

A brief report on the results of the survey amongst all SU students on some of the current student protest issues.

‘n Kort verslag oor die resultate van die opname onder alle studente oor sommige van die huidige studenteproteskwessies.

5.10.2016

Birgit Schreiber (Student Affairs)
Antoinette van der Merwe (Learning & Teaching Enhancement)

Introduction

The issues of *feesmustfall* occupies the university with increasing urgency. The question of continuing to offer an uninterrupted academic programme was debated and the SU executive sought to garner student opinions on key issues.

A brief survey¹ was designed and data was gathered online. The survey contained five questions. The first question explored student opinion on interrupting the academic programme (Q1: SU management would like to complete the academic year without shut-down. Do you support this?).

The second question explored the students' impression on the imminence of fee-free education (Q2: Do you believe that free higher education for all students is viable for next year?).

The third question aimed to assess the degree to which students are informed about financial accommodations and relief (Q3: Are you sufficiently informed about the following relief for financially needy students? Students from household incomes less than R240,000 p.a. pay no study fees, due to SU & NSFAS bursaries and loans. Students from household incomes less than R600,000 p.a. will pay no study fee increases in 2017, due to extra Department of Higher Education and Training funding.).

The fourth and fifth questions related to the degree level (undergraduate and postgraduate) as well as the faculty of study. These two questions were not compulsory and the students could submit the survey without completing these two questions.

An excellent response rate of 29,5% shows that students were eager to respond on issues of the impact of student protests on the academic project and the cost of higher education.

Overall, the results of this survey strongly suggest that SU students support the stance to provide a continued academic programme (93,92%) and that they do not believe that free higher education is imminent (91,64%). Almost two thirds (60,82%) revealed that they were familiar with financial relief programmes.

The results reveal a minority voice which needs to be taken note of. It is essential this voice is recognised in finding balanced and productive solutions which facilitate understanding and advance our shared goal of accessible and affordable quality education.

¹ See Addendum 1: Copy of Survey

Method and Sample

The tool was a snapshot survey² which aimed to get a snapshot of opinions, typically used on referenda or opinion polls. It is an affordable and expedient method and generates good response rates, using closed-ended questions, with participants being asked to respond in binary terms.

This survey contained five closed questions and aimed to get specific information on these questions. Three of the questions were compulsory whereas the demographic questions (degree level and faculty) were not compulsory. The questions were formulated by the RMT on 27.09.2016.

The survey was sent out per email to all 31 694 undergraduate and postgraduate students at SU and after 2 days email and SMS reminders were sent to prompt higher participation. First emails were sent out on 29.09.2016 and the survey was closed on 4.10.2016 4pm. Students were assured anonymity.

From the total population of students at SU, 9 357 completed responses were received. The additional 1 488 incomplete responses where students opened the survey but did not submit any data to be analysed. The overall response rate was therefore 29,5% excluding the 1 488 incomplete responses.

The majority of the respondents were from the EMS faculty (26,75%), Engineering faculty (16,89%), and then from the Arts (14,58%), Medicine and Health Sciences (12,67%), the Sciences (11,2%), Agricultural Sciences (6,46%), Law (5,44%), Education (4,61%), and also from the Theology Faculty (1,28%) and the Military Sciences (0,14%) (Figure 1).

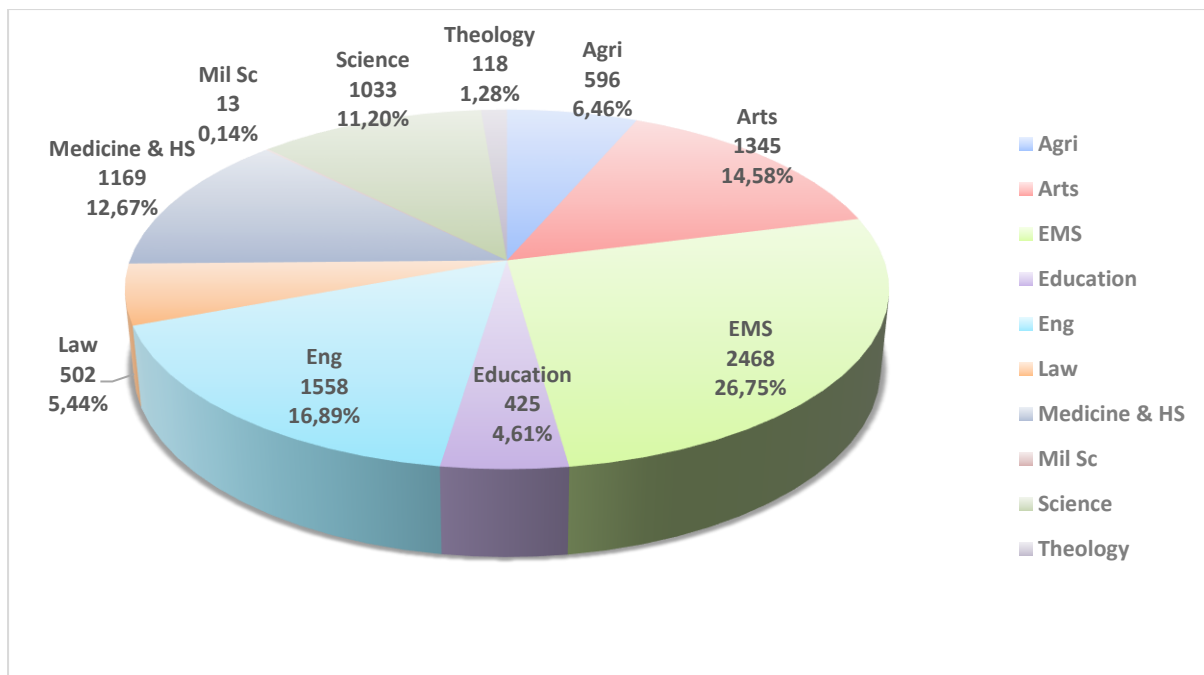


Figure 1: Number of responses per faculty (N=9 227)

² Kelley, K.; Clark, B.; Brown, V.; Sitzia, J. (2003). Good practice in the conduct and reporting of survey research. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzg031> 261-266 accessed on 4/10/2016

The response rate per faculty (number of completed responses expressed as a percentage of the total number of emails sent out per faculty) is displayed in Figure 2 below. It is clear from this figure that the Law and Engineering faculties had the highest response rates per faculty.

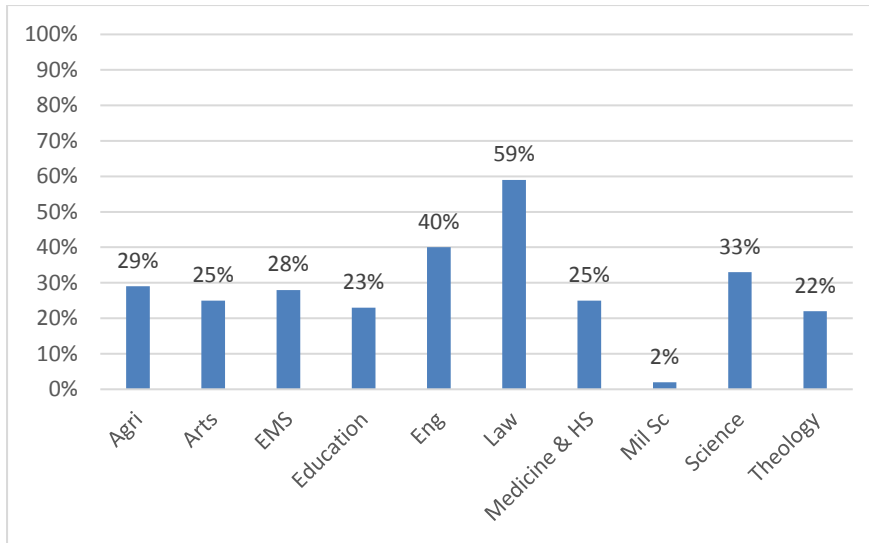


Figure 2: Response rate per faculty

In terms of study level the majority of students who responded were undergraduate students (68,31%) (Figure 3). This is slightly higher than the proportion of undergraduate students (63,5%) in the total SU student population of 30 850 (June 2016 sensus date).

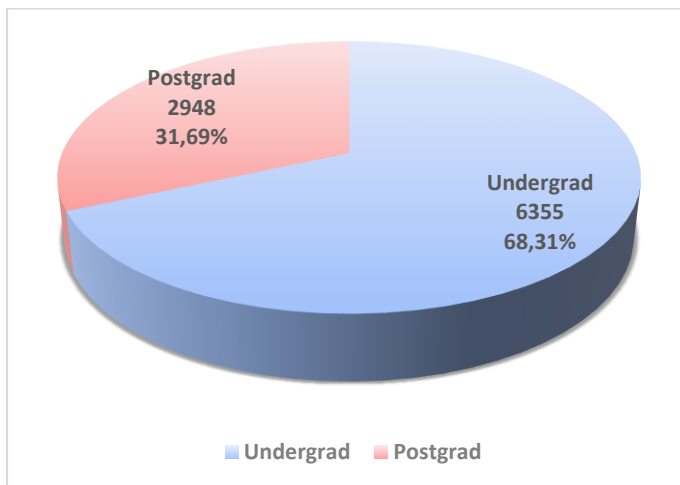


Figure 3: Study level (N=9303)

Results

A very high response rate of 29,4% valid responses reveals SU students’ engagement and motivation to share their opinions³.

³ The recent survey at Wits (29.9.2016) received almost 60% participation rate of students and 77% of students indicated that after a brief interruption of the academic programme they wanted Wits to re-open the academic programme, whereas 23% believed in a continued shut down. (#witspoll, 30.9.2016)

We received 23 emails about the survey, with 3 expressing appreciation, 12 needing more information and clarification and 8 raising issues around timing, wording, and the intention and essence of the survey.

Question 1

SU management would like to complete the academic year without shut-down. Do you support this? (Yes/No)

The overwhelming majority of students (93,92%, 8788 students) support SU to complete the academic year without shut-down (Figure 4). This suggests that students are overwhelmingly convinced that continuing the academic programme without shut-down needs to remain the university's focus.

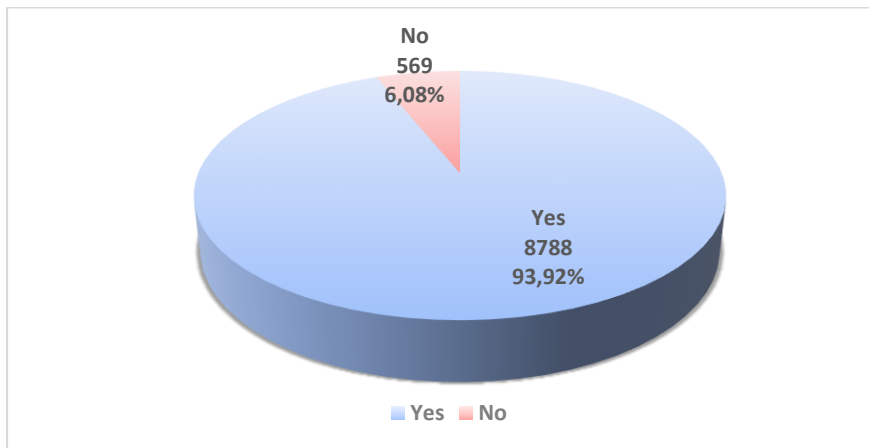


Figure 4: Q1: SU management would like to complete the academic year without shut-down. Do you support this? (Yes/No)

The data was disaggregated per faculty to get more insight into the various responses based on faculty. Figure 5 provides the raw count of NO responses per faculty.

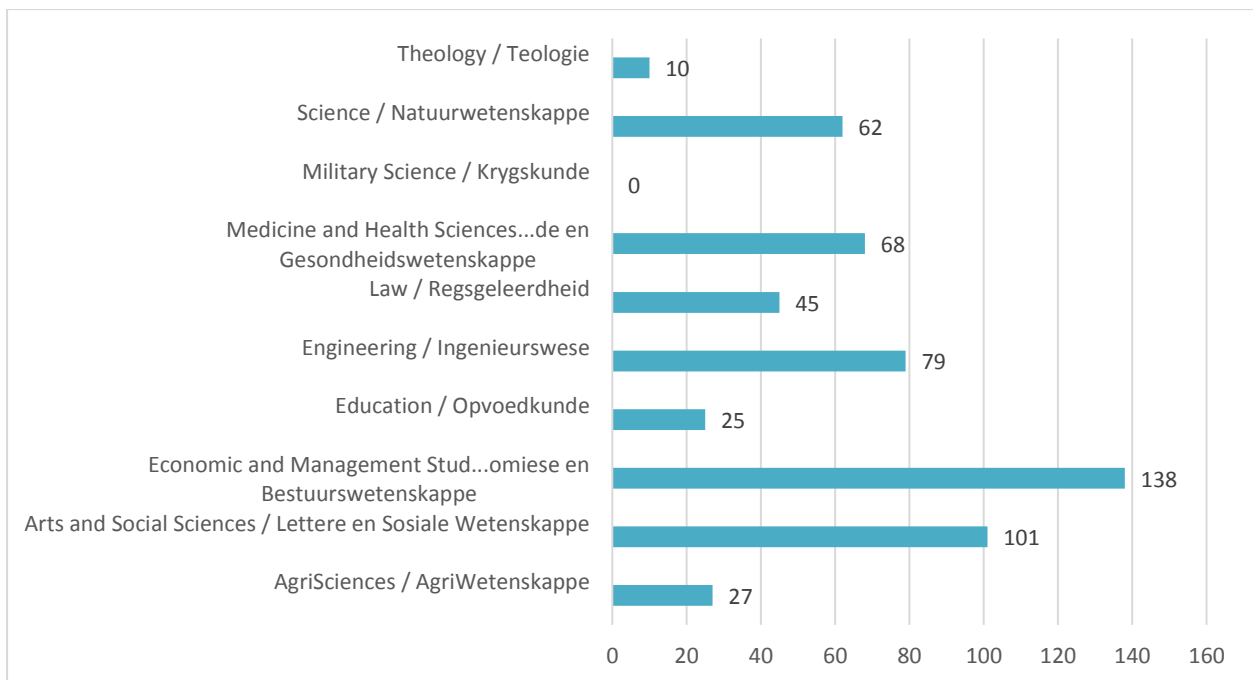


Figure 5: Count of NO responses per faculty (N=555 because not all respondents completed Faculty)

Question 2

Do you believe that free higher education for all students is viable for next year?

The questions on the imminence of affordable education shows that the overwhelming majority of students (91,64%, 8575 students) do not view the possibility of a fee-free education for 2017 as a realistic likelihood (Figure 6).

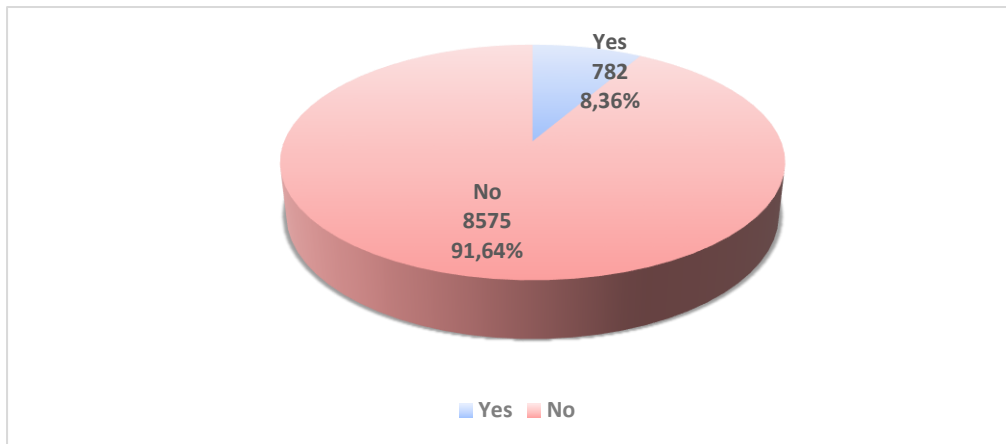


Figure 6: Q2: Do you believe that free higher education for all students is viable for next year?

As with the first question the data was disaggregated per faculty to get more insight into the various responses based on faculty. Figure 7 contains the count of YES responses per faculty.

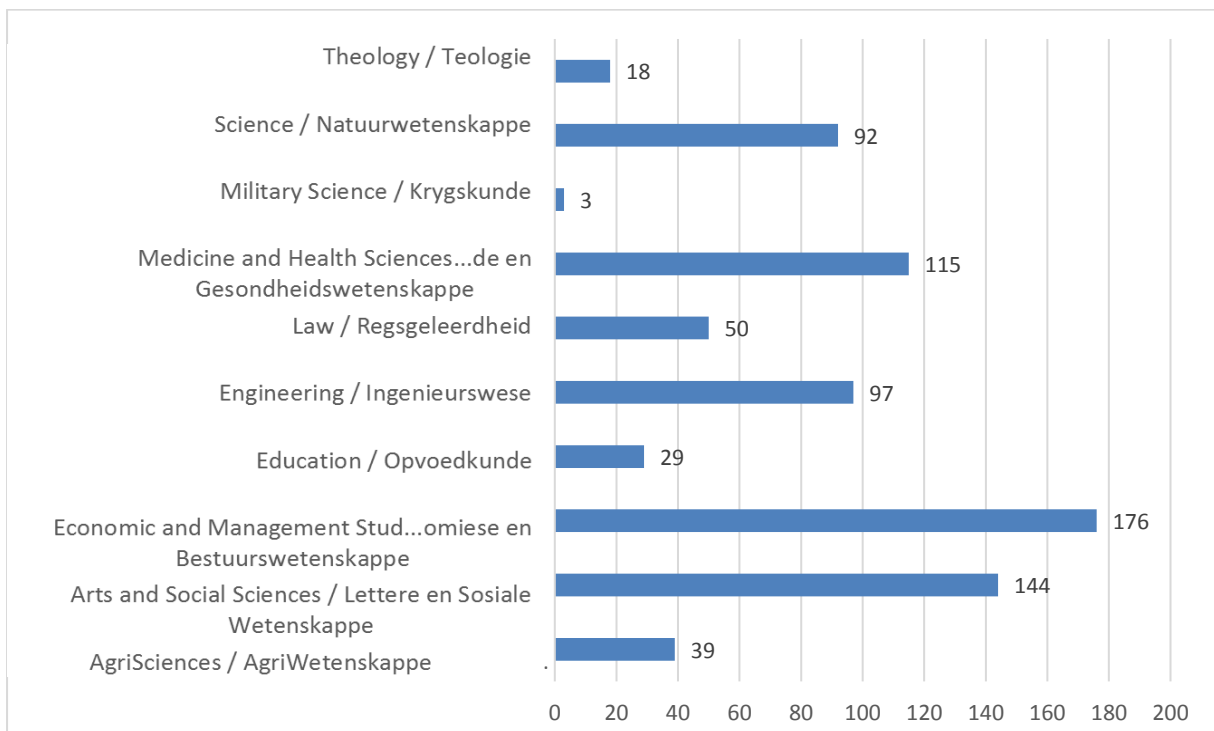


Figure 7: Count of YES responses per faculty (N=763 because not all respondents completed Faculty)

Question 3

Are you sufficiently informed about the following relief for financially needy students?

The question on the depth of information that students felt that they have at their disposal revealed that 60,82% (5691 students) were familiar with the funding relief system enabled by SU and NSFAS (Figure 8).

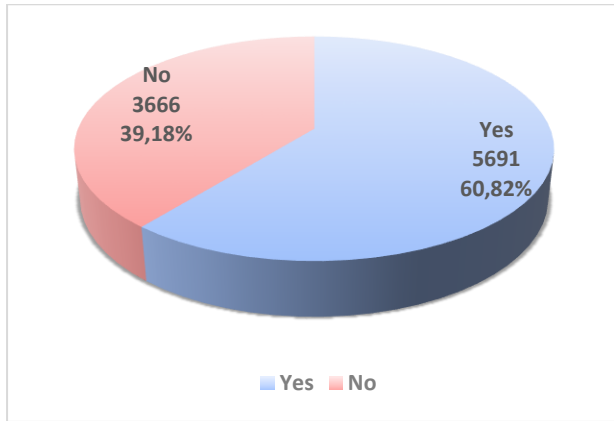


Figure 8: Are you sufficiently informed about the following relief for financially needy students?

As with the first two questions the data was disaggregated per faculty to get more insight into the various responses based on faculty. Figure 9 shows the count of NO responses per faculty.

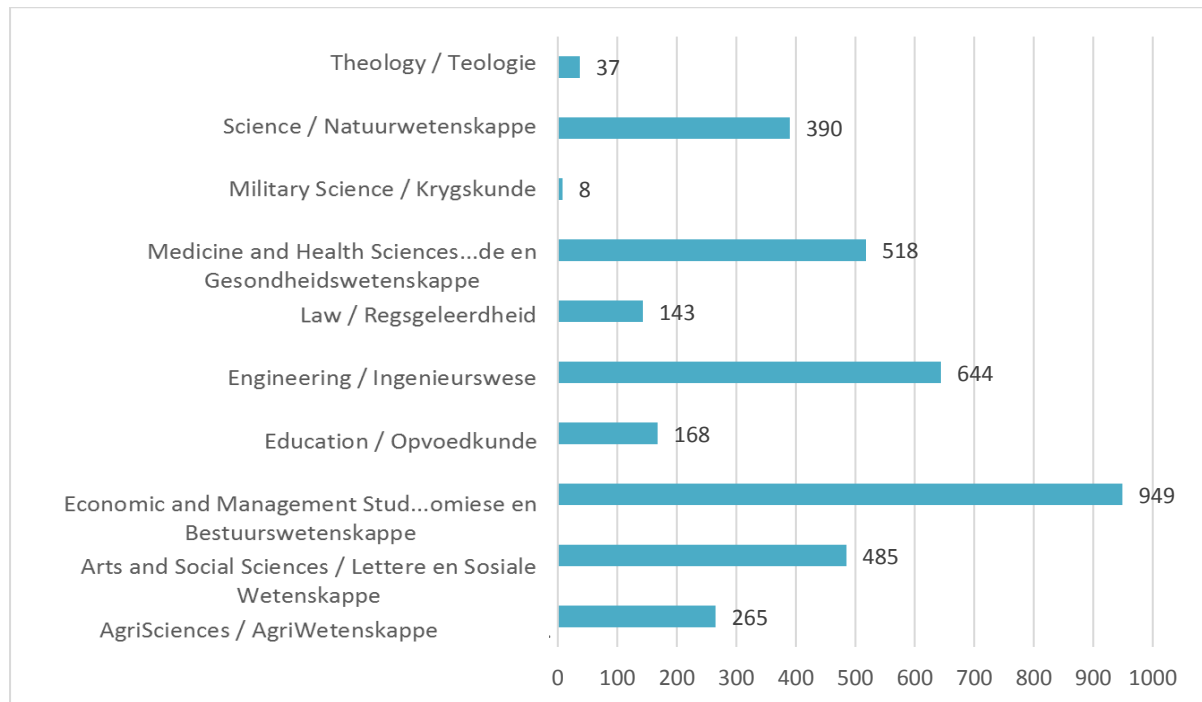


Figure 9: Count of NO responses per faculty (N=3607 because not all respondents completed Faculty)

Conclusion

The survey on student opinions reveals that the overwhelming majority is in favour of continuing the academic programme and does not view fee-free education as imminent. Almost two thirds of students have sufficient information on the fee relief programmes offered by SU, NSFAS and DHET. However, it is evident that more communication on how poor students are financially assisted is needed.

This result does not undermine the minority voice which alerts all SU stakeholders to the importance of continuing towards affordable and accessible education for all. SU continues to be committed to enabling access and affordable quality education.

Appreciation

Much appreciation goes to Jan du Toit, Thys Murray and Maretha Joyce for their spontaneous and reliable assistance.

Addendum 1: Copy of Survey

Dear SU student

Stellenbosch University is doing a very brief survey on student opinions on the current student protest issues. The information will assist Stellenbosch University in further planning the way forward. Your response is kept anonymous.

Thank you so much for your response.

Please follow [this link to complete the survey](#).

For more information please contact Ms Joyce on mjoyce@sun.ac.za

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*Geagte US-student*

*Die Universiteit Stellenbosch is besig met 'n baie kort opname oor studente menings en gedagtes oor die huidige studenteprotes kwessies. Die inligting sal Universiteit Stellenbosch help om die pad vorentoe verder te beplan. Jou antwoord word anoniem gehou.*

*Baie dankie vir jou bydrae.*

*Volg asb [hierdie skakel om die opname te voltooi](#).*

*Vir meer inligting kontak Mev Joyce op [mjoyce@sun.ac.za](mailto:mjoyce@sun.ac.za)*

1. SU management would like to complete the academic year without shut-down. Do you support this?

*Die US bestuur wil die akademiese jaar sonder sluiting voltooi. Ondersteun jy dit?*

- YES / JA
- NO / NEE

2. Do you believe that free higher education for all students is viable for next year?

*Glo jy dat gratis hoërsonderwys vir alle studente vir volgende jaar haalbaar is?*

- YES / JA
- NO / NEE

3. Are you sufficiently informed about the following relief for financially needy students?

- a) Students from household incomes less than R240,000 p.a. pay no study fees, due to SU & NSFAS bursaries and loans
- b) Students from household incomes less than R600,000 p.a. will pay no study fee increases in 2017, due to extra Department of Higher Education and Training funding

*Is jy voldoende ingelig oor die volgende finansiële verligting vir behoeftige studente?*

- a) *Studente met huishoudelike inkomste van minder as R240,000 p.j. betaal geen studiegelde nie, danksy US & NSFAS beurse en lenings*
- b) *Studente met 'n huishoudelike inkomste van minder as R600,000 p.j. betaal geen studiegeldverhogings vir 2017 nie, danksy ekstra befondsing van Departement van Hoër Onderwys en Opleiding*
  - YES / JA
  - NO / NEE

The following optional information will be useful for our analysis:

4. Your study level is:

Jou studievlak is:

- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate

5. The faculty where you are registered is:

*Die fakulteit waar jy geregistreer is:*