

SUNStudent

SUNStudent has shifted gears

The SUNStudent project has come a long way since its launch in 2019. The Applications & Admissions capability went live on 6 April 2021, which represents a significant milestone on the SUNStudent journey.



Since then, the project team has had to navigate some treacherously narrow, uphill and downhill roads ... and some unexpected turns.

Over the past few months, we have seen a sharp increase in our applications – they have more than doubled from approximately 22 000 last year to 55 000 by the end of July this year. This can be directly linked to the intent of broadening access by removing obstacles during the application process. Parents and applicants alike have commented on the ease of the new application process and the student-centredness of allowing applicants up to three programme choices on application.

The major obstacles that have been removed to ensure a streamlined and accessible application process are the two-pronged application approach

and the requirement of a signed student contract upon application. In the previous cycle we required applicants to submit their application and then upload their documents in a second application step. Many applicants never completed the second step. Applicants are now required to upload their supporting documents before they can submit their application in a one-step application process.

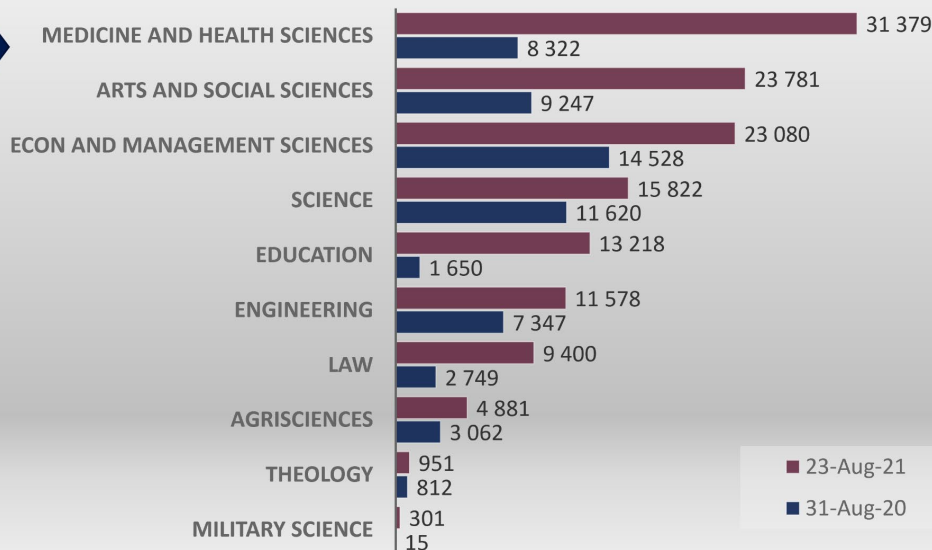
Please see below a summary of the number of applications as well as the number of programme applications per faculty received in comparison to the previous application year (August):

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Total number of UG applicants:
23 Aug 2021: 55 192 submitted
of which 30 407 reviewed
31 Aug 2020: 35 176 finalised of
which 22 468 complete

- Applicants can apply for a maximum of three programmes
- Significant increases in faculties where only first choice programme applications were accepted in the past (e.g., Medicine and Health Sciences, Education and Law)
- On step submission process (in the past uploading application documents was a separate action)
- Applicants not required to upload contract before submitting their completed application (as in the past)

Complete (2020) and submitted programme applications (2021)



In the previous application process, applicants were also required to submit a signed student contract. The contract included a parent's / guardian's signature for surety. For many of our applicants and their parents/guardians this was not a commitment they were ready to make before there was not an offer on the table. The signed contract created a significant obstacle in completing an application. In our new application process, the signed student contract is required only once the applicant accepts an offer.

As for allowing applicants to select three programme choices, considering them for all three and giving the applicant the option to accept one offer by 30 September, the University has moved from a rules-driven to a student-centred approach. We have moved away from the approach where applicants could only apply for certain programmes as a first choice. In many cases this approach forced applicants to make their choices according to our rules and not their preference. The applicant now has the opportunity to accept their preferred choice by 30 September.

The University also, for the first time, has an early indicator of applicants' intention to enrol for a specific programme. This could be a very useful mechanism to manage enrolments. Applicants will also be required to accept their final offers after the release of the matric results in January. This will also enable faculties to carefully manage their enrolments and, if necessary, make additional offers before registration.

Despite our best intentions and efforts, post our go-live date we encountered several challenges with respect to the processing of applications and admissions to the extent that the Steering Committee had to acknowledge the institutional risk to reaching our enrolment targets in 2022.

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On 25 June we shifted gears on the SUNStudent project as we took the decision to focus all project resources on the Applications and Admissions capabilities until such time that the enrolment risk for the institution has been mitigated. Several mechanisms have since been implemented to address the backlog to the extent that by mid-August we have exceeded the number of applications reviewed compared to 2020 and have made the same number of offers to our applicants as at the same time last year. The increase in applications and changes in business processes, however, do imply that we must keep the momentum.

The temporary reprioritisation and reallocation of resources inevitably have an impact on the rest of the project and the project team has therefore embarked on revising the delivery roadmap. This will be aligned to the student lifecycle and will mean a significant postponement of the roll-out of the remaining SUNStudent capabilities. Dates for the postponed capabilities will be communicated by the project team in due course.

The project team would like to reconfirm its commitment to delivering a student administration system that will not only meet the needs of our institution but give us a competitive edge through user-friendly interfaces and increased digitalisation. We thank all our stakeholders, but specifically our functional end-users and our faculties for their patience and support as we continue on this long, challenging, yet exciting journey.

Do you have any questions or feedback with regards to the project? Please make use of the project email: sunstudent@sun.ac.za