**Developing graduate attributes – Do students really gain these at university?**

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A student’s experience at university is not just about learning knowledge and theory about their chosen subject; it is a time when they are developing in many different ways. More than two decades of research has shown that generic graduate attributes (GAs), that is the soft skills that students are expected to develop as part of a university education, are linked with positive outcomes for individuals and society (Barrie, 2006; Young & Chapman, 2010). For example, universities claim that they are producing talented graduates but also productive citizens (Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, & Watts, 2000; McMahon, 2009). Additionally, GAs are important because they can be used across and within different roles (Hager & Holland, 2006), particularly in flatter organisations, where new employees are expected to contribute immediately (Yorke & Harvey, 2005), when managing people and in more complex roles (Azim et al., 2010), and in environments where technology is driving role change (Frey & Osborne, 2013). Many believe that these skills are as important to employability and successful performance as a graduate’s discipline-specific knowledge. However, integrating GAs into university curricula continues to be problematic and many graduates enter work without having developed the skills that employers value (Jackson & Chapman, 2012).

While the development of GAs is seen as important, the nature of these skills means that they are not easily combined with traditional academic teaching methods (Voogt & Roblin, 2012). Furthermore, many GAs typically develop over time rather than in a single lesson (Hager, 2006). According to Turner (2014), to improve and develop their abilities students must understand their current ability, possess the self-efficacy needed to develop their skills and have faith that their environment will aid their learning. This view is supported by Gedye, Fender, and Chalkley (2004) who note that when it comes to learning GAs, students may be hindered because they are not always aware which skills are being taught. Because we want to understand the mechanisms by which GAs are developed at university, this research examines how students view their ability to perform GAs and whether they saw their university as helping them to develop these skills. We are also interested in how these skills develop over time, which will be explored through subsequent questionnaires.

To measure students’ ability across various GAs, we designed a longitudinal questionnaire with three measurements. The time-one survey consists of four parts: Firstly, 43 items measuring individual GAs, adapted from the Graduate Skills and Attributes Scale (GSAS; Coetzee, 2014), which was originally validated on a South African sample. The second part contained 9 items, 8 of which were based on the factor descriptions from the GSAS. These items describe types of GAs (e.g., analytical thinking skills) and asks participants to rate the extent that they developed them at university. We were concerned the original GSAS 6-point balanced response rating scale may not provide enough information between responses because people often answer positively when rating their own ability (see Brown, 2004). So we used a positively packed 6-point rating scale for parts one and two, with two negative and four positive anchors (strongly disagree, mostly disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree, mostly agree and strongly agree). The last two sections contain 16 items that explore participant’s university and work experience, including student grade-point average, and finally, 5 demographic items which will be used to describe the sample.

Student participants have been recruited across the University of Auckland, through bulk email invitations. To date, 593 participants have completed the survey at time one. We will present data from this first time point, focusing on the extent to which students report developing the various graduate attributes during their time at university.

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