DELL YOUNG LEADERS

CASE STUDY

DELL YOUNG LEADERS
MICHAEL & SUSAN DELL FOUNDATION

Based on the Evaluation Report compiled by
SINGIZI CONSULTING
LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT : CONCEPTS THAT WORK

FOREWORD

Ian Scott, May 2016

The South African higher education sector regularly receives deserved accolades of various kinds – particularly for leading research on the continent, contributing to global scholarship, and being able to produce numbers of graduates who are internationally competitive in postgraduate studies and the world of work. However, there is a deep and longstanding flaw at the heart of the sector that concerns its responsibility to enabling personal, economic and social upliftment at home: that is, that its educational mission is effective with only a very small and generally privileged layer of our diverse population, and it has to a large extent failed to successfully accommodate talented students from the disadvantaged communities that make up the bulk of our population.

It is now common cause that higher education is crucial to the advancement of individuals and their families as well as to the progress and well-being of societies at large. However, a range of studies on South African higher education over the last decade have all shown that completion rates – by far the most important performance indicator for personal and economic development – have persistently been very low. The latest figures from the Department of Higher Education and Training[1] and the Council on Higher Education[2] show under 30% of 'contact' undergraduates (that is, excluding distance education students from University of South Africa) graduating in the formally-allocated time, and only another 25% graduating within an additional two years. If University of South Africa students (who make up a third of total enrolment) are included, the national completion rate drops to 37% after seven years. These broad performance patterns have shown no substantial change for at least a decade.

It is true that low success rates are found in various other countries too, but almost always in a context of high participation. In contrast, participation in South African higher education is still very low in comparison with countries at a similar stage of economic development[3]. What this means is that the students in our universities constitute a small, select group of relatively high achievers with strong academic potential. Despite the well-known deficiencies of the South African school system, the success of this elite group in advanced studies should surely be made possible by our higher education system.

Moreover, critical to the prospects of substantial improvement – and hence meeting the country's social and

1. 2000 to 2008 first time entering undergraduate cohort studies for public higher education institutions. Pretoria: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2016.
2. VitalStats: Public Higher Education 2013. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education, 2015.
3. A proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa: The case for a flexible curriculum structure. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education, 2013.

economic development needs – is the fact that successful participation in higher education remains severely skewed along race and socio-economic lines. In terms of race, despite increases in black enrolment, well under 15% of African and coloured youth gain access to any form of higher education, and under half succeed[4]. Data based on socio-economic status are still very scarce, but recent studies confirm that access to higher education is extremely limited for indigent students[5]. Furthermore, since eligibility for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) can be taken as an indicator of poverty, the particularly low completion rates of NSFAS-supported students (as referred to in this report) highlight the severity of the systemic obstacles faced by those from the lower-income groups.

Given South Africa's demographics, it is predominantly from these groups that growth in high-level expertise of all kinds must come, so their continuing under-representation and low completion rates have major implications for South Africa's economic development and social cohesion. However, it is evident from the performance patterns that the higher education system is a long way from successful adjustment to the educational realities and needs of our majority population groups. As long as this failing persists, so will our debilitating skills shortages, and the higher education sector will not have the capacity to play the full role in individual and national development that the country needs from it.

It is therefore to the great credit of the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation that the Dell Young Leaders programme was designed to tackle the daunting challenges of this situation head-on. The foundation has chosen to focus much of its developmental effort in South Africa on students from backgrounds that are both educationally and socio-economically disadvantaged, despite the fact that the intersection of these harsh life conditions results in such formidable obstacles to success. This target group represents young people who are collectively the most vulnerable section of the student body – educationally, psychologically, socially and culturally – in the traditional, often alienating university environment. However, they are also the group that is likely to have the highest level of unrealised potential, and, as noted earlier, whose maturation into educated, skilled and responsible citizens is most likely to make a difference to the future trajectory of the country. Enabling such students to realise their potential, instead of leaving university with nothing but debt, warrants top priority and commendation for agencies that commit themselves to this goal.

In the field of higher education development, there is a tension between the need for sector-wide reform, aimed at dealing with underlying systemic problems, and smaller-scale, focused interventions put in place within education institutions or by concerned civil-society bodies. Some criticise the latter as lacking wide impact. In my view, such criticism fails to understand the process of systemic change in education. Firstly, positive systemic change is very hard to effect and usually takes a distressingly long time. Smaller-scale initiatives are thus essential for bringing hope and advancement to deserving people, and can have

4. A proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa: The case for a flexible curriculum structure. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education, 2013.
5. S. van der Berg: Funding university studies: Who benefits? In Kagisano 10. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education, 2016.

a significant impact on particular areas of life, individually or collectively. Secondly, system-wide interventions often fail to achieve their goals, most commonly because they are insufficiently rooted in sound knowledge and experience. In this key respect, smaller-scale interventions – whether undertaken by private agencies or within educational institutions – are the crucial laboratories for analysing, researching and gaining practical experience in what it takes to overcome systemic obstacles. This role is invaluable in a world such as education where achievement is subject to such a wide range of factors and variables.

The success of civil-society initiatives in making these key contributions is subject to two obvious conditions: that they are effective in themselves, and that the what and how of their work and the insights gained from it are openly communicated. In my view, the Dell Young Leaders programme has been exemplary in this.

The courage shown by the foundation – in particular by its staff in South Africa – in focusing on the area of greatest challenge in South African higher education has been matched by excellent programme design and implementation. In my view, the planning of the Dell Young Leaders programme was based on gaining in-depth knowledge of the field, on astute judgment, and on a willingness to take a comprehensive approach arising from seeing the students as whole human beings; and its implementation has been most impressive, honouring the founding vision, paying due attention to detail, keeping the students at the centre of the project, and being open to learning from experience. The proof of the pudding lies in its extraordinary success, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Caitlin Baron, Thashlin Govender and their colleagues and associates for what they have achieved.

In terms of communication, the commissioning and publication of this case study stands as a fine start to fulfilling the key responsibility of what the Carnegie Foundation's Lee Shulman called 'going public' as an essential element of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This case study does justice to the Dell Young Leaders programme as it has evolved to date, and I trust the report will be widely disseminated and taken seriously within the higher education sector.

In my experience of the Dell Young Leaders programme, its hallmark has been the respect it has demonstrated for the dignity of the students and the importance of their sense of self-worth. The comprehensiveness of the support the programme has offered, and the responsibility it has called for from the students in return, characterise the essentially humane nature of the project, and its success points to the importance of this in all interventions of its kind.

Emeritus Professor Ian Scott, is the former Director of Academic Development Programmes, and Deputy Dean at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. He has been a member of the Ministry of Higher Education's Reference Group on academic development since 2000. His research and development interests over the last 30 years include higher education policy related to teaching-and-learning, curriculum and qualifications frameworks, and comparative models for widening participation in higher education.

CONTENTS

01. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** page 02

02. **INTRODUCTION & PROGRAMME CONTEXT** page 07

03. **METHODOLOGY** page 10

04. **DELL YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAMME MODEL** page 14

05. **RECOMMENDATIONS** page 38

06. **CONCLUSION** page 41

01.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In South Africa, far too many university students on financial aid never make it to graduation with a degree in hand.

Government findings reported in 2010 suggest that since the inception of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, just 19% of students had graduated, 33% were still studying, and 48% had dropped out or otherwise not completed their studies. Why?[1] Department of Higher Education and Training analysis points to a lack of academic and other support for National Student Financial Aid Scheme students – many of whom are first in their families to attend university – as a major contributing factor.

In 2010, seeing the unmet need behind these troubling statistics, the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation launched Dell Young Leaders, an innovative bursary programme to deliver strategic, systematic support for high potential students from historically and financially disadvantaged schools and communities.

The transition to university is an enormous leap across economic, social and cultural barriers for most first-generation students. Research suggests that student support and peer mentorship programmes can have significant impact on student success rates. Most universities, however, are only able to offer these on a limited scale.[2]

While other bursary programmes tend to target students based on academic merit, the Dell Young Leaders programme serves first-generation university students with the greatest financial need who have already jumped myriad hurdles to earn their place in top-tier higher education institutions and pursue a professional degree. The programme selects youth with a proven track record of overcoming adversity, who have received National Student Financial Aid Scheme funding and been assessed at a zero expected family contribution through the means test.

Dell Young Leaders students receive financial relief because the programme works to close the gap between National Student Financial Aid Scheme funding and the high cost of attendance; flexible funds can be deployed for a wide range of expenses both small (from soap and deodorant to job interview clothing) and large (from textbooks and loan repayment to further professional study.) At the time this external review was conducted, Dell Young Leaders served 365 students at two highly ranked universities, the University of Cape Town and the University of Pretoria. (Since then, the programme has added an additional 100 students.)

The programme has ambitious targets: that 80% of its students will graduate from university and 100% will be employed or pursuing further study upon graduation. To date, the programme is on track with a 91% persistence rate[3] and 100% employment amongst programme graduates. This case study shares insights into how the Dell Young Leaders programme is helping students reach these results when, countrywide, an estimated 55%[4] of university students will fail to graduate and youth unemployment remains staggeringly high, at nearly 35%[5], in contrast with the 5% unemployment rate among university first degree holders.

Our analysis of the Dell Young Leaders programme suggests that a relatively small financial investment – combined with the right mix of targeted academic, psychosocial and career readiness support – goes a long way toward producing university graduates who are well positioned to become leaders in their professions and communities. Qualitative and quantitative evaluation finds that programme graduates have the propensity to give back, both to their households and their communities, through volunteer work, financial support and mentoring. Most critically, the external evaluation finds that the programme has had personal and academic impact on students; the safety net provided by programme support enabled the students to overcome difficulties and succeed. This suggests that investments in such safety net supports are worthwhile.

The external evaluation finds this programme impact on students' lives comes from both what the Dell Young Leaders programme does, and how programme staff do it.

- Psychometric analysis of Dell Young Leaders confirms the need for "wrap-around" support; disadvantaged students need more than financial help.
- The programme provides this wrap-around support – which is both broad and deep – by addressing students' financial, academic, and psychosocial obstacles to graduating, and equipping students with needed support and skills to help them secure meaningful employment in their chosen professions.
- Students report that it is not just the services offered, but also the relationships forged with staff who, in turn, offer services in a caring, person-centred way, that made a real difference. Students report feeling treated as individuals worthy of attention and care, and feeling part of a family-like community of programme staff and Dell Young Leaders peers.
- Dell Young Leaders staff connect economically disadvantaged university students with private sector companies; this benefits a broader population of

1. Department of Higher Education and Training: Report of the Ministerial Committee on the Review of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, 2010.
2. International Business & Economics Research Journal: Present Day Dilemmas and Challenges of the South African Tertiary System, 2013.
3. Some 9% of students have been pushed out of their studies through academic exclusion or due to situational challenges, for example pregnancy, mental health or family issues.
4. Council of Higher Education. A proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South African: The case for a flexible curriculum structure, 2013.
5. OECD: Employment Outlook 2015, Chapter 1. SA unemployment rate amongst 15–29 year olds at 34.5%.

students beyond those in the programme because it has an impact on the attitudes of key administrators in the university structures and private sector employers.

- Through Dell Young Leaders, students meet face-to-face with prospective employers in both formal and informal settings; programme staff actively build relationships with corporates and leverage private sector resources to help build students' career readiness. Employers who have hired programme graduates report they would do so again.
- The programme employs technology to efficiently and effectively select programme students, manage funds, incentivise students to share academic, financial or psychosocial hurdles, track student progress and programme participation, connect students with one another, and flag students at risk of falling off track.
- The programme demonstrates best practice in its willingness and ability to continually hone its approach as the programme matures and grows.

This case study places the Dell Young Leaders programme in context, maps the programme model, describes the programme impact and challenges, and outlines opportunities for key stakeholders to leverage learning from the programme to help spur needed systemic changes. The country faces urgent social and economic imperatives to ensure that a university degree and a trajectory of professional employment are not reserved for the privileged few. In reality, no bursary programme will ever be able to serve all the qualified students in need. This underscores the need for invested parties to consider taking steps to help first-generation, economically disadvantaged students succeed at university – and beyond. These steps involve minimising financial, situational, and psychosocial stressors that can contribute to a student's failure to graduate.

THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING COULD:

- work to ensure students receive their National Student Financial Aid Scheme loan in time for their first term at university and eliminate the gap between what the loans cover and the full costs of attendance to enable the more disadvantaged students to complete.
- collaborate with higher education institutions to consider how they can offer students not just academic support, but situational and psychosocial support to help them successfully navigate university and manage challenges during their studies.
- consider tracking graduation and employment rates of National Student Financial Aid Scheme students.

> "The biggest thing that was life-changing was getting accepted – having family. Because I actually come from a sibling family where we don't have parents. There wasn't really anybody by me that I can actually go to and say, "This is the situation I am facing right now." (After becoming a Dell Young Leader) I made it into the family which turned out to be this kind of a family where I can actually get the whole support which I was missing."
>
> University of Pretoria male undergraduate

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS COULD:

- institute new support, or expand existing support, for needy students with basic items, such as food and toiletries, as well as accommodation and study items, such as photocopy monies.
- prioritise tracking National Student Financial Aid Scheme students' graduation and employment rates.
- reassess policies and practices that inadvertently hinder disadvantaged students' success, such as a lack of access to residences, proactive outreach to and advocacy for disadvantaged students to access existing academic skills and support centres, and services that address crisis management as well as social integration and adaptation to university life.
- consider how they can better prepare graduates for employment with greater emphasis on career services and employer outreach generally.

OTHER SCHOLARSHIP-BURSARY PROGRAMMES COULD:

On the financial side

- contemplate partnering with the National Student Financial Aid Scheme to target students who have met university requirements but who require aid to cover the gap between the National Student Financial Aid Scheme's loans and the full cost of attendance, thus leveraging bursary programme monies to serve more students with a lower per-student cost by paying only the top-up bursary versus a full-cost bursary.
- consider offering higher education institutions small sums to help students meet their basic needs.

On the non-financial side

- consider providing students holistic supports: academic, situational, psychosocial and career readiness.
- weigh installing some staff on-campus to work face-to-face with students.
- think about employing technology to better manage programme finances and, more critically, to closely monitor and support students.

EMPLOYERS COULD:

- help close the gap between employer expectations and higher education outcomes through partnership with universities, mentoring students, and providing students internships and vacation work opportunities to better equip them with the hard and soft skills needed in the professional world.
- diversify their businesses and gain talent through intentional hiring of disadvantaged students who have proven track records of perseverance, recognising that first-generation students may need financial assistance to relocate or mentorship in the work place.

A university degree remains out of reach for many disadvantaged students. A well-crafted combination of financial help and a student-centred system of academic, situational, psychosocial and career readiness support is helping young people from historically disadvantaged schools and communities beat the odds to graduate from university, and find meaningful employment and pursue further study. As higher-education leaders contemplate pressing system reforms, they may glean ideas from the Dell Young Leaders programme that are helping deliver results and transform lives, as documented in this case study.

02.

INTRODUCTION & PROGRAMME CONTEXT

Students face a South African higher education system that itself is at a crossroad.

With a university degree financially out of reach for many, students are clamouring for lower fees, making international headlines in the process (South Africa's average per capita GDP was $6,800[6] in 2016; the approximate annual cost of attendance at the University of Cape Town and the University of Pretoria was $7,400).

6. World Bank: World Development Indicators Database, 2015.

While the National Student Financial Aid Scheme vision calls for opening the university doors to historically disadvantaged students, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme cannot meet student demand for loans and bursaries[7]. Furthermore, the maximum National Student Financial Aid Scheme awards only cover a portion of students' costs of attendance, particularly at top-ranked universities and in certain areas of study, requiring students to find top-up funding to complete their studies – or face dropping out.

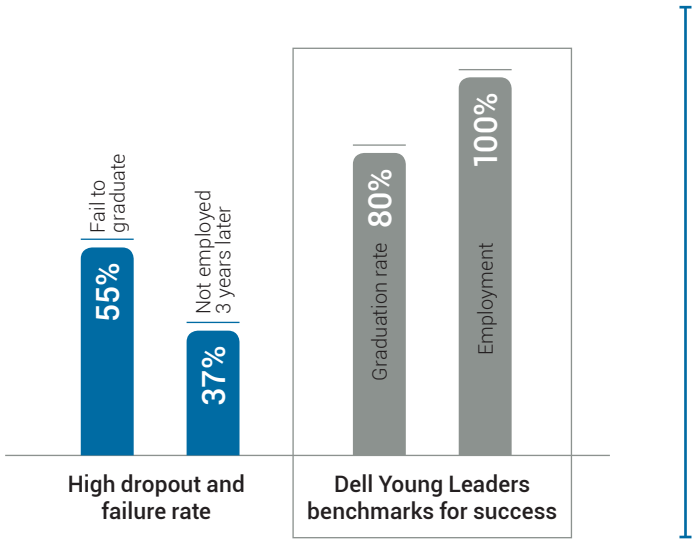
Historically disadvantaged students, most of whom are black, face a slew of other barriers in getting to and through university, from imperatives to contribute to family income to orphan status. Many attend under-resourced primary and secondary schools that are ill equipped to prepare them for university. (The grade 12 matric pass rate for black students is often half that of white students, mostly due to poor quality primary and secondary schooling.[8])

For disadvantaged students who do make it to university, the challenges can be daunting. Many arrive on campus with massive academic deficits. Many are the first in their families to attend university and feel socially and culturally alienated on historically white campuses. Many students confront myriad financial challenges that result in untenable trade-offs to meet their basic needs. Both the Dell Young Leaders programme and the Centre for Higher Education Transformation have found that even relatively small expenditures can create big problems. Students miss classes because they are self-conscious about lacking basic toiletries for personal hygiene or because they were too hungry.

High dropout and failure rates have resulted. An estimated 55%[9] of university students will fail to graduate; National Student Financial Aid Scheme students face an even higher failure rate[10]. This has implications for the futures of both the students themselves, and the system and society as a whole. Some 37% of students who drop out of higher education are unemployed three years after leaving university[11]. When aid recipients leave university

> The Dell Young Leaders programme was designed to help end this "revolving door" by creating a holistic, student-centred system of academic, situational, psychosocial and work readiness supports.

7. Report of the Ministerial Committee on the Review of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, 2011.
8. National Planning Commission: National Development Plan, 2011.
9. Council of Higher Education: A proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa: The case for a flexible curriculum structure, 2013.
10. Department of Higher Education and Training: Report of the Ministerial Committee on the Review of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, 2010.
11. Bhorat, Mayet & Visser, 2010.



before gaining the skills and degree needed to secure solid employment, it becomes difficult for them to repay the National Student Financial Aid Scheme loans and refill the public coffers to enable other students to attend university.

A 2011 Ministerial Review of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme by the Department of Higher Education and Training described the net result of the high drop-out and low graduation rates among poor, disadvantaged students as a "revolving door": While some are able to enter higher education, they face many challenges to complete their degree, dropping out only to return to poverty (and often saddled with significant student loan debt). The White Paper for Post School Education and Training states that "success and throughput rates is a very serious challenge for the university sector and must become a priority focus for national policy and for the institutions themselves, in particular in improving access and success for those groups whose race, gender or disability status had previously disadvantaged them".[12]

The Dell Young Leaders programme was designed to help end this "revolving door" by creating a holistic, student-centred system of academic, situational, psychosocial and work readiness supports for poor, first-generation university students from historically disadvantaged schools and communities. The programme benchmarks for success include targets of an 80% graduation rate and 100% employment rate after graduation. External evaluation finds that Dell Young Leaders is on track to meet its goals because the programme works effectively and holistically with each student as an individual to maximise his or her chance of success. Students themselves report being profoundly impacted by the services offered and the caring way they are offered, through an attentive, supportive community of programme peers and staff that helps humanise and personalise the larger institutional university experience.

12. As approved by Cabinet on 20 November 2013.

03.

METHODOLOGY

This external evaluation utilised several quantitative and qualitative methodologies to ensure that the evaluation team developed a full understanding of the Dell Young Leaders programme and could triangulate the data to produce comprehensive and credible findings.

CONTRIBUTORS

Singizi integrated the various reports and completed key areas of evaluative research, including interviews with the universities, with students who did not consistently participate in programmatic workshops, and with staff from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and Dell Young Leaders programme. Singizi also conducted Dell Young Leaders graduate and employer surveys, as well as analysis of a range of quantitative data.

Angela Smith (nee Schaffer) from Angela Schaffer Smith Consulting was responsible for the Most Significant Change work.

Dr. Nicola Taylor and Sharlene Olivier from JvR Psychometrics conducted a psychometric profile analysis of 202 Dell Young Leaders.

INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSIS

Singizi conducted one-hour, in-person interviews with three senior officials from both universities involved in the programme – the University of Cape Town and the University of Pretoria – as well as with six Michael & Susan Dell Foundation and Dell Young Leaders programme staff.

Of the 36 Dell Young Leaders who had graduated at the time of evaluation, 21 responded to an online survey. The survey asked for information on graduates' perceptions of their experiences as Dell Young Leaders, but focused on their activities post-graduation, such as graduates' employment or further study status; the extent of graduates' financial or other support to their childhood households and/or broader social circles in accessing education or employment; and the extent of graduates' leadership status in their local communities.

Singizi conducted telephone interviews with current Dell Young Leaders identified as not having participated in one or more wrap-around service offerings to better understand the reasons why, and potentially inform programme improvements: 14 of the 25 Dell Young Leaders students identified responded, representing several fields of study.

Analysis of a range of Dell Young Leaders quantitative programme data examined the effect of wrap-around services on programme students. Analysis of data regarding the South African higher education landscape sought to place the Dell Young Leaders programme in context.

In two-hour sessions, students and graduates were asked to recount the most important positive or negative changes in their lives during their programme participation and asked to give reasons for these changes.

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STUDY

Most Significant Change is a qualitative research approach used to monitor or assess the efficacy of complex projects. In this study, conducted between December 2014 and June 2015, Dell Young Leaders participants told stories about how the programme had most significantly affected their lives. Dell Young Leaders staff helped verify, classify and attribute value to the oral evidence participants' stories generated.

Most Significant Change findings were intended to help improve programme effectiveness by: highlighting significant contributions to the Dell Young Leaders' well-being and success; identifying any superfluous provision so that programme resources might be redirected effectively; and suggesting refinements in student support.

Of the 63 representative Dell Young Leaders asked to participate, a purposive sample of 30 students and 15 graduates from the University of Cape Town and the University of Pretoria (25 men and 20 women), agreed to participate in one of the nine storytelling groups. In two-hour sessions, students and graduates were asked to recount the most important positive or negative changes in their lives during their programme participation and asked to give reasons for these changes. Focus groups explored the advice participants would give to first-year university entrants who resembled their younger selves as well as any feedback participants could offer on particular elements of the support programme.

EMPLOYER SURVEY

Singizi surveyed, by phone and email, all six employers that have hired Dell Young Leaders programme graduates. Those surveyed were First National Bank, the Department of Health, KPMG, MMI Holdings, The Foschini Group and Unilever.

PSYCHOMETRIC PROFILING

JvR Psychometrics assessed 202 active Dell Young Leaders students from the two participating universities in February 2015 in the areas of cognitive ability, personality and emotional intelligence to better understand the Dell Young Leaders student profile, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and provide maximum insight for selecting and supporting Dell Young Leaders going forward. They were benchmarked against young working adults with similar socio-economic status. To our knowledge, this work represents the first psychometric assessment of National Student Financial Aid Scheme students. Online testing instruments used were a Basic Traits Inventory (BTI), Matrigma and Emotional Quotient Inventory 2.0 (EQ-I 2.0).

04.

DELL YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAMME MODEL

The Michael & Susan Dell Foundation describes an ideal Dell Young Leader as a youth who:

- Has experienced situational hardship and overcome adversity
- Shows persistence through goal-directed actions and problem-solving abilities
- Demonstrates leadership experience and a vision for the future
- Has the academic ability and preparedness to cope with university demands

The Dell Young Leaders programme stands apart from other bursaries for its holistic wrap-around supports and use of technology to both manage programme funds and administration and – critically – to track and support students through university graduation and employment. Programme aid does more than simply fill the critical financial gap between what National Student Financial Aid Scheme provides and the true cost of attendance. The programme also delivers aid in a way that is responsive and sensitive to students' needs and offers students financial incentives to help ensure they report data critical to keeping them on track.

IN SELECTING THE PARTICIPATING UNIVERSITIES, THE FOUNDATION ESTABLISHED CORE CRITERIA THAT REQUIRED THE INSTITUTION TO:

- enrol sufficient numbers of National Student Financial Aid Scheme students.
- have functioning academic, situational (psychosocial) and financial student support services.
- possess strong credibility with employers in its professional programmes.
- have leadership buy-in for the Dell Young Leaders programme.

With this in mind, the foundation chose to launch the programme at the University of Cape Town in 2010, followed by the University of Pretoria in 2012.

WHO IS SERVED TO DATE?

The programme serves National Student Financial Aid Scheme-supported students from families poor enough to have zero expected family contribution and who have already been accepted to the University of Cape Town and the University of Pretoria in a professional degree programme. These factors round out the picture of who is served to date:

- 87% of students are black, 7% are coloured or mixed race, 4% are Indian and 2% are white.
- Psychometric assessment of Dell Young Leaders programme students (in what is thought to be the first such assessment of National Student Financial Aid Scheme students) reveals that:
  - The main factors that appear to contribute to student success are self-discipline, emotional stability, and the ability to cope with stress. The students more at risk of failure would be less conscientious, more prone to stress, and more impulsive risk-takers. Profiling found a high correlation between situational factors students face and their academic performance.

– When compared to working adults, programme students have a specific psychometric profile, one which clearly points to the need for supports
  - From a personality perspective, the students tended to be less emotionally stable, more anxious, self-conscious, and prone to depression.
  - From an emotional intelligence perspective, the students tended to score lower on most elements measured, most notably stress management (a typical finding in student profiles generally, not just those in the Dell Young Leaders programme.)
  - The students scored lower on "resilience factors" such as stress tolerance and conscientiousness (unsurprising given that the programme selects students who have experienced adverse circumstances and hardships, and overcome them. According to JvR Psychometrics, these environments tend to cultivate a less resilient psychological structure; students will possibly have more difficulty coping with university demands than students with more positive experiences growing up.)

STUDENT SELECTION

Participating universities pass to programme staff the rosters of qualifying first-year students enrolled on their campuses who meet the National Student Financial Aid Scheme means test. The programme then further sorts for students with zero family contribution who are enrolled in a professional degree programme. Qualifying students are invited to complete a comprehensive online application; detailed questions get at students' persistence and ability to cope with adversity. An algorithm generates a quantitative "adversity score" for each student. In-person interviews with the top 75 applicants at each institution allow for further evaluation.

Unlike other bursary programmes, the Dell Young Leaders bursary does not select for academic performance beyond the academic threshold that enrolment in a top-tier university requires. In other words, Dell Young Leaders are not all top scorers on matric or the National Benchmark Tests. JvR Psychometric analysis found the programme selection sound, particularly as cognitive ability does not appear to be linked to academic success at university, once students have met the entrance requirements for a professional degree programme. The analysis concluded that additional measures of cognitive ability were not likely to add value to the selection process.

Unlike other bursary programmes, the Dell Young Leaders programme does not select for academic performance beyond the academic threshold that enrolment in a top-tier university requires.

Evaluation found the online processes and selection criteria effective in identifying university students who are most in need of support and have high odds of success when wrap-around supports are there for them. The online processes also demonstrate the potential to efficiently run a highly impactful bursary programme without a large staff to manage it. The Dell Young Leaders team comprises of one full-time project manager per campus, one part-time psychologist referred to as a personal and professional development consultant per campus, and one full-time foundation staff member dedicated to managing employer relationships and supporting students' successful transition to the world of work.

By partially automating selection (through the structured online questions) the programme team saves more than 250 hours a year without harming the selection process integrity. The programme has moved away from its initial (more labour-intensive) use of applicant essays and readers to score them, as staff found reader scores did not materially influence final candidate selection.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT: BOTH BIG (NATIONAL STUDENT FINANCIAL AID SCHEME TOP-UP) AND SMALL (SWIPE CARDS, LAPTOPS)

In addition to the aid itself, the way the programme delivers aid is seen as integral to fulfilling the mission of getting students through university and into employment. Financial tools play a strategic role beyond simply providing much-needed funds; they support students' academic work, well-being and work readiness.

Swipe card: Each student receives a preloaded swipe card that can be used for food, toiletries, medicine, books, transport, and employment-related costs (such as appropriate interview and work attire). Because the funds have some flexibility, students can buy what they really need and not be forced to make untenable choices between, say, food or medicine. Students also receive R150 per semester for printing and photocopy costs.

The programme incentivises students to self-report key situational information in an online check-in at the start

of every semester. Once students report, their swipe card funds are released. (More on online reporting in the following technology section.) This helps programme staff expeditiously address the challenges a student is facing. For example, early reporting keeps open the possibility for an academically struggling student to discuss with staff a change of course while the registration period is open and such changes are still possible.

Laptop: Each student receives a fully insured Dell laptop (which can be replaced if broken or stolen.) The laptop is a critical tool for students to become computer literate, to maximise their university studies (University of Cape Town plans to expand its WiFi and make lectures available online), and to develop their online professional profiles (such as LinkedIn) and enable easy access to online job applications. Most Dell Young Leaders would have had minimal to no computer access prior to university.

Top-up aid: The Dell Young Leaders bursary money has an unusual degree of flexibility, compared with other programmes. The programme provides R150 000 which can be used, as required, during the student's time at university. Students are funded on an "N+2" formula, where N is the degree's minimum time required and the +2 are the additional two years the student may take to complete their qualification (this formula aligns with the National Student Financial Aid Scheme maximum duration of support). Bursary holders are allowed to accept bursaries from corporates or government as some of these are linked to employment.

Of note: If all the money is not needed in a given year – because the student received another bursary or completed in the minimum number of years – the student can use the money to help repay National Student Financial Aid Scheme loans or fund further studies. Money allocated to the student will always be paid against the student's account. This is critical: the average National Student Financial Aid Scheme debt at graduation for Dell Young Leaders students is between R165,829 (University of Cape Town) and R173,426 (University of Pretoria).

Significantly, programme funds are not reallocated if a student is excluded from their degree or receives full-cost funding elsewhere. In the case of exclusion, programme staff help students appeal and continue their studies at the university, even in a different field. Similarly, students who change degrees within their university are not expelled from the programme. Dell Young Leaders programme

funds allocated to students who subsequently receive full bursaries elsewhere are used to pay off those students' National Student Financial Aid Scheme loan and these students are encouraged to continue in the wrap-around programme.

The average annual cost of attendance for Dell Young Leaders students in 2015 was R81,221. On average, the Dell Young Leaders programme contributed R27,642 per annum to students in the programme, representing 34% of the annual cost of attendance. The balance is made up of National Student Financial Aid Scheme loans and/or "other receipts" such as other bursaries.

To help universities manage the grants, a Dell Young Leaders finance manual serves as a complete reference document for all of the grant's financial requirements and outlines suggested implementation procedures.

"When I got National Student Financial Aid Scheme help it took some financial burden away. When I got the Dell Young Leaders bursary it made life completely stress free and things changed ..."

University of Pretoria male student

TECHNOLOGY: PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT AND STUDENT TRACKING TOOLS TO TAILOR SUPPORT

Technology is at the centre of programme management and the student-by-student tracking that enables timely and targeted intervention to help prevent students from falling off track. Technology – in conjunction with face-to-face student self-reporting – helps let programme staff know if a student needs grief counselling, is pregnant, depressed or at risk of failing a course. The Dell Young Leaders Admin Tool helps programme staff and students stay on task by storing detailed records of each student-staff interaction; staff then outline any next steps that need taking and the technology helps staff and students easily track completion of those steps.

An integrated IT platform helps the programme team maintain and track student data across multiple fields (which reflect the areas of wrap-around supports). In addition to providing staff with detailed biographical information for each student, the Admin Tool tracks student attendance at Dell Young Leaders events and stores students' CV and work experience details.

The Admin Tool uses flags as an early-warning system to staff, categorising each student's situation as "on track," "monitor" or "needs attention" across a range of risk indicators as students move through university, bucketed into three categories: academic, situational and financial. As part of the Dell Young Leaders grant agreement with participating universities, the institutions are linked with the Dell Young Leaders programme to directly report students'

academic and financial data. Programme staff and students can update any of the areas below.

- Academic tab: provides a full progress record of each student's degrees and courses.
- Situational tab: details mental and physical health issues the student might be facing, where the student is living, issues around motivation, or other factors that may impact on their studies.
- Financial tab: describes any funding student has accessed, including the Dell Young Leaders programme bursary and National Student Financial Aid Scheme monies. Categorises swipe card expenditures so staff can see a student's area of need: food, books, transport, medication etc.
- Employment tab: update work experience, support and guidance required, and changes to external employment-related bursaries awarded.

This system is particularly critical in the absence of early-warning systems at the universities; this can mean that students do not realise they are at risk of not meeting the minimum requirements to take an exam or are about to be academically excluded until virtually the last moment. With the programme-provided laptop, students use the Dell Young Leaders Connect student-facing platform to continually update information and complete online check-in surveys each semester, as described in the prior financial section. Student responses feed into the Admin Tool, which automatically updates students' risk indicators and lets programme staff intervene promptly. Just as the Admin Tool helps staff with programme management, Dell Young Leaders Connect helps students manage their academic and events calendars, as well as any tasks programme staff have requested they complete and report on.

WRAP-AROUND SUPPORTS

The Dell Young Leaders programme extends four arms of wrap-around support: academic, financial, situational, and career readiness. These supports are built around what it takes to get students from low-income households to graduation and into employment and is what distinguishes the programme from other bursary programmes. The JvR Psychometrics analysis found that given Dell Young Leaders' psychometric profiles, the programme's wrap-around support is critical to help students navigate the massive change in mind-set and environment that university represents. JvR Psychometrics found academic performance and situational factors are highly correlated, which underscores the need for student support.

"The Dell Young Leaders programme asked if I needed residence accommodation or not, and I told them yes and that I was waiting forever; they said that they will organise the matter. They talked to the residence department and after a few weeks I got in. They intervened on my behalf... I think the Dell Young Leaders team know who to talk to."

University of Pretoria male student

Anxious first-generation students in the programme showed that they were reluctant to take the first steps required to access institutional systems of support unless encouraged to do so by the Dell Young Leaders programme staff.

While the programme uses technology to gather information, track student progress and flag students most at risk for priority intervention, this system works in tandem with face-to-face interactions with on-campus programme staff who offer individualised guidance and support and advocate on behalf of disadvantaged students in navigating university bureaucracy. Formal online check-ins happen once a semester but students can – and do – make additional appointments or simply drop in. The Dell Young Leaders programme Project Manager at each university is the primary line of support to students.

Programme staff offer students administrative support and advocacy with institutional issues like managing academic appeals, obtaining affidavits for financial aid, applying for other bursary programmes, ensuring sufficient food allowances, and a wide range of housing issues, from accessing university residences and ensuring accommodation is close to classes, to securing accommodation for writing supplementary exams.

"We facilitate, we don't impose."
Dell Young Leaders programme staff member

External analysis found participating universities offer students many of the same types of support as the Dell Young Leaders programme: career and academic counselling, academic mentoring, tutorial support and psychological counselling. But these are discrete services serving a large population of students. As a result, the anxious first-generation students on the programme showed that they were reluctant to take the first steps required to access these institutional systems of support unless encouraged to do so by the Dell Young Leaders programme staff. This underscores the importance of how programme supports are delivered, not simply what services are offered per se.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Academic counselling: Most first-generation university students have had little or no guidance in selecting their professional degrees to ensure they are well matched to their strengths and interests. While the programme cannot prevent this (the Dell Young Leaders are chosen from recipients of National Student Financial Aid Scheme loans which are awarded after students have registered for their degrees), staff work to help align students to a

"I think it's just fear. I think you want to feel that you are capable of doing something. You don't want to be weak or stand out as needy. I think the biggest thing one can do for themselves is actually identifying that you need help. And then you seek it."
University of Cape Town female graduate

degree and career path that makes sense for them. Regular check-ins provide the chance to discuss course or degree changes if programme staff see a student struggling early on and potentially facing academic exclusion. The Dell Young Leaders programme supports such changes, even if this means that the student is no longer enrolled in a professional degree (the aim being to have a student graduate university versus not.)

The programme does not limit the number of times a student changes programmes or courses; staff work to try to ensure students have sufficient credits to stay within the N+2 attendance limits. Staff support students with academic appeals and work with the university to try to readmit those who are academically excluded. To date, data indicate a 91% persistence rate among Dell Young Leaders. (The remaining 9% have been pushed out through academic exclusion or have taken a leave of absence by choice or due to circumstances such as pregnancy or health issues.) This demonstrates the programme is on track to meet its 80% graduation rate goal.

Students who had to change degrees or courses reported in the Most Significant Change study that their original degree choices had been based on faulty considerations such as:

- Limited – and poorly understood – information provided by university prospectuses.
- An inflated sense of their abilities based on good results at school (especially in mathematics).
- Common perceptions of the high social status of certain careers.
- The prospect of earning a top salary.

The majority of students who had found themselves unsuited to their courses reported that they or their parents had been most strongly influenced by the prospect of

high earnings. (By way of illustration, the Most Significant Change study cites a graduate and two undergraduates who explained that even when they were struggling to pass, their mothers had tried to persuade them to persist with the degree which offered the best economic prospects.)

Study support and tutorial assistance:
Dell Young Leaders develop a study timetable at the beginning of the exam quarter and post it online through Dell Young Leaders Connect; if students struggle to complete this task, on-campus programme staff are available to help.

The programme holds quarterly Personal and Professional Development workshops on skills common across areas of student study, such as study skills, time management, stress management, exam preparation, motivation, self-confidence and emotional intelligence. The first-year course includes a component on adjustment to university life. Beyond scheduled workshops (which are held on Saturdays to try to minimise students' schedule conflicts), Personal and Professional Development consultants are available for one-on-one consultations and support sessions with students. Students wanting a tutor's help are referred to existing university faculty tutorials; if this proves insufficient, Dell Young Leaders can provide a voucher for a personal tutor (who may be a successful Dell Young Leader or another senior student.) About 30% of students use these vouchers.

Where relevant, the programme underwrites students' attendance at university-run winter and summer schools.

SITUATIONAL SUPPORT

Psychosocial support is offered through on-campus programme staff and a psychologist known as a Personal and Professional Development consultant (one per campus, working on a flexible contract that to date provides 10 hours per week) who assists with individual challenges and runs workshops on issues common across large groups of students, such as coping with grief. The programme plans to appoint a social worker on a contract basis for each campus to assist students with practical issues, such as accessing social grants (for example, assisting a student who has recently given birth to complete the necessary child grant documentation).

Students' psychosocial challenges tend to be so large that they can only be addressed jointly with the university: The Dell Young Leaders programme plays more of a

Peer mentoring pairs "first-year" Dell Young Leaders students with a more senior student mentor (who speaks their home language) to help the new students adapt to university culture, reduce their sense of alienation, and ease their struggle to integrate socially.

"It (tutoring) made a huge difference. It was an hour – just an hour – it was enough for me. ... I just needed that moment for clarity and to ask things that I couldn't ask in class."
University of Pretoria male student

facilitator role versus that of direct service provider. That said, programme staff members spend 25% of their work week, on average, consulting with Dell Young Leaders on situational/psychosocial matters.

Programme staff leverage available on-campus services, such as student wellness and faculty counselling; the programme-contracted psychologist can help support students through the process. In the Most Significant Change study, the most frequently mentioned crises topics that threatened students' academic progress and mental health were pregnancy, family pathology, grief and depression, and difficult home situations that resulted in various pressures on students.

Peer mentoring pairs first-year Dell Young Leaders students with a more senior student mentor (who speaks their home language) to help the new students adapt to university culture, reduce their sense of alienation, and ease their struggle to integrate socially. Peer mentors also serve as an early alert, connecting students with programme staff as needed. The programme vets peer mentors on the basis of academics and psychosocial elements and trains them to ask mentees guiding questions. The mentor list is updated annually to ensure mentors continue to meet the criteria.

WORK READINESS AND JOB PLACEMENT SUPPORT, EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Officially in place since 2012, concurrent with the first two Dell Young Leaders graduates, the programme's comprehensive work readiness and job placement approach encompasses myriad skills and supports, which include career advice and guidance, CV and cover letter writing, mock interviews, personal branding (e.g. creating and maintaining a LinkedIn profile), professional etiquette, networking and business writing.

An annual leadership symposium breaks out students by their study year to enable more targeted skill building, depending on how close to graduation students are: Year 1 focuses on skills development (confidence building, personal branding); Years 2 and 3 add workplace assessment; Year 4 adds more on CVs and interview preparation.

> "I have been to a number of interviews and you actually do get a competitive advantage from the training that you got (from the programme) ... they do make sure that you are all set up."
>
> University of Pretoria female student

The programme works to develop students' leadership skills and professional experiences, helping students secure vacation work opportunities and internships.

Research highlights the difficulties that "outsiders", or those with lower social capital, face when trying to access the labour market.[13] The Dell Young Leaders programme works to level the playing field for young people from economically and historically disadvantaged communities who often come to university with no established professional networks in their fields of learning. The programme provides opportunities for Dell Young Leaders to interact with potential employers through both formal presentations and interviews and informal networking events. (This exposure is significant as corporates increasingly use such "unofficial" events to assess prospective job candidates for things like "cultural fit.")

13. Kraak, A: State failure in dealing with the NEET problem in South Africa: which way forward?, Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 18:1-2, 77-97, 2013.
Nudzor, H: "Depicting Young People by What They Are Not: Conceptualisation and Usage of NEET as a Deficit Label." Educational futures 2 (2): 12–25, 2010.
Seekings, J. 2012a: How young people look for work (ed) in Coping with Unemployment. Centre for Development and Enterprise, November 2012.
Seekings, J. 2012b: Entry into the labour market. Chapter 1. Draft report used for presentation at Carnegie Conference. University of Cape Town.

As of 2015, a full-time Programme and Partnership Manager from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation is responsible for:

- building and delivering the career development programme.
- linking students at university with internships and vacation work opportunities.
- creating partnerships with employers (understanding the needs of the business) and managing these relationships .
- supporting Dell Young Leaders through the placement process, including making sure students arrive at interviews.
- monitoring placements.

Placement increasingly focuses on employer engagement and bringing companies closer to Dell Young Leaders. The programme actively markets would-be graduates to prospective employers, sharing final year students' profiles and CVs. The programme also leverages private-sector resources to benefit students, such as having corporate human resources professionals conduct mock interviews and give students feedback on their performance, or having employers and recruitment experts talk with students about matching their interests to specific jobs. The programme encourages companies and government departments to endorse the programme and the quality of Dell Young Leaders graduates they have employed; endorsements will be used to urge others to actively recruit from the Dell Young Leaders graduate pool.

As noted in the earlier financial support section, students receive a stipend to purchase appropriate interview attire. Interview transport costs are also covered to ensure financial concerns do not stand in the way of students finding employment in their chosen profession.

Similar to the way Dell Young Leaders tracks a student's academic progress, plans are underway to more formally track a student's career readiness and progress towards employment. (This is intended to both improve support offered to individual students, as well as help programme accountability by monitoring effectiveness of the career readiness and placement efforts.)

Where students may need to study further – in order to complete the requirements of the profession or for other reasons – the Dell Young Leaders programme helps students identify which further studies would be beneficial and assists students with their applications.

Unlike other bursary programmes, the Dell Young Leaders programme does not select for students with the highest marks.

PROGRAMME IMPACT

The programme's core mission is to help first-generation, economically disadvantaged university students graduate with a professional degree and find employment aligned to their field of study (or pursue further studies). The programme to date is on track to meet its goals of an 80% graduation rate and 100% of graduates in employment or further study. Data indicate a 91% persistence rate among Dell Young Leaders in university. To date, all graduates (100%) from the programme have been placed in employment or are continuing with further studies.

Psychometric profiling of Dell Young Leaders and government report findings confirm the need for wrap-around supports beyond financial help, with a high correlation between the situational factors students face and their academic performance. Since the programme began, more than 50% of Dell Young Leaders on average have seen the programme project manager for situational support. Similarly, 31% of University of Pretoria students and 23% of University of Cape Town students have experienced a crisis in the course of their degree that the programme helped the Dell Young Leaders to manage, ensuring they were not derailed from their studies.

The vast majority of Dell Young Leaders pass between 75% and 100% of their courses each year. Of the 36 students who had graduated at the time of this evaluation, seven completed their studies within the minimum number of years for the degree and the remaining 26 completed their studies within two years after the minimum.

Given the programme's student-centred mission, evaluation found bountiful evidence of clear and impacts on students, which are focused on here. Their stories can be found throughout the document. But evaluation also revealed impacts on the University of Cape Town and the University of Pretoria, which are briefly addressed at the end of this section.

In interviews and surveys with programme students, graduates, staff, the two participating universities, and employers, evaluators find it is the combination of the programme offerings themselves, in tandem with the process by which the programme delivers and continually refines its offerings, that make the programme “work”. Success to date comes from:

1. the comprehensive nature of the programme supports and the caring way staff deliver supports and treat the “whole person”.
2. students' and graduates' strong sense of belonging to a community or cohort.

3. programme leaders' continual reflection on and refinement of the programme based on the experiences of programme participants and staff.

As an example of the third point above, the Dell Young Leaders programme is looking to retool its peer mentor programme to make it more effective, in response to student feedback. In addition, the programme has evolved its student selection process, moving away from a labour-intensive system that relied on student essays and readers (whose ratings turned out not to correlate with final candidate selection) toward an online system that greatly reduced selection time and cost without sacrificing selection integrity.

EFFECTIVE STUDENT SELECTION

Psychometric profiling suggests that student selection process refinements have been positive, as newer student cohorts score slightly higher than earlier cohorts on emotional intelligence and positive personality attributes, desirable factors that may provide a buffer for students. In addition, evaluation found a relatively smaller number of students flagged as academically "struggling" from the 2013 and 2014 student cohorts as compared to earlier cohorts. In essence, profiling found the refined Dell Young Leaders selection process results in just the cohort the programme seeks to serve: youth who have experienced high levels of adversity and have adopted risk-mitigating strategies, such as persistence. Unlike other bursary programmes, the Dell Young Leaders programme does not select for students with the highest marks. Psychometric profiling confirmed the programme does not need to further measure cognitive ability in selection as the matric and National Benchmark Test scores are sufficient indicators of students' ability to cope with academic demands at university.

> "I have a personal psychologist (Dell Young Leaders staff members and contracted psychologist), a personal lawyer (Dell Young Leaders staff), and I have a personal employment expert (Dell Young Leaders staff and corporate connections), and I have never had that before."
>
> University of Pretoria male final year student

STUDENT IMPACTS

As part of qualitative programme evaluation, students were asked for stories about the most significant change they experienced in the Dell Young Leaders programme. The Most Significant Change study finds the programme has personal and academic impacts on students' lives because: the support is person-centred, broad, and deep; the programme provides a caring community for anxious and lonely students; programme staff take on demanding advocacy roles.

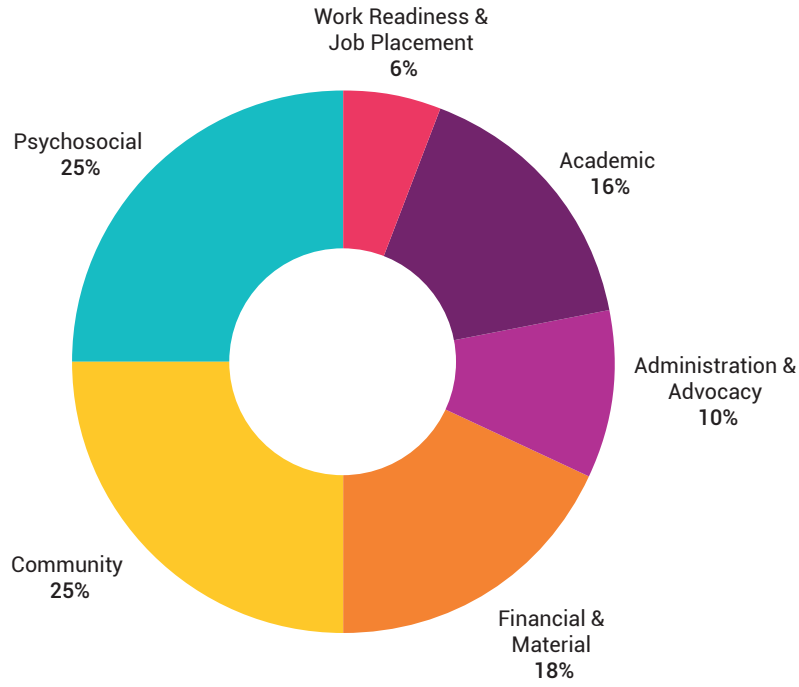
The programme's comprehensive nature appeared to carry through into students' stories: 73% of students cited multiple aspects of programme support in their stories. Most spoke of programme support as a whole package.

The programme provides a caring and interested community in which the Dell Young Leaders feel appreciated, evidenced by students' frequent references to the programme community as a "family". Of the 59 Most Significant Change stories, 51 recounted benefits to students in terms of membership of the Dell Young Leaders programme community. These included stories in which students' feelings of alienation were assuaged through the sense of belonging, student reports of feeling understood and trusted, as well as feelings of self-knowledge and confidence. The high levels of attendance at programme events that "celebrate" the community (such as welcome-back sessions) also confirm the importance programme students place on being part of a larger community.

A University of Pretoria male final-year student's comment on the next page demonstrates the impact of both the comprehensive support and the supportive programme staff.

Many students' Most Significant Change stories revealed that caring gestures by programme staff are what really made a difference to them. Clearly, it is not only about the services offered, but about how the programme offers them; it is about human warmth and relationship.

The chart below illustrates what percentage of student change stories fall under each domain of programme support, classified by programme staff. Half of the change stories described the programme's impact on Dell Young Leaders' well-being. Within this group, 25% recounted how belonging to the programme helped students deal with their feelings of isolation and difference (community); the other 25% described how the programme helped the students overcome personal crises which threatened their academic progress and mental health (psychosocial).



Student change stories
Results of the Most Significant Change study, "Percentage student change stories per domain of support", by Angela Smith, conducted in 2015

The relatively low proportion of stories focused on work readiness and employment may be explained by the fact that the Most Significant Change study included more students than graduates. Graduates report a much greater impact of the programme's career readiness and placement features in the separate graduate survey (detailed later in this section).

HIGHLIGHTS OF STUDENT IMPACTS IN THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STUDY DOCUMENTS INCLUDE:

Academic impact: Given that first-generation university students commonly face a lack of adequate guidance and information for choosing their degrees, several students' stories illustrated how crucial programme support prevented the students from being excluded from university on academic grounds. An undergraduate in danger of being excluded from the University of Pretoria reports that after programme staff helped her change degrees, she became more confident and achieved outstanding academic results.

> "I thought I came to varsity to do Chemical Engineering. When it didn't go well I had the option to stick to this or seek other options. When I talked to (programme staff) they were very supportive. On the Dell Young Leaders programme - you get direct access to the people who run it. It is not about some name that you get with the emails. They are personal people - I know them. And he (Dell Young Leaders programme staff) was not talking over me and making me feel small. He said, 'What do you think should be done? If you want to change, we are with you. If you want to stay we will still be with you and help you to rectify those mistakes which you made last year.' They accept you either way - every step of the way."
>
> University of Pretoria female undergraduate

Advocacy impact: Many examples surfaced of how programme staff had cultivated productive relationships with key members of the universities' administrations, enabling programme staff to give effective administrative support to students who felt defeated by institutional red tape.

In one case a University of Pretoria programme staff member successfully negotiated with the residence

Many students' Most Significant Change stories revealed that caring gestures by programme staff are what really made a difference to them. Clearly, it is not only about the services offered, but about how the programme offers them; it is about human warmth and relationship.

"In my first semester I felt lost. I was like, 'Why am I here? Always, I was out of place. I didn't belong. With the Dell Young Leaders team coming in, in the second semester, it was a good thing for me to know that there is somewhere I belong because I didn't belong to any of the societies on campus. Here are 50 other students who share the same thing as you maybe they experience those feelings of inadequacy... And knowing people on campus you bump into them and it was 'Hi'. It came in at the right time because I just didn't feel at home in this place."

University of Pretoria female undergraduate

administration on behalf of a male undergraduate who had spent his nights in the library because his results did not qualify him to return to the university residence. This student explained how difficult it had been:

"I have nowhere to go, no food.
... You don't sleep - it's a study centre and so you just study the whole night.
If you try to sleep security wakes you and says, 'You are here to study, not sleep'."

University of Pretoria male undergraduate

Without the intervention of programme staff, the Most Significant Change study suggests students like these would have failed and/or dropped out of university.

Impact of supportive community: Stories indicated few Dell Young Leaders could discuss their frustrations with adult family members. Several had no parents and were constantly worried about the welfare of younger siblings at home. Others felt the pressure of parents' unrealistic expectations. Many reported that the "people at home don't understand" life on campus.

For some lonely undergraduates the personal interest programme staff showed in them compensated for the lack of parental concern and they came to regard certain staff as surrogate parents. University of Cape Town graduates referred to the programme on-site manager as "Mama"[14] and a University of Cape Town undergraduate explained that the programme staff members were "like a family" because "they want to hear your social life, your academic life – anything". And some stories, like the one from a University of Pretoria female student, illustrated a powerful sense of community among Dell Young Leaders peers.

It often took persistent enquiries from programme staff to get students, especially males, to express their anxieties and accept psychological assistance. Notably, male Dell Young Leaders featured prominently among the students who referred to gaining self-knowledge and confidence from the programme. Several reported that they had been helped to understand and regulate their emotional reactions as a result of counselling by programme staff or by psychologists to whom they had been referred by programme staff.

14. It should be pointed out that calling an older woman "Mama" can be a sign of respect. The particular staff person to whom the graduates referred seemed to be too young for this to apply.

Financial relief impact: More University of Pretoria than University of Cape Town students focused on this because University of Cape Town's efficient administrative systems for National Student Financial Aid Scheme loans and donor bursary made provision for the fact that poor university entrants were often unable to pay registration and residence fees. As a result, Dell Young Leaders from the University of Cape Town – where financial aid aligns with the academic calendar – had not experienced the same financial anxieties as their University of Pretoria counterparts. University of Pretoria students recounted how the slow and unpredictable administration of their National Student Financial Aid Scheme loans had left them in a precarious position for their first semester of university. Two male students talk about how this impacted their lives until their loans and the Dell Young Leaders bursary were awarded.

Students described the following impacts on their lives from being given their own laptop as part of the programme's financial support: it was easier to research and complete assignments; it enabled them to access lecture notes and texts online; it saved them from having to travel by public transport to and from the university computer laboratories at night; it saved them valuable time; and it gave them confidence because they resembled the other students who carried laptops on campus.

As to the preloaded swipe card component of financial support, students in the Most Significant Change study who spoke of its impact said the card allowed them to buy essential text books and groceries and, as a University of Cape Town female student pointed out, it provided a "back up" for when they had no money. The preloaded swipe card was developed later in the programme in response to students missing lectures because they were self-conscious about being unable to buy basic toiletries necessary for their personal hygiene or were hungry.

Programme staff noted that students often do not have the money needed to return to university from their homes following vacation periods or to make trips to sit supplementary exams. The preloaded swipe card offers critical help to ensure students are back on campus when they need to be.

Psychosocial impact: Students described crises that had threatened their academic progress and mental health. In several stories students recounted how they had responded to particularly difficult circumstances by

> "When you don't have a stable financial background it's going to be difficult for you to get accommodation. And in most cases the accommodation that is good for you is very expensive and those ones where you don't have to pay a deposit are really dodgy. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme pays out late ... so in those four months you have to see how you stand and you struggle - especially someone like me. I am living with two people whose parents depend on a (social) grant and the grant is not enough to keep me."
>
> University of Pretoria male undergraduate

> "In the first year we didn't have the money to register so I waited until the last day that I could register because my dad had taken out a loan for me. A course (is) R30,000 as well and coming from a home where R70,000 is the yearly salary ... I registered, then the emails started coming in about fees. ... A total of R10,700 had to come from somewhere ... For me, the biggest change that I have seen being in the programme, it's peace of mind."
>
> University of Pretoria male undergraduate

isolating themselves and becoming depressed.[15] Invariably a programme staff member noticed that something was wrong, reached out to the student and helped him or her to get the appropriate help. Students' self-reported situational data (housing concerns, mental or physical health etc.) through the programme technology system help flag a student if he or she is at risk so programme staff can intervene.

Anecdotal evidence from both the University of Cape Town and the University of Pretoria reflects an alarming increase in cases of students' reactive depression and attempted suicides. In response, both universities have expanded their health services, and the University of Cape Town has implemented a campus emergency triage system. But several students said campus help remains inadequately resourced and long wait times for psychologist appointments are not unusual. In this context, Dell Young Leaders staff offer students a vital safety net. A University of Cape Town male student account, illustrates the stories of many programme students who described being distracted from their studies by difficult situations at home. Juggling pressing financial issues tangled up in the recent loss of a parent, plus responsibility for a younger sibling, this student turned to programme staff for help.

> "I'm not a person who (asks for money) because I understand the situation back home. So I always keep quiet when I'm struggling. I just have to figure things out myself; I don't want to burden my mom. ...So the swipe cards were very, very helpful to me."
>
> University of Cape Town female graduate

15. One of the staff members who was familiar with most of these stories explained that many Dell Young Leaders had experienced some type of childhood trauma which predisposed them to depression in reaction to difficult situations.

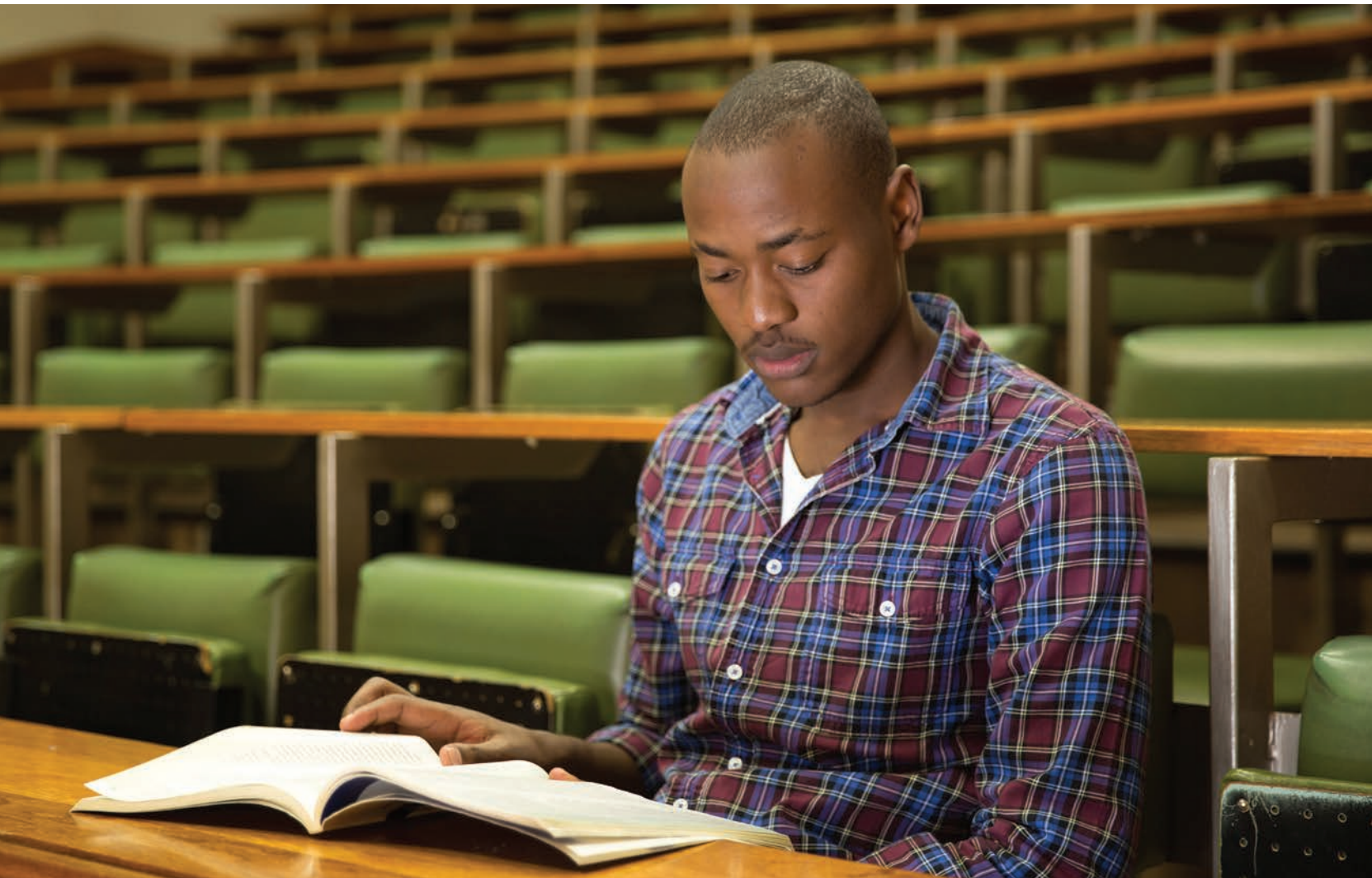
"I knew if I go to her (Dell Young Leaders staff), she will tell me the kind, ugly truth and sometimes that is what you want to hear - that is why I chose her. This Dell Young Leaders programme is like an incubator that I can chill in and grow. Here I am comfortable if things go wrong... because varsity has psychologists, but how many students are trying to make use of them and how seriously do they take you? I emailed the psychologist and the office was like, 'She will be away for a week and already she is fully booked'. It is not that I need professional help, it is just that there are issues at home that I really have to get out of my head and I need to tell someone who is also a mother."

University of Cape Town male undergraduate

GRADUATE AND EMPLOYMENT IMPACTS

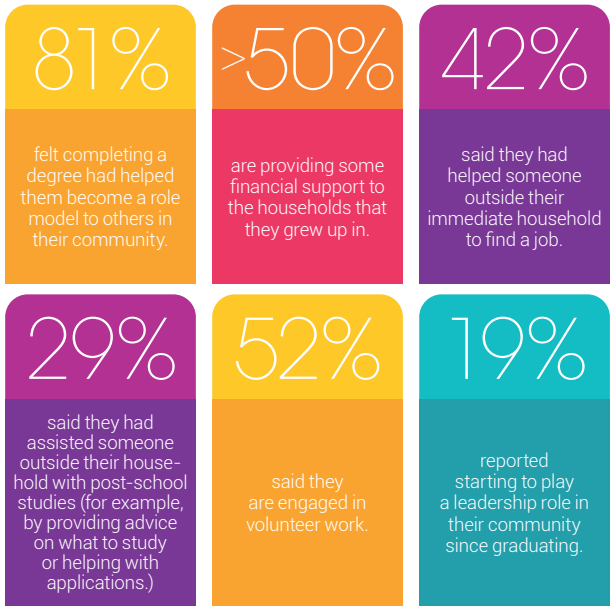
The Graduate Survey asked respondents to indicate what type of support was most important for them; work readiness support ranked just after financial supports (bursary/swipe card/laptop). Of note: the programme has substantially built out the work readiness support and employer engagement components since the time these early Dell Young Leader graduates began university, making it difficult to assess the full impact of these provisions at this time.

The pool of graduates at the time of evaluation was small (36). Even as the number of graduates has grown, the programme continues to meet its goal of having 100% of students in employment or enrolled in further study. This is significant in light of the difficulties young people from economically and historically disadvantaged communities can face in navigating the professional labour market. Evaluation found that the programme is working to ensure that Dell Young Leaders graduates who do not have access to an employer network are supported to access the network that the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation is able to form on their behalf.



In a survey of six employers who had hired programme graduates, four indicated that they had recruited the Dell Young Leaders graduate(s) working in their companies only after the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation directly approached them. This suggests the importance of active employer outreach. All six employers said they would hire a Dell Young Leader graduate again – the most important rating score a programme could achieve.[16] (As the programme's formal career readiness development component grows, programme staff expect student self-placement to increase.)

Key survey findings from graduates include:



It has been well documented that those who are most successful at finding employment have higher social capital (Kraak, 2013[17]; Nudzor 2010[18]; Seekings ed. 2012[19]). The Dell Young Leaders programme appears to be successfully building social capital among university graduates from communities that have previously been "outsiders" and thus creating a "multiplier effect" in communities that have previously been excluded from the labour market.

16. Sometimes described as the "net promoter score" which tests the loyalty of "customers" – in this case the employers that recruit the Dell Young Leaders programme graduates.
17. Kraak, A: State failure in dealing with the NEET problem in South Africa: which way forward?, Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 18:1-2, 77-97, 2013.
18. Nudzor, H: "Depicting Young People by What They Are Not: Conceptual-isation and Usage of NEET as a Deficit Label." Educational futures 2 (2): 12–25, 2010.
19. Seekings, J. 2012a: How young people look for work (ed) in Coping with Unemployment. Centre for Development and Enterprise, November 2012.
Seekings, J. 2012b: Entry into the labour market. Chapter 1. Draft report used for presentation at Carnegie Conference. University of Cape Town.

UNIVERSITY IMPACTS

As the University of Cape Town and the University of Pretoria have participated in the Dell Young Leaders programme – and experienced programme staff advocacy on behalf of students across a wide range of institutional issues – it appears this experience has had some impacts on the institutions more broadly. (Or, at least alerted them to an array of student needs of which they may not have been fully aware.)

Examples include:

Housing: A University of Pretoria interviewee said in the course of Dell Young Leader programme implementation on campus "we encountered internal admin issues that needed to be smoothed to enable us to process applications more effectively and improve our services to Dell Young Leaders, and also to all students."

The interviewee explained that in the past, the housing and academic departments did not talk to one another when allocating student residences. As a result, the university did not realise that many students on financial aid were not receiving housing because although they were students in good academic standing, they failed to meet stringent residence academic requirements. Dell Young Leaders programme staff successfully advocated for Dell Young Leaders students to be allowed access to housing so long as they remain academically included. (The university still faces the larger problem of demand for housing outstripping supply.)

Even as the number of graduates has grown, the programme continues to meet its goal of having 100% of students in employment or enrolled in further study.

36

"Through working with the Dell Young Leaders programme, we realised we need a single (more aligned) process, A cohort like this requires you to process simultaneously a whole number of things … It was a learning for me."

University of Pretoria interviewee

Laptop: After seeing the impact of owning a laptop on Dell Young Leaders, the University of Cape Town is exploring ways to enable students outside the programme to acquire them. The university has undertaken its own research on the impact of owning a laptop and found that impact to be significant. Ideally, the university would like to equip every first-year student with a laptop, particularly as the university expands a WiFi environment and makes lectures available online.

Swipe cards: One university interviewee said the university became aware of the untenable trade-offs its neediest financial aid students were making, missing lectures because they were self-conscious about not being able to buy the basic toiletries necessary for their personal hygiene. The university has recognised the severity of this challenge and now has "an incidental allowance for students in catering residence because, for some students, buying toothpaste is a challenge".

Other bursaries: University interviewees emphasised the value of the mechanism the Dell Young Leaders programme has put in place to provide students with academic guidance and counselling, noting the particular importance of having an office on campus. One interviewee said the university is advising other bursary programmes to follow suit.

05.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation documents the Dell Young Leaders programme and its impacts.

The programme has a significant impact on the lives and potential futures of first-generation university students from economically and historically disadvantaged communities. Key stakeholders have an enormous opportunity to leverage learning from the programme to help spur needed systemic changes that can level the playing field for even more of these youth.

South Africa faces social and economic imperatives to ensure that a university degree and a trajectory of professional employment are not reserved for the privileged few. In reality, no bursary programme will ever be able to serve all the qualified students in need. This underscores the need for invested parties to consider taking steps to help first-generation, economically disadvantaged students succeed at university – and beyond. This involves minimising financial, situational, and psychosocial stressors that can contribute to a student's failure to graduate. This failure has repercussions for both the individual and society as a whole. We outline the following recommendations for key stakeholders to help boost the odds of success for economically disadvantaged students.

THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING COULD:

- Work to ensure students receive their National Student Financial Aid Scheme loan in time for their first term at university and eliminate the gap between what National Student Financial Aid Scheme loans cover and the total costs of attendance to ensure more financially needy students can complete.
- Work with higher education institutions to consider how they can offer students not just academic support, but also situational and psychosocial support to help them successfully navigate university and manage challenges during their studies.
- Consider tracking graduation and employment rates of National Student Financial Aid Scheme students.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS COULD:

- Institute new support or expand existing support for needy students with basic items, such as food and toiletries, as well as accommodation and study items, such as photocopy monies.
- Prioritise tracking National Student Financial Aid Scheme students' graduation and employment rates.
- Reassess policies and practices that inadvertently hinder disadvantaged students' success, such as a lack of access to residences, proactive outreach to and advocacy for disadvantaged students to access existing academic skills and support centres, and services that address crisis management as well as social integration and adaptation to university life.
- Consider how they can better prepare graduates for employment with greater emphasis on career services and employer outreach generally, from consistently developing graduates' work readiness skills (which psychometric evaluation indicates is much needed) to developing institutional relationships with corporates and other employers.

OTHER SCHOLARSHIP-BURSARY PROGRAMMES COULD:

On the financial side:

- Contemplate partnering with National Student Financial Aid Scheme to target students who have met university requirements but who require aid to cover the gap between the scheme's loans and the full cost of attendance, thus leveraging bursary programme monies to serve more students with a lower per-student cost by paying only the top-up bursary versus a full bursary.
- Consider offering higher education institutions small sums to help students meet their basic needs.

On the non-financial side:

- Consider providing students holistic supports: academic, situational, psychosocial and work readiness.
- Consider installing some staff on campus to work face-to-face with students.
- Consider employing technology to better manage programme finances and, more critically, to closely monitor and support students.

EMPLOYERS COULD:

- Help close the gap between employer expectations and higher education outcomes through partnership with universities, mentoring students, and providing students internships and vacation work opportunities to better equip students with the hard and soft skills needed in the professional world.
- Diversify their businesses and gain talent through intentional hiring of disadvantaged students who have proven track records of perseverance, recognising that first-generation students may need financial assistance to relocate.

A university degree remains out of reach for many financially needy students. A well-crafted combination of financial help and a student-centred wrap-around system of academic, situational, psychosocial and work-preparation supports is helping young people from historically disadvantaged schools and communities beat the odds to graduate university and find meaningful employment. As higher-education and business leaders contemplate pressing system reforms, they may glean ideas from the Dell Young Leaders programme features that are helping deliver results and transform lives, as documented here.

JAMESON

06.

CONCLUSION

At a time when students are clamouring for access to higher education and employment, key stakeholders have an opportunity to make a real difference for students and the country as a whole.

At a time when students are clamouring for access to higher education and employment, when leaders increasingly acknowledge the imperative to ensure access and success, and employers see a gap between the skills graduates bring and the skills professional work requires, key stakeholders have an opportunity to make a real difference for students and the country as a whole.

Each stakeholder has a role to play in clearing the barriers that can stand in the way of first-generation university students on financial aid earning a professional degree and finding suitable employment. As this evaluation documents, some of those stumbling blocks are quite large, while others are relatively small. This evaluation's psychometric research – the first conducted with National Student Financial Aid Scheme students, to our knowledge – confirms that students from economically and historically disadvantaged communities require much more than financial help to succeed.

We find the Dell Young Leaders programme's comprehensive approach of wrap-around supports – financial, academic, situational and work readiness – is gaining results. We find the programme's effectiveness and student impacts stem from the following features: the support is person-centred; the support is both broad and deep; the programme provides a caring community; programme staff take on demanding advocacy roles.

Looking forward, these very features may present challenges to scaling-up or replicating the programme:

1. **Resources:** This type of individualised provision is expensive and requires substantial human resources.
2. **Staffing:** It is difficult to find and keep staff who possess all the following qualities:
   - willingness to be accessible much of the time
   - ability to maintain a delicate balance between caring for and over-protecting students and thereby encouraging dependency
   - skill at listening, counselling and practical problem solving
   - ability to work effectively within the university bureaucracy, and
   - expertise in managing a large budget.

This said, the Dell Young Leaders programme offers a best-practice model upon which others can build. From an efficiency perspective, the programme strategically leverages university and private-sector resources on behalf of students. Dell Young Leaders demonstrates that a programme can be highly impactful and strip away students' financial barriers without providing a full bursary. Focusing on the critical top-up aid needed to bridge the gap between government aid and the full cost of attendance allows the programme to reach more students at a lower per-student cost than funding fewer students at the higher per-student cost of a full bursary. By helping National Student Financial Aid Scheme students to graduate, the programme helps ensure limited government student-aid Rands are invested wisely. By helping these National Student Financial Aid Scheme graduates find meaningful employment in their profession, the programme helps ensure graduates can repay their loans and refill the coffers for future university students.

Dell Young Leaders demonstrates that a programme can be highly impactful and strip away students' financial barriers without providing a full bursary.

In addition, we find that Dell Young Leaders are "giving back" and contributing to their families (financially and otherwise), as well as to their wider community. More than half of programme graduates are providing some financial support to the households in which they grew up. Many have helped others in their family or community to get a job or pursue post-school studies. Significantly, 81% of graduates felt that completing a degree has helped them become a role model in their community, perhaps contributing to a wider sense of possibilities in the historically disadvantaged communities from which Dell Young Leaders come. The Dell Young Leaders programme appears to be building social capital in these communities, creating a "multiplier effect" in communities that have previously been excluded from the labour market.

In other words, Dell Young Leaders helps to break the cycle of disadvantage – a goal many stakeholders share.

We are grateful to the Dell Young Leaders programme within the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation for providing data and financial support to make this research possible. We especially thank Thashlin Govender for insights into the structure and operation of the programme. The interpretations and views presented here do not reflect those of either the Dell Young Leaders programme or the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. All errors are our own.

Copyright © All photography attributed to Michael & Susan Dell Foundation