Identity transitions: Developing graduate attributes

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Achieving graduate attributes

• .......meaningful solutions have proved elusive and there remains a 'national gap' between the rhetoric of graduate attributes and the reality of the student learning experience.
The National GAP

• Because of the way ‘we’, as individuals, think about Graduate Attributes.

• Because of the way the systems we work in, shape what we do.
  (See Barrie, Hughes & Smith 2008)

• But what does it mean for a student?
A way of thinking about the institutional systems

1. Conceptualisation
2. Stakeholders
3. Implementation
4. Curriculum
5. Assessment
6. Staff Development
7. Quality Assurance
8. Student Centred

A way of thinking about institutional strategy
Conceptualisation

• Context ▶ focus

• Conceptions of GA learning outcomes and processes – these explain how people approach teaching and learning of GA. They are also embodied in university policy statements.

• Limitations inherent in conceptions based on “generic” and “skills”
Stakeholders

• Multiple – with multiple agendas

• Rarely recognise the differences or way these interact

• Who is included and who is excluded?
Implementation

• Limited range of implementation ‘strategies’

• Left to individuals - or done for them or done to them & rarely engages the diverse members of university community

• Need multi-level leadership, coordination & prioritisation……resourcing
Curriculum

- Curriculum structure & organisation limits what can be achieved

- Linear sequence of content blocks – add in some other ‘blocks’ (PD theme, skills courses, WIL, internships)

- Change the existing learning experiences

- Broaden the range of learning experiences
Assessment

• Assessment defines the curriculum – for all stakeholders

• The complexity of GA assessment is ignored in favour of ‘tick and flick’

• Articulation of GA in standards and criteria needs operationisation in lived experience

• Need a whole degree approach to assessment

• Need to broaden *how* we assess & broaden *who* is engaged in assessment
Staff development

• Support and encouragement to engage in curriculum renewal & development of new learning experiences

• A different (broader) cohort with different needs to usual ADU constituency

• SD needs to address all aspects of the puzzle not just ‘tools’

• Long term undertaking - not short term fix

• Motivation to engage is vital
Quality Assurance

• How we ‘assess’ teaching / curriculum determines what we do – teachers are no different to students

• QA is often simplistic and reflects low level conceptions

• QA does not capture the multi-level effort required to foster GAs

• Does not measure all the bits of the puzzle or the integrated effect
Student Centred

- It is the students’ experience of GAs that counts – not what we do or say
- This is not prominent in institutional approaches
- This is not evident in students reports of their experiences
- Career (life) development learning life-long / life-wide learning
The people in the system: Staff and Students

- As staff our ideas about GA do shape the system…...but we rarely articulate them in a way that does this intentionally.

- In the absence of such conversations….. the system limits how we can act on our ideas

- What sort of vested interests are there maintaining the current system?
Students and Graduate Attributes

What ideas do students have about GA?
Students and Graduate Attributes

- Students have ‘ideas’ about GA ….
- I don’t have the faintest idea…
- These are lists of things on the front of assessments and study guides…
- These are extra things we need to develop by doing extra things…
- These are things we are told employers want…
- Where do these ideas come from?
Students do say of their courses…

• “My courses at uni changed the person I am……I think differently and I interact with other people’s ideas differently. I see the world differently……I just don’t deal with work or life in the same way because of what I’ve learnt about X / Y / Z ……I know I’m different to my friends who didn’t go to uni…but I don’t know how to put that difference into words”

• Why don’t students see this transformational learning as being about graduate attributes?
Talking to students about university

• Becoming the person you can be through university…….

• Transition in….developing your identity as a university student….. (Foundation Skills)

• Transition through…..developing your identity as a historian / scientist …. (Graduate Attributes)

• Transition out…developing your identity as a graduate employee and an educated member of society…(Graduate Attributes)
Three actions from the student perspective:

• Ensure that the students’ T&L experiences of university do explicitly focus on fostering graduate attributes, rather than “courses + generic skills”

• Explicitly connect students with this graduate attributes experience through transparent assessment

• Have meaningful conversations with students about graduate attributes in the context of their aspirations and experiences of university - so that they stop missing the point of our efforts
Thank you!