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Student Evaluations and the Impact on Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment

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Student evaluations and the impact on curriculum, teaching and assessment

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Georgia Southern University
Statesboro, GA
Central Focus of Presentation

- Consider how Universities could integrate Graduate Attributes into the Curriculum and in so doing encourage greater awareness in students of these attributes so that they will provide more positive performance ratings and consequently increased funding to Universities.
What are Graduate Attributes?

- Graduate attributes are ‘the qualities, skills and understandings a university community expects its students to develop during their time at the institution and, consequently, shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and as a citizen’ (ATN 2000, see also Higher Education Council 1992).
Why Attributes?

• Pressure to identify attributes arose from:
  • **Federal government policy** – required universities to articulate to students the major qualities their graduates will possess (1993).
  • **Employers** – want ‘employable’ graduates – more than discipline knowledge but also employability skills (*)
  • **Professional associations** – want university courses to provide professionally required discipline knowledge and range of generic skills.
Employability Skills

- Communication that contributes to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers.
- Teamwork that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes
- Problem solving that contributes to productive outcomes
- Initiative and enterprise that contribute to innovative outcomes
- Planning and organising that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning
- Self-management that contributes to employee satisfaction and growth
- Learning that contributes to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes
- Technology that contributes to effective execution of tasks (DEST 2002)
Why the Continued Focus on Attributes?

• Universities’ performance is ‘measured’ in part by student feedback on whether get jobs or go onto further education and also on the quality and outcomes of their university education, including whether attained GAs.

• Even though the Australian Government required articulation of attributes in 1993, by 2002 the Department of Education, Science and Technology (DEST) reported no Australian university had adopted a university-wide strategy for the integration and assessment of these attributes (DEST 2002a).
Why the Continued Focus on Attributes?

- Remains an issue at:
  - National level – Current national (Carrick Institute) funding for investigation into the integration and assessment of graduate attributes in curriculum design – suggests more work required by universities.
  - Local level (Deakin University) – audit finding, CEQ and LTPF results - indicate more work required.
Deakin University’s Response

• Produced a list of ‘graduate attributes’ that they claim students will develop in undergraduate and post-graduate.
• Not surprising, similar to other Australian Universities.

• Before looking at Deakin’s attributes,

• LET’s CHECK
  – Does your university articulate to students attributes they will gain from going to YOUR university?
  – What are these attributes?
Deakin University Graduate Attributes (Undergraduate)

- Undergraduate programs will provide opportunities for students to develop the Attributes of a Deakin Graduate in the areas of knowledge and understanding, skills and attitudes:
Knowledge and understanding

- acquisition of, and ability to work with, a systematic body of knowledge, based on the highest standards of scholarship and research

- understanding of the professional, social, economic and cultural contexts of the discipline area

- understanding of the principles and applications of sustainable development
Skills

– identifying, gathering, retrieving and working with textual, graphic and numerical information
– communication, orally and in written form, across a range of contexts
– personal organization and management
– collaborative and team working
– harnessing information and communication technology
– critical analysis, problem solving, and creative thinking
Attitudes

– commitment to independent and lifelong learning
– awareness of ethics, social responsibility and cultural diversity
– appreciation of international perspectives in a global environment
What more has Deakin Done to Ensure these Attributes are Developed?

Course level:

- Accreditation/Reaccreditation requirements – course-wide identification of their development

HAS THIS WORKED?

Feedback suggests NOT YET:

- AUDIT FEEDBACK
- STUDENT FEEDBACK
The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) recommended in 2004: That the University communicate to students more effectively the nature and aims of the Deakin Advantage and assist them to document the discipline-specific and generic skills that they are developing throughout their course.
Student Feedback

• CEQ results
• LTPF results
• However – some questions arise over low response rates
What occurs elsewhere?

• Before looking at our Project,
  • LET’s CHECK
    – What does your university require in terms of attributes and curriculum?
Project: Attributes and undergraduate legal education

• University Strategic Teaching and Learning Grant (STALGs) titled, ‘The contextualisation and embedding of the attributes of a Deakin graduate in professionally accredited courses of study: Developing an approach in undergraduate law courses’.
Why legal education?

1. The popular ‘Good Universities Guide 2006’ was generally quite critical of Law Schools in Australia, stating ‘it is not as bad as it used to be, but a lot of it remains detailed and arcane’ and ‘if the CEQ is right, a lot of students judge that it is badly taught’ (The good universities guide: Universities and private colleges: 2006 2005) p. 120.
Why Legal Education?

2. Numerous reports have identified the importance of skill development in legal education. For example, the Australian Legal Reform Commission (ALRC) 1999. *Managing Justice* advocated the re-orientation of legal education around "what lawyers need to be able to do, rather than of what lawyers need to know" (ALRC, 1999, para 2.21). In addition, ‘Law schools should make explicit the nature and extent of their skills development programs and how they examine these skills’ (ALRC, 1999, para 2.80).
Why Legal Education?

• 3. Self – contained study relative to other courses offered in Faculty of Business and Law at Deakin (eg. B.Comm). This provided opportunity to investigate and develop approaches for application in other parts of Faculty.
Project Aims

The main aims of the project included
• raising student awareness and retention of the skills and knowledge gained in undertaking undergraduate legal education at Deakin,
• develop a set of procedures or options for contextualising and embedding the attributes,
• and establish and implement procedures for collecting and recording evidence of attribute development, which can be used for assessment and reflection purposes and be also used to improve employment opportunities and student feedback through GDS and the CEQ.
What has Project Team Done?

1. Reviewed literature on legal education.
2. Reviewed activities and literature on the attributes developed in Deakin’s course.
3. Reviewed student feedback on attribute development.
4. Sought staff feedback on attributes developed.
5. Set up site for communicating information to staff.
6. Identified options for advancing attribute development.
1. Reviewed literature on legal education

- The review has confirmed the need for law courses to develop ‘lawyering’ skills in addition to substantive law knowledge.
2. Attribute Development in Legal Education at Deakin University

1. Law School claims:
   • It provides graduates with a broad technical competency, a specialisation in commercial law and an appreciation of how the law operates in practice. Students will also have acquired highly developed research and analytical capabilities, a facility to quickly master a situation and the ability to present a case in a persuasive and convincing manner. The LLB will also equip graduates with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the professional practise of law.
Attribute Development in Legal Education at Deakin University

2. Students are required
• to complete 32 credit points
• to take part in a number of practical legal skill (PLS) exercises to satisfy the four units comprising the Dispute Resolution requirements of the degree. The four units include:
  • Moot
  • Mediation
  • Arbitration
  • Witness Examination
Attribute Development in Legal Education at Deakin University

3. Students required
   • to complete the prescribed Professional Experience
Attribute Development in Legal Education at Deakin University

4. Reaccreditation documents shows:
  • During 2005, an educational developer evaluated study materials, assessment tasks and unit guides to complete the mapping of attributes for the LLB reaccreditation. The specific attributes in each unit of the LLB were identified and reported as being either taught, practiced and/or assessed.
5. Unit guides:

- Unit Chairs required to identify the graduate attributes developed in their unit of study and link these to assessment tasks and learning objectives.

  (NOTE: the attributes identified were often less than those identified in the reaccreditation documents)
Attribute Development in Legal Education at Deakin University

   • Law E-ssentials is a website full of easily accessible, engaging, practical information, hints, tips and ideas.
   • An online community: Interactive chat rooms, blog areas and forums for you
   • The skills of a lawyer
   • Links and resources in law
   • Opportunities open to law graduates
   • Practical and useful study skills on time management, critical thinking and much more!
   • (NOTE: this is not in operation as yet and has not been integrated into curriculum)
7. Individual initiatives:

• Introduction of a Client view e-simulation into one unit – interviewing skills

• Proposed introduction of reflective journal/log and problem based learning in a unit
3. Student Feedback

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)</th>
<th>2000 respondents</th>
<th>2001 respondents</th>
<th>2002 respondents</th>
<th>2003 respondents</th>
<th>2004 respondents</th>
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<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Percent broadly satisfied</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generic skills</td>
<td>83.33%</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td>72.22%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geelong</td>
<td>Percent broadly satisfied</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: the very low response rate.
4. Staff Feedback

• The survey sought staff perceptions of the attributes (knowledge, skills and attitudes) students gained from the LLB and also list other attributes not developed in the current course.

• Staff were also asked to rate the level of importance they would give to these attributes and provide an indication of the extent to which they believed the attributes are being developed.

• They were also asked to identify the measures taken by the School of Law to inform students.
Staff Feedback Continued

- Staff (35%) reported:
- Legal knowledge as most important
- Skills also important, including
  - Critical/analytical thinking/legal reasoning
  - Research skills
  - Problem solving
  - Writing/drafting

(Note: no response used terms contained in list of graduate attributes of the University)
5. Shared information with staff

- Project team has established site for staff to access information collected about project, including relevant reports, student feedback.
6. Options considered by Project Team

The options to date have included:

• A. The contextualising and embedding attributes into existing curriculum.

• B. The teaching of generic skills separate from discipline knowledge – as either zero credit units or as core units within the LLB (obviously at the expense of existing units).

• C. The introduction of a Capstone unit.

• D. Combination of above options.

• E. Other – Participant experience?
Option A: Contextualising across curriculum

Process involves:

• Identify graduate qualities desired
• Work backwards to locating in curriculum

Concerns:

– Requires leadership and commitment,
– Time and resource intensive,
– Cultural shift in staff,
– Maintaining currency of curriculum
– Assessment and recording
Option B: Teaching of Separate Skills Units

• Skills in communication, team work, etc can be taught separately.
• Law E-ssentials site will provide access to study materials on these skills.
• Concerns:
  – Remains dis-engaged from core curriculum
  – Physical location into curriculum poses problems.
Option C: Capstone

Capstones provide:

• students the opportunity to integrate their undergraduate studies and prepare them for their careers
• reinforce the attributes developed previously in the course
• Martin et al. (n.d.) claims a capstone experience ‘often plays a crucial role in bringing closure to the undergraduate experience, and they catapult students into their new roles as professionals
Proposals

Immediate a focus on a CAPSTONE experience appears most essential.

- Support for the development of capstone units was also evident in the teaching and learning review undertaken at Deakin University. The Review noted the ‘obvious benefits in terms of student responses to the CEQ in terms of their specialist knowledge and skills, but especially with respect to their appreciation of the generic skills they have developed’ (PhillipsKPA 2007).

- Potentially distinguishes and enhances Deakin legal education from other universities.
Proposals continued

- Also keep individual initiatives going and try to expand at individual level.
- Develop integration between individual units and Law E-ssentials.
- And commence process of course-wide integration and raising staff awareness.
Issues remaining

• Raising staff commitment to graduate attributes – How?
• Further knowledge about models and experiences of skill integration into curriculum (eg. of capstones) – What? Who? Where?
• Ways to assess attributes – What’s available? How?
• Raising student awareness – communication of these – How? Through assessment, portfolios?
• Ways to encourage students to complete evaluations and report positively.