

Never two without three:
The importance of measurement,
interpretation and narration in South
African HE institutional research

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"Jamais deux sans trois"

Something my mother taught me

The three parts of IR

- Measuring (the right things)
- Interpreting the measurements (what do the results mean?)
- Narrating (explaining their significance to a range of audiences)

The ultimate goals of IR

- To learn
- To know
- To understand
- **To explain**
- **To influence**
- **To influence decisions**
- **To influence decision-makers**
- **To influence decision-makers' capacities**
- **To influence acceptance of decisions**
- **To provide convincing evidence**
- **To secure broad buy-in**
- **To ensure success**
- **To protect**
- **To guide**

Example 1: Graduation Rate

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In 2003 the Ministry of Education began to publish figures on the performance of the HE sector

- One of the measures was the graduation rate
- We were told that our graduation rate was around 14%
- **Wow!!!**
- We had thought it was 23% in minimum time and 45% in minimum time plus 2 years



Graduation = Coffee

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Year 1	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Year 2		95	95	95	95	95	95
Year 3			85	85	85	85	85
Total	100	195	280	280	280	280	280
Graduates	0	0	85	85	85	85	85
Rate			85%	85%	85%	85%	85%
Ratio			0.304	0.304	0.304	0.304	0.304

Graduation = Coffee

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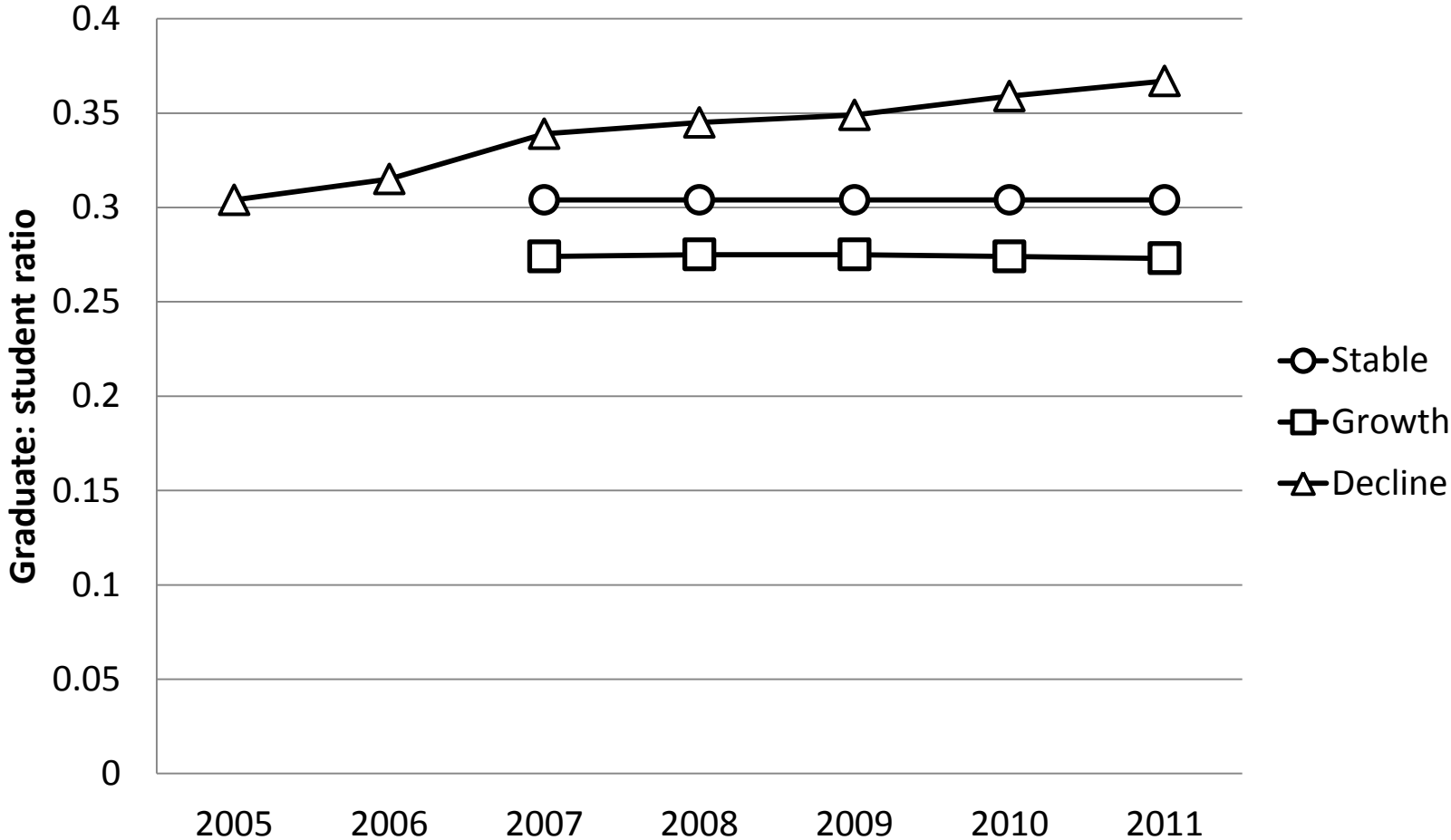
Graduation ≠ / = Coffee

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Year 1	100	110	121	133	146	161	177
Year 2		95	104	115	126	139	153
Year 3			85	94	103	113	124
Total	100	205	310	342	375	413	454
Graduates	0	0	85	94	103	113	124
Rate	0	0	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%
Ratio			0.274	0.275	0.275	0.274	0.273

Graduation ≠ Coffee

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Year 1	100	90	80	70	60	50	40
Year 2	95	95	86	76	67	57	48
Year 3	85	85	85	77	68	60	51
Total	280	270	251	223	195	167	139
Graduates	85	85	85	77	68	60	51
Rate	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%	85%
Ratio	0.304	0.315	0.339	0.345	0.349	0.359	0.367

Graduation ratios: three scenarios of 85% graduation



Only 15% of SA university students graduate

June 13 2013 at 11:20am

By NONTOBEKO MTSHALI_

[Comment on this story](#)

INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPERS

Nicolene Murdoch, executive director for teaching, learning and quality at Monash South Africa, believes students struggle with learning areas they're not suited or skilled for.

Johannesburg - The graduation rate among undergraduate students in South Africa's 23 public universities is 15 percent.

The rate for Master's students is 20 percent and for doctoral students 12 percent.

These figures are contained in the Department of Higher Education and Training's first annual statistical report, published this year, which looked at the "size and shape of post-school education and training in South Africa".

Nicolene Murdoch, the executive director for teaching and quality at Monash South Africa, said the graduation rates have ranged from 15 percent to 20 percent for several years now.

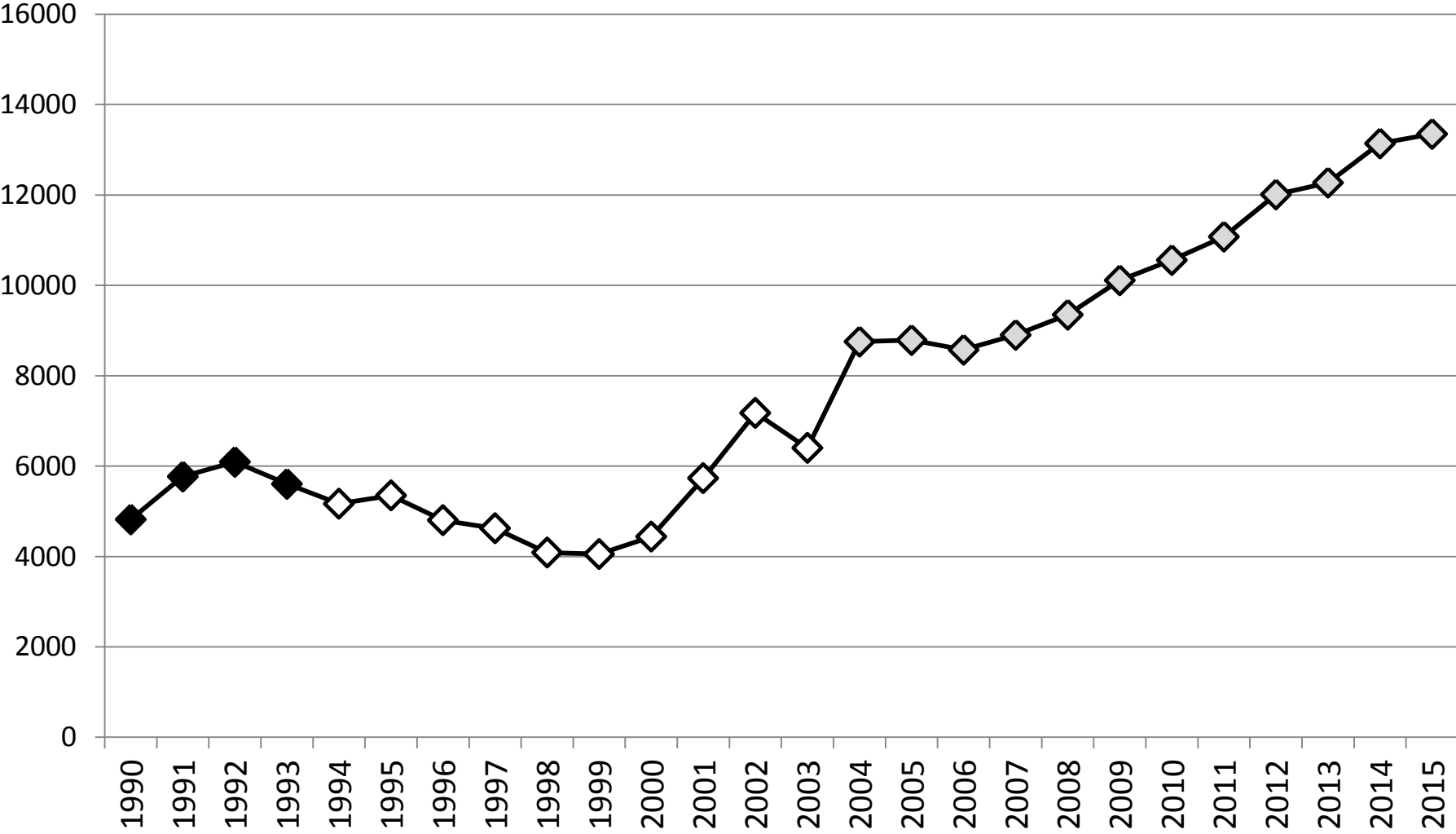
Example 2:

Institutional Effectiveness

Reporting institutional effectiveness

- Although the University of Fort Hare is old by South African standards (100 years old in 2016), it has gone through three major phases in its existence:
 - A small (less than 300 students) institution run largely by protestant churches
 - An institution recast to serve the peculiar needs of Bantustans under the apartheid government
 - A post-apartheid university having to compete in the national sector on even terms

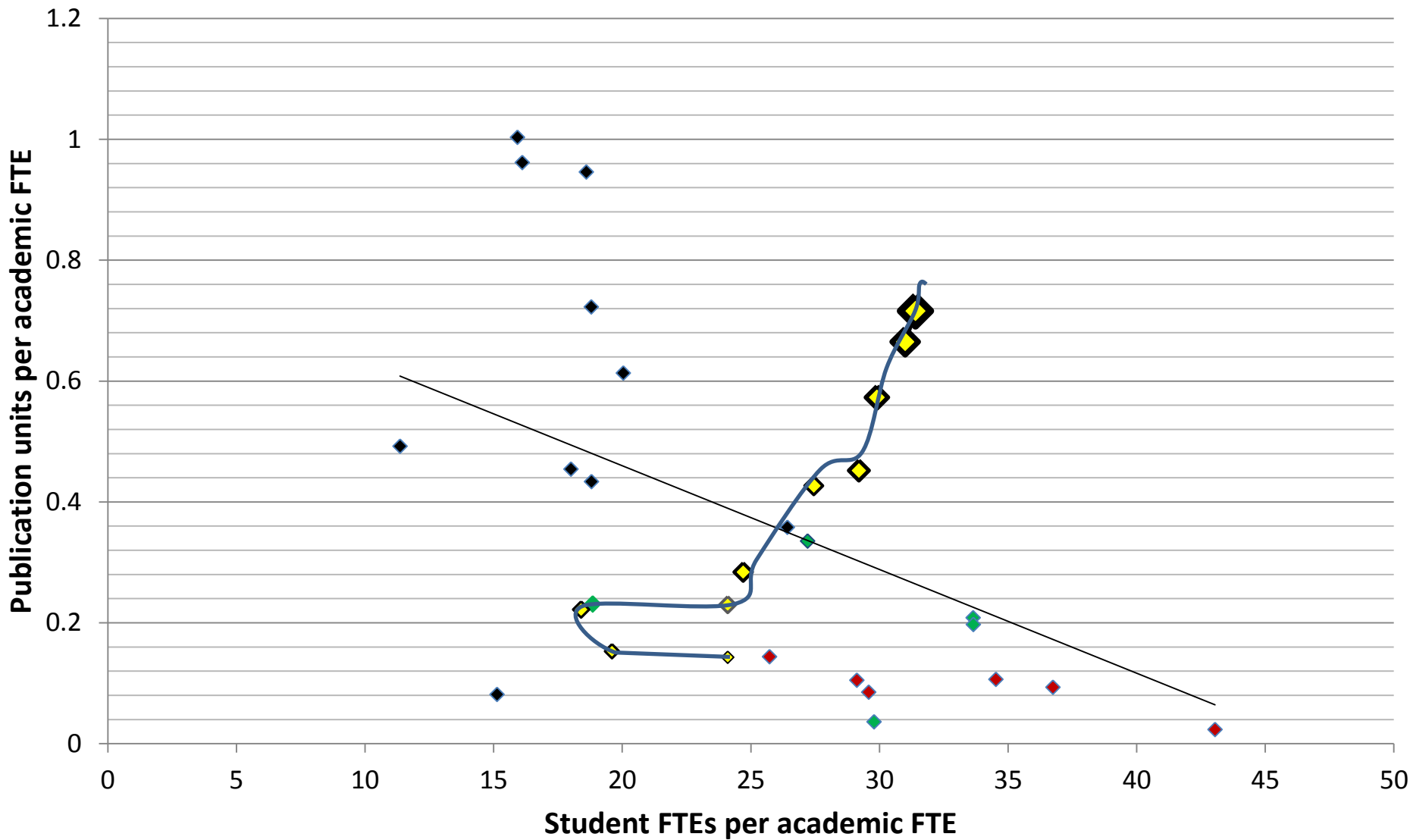
UFH student headcount: 1990-2015



How do we report effectiveness?

- Comparisons
- Standardised measures
- Target setting
- Year-on-year progress
- Internal reporting
- Presentation

Teaching loads vs Productivity: national 2009 data and UFH 2004-2013 data



Tailoring to the audience

- Although a “picture is worth a thousand words”..
 - Only 10% of university council are comfortable with graphs
 - Even senior university officials did not understand the figure
 - Most student leaders (who tend to be from the Law faculty) also found it meaningless

In the end *this* carried far more punch.....

2004 versus 2014

	2004	2014
Publication units	45	235 (2013)
Students supported by Blackboard	0	+/- 11 500
Percentage postgraduate students	12.5%	24.1%
Doctoral graduates	2	66
Academic staff FTEs	315	+/- 345
Student enrolment	+/- 6,000	+/- 13,000

Conclusions

- IR helps us understand the system, its components and their inter-relationships
- But when we have to report and recommend, we need to tailor this to the audience
- For audiences of mixed interpretive skills (be it based on discipline or ability), *accurate* simplification of the narrative is the most effective
- *Inaccurate* simplification of the narrative is the most potentially destructive

KISSA....

Keep
It
Simple,
Stark,
Striking,
Accurate