

# Institutional research and the student: Exploring the promise of mixed methods and intersectional analysis

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“[There is currently a] sense of urgency to do *something* to fix things, an urgency that is pushing US higher education towards developing simple solutions for complex problems”(Terenzini, 2013, p.145 – closing remarks at the 2012 AIR Forum, emphasis in original).

“Intersectionality suggests that the confluence of one’s multiple marginalised and privileged identities is an interaction that creates a unique experience, distinctive from those whom they may share some identities but not others” (Museus & Griffin, 2011, p. 8).

# IR and the student

- Why place emphasis on understanding students?
  - Core business
  - Funding base
  - Student performance remains poor and insufficient to meet national skills needs
- In SA we have high quality national data and challenges well-documented – but the challenges continue
- What does this mean for IR?
- What role could IR play in turning this tide of poor performance?

## IR and the student cont.

- Deeper analyses and understanding of the complexities of students' lives and experiences
- This has conceptual and methodological implications particularly regarding the “problematic conflation of intergroup differences in higher education research and discourse and the role of intersectionality in addressing the problem” (Museus & Griffin, 2011, p 7)

# Intersectionalities – definitions

- “the examination of individuals and their positionality at the intersection of multiple social identities or groupings.”
- “[T]hose employing intersectional analyses strive to better understand the unique ways in which multiple intersecting social identities come together to shape one’s experiences, making distinctions in how individuals experience and engage in environments as a results of their unique position at particular intersections, rather than focusing on a single identity” (Museus & Griffin, 2011, p. 8)

# Mixed methods, pragmatism and intersectional research

Methodological implications for approach IR focused on students from intersectional perspective

- Mixed methods most commonly advocated
- Located in pragmatist paradigm as alternative to paradigm wars (quant and qual)
- Pragmatism:
  - Epistemological middle ground, highlighting similarities
  - “knowledge is simultaneously constructed and based on a general reality we all inhabit” (Griffin and Museus, 2011, p. 20)
  - Research question or problem is primary and this guides methodological choices
- Focus on research question or problem resonates well with IR which is usually oriented towards applied research



# Using mixed methods for intersectional research

- Category comparisons
- Category deconstruction
- Quantification of qualitative data
- Voice excavation
- Disparity explanation



# Benefits of mixed methods and intersectional research

- More accurately reflect diversity in higher education
- Provides a means of bringing out voices and realities on the margins
- Provide better understandings, depth and breadth of analysis
- Helps to avoid advancing equality in one area while potentially perpetuating inequalities in other areas



# Challenges of mixed methods intersectional analysis

- Conceptual and analytical complexity
- Expertise in both quantitative and qualitative methods
- Requires more resources – time, energy and money





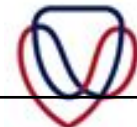
# Applying these ideas in practice

- Illustrative example using student engagement data and qualitative data about student experiences to conduct an intersectional analysis
- Focus on data about how students spend their time both within and outside of university



# Methodology

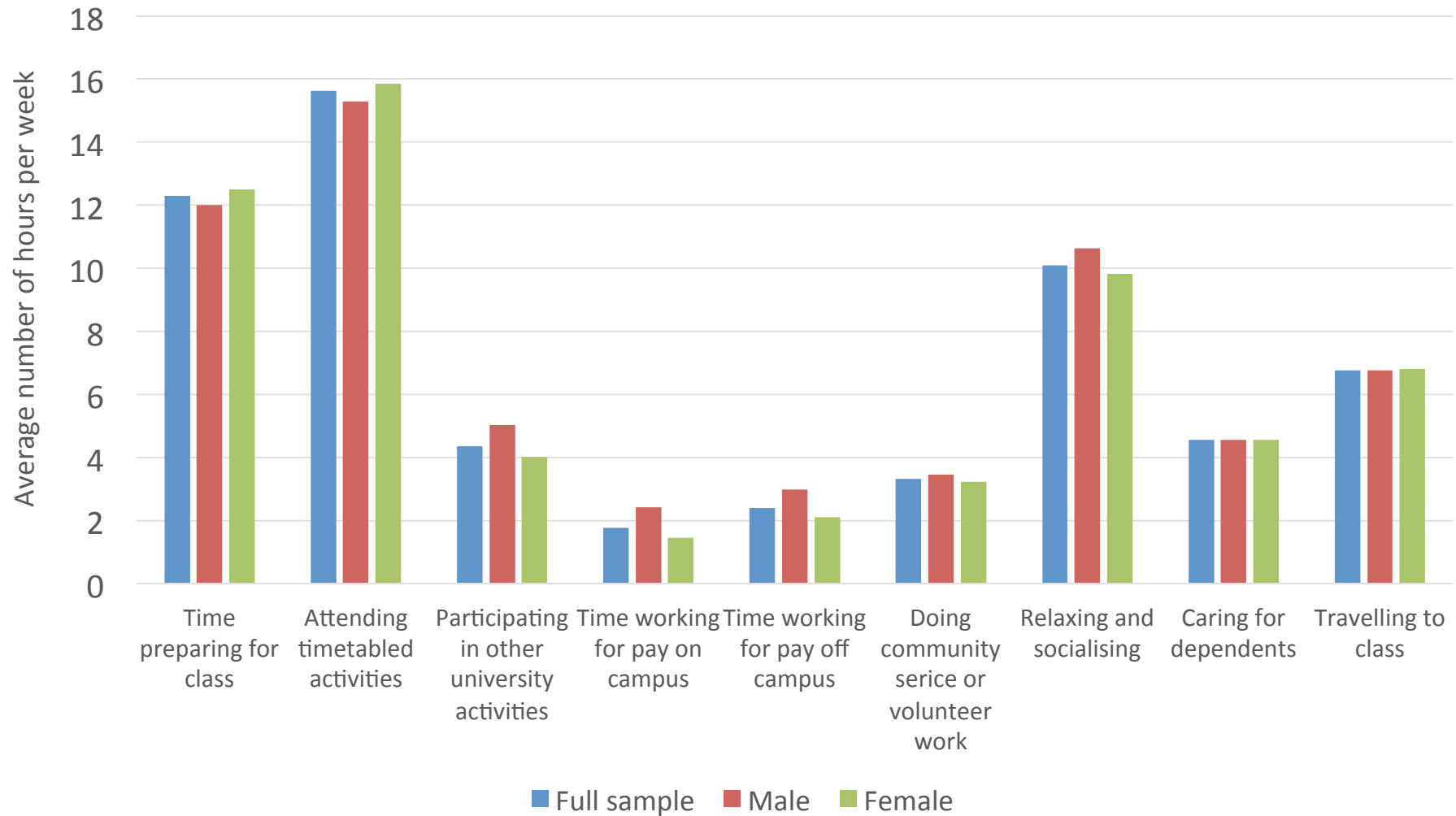
Quantitative data	Qualitative data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive analysis of UFS SASSE 2014 (n=2133), focus on items about how time is spent.</li> <li>• Two-way ANOVA – using 4 student groupings/factors (race, gender, first-generation, residential status)</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative data collected from students (2009-2014) organised and coded in Nvivo.</li> <li>• Extracted qualitative data about how students spend time.</li> <li>• Explore and analyse this data by the four student groupings (still in process).</li> </ul> 



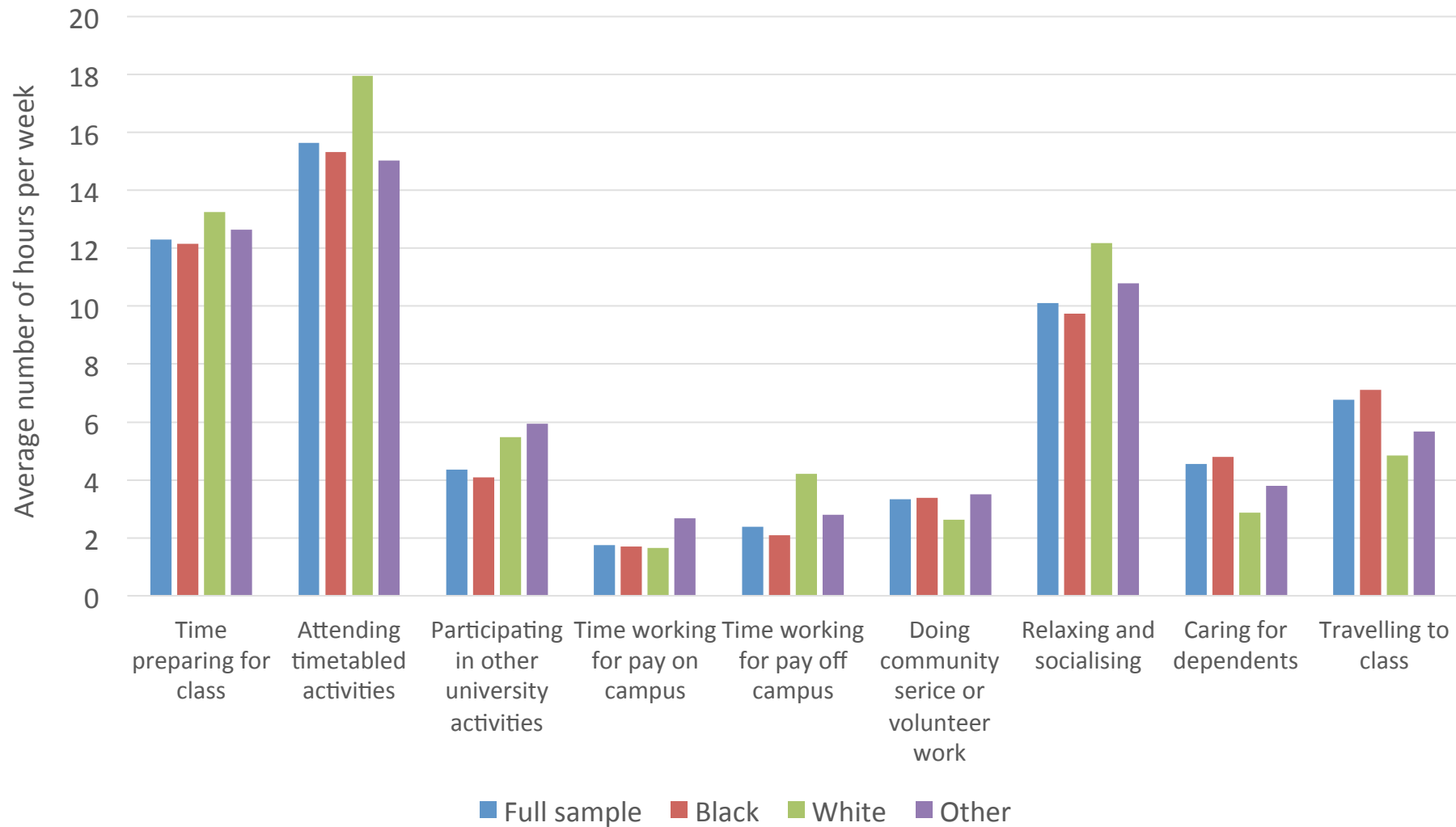
# Initial results



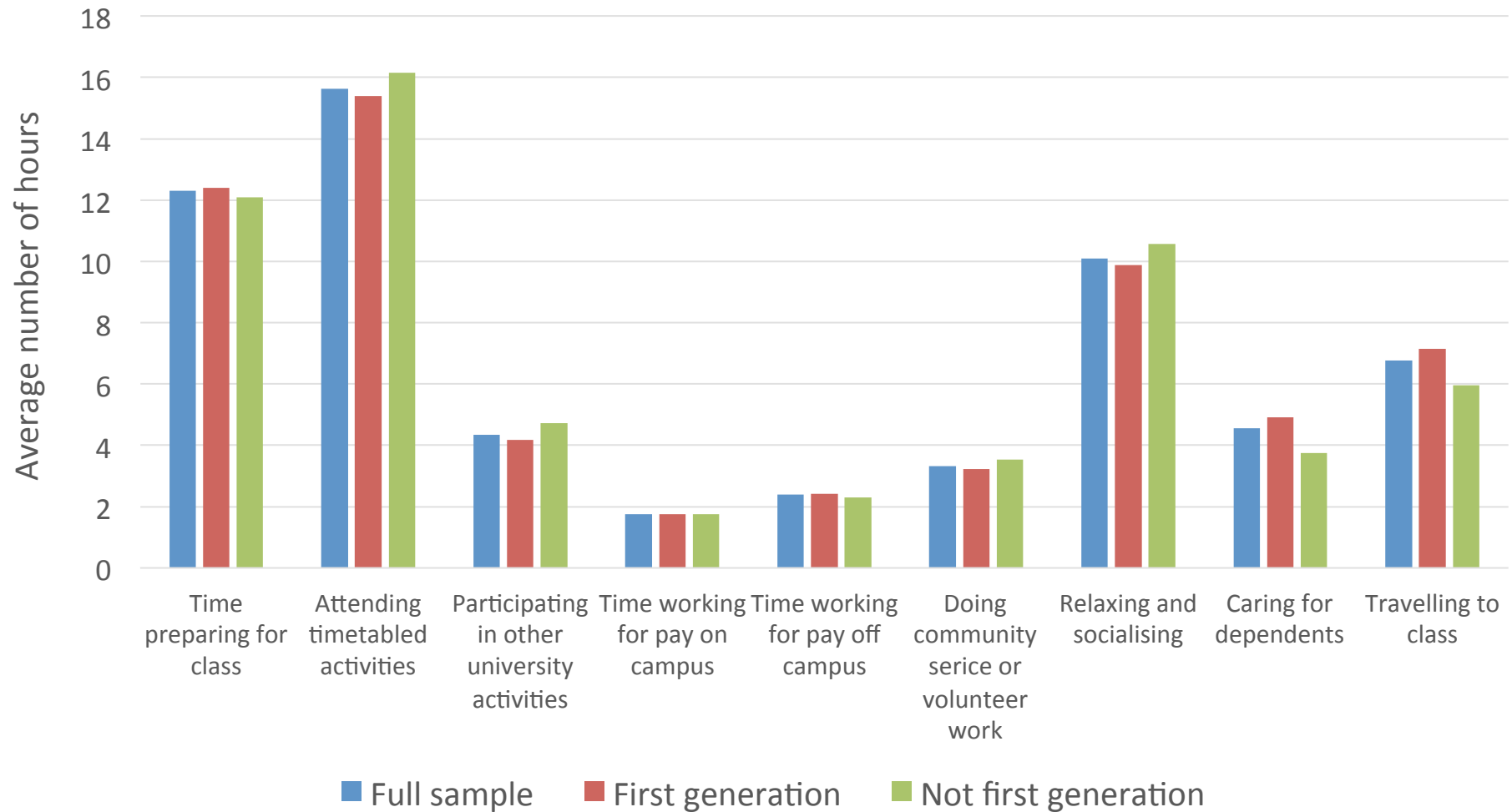
Estimated time spent on various activities per week by gender



# Estimated time spent on various activities per week by race

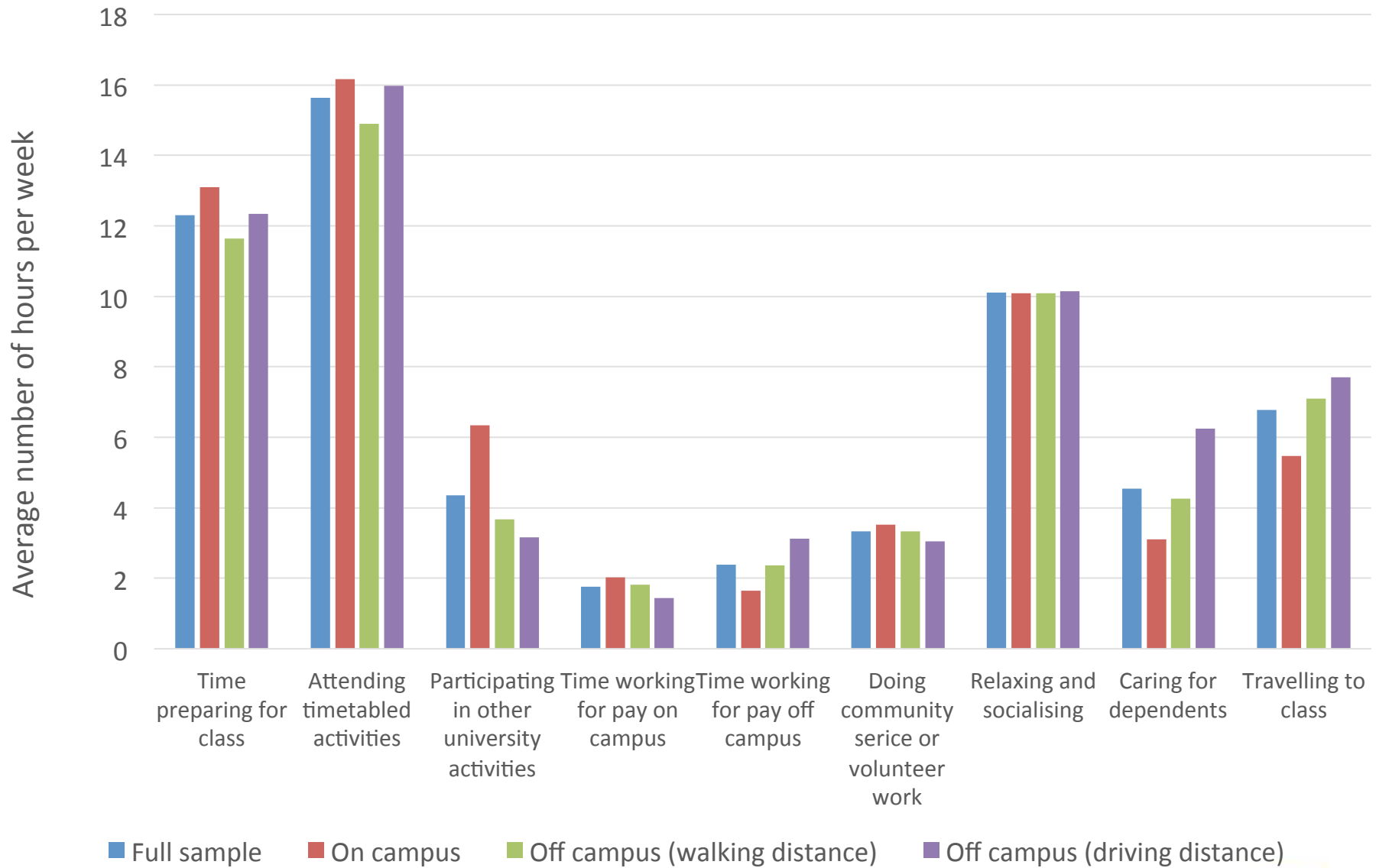


## Estimated time spent on various activities per week by generational status

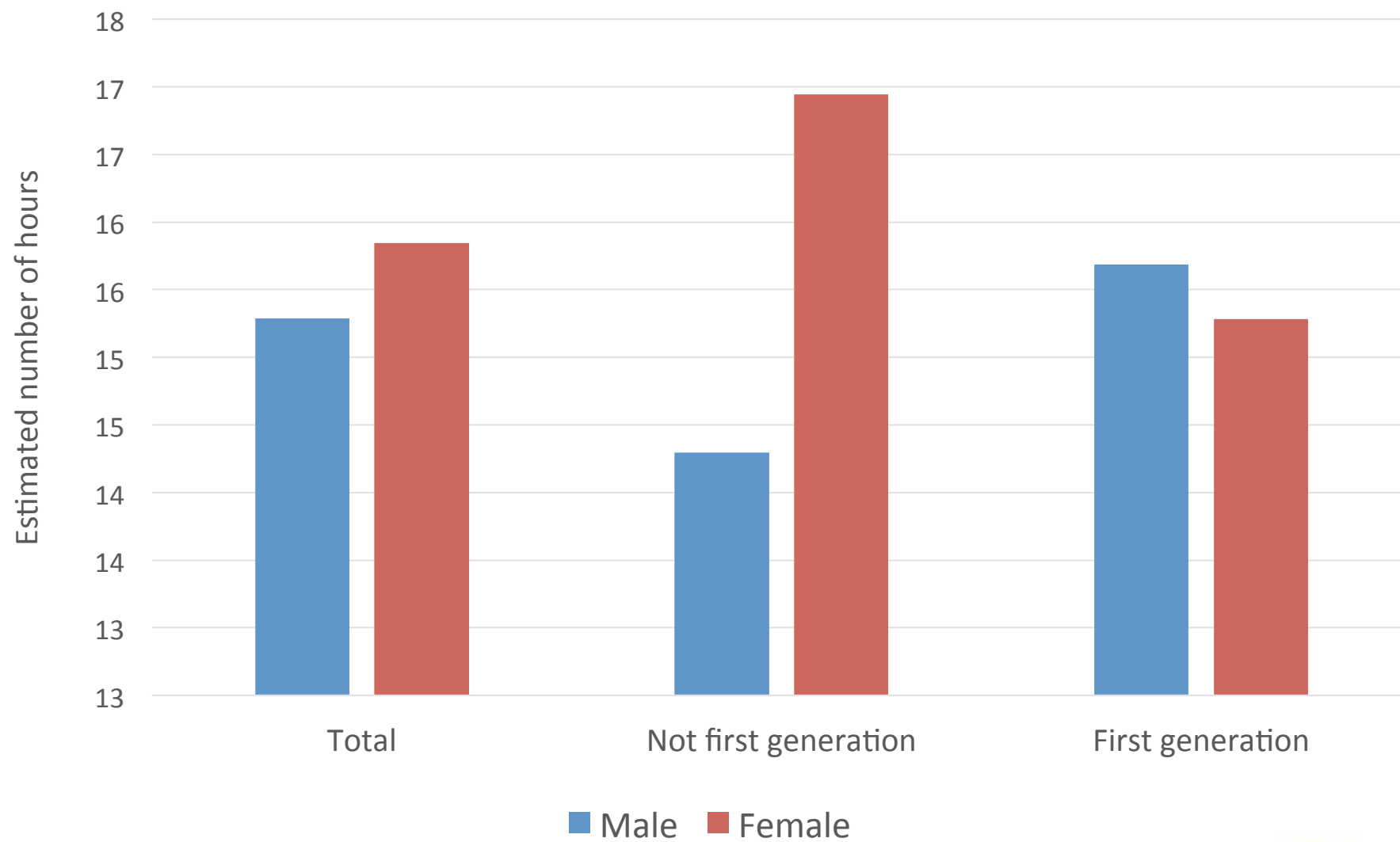




# Estimated time spent on various activities by residential status

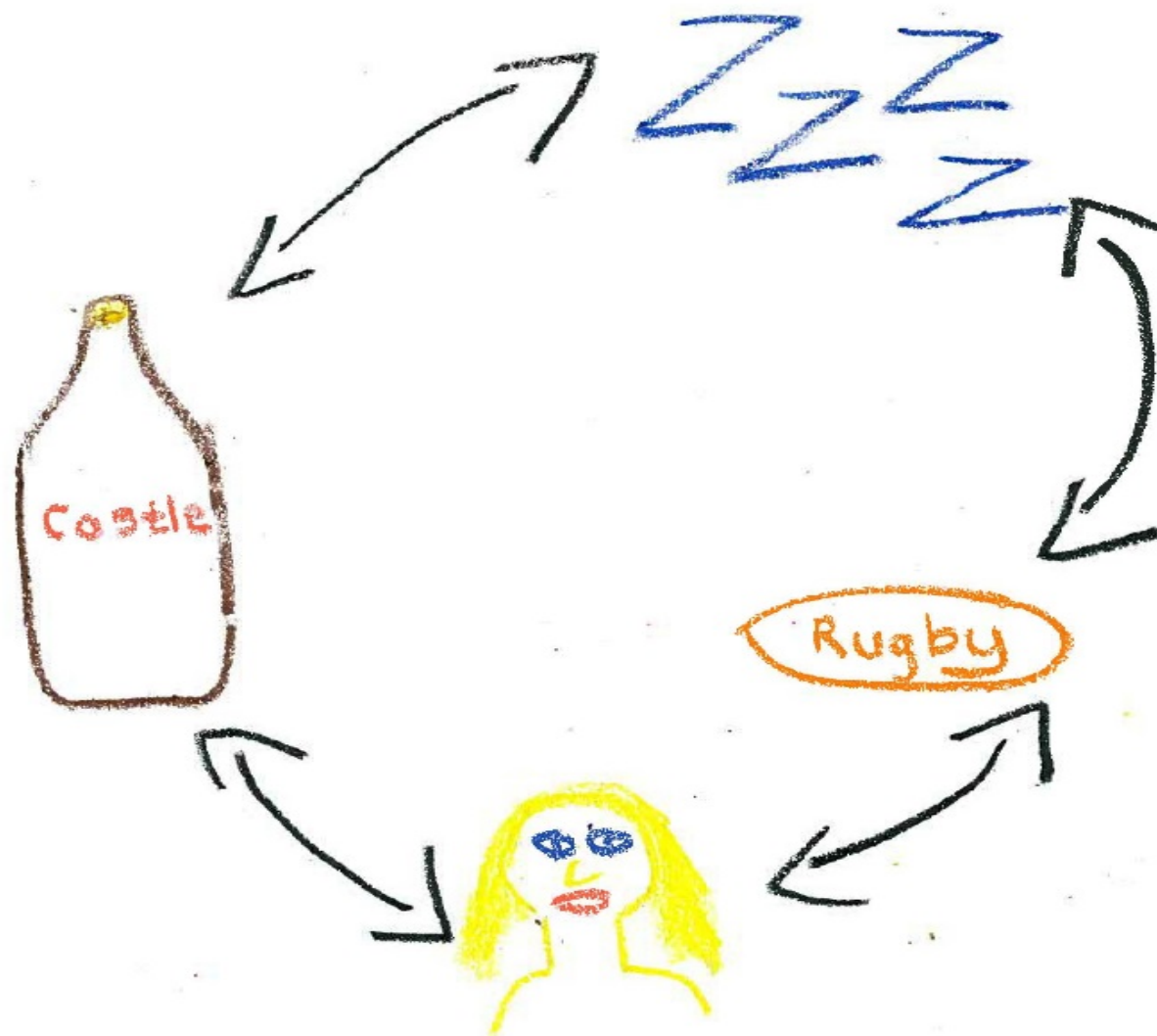


## Average time per week spent attending timetabled activities

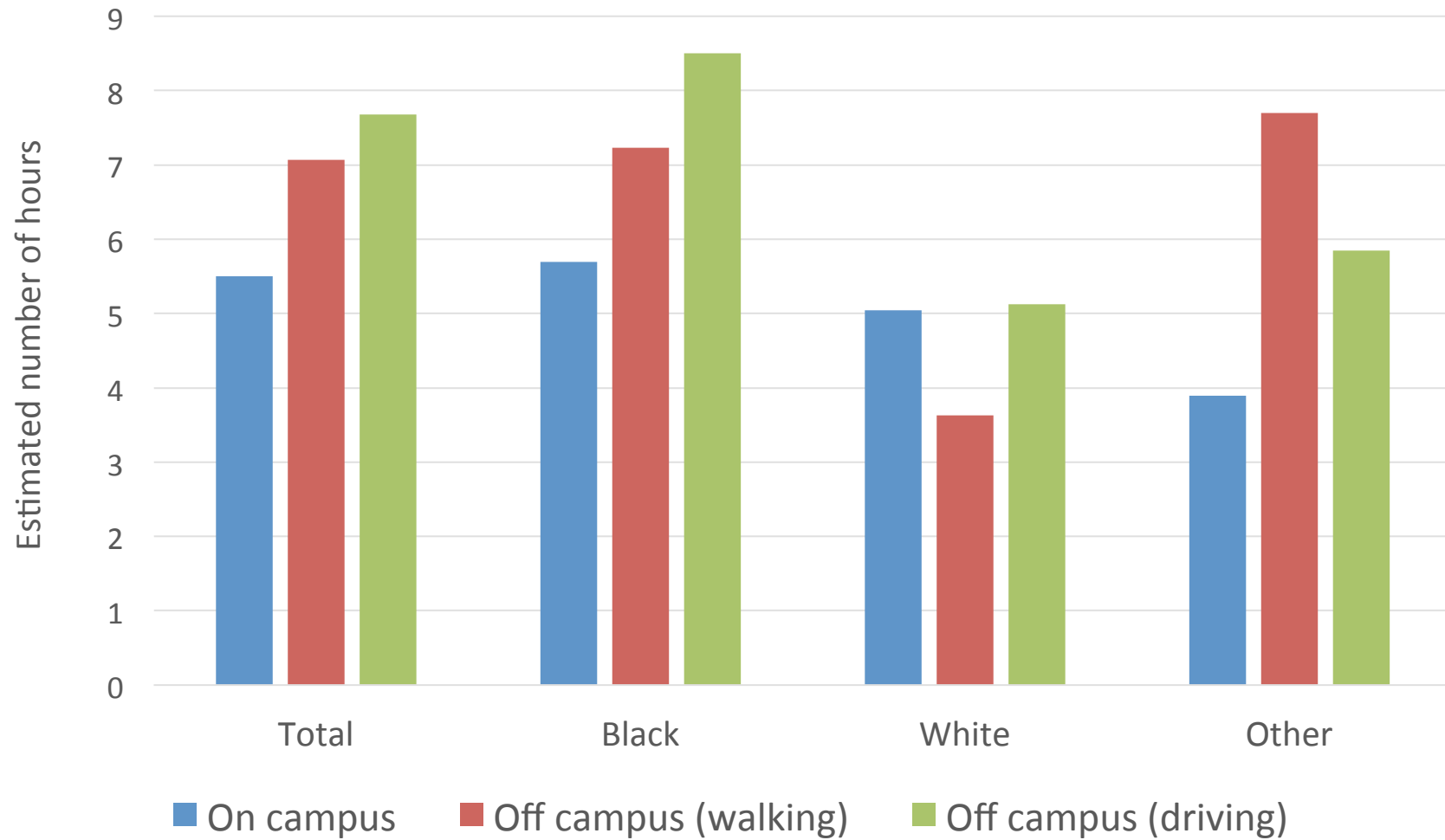


# Besluitneming

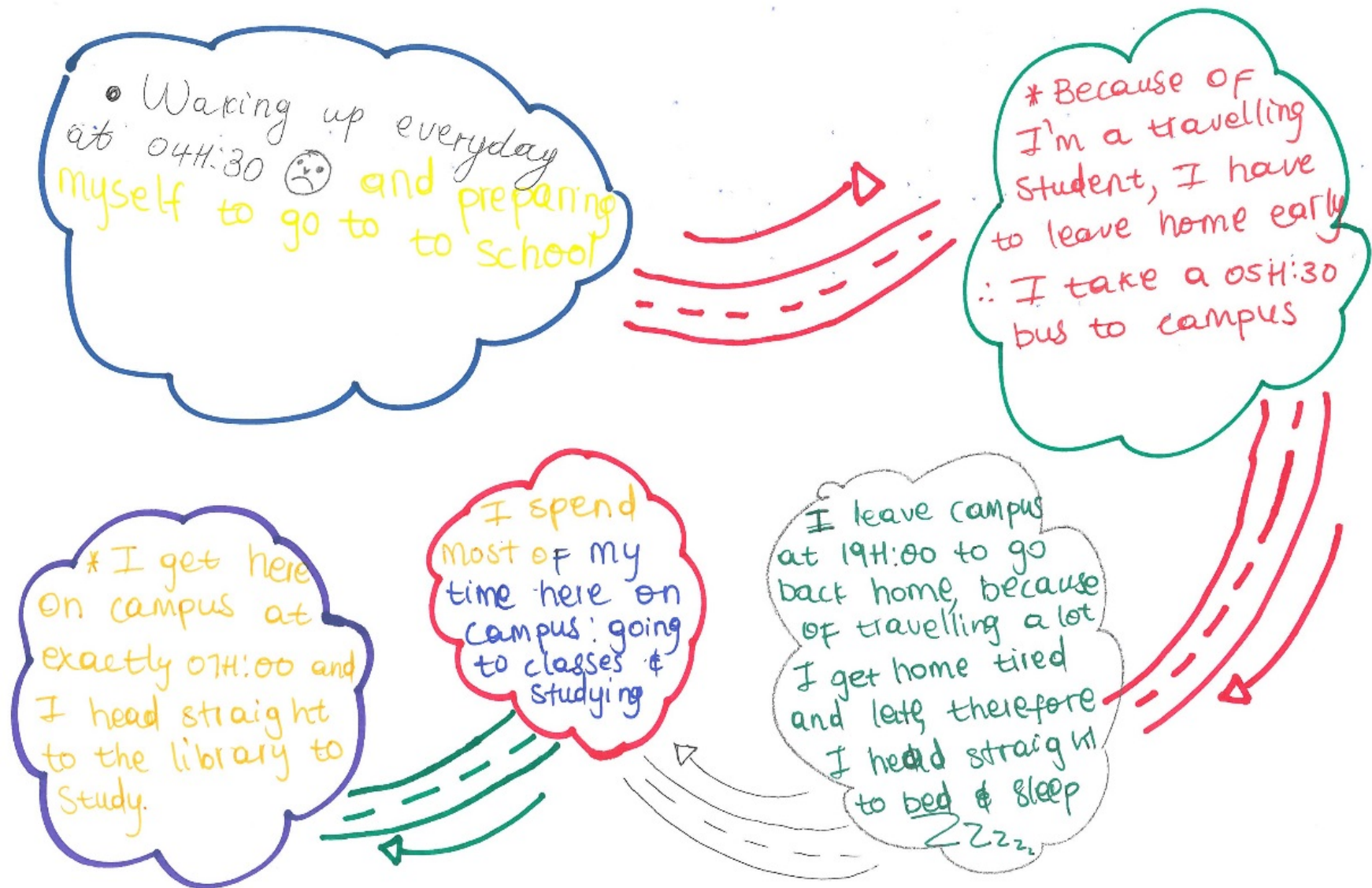




## Average time per week spent traveling to campus

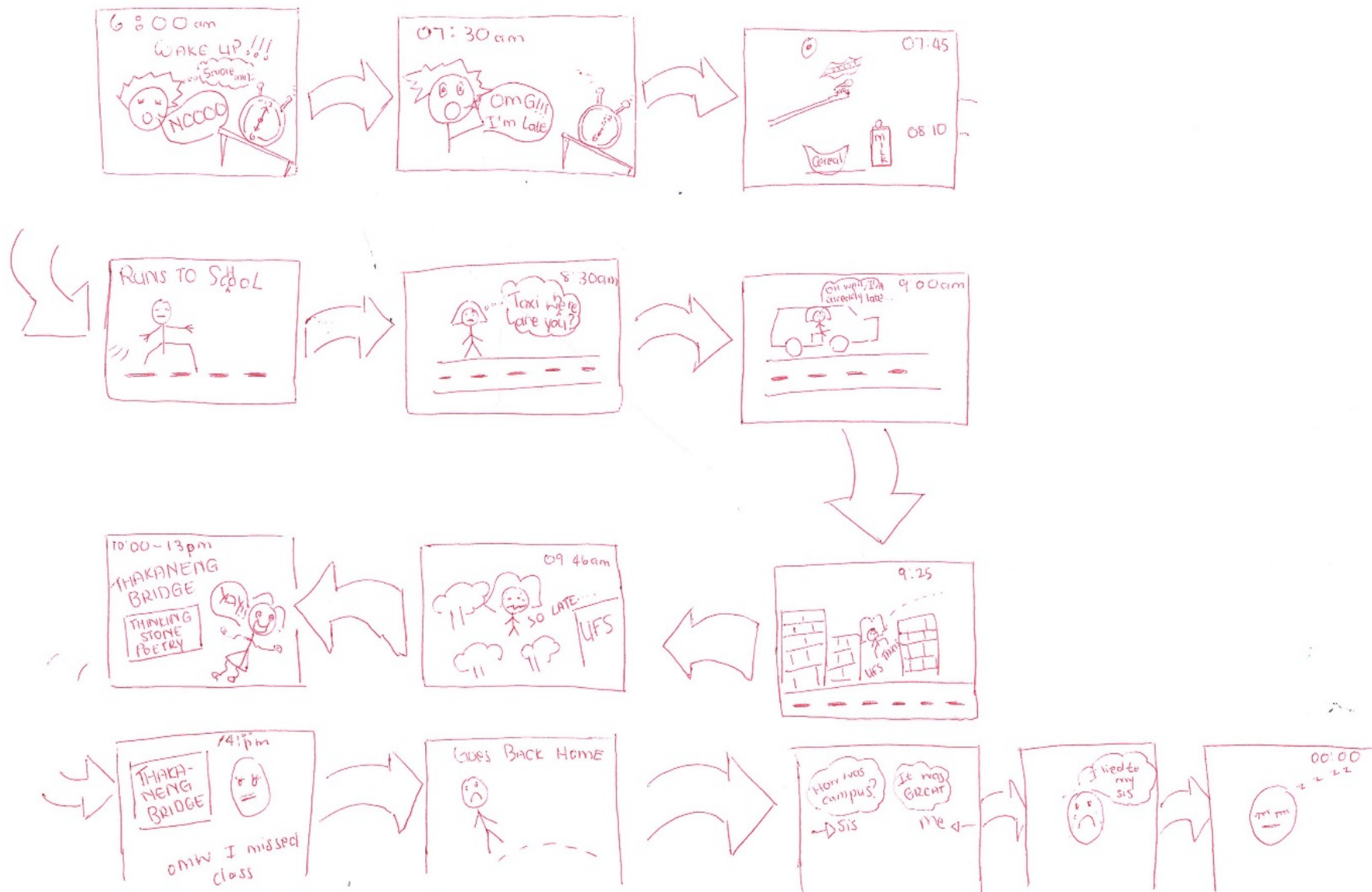


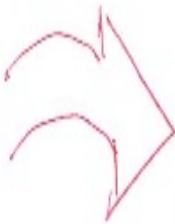
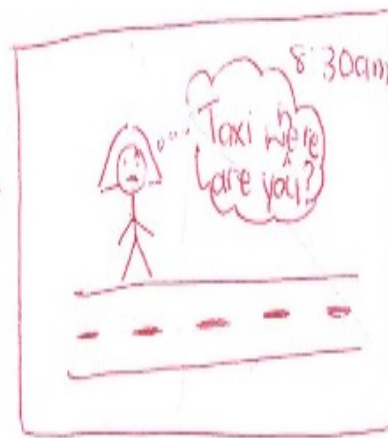
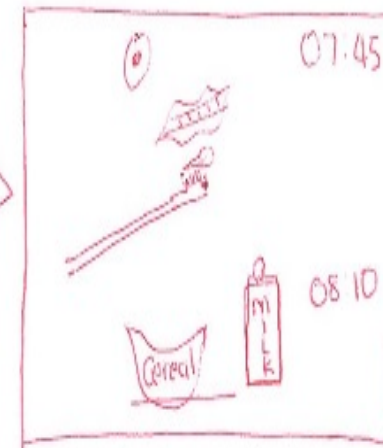
## A typical day in the life of REFILOE



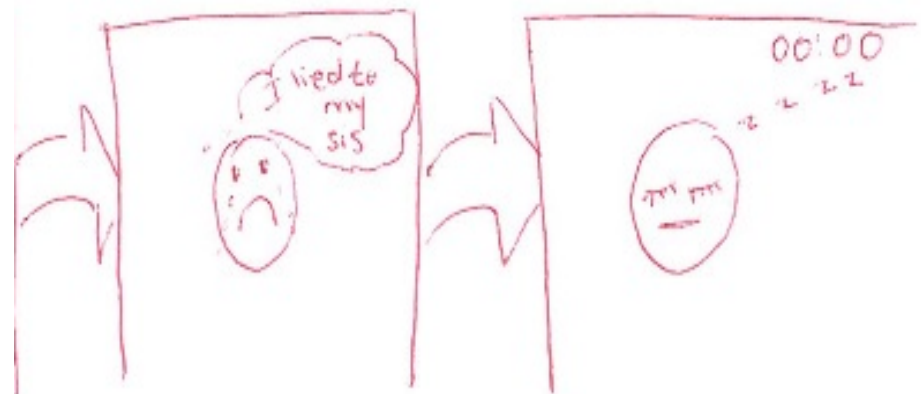
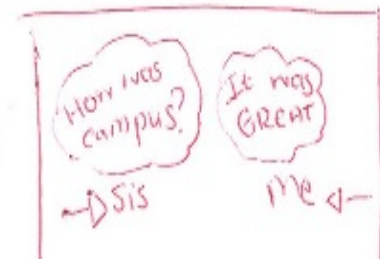
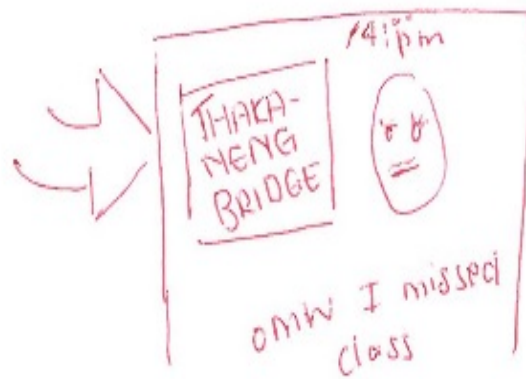


## A typical day in the life of a STUDENT at the University of Free State









# Conclusion

- Examples show the potential for richer understandings of our students
- Hopefully this helps up to avoid the problem of IR providing simple solutions to complex problems (Terenzini, 2011)
- Perhaps this more complex and nuanced understanding of our students' lives provides a new way of understanding the current student protests
- Once full analysis is completed then we can make recommendations for evidence-based change





Thank you.

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