

Chapter 20

A Whole of University Approach to Embedding Graduate Attributes: A Reflection

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reflects on the processes involved in managing a curriculum mapping exercise aimed at integrating graduate attributes across CQUniversity's undergraduate programs. Most of these programs are offered via distance education. Due to the complexity of program offerings and the dispersed campus locations, a whole of university approach was needed to address quality and consistency of graduate outcomes. In order to achieve this, an audit of existing course graduate attributes was conducted using an online mapping tool. While the whole of university approach served to provide cohesion within the project, there were some challenges regarding the perceived top-down approach. This chapter serves to inform senior management of the complexities of managing resistance to change within an academic community. It is envisaged that this reflection will assist with future projects that require a whole of university approach.

INTRODUCTION

CQUniversity offers a variety of course delivery modes which pose a challenge for quality assurance of the curriculum, specifically for its distance education programs. These programs

are delivered using distance education models, which adds to the complexity of the learning and teaching environment. These include paper-based course resources, interactive multimedia and an online learning management system. The scale and modes of CQUniversity distance education programs have required management to develop formal and transparent systems of quality assur-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3978-2.ch020

ance. Introducing these systems can help guarantee curriculum quality for a complex and dispersed institution.

One such initiative at CQUniversity is the embedding of graduate attributes across all courses and programs. The development of these skills and attitudes is now accepted as a core outcome for university graduates. These skills include the ability to work in teams, to solve problems, to behave ethically and to be lifelong learners. Further, the emergence of the knowledge economy has required employees to possess skills in addition to those typically associated with their chosen discipline (ACNielsen, 2000).

The term 'graduate attributes' has been described by Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, and Watts (2002, p. 2) as:

... the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students would desirably develop during their time at the institution and, consequently, shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and as a citizen.

Universities have traditionally been responsible for the development of skills related to discipline. However, due to various forces acting across the higher education sector, including the call that universities produce more employable graduates, universities are now being required to go beyond disciplinary content and include graduate attributes as a condition of funding (Barrie, 2006). A review of literature indicates that most universities across Australia are in various stages of graduate attribute flux (Barrie, 2004, 2006; Green, Hammer & Star, 2009; Crebert, 2002; Sumison & Goodfellow, 2004). Barrie (2006, p. 218) notes '...the overall picture in higher education systems around the world is one of patchy implementation and uptake of ... graduate attribute initiatives'.

Green et al., (2009) recommend that a whole of university approach is required for institutions to successfully embed the development of graduate

attributes with their programs and courses. A scan of the literature and university websites has found limited evidence of the use of a university wide approach. The recent national forum sponsored by the Australia Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) on graduate attributes identified twelve strategies for potential collaboration (Oliver, 2010). One of these strategies supported the deployment of a whole of university approach when embedding graduate attributes across the curriculum.

The aforementioned appears to indicate that universities have underestimated the cultural, institutional and policy changes required to implement graduate attributes.

This paper describes the whole of university approach that CQUniversity has adopted in terms of progressing the graduate attribute agenda. Further, this paper reflects on the process of engaging academic staff, as custodians of the curriculum, in an online mapping exercise that benchmarks existing course graduate attributes.

CONTEXT

CQUniversity was established in Rockhampton as the Queensland Institute of Technology (Capricornia) in 1976 and became a university in 1992. Since its inception, the university has established regional campuses in Bundaberg, Emerald, Gladstone, Mackay and Noosa and city campuses which service international students in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and the Gold Coast.

CQUniversity has a complex learning and teaching environment with approximately 20,000 students across its campuses. Reports submitted by the university to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in 2009 document that 42.45 percent of CQUniversity's students were enrolled as distance education students (CQUniversity, 2010). Such complex teaching and learning environments create a chal-

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