going into my first year knowing that it is not always easy to cope with meals, accommodation and study money...ISFAP crossed my road and I am very grateful for that. After a whole process we gained access to our allowances together with a laptop they gave us which was very useful. My laptop surely worked hard throughout my years of study, not having many breaks during the online teaching and learning. It surely helped a lot knowing I have my own laptop to do and finish schoolwork on time. Not to forget about the finance course ISFAP once provided for us. I appreciate more the zoom meetings organised by our program manager that gave us more clarity on certain information needed during our studies and after studies. In our last year we held a small award ceremony and although it was a virtual ceremony, I think the few students who got awarded appreciated that they were recognised for their hard work. It was great working with ISFAP even when there were challenges, we still got through. Thank you ISFAP for helping me make my study dream come true.”

J. Debruine (2018 cohort)





ISFAP

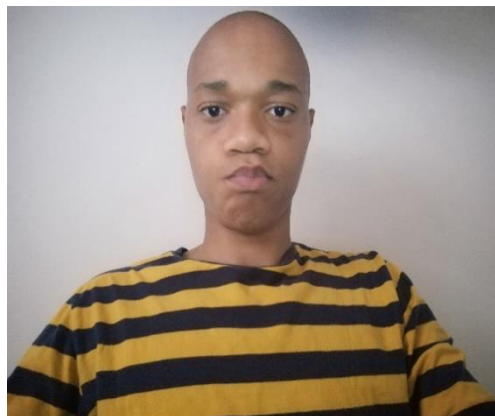
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“My journey with ISFAP started around April 2019. Since then, my life has been favourably transformed. The assistance I received from them has always made sure I focus primarily on my studies and have an additional motivating force to stay committed to them.

They have also contributed to my holistic growth with many programs, seminars, and sessions we attend. I also got to be involved in some volunteer work for the benefit of others. There really is no greater joy than helping other people. It adds purpose to one’s life.

I am grateful for having been a beneficiary of all the benefits ISFAP provides for students to support and assist them.”

M. Matlotlo (2019 cohort)



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“I became part of ISFAP from July 2020, before ISFAP, I was just a student with no ambition, no vision and no dedication. I failed most of my modules because I did not have the kind of support I get from this programme (peer mentorship and being given a platform to talk about the problems concerning students with my bursary manager).

From the moment I received the ISFAP bursary, I started doing things differently because of the way this program is structured.

They make sure that NO STUDENT IS LEFT BEHIND. I made friends within the programme, friends with whom we speak the same language (ENGINEERING LANGUAGE). This is one of the extraordinary things one will find on this programme. Because of this programme and its support, I am now an extraordinary student, I am entrepreneurial, and I have developed leadership skills (GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES). I believe that if other bursary schemes can adopt the ISFAP bursary structure then most students will graduate with the drive to make an impact.”

W. Sello (2020 cohort)

“Academic success starts when a student is in class with only the stress of equations not what she/he will eat or where she/he will stay. Everyone can rise above their circumstance and achieve success if they are dedicated and passionate about what they do.

As a student I must take it upon myself to ensure that I receive the highest education possible so that I can represent South Africa well in the future as a future leader and ISFAP gave me an opportunity of a lifetime. I got encouraged and motivated after all the challenges I went through ever since I got to varsity regarding funding and I was not alone in this. Others are still going through it but my experience with ISFAP gave me hope. I was thrilled to learn of my selection for this honour, and I am deeply appreciative for the support I have received. ISFAP truly makes a difference for students like myself because ever since I was funded, I became more positive towards most things, personally and academically and I wish an African child can get the same opportunity because that would mean free education. My gratitude is beyond measure for the opportunity ISFAP gave me.”

D. Khesa (2020 cohort)

