

**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEARNING OF GRADUATE
ATTRIBUTES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE**

Monique Withering

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Department of Curriculum Studies



Stellenbosch University

Supervisor: Prof. EM Bitzer

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DECLARATION

I, Monique Withering, do hereby declare that this thesis is a product of my investigation and research. I also declare that this has not been submitted to any university for degree purposes.

April 2019

Date

M Withering

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ABSTRACT

Student voices are notably absent from academic discourse on graduate attributes (GAs) as such attributes are often constructed and conceptualised from the viewpoint of educational institutions, government and industry. The overarching aim of the study was to gain deeper insight into how students understand graduate attributes to be developed and learnt within the institutional context of one higher education institution, namely the University of the Western Cape (UWC). With students increasingly being challenged to assume greater responsibility for their own growth and development, it is imperative that they be brought into the discussion around graduate attributes.

This study involved participants registered as UWC students and involved in the programme offerings of the Leadership and Social Responsibility (LSR) office in 2016. Within an interpretive knowledge position, an exploratory institutional case study design was utilised. Qualitative data were generated through the use of two focus group interviews, one individual interview as well as photo elicitation activities over a period of three weeks.

The main study findings indicated that students hold some measure of understanding of what graduate attributes are, how they acquire these attributes and that they are important in the context of increasing students' employability. It also emerged that the staff at the institution play a vital role in how graduate attributes are learnt and developed. There appears to be an expressed need that graduate attributes should be embedded within all facets of the institution and, importantly, students' own self-interest has a crucial role within how graduate attributes are taken up.

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Student voices are notably absent from academic discourse on graduate attributes as such attributes are often constructed and conceptualised from the viewpoint of educational institutions, government and industry (Legget, Kinnear, Boyce and Bennett, 2004:295). Whilst the term ‘graduate attributes’ does not have a single, universally accepted definition, it might be necessary to provide a common definition to avoid ambiguity. The definition provided by Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell and Watts (2000: np) provides a useful understanding:

Graduate attributes are the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution. These attributes include but go beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future.

It is notable that this more commonly accepted definition shares many commonalities with the one provided by Barrie (2004:262), who sees graduate attributes as being “...the skills, knowledge and abilities of university graduates, beyond disciplinary content knowledge, which are applicable to a range of contexts”.

Given these definitions, one can draw on graduate attributes as being those qualities a higher education institution would want their graduates to exit with and which might not necessarily be embedded within the formal university curriculum. These qualities can be different for each student, as they would develop in different ways given their different backgrounds and their institutional and personal learning experiences.

Institutions are increasingly concerned with graduating students who have acquired the skills and qualities that would enable them to be active citizens and who can contribute to civil society (Barrie, 2006). There is also increasing pressure on institutions by governments and the private sector to provide competent professionals and employable graduates. The Education White Paper 3 (1997), for instance, stipulates that higher education institutions should be producing graduates with competencies and skills, which include but are not limited to communication, problem solving, critical thinking, analytical skills and being able to deal with diversity (Education White Paper 3, 1997:10). These requirements facilitate the development of graduate attribute ‘charters’ in higher education institutions.

These ‘charters’ address, for instance, the communication, critical thinking and citizenship skills gaps through either the provision of standalone skills development programmes, embedding of skills within the curriculum or the provision of parallel courses. However, whether graduates actually have developed such skills is less clear as there is a lack of research on this topic. Additionally, the voice of the student in the discussion and debate around graduate attributes has not clearly emerged.

The present study sought to explore students’ perceptions and constructions of graduate attributes within the institutional context of one higher education institution, the UWC. Obviously, studies related to perceptions and meaning construction are complex given the different influences and understandings of individuals and such complexity has various implications. Firstly, within the South African context, the notion of students’ views of graduate attributes is relatively recent, and not many studies of this nature have been conducted in South Africa to draw upon. Secondly, there is a general paucity of research on students’ perceptions and understandings of graduate attributes internationally, which makes the topic challenging (Collier, Jobbins and Taylor, 2009; Su, 2014; Leggett, Kinnear, Boyce and Bennett, 2004; Jansen and Suhre, 2015).

In general, however, there seems to be a wealth of literature on graduate attributes in both local and international contexts (Barrie, 2006, 2007; Leggett et al., 2004; Kew, 2014; Mashiyi, 2015; Bester, 2014; Griesel and Parker, 2008; Clark, 2017; Moore and Morton, 2017; Norman and

Anderson, 2017). Much of the literature tends to focus on how graduate attributes are developed by institutions through the curriculum (Mashiya, 2015) and through teaching and learning processes (Jacobs and Strydom, 2014). The vantage point is usually from that of various stakeholders such as academics, government policy and employers (Barrie, 2006). The lack of research into students' perceptions on graduate attributes has resulted in a continued focus on graduate attributes being developed to satiate the needs of institutions, government, and employers. As a result, the issue has had, until now, little meaning to students.

Su (2014:1208) motivates that graduate attributes need to be made meaningful to students in relation to the life they envision for themselves. In order for such attributes to be meaningful, one needs to understand how students perceive and construct them. Understanding students' perceptions moves us away from seeing them as passive recipients in the process, but as active participants in the construction of the meaning of graduate attributes. Su (2014) also emphasises that graduate attributes are often embedded within academic programmes through a 'top down' approach with little acknowledgement of students and their "... agency in determining which graduate attributes they develop, why they chose to develop them, and through what means" (Su, 2014:1208). For graduate attributes to have any meaning to students, their work and their experiences, they need to be meaningful for their future life and where they envision themselves. This promotes the "... environment and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves" (Barr and Tagg, 1995:15). Since student learning is driven by students' perceptions of what is important, an understanding of student perceptions of the importance of graduate attributes may inform the development of effective, inclusive learning opportunities that meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds (Collier et al., 2009).

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

With students increasingly being challenged to assume greater responsibility for their own growth and development, it is imperative that they be brought into the discussion around graduate attributes. Through my interaction with students as a student leadership facilitator, it became increasingly evident that students did not fully understand the term graduate attributes. Although students recognise that 'soft' skills such as communication and critical thinking, which are often

outlined within graduate attribute charters, are important, they often did not conceptualise these as ‘graduate attributes’. This highlights a mismatch in the way graduate attributes are articulated within the institution and students’ conceptualisation of these. The present study contributes to the development of a better understanding of graduate attributes from a student perspective, how students engage with the concept and learn about it both within their academic, co-curricular and personal contexts.

Bester (2014:3) highlights that despite graduate attributes gaining increased attention, not only internationally, but also increasingly within the South African context, it is still relatively hidden within most university programmes. This is partly as a result of the lack of proper engagement with such attributes. This lack of engagement often delineates the development of graduate attributes to support services. When not embedded within the academic curriculum, there is a limit to the importance given to the development of these skills. In Australia, by embedding the development of attributes into the curriculum they have achieved widespread acceptance and success. However, this can also be linked to the high degree of funding allocated to institutions who have implemented graduate attribute development initiatives (Bester, 2014). This asks us to examine how we perceive and construct graduate attributes, and in this study in particular, how students do this within their institutional, social and personal learning experiences.

1.3 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The overarching aim of the study was to gain deeper insights into how students understand graduate attributes to be developed within the institutional context of the UWC. Given this broad aim, the study focused on the following primary research question:

How do students perceive the learning of graduate attributes at the University of the Western Cape?

In order to explore this primary research question, the following secondary research questions were posed:

- What are the theoretical and contextual positions taken in literature on the development of graduate attributes?
- How do UWC students involved in the programme offerings of the Leadership and Social Responsibility (LSR) office perceive the concept of graduate attributes?
- How do UWC students involved in the programme offerings of the LSR office perceive the value of graduate attributes in relation to their gradueness?

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

An exploratory institutional case study design, which is a strategy of inquiry through which a researcher examines activities, events or processes, was used for this study. Yin (2003:1) outlines that as a research strategy, the case study "... is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organisational, social, political and related phenomena." Zainal (2007:1) is of the opinion that case study designs allow for "... the exploration and understanding of complex issues" and can be considered a robust way of inquiry into phenomena, particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required.

While Yin (2003:13) provides a sound definition of a case study when he states that he sees it as "...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". There are other authors who suggest different definitions. For instance, Neale, Thapa and Boyce (2006:3) propose that a case study is "... a story about something unique, special, or interesting, stories can be about individuals, organizations, processes, programs, neighbourhoods, institutions, and even events." A definition provided by Creswell (2007:73) adds that case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system.

Cases are usually bound by time and activity with a variety of data generation methods used to generate detailed information (Creswell, 2009:13). Case study research allows for specific focus and study of things in detail. It has many benefits, one of which is the flexibility to use "... a variety of methods depending on the circumstances and the specific needs of the situation" (Denscombe 2003:36). A further strength of a case study design is the potential to "... deal with

the subtleties and intricacies of complex social situations” (Denscombe, 2003:36). Yin (2003:20) has outlined that all empirical studies should have clear designs and in case study designs there are five areas of importance namely “...the study question, propositions, units of analysis, the logic linking the data to the proposition and the criteria for interpreting the findings” (Yin, 2003:22). The unit of analysis which was under investigation in this study was the phenomenon of graduate attributes in one higher education institution and in particular student perceptions of how they understand and learn or have learnt such attributes. This is further expanded on in Chapter Three section 3.5.

It was also important to clarify an understanding of my own worldview as this has a bearing on how research is conducted. As Creswell (2007:16-18) notes, “... a paradigm or worldview is a basic set of beliefs that guide action.” Bryman (2012:630) defines a paradigm as “... a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how it should be done, and how results should be interpreted”. Each paradigm has consequences; it influences what questions can be asked and the type of analysis that can then result. Often as researchers, we are unaware of the deep assumptions of our work and it is important to reflect and understand how we unconsciously operate. There are authors who take a less stringent view regarding the issue of world- or philosophical view as related to research (for instance, Plowright, 2011). The argument is that sound methodology, data quality and data analysis are paramount and that researchers, especially those doing small-scale projects, should not be limited by declared singular worldviews.

In this study, however, how I see the world influenced the course of my research as much of the data I generated involved perceptions and interpretations of university students. In essence, I had to make sense of what was elicited from these students. As Bitzer (2013) explains, your view of the world is an important determinant of how you will position your research.

This present study adopted a constructivist knowledge position which can be defined as “... the idea that the mental world or the experienced reality is actively constructed or ‘brought forward’, and that the observer plays a major role in the construction” (Reigler, 2012:237). A constructivist knowledge position contends that individuals construct their own social realities in relation to one

another and that this is an active rather than a passive process. Reality can therefore be seen as largely subjective and experiential. My preference towards this approach became evident in the present study as students come into the domain of higher education with prior knowledge and experience. They are therefore neither blank slates nor passive participants. They construct what they need to from the information they are exposed to and construct their own meaning and understanding by incorporating their prior knowledge and skills. Oakley (1999:247) states that "... apart from what we do, there is the whole issue of how others construct our work." This is an important consideration within research in educational research contexts as we often forget that participants are not passive recipients within the research process and that generating from participants involves a social process.

1.5 DATA GENERATION METHODS

The present study utilised a case study design, which allows for the use of a number of different sources of evidence, which may include documents and archives, observation and interviews. This is beneficial as having multiple sources of data might add to the validity and reliability of a study. In the present study, data were generated through the use of two focus group interviews, one individual interview (in the case where a participant could not attend a focus group interview), as well as photo elicitation.

1.5.1 Focus groups

The students in the sample were invited to participate in two focus group interviews, which were conducted on 16th August 2016 and 08th September 2016. The first focus group interview comprised ten students and focused on an introduction to the topic of the research and discussed the methodology, study process and core concepts. The focus group interview provided an opportunity to understand how the participants thought, experienced and felt in relation to graduate attributes. A final focus group interview was conducted when all four students who had agreed to participate in the elicitation of photographs had completed the activity. The focus group interviews allowed for both individual and group discussion on the meaning of the photographs in relation to students' perceptions of graduate attributes. This is fully unpacked in Chapter Three under section

3.7.1. Schulze (2007:541) has highlighted that photo elicitation interviews are effective when combined with focus groups.

1.5.2 Photo elicitation

Given my paradigmatic stance and the question under investigation, photo elicitation was used as another method or tool to generate data. Photo elicitation is based on the idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview (Harper, 2002). This allows for active engagement in the research process by participants as photographs taken by them evoke meaning beyond the obvious and "... extend personal narratives that illuminate lives and experiences" (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004:8). The images themselves do not necessarily have an intrinsic meaning, but participants assign different meanings to them and then have to explain these in photo elicitation interviews (Schulze, 2007:540). Such interviews reveal what Schulze calls "... unconscious perceptions individuals hold about the social and psychological environment, providing insight into how people perceive and organise their worlds which provides useful data" (Schulze, 2007:541).

Photo elicitation also holds an inherent dimension of empowerment through the choice, justification and construction of the meaning of photographs, which can "... promote participant agency in the interviewing process making the interview seem more participant directed" (Richard and Lahman, 2015:15). As the current research was based on eliciting students' understanding of graduate attributes, this shared agency was deemed important. Harrington and Schibik (2003:23) posit that the use of photo elicitation allows for a "... more open and creative analysis of student perceptions."

In the present study, participants were asked to take photographs of instances or objects in and around the university campus that they considered linked to graduate attributes and then to provide a short, written description or narrative of each photograph. The students had the freedom to be creative, while acknowledging that they needed to motivate why each picture was relevant. This was done as visual research methods are not restricted to only the visual and may include narratives and interviews, which extend meaning (Bryman, 2012:458).

1.5.3 Individual interview

As part of the research process, an individual interview was conducted with one participant who was unable to participate in the focus group interviews. An interview is one of the most widely used sources of generating information. Berg (2001:66) indicates that often an interview is simply defined as a conversation with a purpose, "...the purpose being to gather information". Berg (2001:84) provides that although interviews may seem like ordinary conversations, the qualitative interview differs "in terms of how intensely the researcher listens to pick up on keywords, phrases, and ideas". These interviews can be classified into two types, namely structured or unstructured with at least three major categories which, according to Berg (2001:68), are "... the standardised (formal and structured) interview, the unstandardized (informal or non-directive) interview, and the semi-standardized (guided semi-structured or focused) interview". Yin (2003:89-90) makes the case that the interview is an essential source of case study information. Yin (2003:92) makes the point that "interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs." Yin (2003) also adds that the key benefit of interviews is that "... well-informed participants can provide important insights into a situation" which proved to be beneficial in the present study for the process of photo-elicitation.

1.5.4 Data analysis

Koen (2011:12) argues that "... doing good qualitative research consequently also involves cutting away those details that are of no consequence in order to concentrate on what is important. This is done by data analysis, coding and reduction." The narratives from the individual and focus group interviews were recorded, transcribed and reviewed for themes that were coded in the same way as the photographs and accompanying descriptions and narratives. These codes, according to Saldaña (2009:3), are most often a word or short phrase that "... symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data."

Coding involves breaking the data down for the purpose of analysis and categorisation of units. The researcher decides on the units, which might be specific words, particular ideas, or events, which frequently occur in the data. However, this position might change as the research process

progresses. The initial analytical stage, which is often termed ‘open coding’ is used to discover, name and categorise phenomena and to develop categories in terms of their properties and dimensions (Denscombe, 2003:271-272). Koen (2011) states that “...the object of analysing the data originating from the focus groups and interviews ... is to break the data down into segments in order to determine the categories, relationships and assumptions that informed the participants’ views and ... then to make sense of the information.” In the current study, the process of data analysis was done manually as only a small sample was involved and, as Tesh (1990) in Wellington, (2000:147) highlights, “... a computer cannot replace the researcher’s own interpretation, analysis and craftsmanship.”

1.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The issue of trustworthiness within qualitative research is often questioned. Bryman (2012:717) defines trustworthiness as “...a set of criteria advocated by some writers for assessing the quality of qualitative research.” Rule and John (2011:107) see enhancing trustworthiness as promoting scholarly rigour, transparency and professional ethics in the interest of better qualitative research. Koen (2011:12) also contends that trustworthiness within the qualitative data process is paramount. Bryman (2012:390), as well as Koen (2011:13), suggests that data trustworthiness comprises four key criteria, namely that of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Data credibility, according to Bryman (2012:390), relates to research being carried out according to good practices of inquiry and then revealing the findings to those within contexts with the confirmation that the research is correctly understood within the relevant context (Bryman, 2012:390).

At the same time, transferability of data and findings relates to the quality of the descriptions analyses and how possible it is for the findings to be transferred to other categories of related context (Bryman, 2012:392). Dependability, in turn, should be viewed as “... researchers adopting an auditing approach”, meaning that proper records are kept at each stage of the research and analytical process (Bryman, 2012:392). Peers would then be the auditors of the process, ensuring that proper data procedures are followed. Conformability is the last of the key criteria relating to trustworthiness. Rule and John (2011:107) contend that conformability can be seen as “... a way

of addressing concerns about the researcher's influences and biases on the study." In order to ensure that the current study met the data criterion of trustworthiness, the above characteristics were adhered to as far as possible, while the researcher aimed to craft thick descriptions of the case and its context.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Koen (2011:13) outlines that ethical considerations are not restricted to a specific time within the research process; rather they are worthy of consideration throughout as part of research integrity. This is based on a need to respect both the research and the research participants. The key ethical considerations taken into account throughout this research process were those of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, ethical approval and the right to withdraw.

These ethical elements were adhered to as follows in the present study:

Informed consent: Participants were fully briefed about the purpose of the study, and this was confirmed in writing, with participants understanding that participation was fully voluntary.

Confidentiality: The rights of the participants in the study to privacy was acknowledged, with focus group interviews and photographs discussed, conducted through a relationship of transparency and trust.

Anonymity: The research participants were assured that they would not be identified at any stage of the research process and that the information they provided would be treated anonymously.

Ethical approval: Ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research (Humanities) Ethics committee at Stellenbosch University as well as permission to conduct research at UWC, from the office of the registrar.

Right to withdraw: Participants were assured that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the research and would not be disadvantaged in any way.

The various addenda utilised in this study are labelled Addenda A to J as follows:

- A - Focus group consent form
- B - Informed consent form
- C - Photo elicitation instructions
- D - Request to participate in research email
- E - UWC institutional permission
- F - Consent for use of photographs
- G - Interview protocol
- H - Participant data information sheet
- I - Human Research (Humanities) Ethics
- J - CSSS database permission

1.8 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

This study covered a variety of key terms and concepts. The most important of these is that of ‘graduate attributes’. Given the complex nature of these terms, it is important to clarify the meaning associated with the term, as it is key to this study. ‘Graduate attributes’ as a concept and construct is elaborated on in Chapter Two. However, the definition outlined at the beginning of the chapter, by Bowden et al., (2000) was used as a guide. Graduate attributes is the preferred term over that of generic skills, employability skills, transferable skills or the like. As Bester (2014:10-11) outlines, graduate attributes in this context can be seen as including the “... disciplinary and subject knowledge, practical and reflexive skills, as well as technical competence”.

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This chapter provided an overview of the study which will be further explored in the next four chapters. It highlighted the description of the problem being investigated as well as the purpose of the study. It also stated the primary research question and sub-questions as well as briefly referring to relevant literature for understanding graduate attributes and appropriate research methodology. **Chapter Two** provides various literature perspectives to investigate the complexities of graduate

attributes in higher education. It focuses on graduate attributes as concept and construct; international perspectives on graduate attribute development as well as providing an overview of how Africa outlines graduate attribute development. The chapter then proceeds to address the South African scenario in terms of policies and processes that influence the development of student graduate attributes. Before delving into how UWC develops and implements graduate attributes, a perspective is provided of how graduate attributes are viewed, developed and implemented in relation to its students. **Chapter Three** explains the research design and methodology that were followed in this research inquiry and **Chapter Four** reports on and analyses the empirical findings of the study. **Chapter Five** ends the study by focusing on the conclusions, implications and limitations of the study, based on the research findings and in relation to the explored literature.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE PERSPECTIVES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into six sections which each focuses on a separate aspect of the graduate attribute debate. The first section around *Graduate Attributes concept and construct* aims to examine how graduate attributes are conceptualized and constructed with a special focus on the agenda of employability. The second section looks at *International perspectives on graduate attributes* with special reference to Australia and the United Kingdom, whose education systems largely mirror that of South Africa. A brief examination of two BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) nations was made looking at India and China and how these nations have addressed the issue of graduate attributes. The focus then shifts in section three to the African continent, looking at *African Higher Education and Graduate Attributes* and various discussions around graduate attributes within the Sub-Saharan region in particular. The views of *South Africa and graduate attributes* are briefly explored in section four, particularly the policies and legislation around higher education which impact on the graduate attribute discussion. Section five focuses on the *UWC, development of and implementation of graduate attributes* before concluding in section six, with how graduate attributes are viewed, developed and implemented with regard to students.

As a starting point, it would be relevant to touch on the purpose of the university and how universities tend to approach the concept of graduate attributes. Increasingly, institutions worldwide are concerned with students graduating with skills and qualities which will enable them to contribute to society. Barrie (2006) states that universities worldwide face increased pressure to prove that they are able to provide relevant education efficiently and effectively and produce graduates who are able to contribute to society. With the increased vocational nature of universities, there is increased pressure to ensure that graduates are both professional and

employable (Green, Hammer, & Star, 2009). Boulton & Lucas (2011:2506) remind us that a university's strength lies in its freedom to think, teach and research which is "... the totality of the university enterprise". Boulton & Lucas (2011) put forth that one of the key functions of the university is to educate students in both disciplinary and non-disciplinary knowledge, so they leave the institution equipped with the necessary tools to address contemporary problems (Boulton & Lucas, 2011).

2.2 FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

When reviewing relevant literature, I decided to use Barrie's (2007) generic attributes model as the theoretical basis for this study. This model was not explored in great depth given the limited scope and scale of the study. However, given the expertise of the writer in the field, as well as the work done in understanding the conception of graduate attributes from the perspective of academia, it was pertinent to include. Utilising Barrie's proposed model, one could establish whether the conception of graduate attributes is "... precursor, complement, translation or enabling" (Barrie, 2007:440). Barrie (2007:440) outlines that these understandings of graduate attributes are "increasingly complex, qualitatively distinct". Bester (2014:120) puts forth that these conceptions differ with regard to the "additive or transformative potential" of the attributes as well as the relationship between "attribute outcomes and discipline knowledge".

The different conceptions are unpacked as follows:

Precursor conception

Barrie (2007:440) outlines the precursor conception as providing a "foundation, to which can be added the discipline knowledge of a university education". Bester adds that the majority of students "are expected to have these undifferentiated foundation skills" (2014:122).

Complement conception

Barrie (2007:440) defines complement conception as "the discipline-specific learning outcomes of a university education". With Readman (2011:11) elaborating that if a complementary conception is present, "graduate attributes are conceived of as general skills that round out or

complement a university education”.

Translation conception

The translation conception looks at the “translation of university learning to unfamiliar settings” (Barrie, 2007:440), with Readman (2011:11) sharing that with this conception academics “saw graduate attributes as required for students to apply or make use of discipline knowledge”.

Enabling conception

This conception is described by Barrie (2007:440) as the “enabling abilities and aptitudes that lie at the heart of all scholarly learning and knowledge, with the potential to transform the knowledge they are part of and to support the creation of new knowledge and transform the individual”.

A further six “increasingly complex, qualitatively distinct, categories of description” were identified by Barrie (2007:446) as to how “students acquire generic attributes”. These include the associate, teaching content, remedial and teaching process which Readman (2001:11) highlights, all share a teacher focus with the final two, participatory and engagement, sharing a learner focus.

Even though this model is applied to an academic understanding of the concept, aspects of the model can be used to establish the conceptions of students and how it relates, as well as to whether they view it as being developed in remedial, engaged, participatory or associated processes. As Barrie (2007:439) highlights, “... these integrated conceptions of generic graduate attributes provide a tool to support current attempts to implement systematic curriculum reform in universities.” Internationally, universities are increasingly concerned with students developing attributes which better equip them for the world of work and also as members of society (Bardhan, Hicks, and Jaffee, 2013; Griesel and Parker, 2008; Kavanagh and Drennan, 2008; McCabe, 2010). My research for the present study is rooted within the South African context where graduate attributes is a relatively recent trend. There is also limited information available, locally and internationally, around student construction and understanding of graduate attributes.

2.3 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AS CONCEPT AND CONSTRUCT

Given the rapid change in education and the age of super complexity, we find that there is increased pressure for students to succeed and for higher education to prove its worth (McCabe, 2010). Increasingly, universities worldwide have sought to unravel the notion and the type of education offered to students through the provision of generic attributes charters. Bosanquet, Winchester-Seeto and Rowe (2010) attest that statements or charters of graduate attributes have gained international prominence in university education. These graduate attribute charters are used to outline what each institution expects its students to possess and demonstrate upon the completion of their degree, a view strongly held by Barrie (2012:79; 2007:439) and Collier et al. (2009). This view includes that all students would develop certain attributes which transcend disciplinary knowledge as a result of the learning experience within the curriculum. Universities have used these attributes to differentiate their graduates and to increase their marketability to prospective employers, claiming that graduates are capable of being employed and are work ready. Treleaven and Voola (2008) have rightly pointed out that graduate attributes are increasingly gaining prominence in higher education worldwide – not only within industry but also in governments.

The conversations around the nature of graduate attributes have become “... more, rather than less, fine-grained over time” (Green et al., 2009:5). Graduate attributes are defined and described differently at different institutions and even between different countries and education systems with the outcome being a variety of terms used to describe the term. Green et al., (2009:2) add that there is a lack of “... conceptual clarity about what we mean by the term”. This thought is echoed by Kew (2014:7), who states that as there is little agreement on how to define the term it leaves little “... consensus on which graduate attributes higher education institutions should go about instilling in their students”. Various authors (Barrie, 2012; Bester 2014:66–67; Leggett et al., 2004; Mashiyi, 2015; Treleaven and Voola, 2008; Oliver, Herrington and McLoughlin, 2000) have provided various iterations of the term, ranging between transferable skills, generic skills, generic capabilities, employability skills and others. The term has attained widespread use, especially within the South African context (Kew, 2014:7). Looking into how and when graduate attributes are developed is also a complex undertaking as various role-players often have different views and definitions of the term. This variety of meanings and interpretations contributes towards the

confusion around what exactly institutions should be expecting of students at different stages of their education and particularly towards graduation (Kew, 2014:7). While there is continued debate around use of the correct terminology, the importance of graduate attributes as an essential outcome of a university education seems clear (Bester, 2014:84; Barrie, 2012:80).

Barrie (2012:80) highlights that generally, graduate attributes are accepted as the abilities, skills and knowledge of graduates beyond their discipline specific knowledge, a view which is supported by Jones (2013). These attributes are regarded as generic as they are thought to be developed "... regardless of the field of study or domain of knowledge" (Barrie, 2012:80). It is not that they are independent of the disciplinary context and knowledge, but more that they can be developed in a variety of different spaces and ways, which go beyond the discipline. Barrie (2012) takes the view that these outcomes should be seen as generic attributes rather than skills as the "... outcomes encompass more than skills and attitudes." The definition provided by Bowden et al., (2000:np) was adopted as the guide for the present study as it provides an encompassing view of the term and is one supported by UWC when the process of graduate attribute development was debated.

Graduate attributes are the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution. These attributes include but go beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future.

An example of generic graduate attributes adapted from Kew (2014:09), Bester (2014:76) and Oliver and Jorre de St Jorre (2018:824-826) indicates the following shared generic attributes as important (see Table 2.1):

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Graduate attributes</i> | Critical thinking |
| | Communication skills |
| | Creativity |
| | Able to work across diversity |
| | Adaptability |
| | Problem solving |
| | Leadership skills |
| | Creativity |
| | Flexibility |
| | Social responsibility |
| | Global citizenship |
| | Honesty |
| | Interest in lifelong learning |
| | Oral and written skills |
| | Practical orientation |
| | Ethical practice |
| | Technology skills |
| | Ability to work independently |
| | Ability to work within a team |
| | Information management skills |

Table 2.1: Shared generic attributes

Table 2.1 by no means represents an exhaustive list of higher education graduate attributes but provides a suitable overview, with Hill, Walkington and France (2016:156) outlining that certain attributes in particular have gained widespread prominence in universities. According to the authors, these include “critical thinking skills, such as intellectual curiosity; analytical reasoning; problem-solving and reflective judgement; effective communication; leadership and teamwork skills; research and inquiry skills; information literacy; digital literacy; personal attributes such as self-awareness, self-confidence, personal autonomy/self-reliance, flexibility and creativity; and

personal values such as ethical, moral and social responsibility, integrity, and cross-cultural awareness” which is evidenced in Table 2.1.

As Su (2014) has argued, graduate attributes involve more than the alignment of what is intended, taught and learned; rather it occurs through students developing personal graduate attributes in a self-directed and genuinely engaged manner. The development of a general set of graduate attributes has been recognised by some countries such as Australia (a leader in the discussion on graduate attributes), as well as the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as one of higher education’s most important tasks. This as the role of the university in preparing students to be employable in the knowledge-based economy is increasingly acknowledged.

Bosanquet et al., (2010) remind us that there are four conceptions of graduate attributes that are important to understand; amongst them is that of employability, lifelong learning, as well as a commitment to social justice as the primary purpose of higher education. The one which I think deserves a special focus, is that of employability due to its prevailing influence on conversations around graduate attributes. This is a thought echoed by Bozalek (2013:70), who says that many policies in Europe, Australia and the United States of America have focused on the employability agenda. Bester (2014:13-14) highlights how, even in the South African context, the notion of employability influences policy. With the former Minister of Higher Education in South Africa, Dr B.E. Nzimande, noting in the *Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (SA, DHET, 2012:ix-viii) that the policy framework must be put in place to ensure “... all graduates to be empowered to address the needs of the economy and the country; ... to ensure that those entering the labour market are qualified and competent to take up the employment and income generating opportunities that exist, and that will exist as the economy grows and changes in the future”.

2.3.1 Employability as an attribute

Universities have to a certain extent become increasingly vocational. There has been concern for “... acceptable employability and professional outcomes for university graduates by external stakeholders, including government and business” (Green, et al., 2009). This increased focus on

graduate employability is a recurrent feature in many conversations around higher education (Treleaven and Voola, 2008). One of the ways in which this is achieved is through a mix of university types, such as universities of technology, comprehensive universities and research-intensive universities. This might allow specific institutions to focus on the development of employability skills, which I view more as an attribute than a curriculum outcome. There are differing views on the subject however. One view of employability is that it is a direct outcome of the curriculum (Tomlinson, 2012; Yorke, 2004). It states that it is the university's role to support students in the development of skills to enable employability through the creation of a curriculum, which embeds the teaching, and learning of certain skills into the curriculum. It can be argued that this suggests a connection between the development of employability skills and academic skills.

One of the strongest pushes is around viewing graduate attributes through the employability lens, as employability is high on the agenda of many countries. Bester (2014:74) indicates that "... employability skills might range from what can be called 'work-ready' skills to 'career success' skills". Bester (2014) also indicates that it is useful to think of employability skills as being how graduate attributes are demonstrated in a particular environment, such as the research arena or workplace, rather than viewing it merely as a subset of graduate attributes. Despite this, employability is difficult to define, as there is much confusion around its outcomes. For some, it is the ability to get a job, and keep it, which in itself, poses a problem as the institution is then responsible for either the employment or lack thereof of a student, with a student's employment then a success for the university, which does not give credit to the student's investment into the process (Harvey, 2001). Employability is much more nuanced. It is about not only the skills to get a job, but rather the skills needed to succeed in the job. Interestingly, there is an overlap between the skills needed to succeed in a job and what employers are seeking from employees.

Increased pressures for universities to produce graduates that are more employable can be linked to governments and to the worldwide increase in focus on tying economic growth and education agendas to each other which has led, amongst other things, to the massification of higher education worldwide. This push by governments for higher education to produce a strong labour market through its output has placed increased pressure on higher education institutions to increasingly demonstrate why they are relevant, effective, and efficient (Barrie, 2006; Bardhan et al., 2013).

Increasingly there is debate regarding whether the link between higher education and economic development has been proven beyond doubt. Mabelebele (2013) and Pillay (2010) are of the opinion that there is a strong correlation, with Pillay (2010:2) highlighting how three higher education systems namely Finland, South Korea and North Carolina had a rethink of their economic policies, which “were accompanied by a deliberate attempt to link higher education to economic development.” This is however open to debate with authors such as Oliver et al., (2018:822) pointing out that linking employability “risks erosion of the higher purpose of universities and is to the detriment of students’ social and personal development.” Other aspects, such as the ability to adapt, entrepreneurship, relevant knowledge and skills, sound conceptual underpinnings and a grounding of understanding are also considered as essential for developing economies to thrive.

Much attention has been directed towards reforming the education system to adequately prepare this workforce. The difficulty, however, is that often the expectations of employers in relation to university education are “... highly context-bound interpretations of desirable graduate attributes, capabilities and competencies and the like. It is unrealistic for universities to guarantee that their students will graduate in possession of all the desirable generic skills spelt out in their institutional documentation” (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick and Cragolini, 2004). Despite how developments of work and graduate employment are evaluated, “most experts and key actors seem to agree that the substantial expansion of higher education over the last few decades has necessitated constant readjustment between higher education and the world of work” (Teichler, 2000).

In Australia, the term employability skills is preferred over that of graduate attributes or transferable skills (see Bester, 2014:73). This perspective provides a longitudinal view of the “... individual’s long-term capacity to build a career and to prosper in a dynamic labour market and employability implies qualities of resourcefulness, adaptability and flexibility” (Bester, 2014:73).

2.4 INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

International discussion on graduate attributes started predominantly in Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), Europe and the United States of America (USA), with those in higher education examining generic competencies and skills (Bester, 2014:66-67). Many of these discussions began in the early 1990s as these countries started working towards developing core workplace competencies. Each of these countries clearly highlighted the need for employability skills, identified by government, civil society, as well as higher education. As previously highlighted, graduate attributes are often viewed differently in different countries and in different education systems, with Barrie (2012:80) suggesting that there is a difference in how graduate attributes are articulated in Australia versus the UK. Often in Australia, Barrie (2012:80) adds, the focus is placed on work and graduates are considered as being global citizens who have the ability to be agents of social good; this is similar to the sentiments of the UWC charter of graduate attributes. Below, I examine graduate attributes within the context of Australia and the United Kingdom; both considered ‘developed’ countries with significant resources being available to them. Finally, I will compare two BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) nations, India and China, to provide a view as to how these countries develop or view graduate attributes in their respective contexts.

2.4.1 Graduate attributes in Australia

Australia has been a pioneer in the resurgence in conversation around graduate attributes. The view has been that the development of key competencies was “... the most direct and beneficial employment solution for the future” (Bester 2014:69). Kew (2014:10) mentions that the development of graduate attributes has become a condition of government funding in Australia, which has spurred institutions into investing time, effort and resources into the integration of attributes into their curricula. Bester (2014) reminds us that the Finn Committee in Australia has been instrumental in driving the graduate attribute agenda with a primary focus on competency development in different areas. These include science and technology, mathematics, language and communication, problem solving both on a personal and interpersonal level and on cultural understanding.

The majority of Australian universities have developed graduate attribute charters and they are firmly entrenched in the system (Bester, 2014:74-75), while Rigby (2009:3) indicates that these charters are often based on "... a broad conceptualisation of generic skills in Australian universities, ...[which] encompasses anything from skill components to attitudes, values, dispositions, capabilities, and competencies". Oliver et al., (2018:823) outline that in Australia there have been a number of national projects which "sought to identify the graduate attributes that are most important to higher education providers and the strategies they adopt to foster and assure their achievement". The broad uptake of graduate attributes in Australia may therefore be due to pressure from both government and employers.

Increasingly Australian higher education institutions have had to comply with the Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency, which has provided a Higher Education Standards Framework. This has resulted in institutions often paying "lip service alone" to the implementation and development of graduate attributes (Donleavy, 2012:341-342), with Oliver et al., (2018:823) outlining that "all higher education providers must now provide evidence that learning outcomes including skills important to employment and life-long learning have been achieved". The argument is that while there was a widespread acceptance of GAs and the development of GA charters in Australia, its actual implementation and development was lacking. Donleavy (2012:343,348) highlights that institutions have often used GAs as a means of acquiring legitimacy on "their relevance to the economy and to society, but there is not yet much evidence of universities being able to show convincingly that their graduates really do have the attributes the universities espouse."

2.4.2 Graduate attributes in the United Kingdom (UK)

The United Kingdom has a well-respected higher education system with record numbers of people enrolled in varied courses of study at a range of higher education institutions (Browne, 2010: 2). The majority of graduates go on to well-paid employment and "add to the nation's strength in the global knowledge-based economy" (Browne, 2010:2). Browne (2010:2) contends that the relative strength of the higher education system in the UK is being challenged by other countries who are increasingly investing in their higher education systems. Tomlinson (2008:49) adds that there is

continued emphasis placed on higher education for both the individual and society. It has been regarded as particularly “crucial for economic development, particularly in meeting the changing needs of the knowledge-driven economy” (Tomlinson, 2008:49).

Arnold, Loan-Clark, Harrington and Hart (1999:43) contended that for years there has been an expression from employers that graduates are not skilled in the areas needed. This complaint has prompted many initiatives in that country to ensure that such skills were developed. Fahnert (2015:4) makes the point that higher education institutions are increasingly being held accountable “in the context of the governmental employability agenda”. Howls (2015) indicates how the UK government has recognised the need to align the education system with the needs of the economy. A number of reviews have been instituted which have the potential to “significantly re-shape the technical and skills provision delivered through the further education sector in future” (Howls, 2015).

In the United Kingdom, there was much more early resistance to adopting “key skills” (Bester, 2014:79). However, by the early 2000s, there was a shift towards producing university graduates ready to enter the labour market with ‘employability’ becoming a ‘performance indicator’ with a strong influence on the higher education curriculum.

2.4.3 Graduate attributes in BRICS countries

Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa are the countries which together form the BRICS group of countries. These countries are seen collectively as playing an important role in the global economy and hold strong purchasing power parity. Initially, South Africa was excluded from this group, but joined in 2010. Each is seen as being within different stages of their countries’ growth and transition (Schwartzman, Pinheiro and Pillay, 2015:1-2). They are regarded as emerging economies, and despite the vast differences within these countries in terms of size, population, language and location, there are some shared characteristics. These include their high level of influence within their respective regions, as well as their focus on transformation to “modernize their societies” (Schwartzman et al., 2015:1-2). Education, and specifically higher education, has been identified as playing an important role in their transformation “... not only in terms of human capital and access to the resources of modern science and technology, but also by creating channels

for social mobility and fostering the values of scholarship, intellectual freedom, and individual choice” (Schwartzman et al., 2015:1-2). However, Kigotho (2014) contends that there are challenges that present with an increased focus on higher education. As the author highlights, “... with more than one in three students in the world today living in a BRICS country, a major challenge is not just continuing massification, but at the same time enhancing quality...” (Kigotho, 2014:np). Given an increased focus on higher education, it is necessary to understand a bit better how graduate attributes are viewed within their higher education contexts. To do this, I have looked at two examples, namely India and China. This choice was mainly due to South Africa sharing strong links with both nations. China, similarly to South Africa, is regarded as an efficiency-driven economy where the growth in the country, according to the World Economic Forum Competitiveness Report (2013), is based on more efficient means of production being developed, coupled with an increase in product quality. India, by contrast, is regarded as a factor-driven economy according to the same report, as unskilled labour and natural resources are primarily used.

2.4.3.1 Indian higher education and graduate attributes

The Indian higher education system is ranked as among the three largest in the world according to Timm (2013:161) and Joshi and Ahir (2013:43). Despite this, there is a lack of attention to graduate attribute development. This may be in part due to the complexity of the Indian higher education system which, as Joshi (2016:237) contends, has to consider “... regulations, access, financing, equity, efficiency, quality”. India has a relatively young population with more than half of its members below the age of 25. This poses a unique set of challenges to India in that it needs to educate students to best meet the needs of society. Blom and Saeki (2011) outline that the “... skills shortage remains one of the major constraints to continued growth of the Indian economy.” The authors also highlight that increasingly employers within the Indian employment sector “... perceive soft skills (core employability skills and communication skills) to be very important” (Blom and Saeki, 2011:27).

This point is echoed in the India Skills Report (ISR) of 2018, which points out that there is an increased emphasis being placed on ‘soft skill’ acquisition to increase opportunities for employment within the Indian labour market. The ISR (2018) marked the first time that soft skill acquisition has been emphasised in a report as key to increase employability. The report outlines skills such as adaptability and a positive attitude as particularly important (Sharma and Abishek, 2018).

There is increasing evidence that Indian higher education is adopting graduate attribute development. The National Accreditation Board in India, for instance, adopted the *Washington Accord Graduate Attributes* which has mandated all institutions offering a Bachelor’s degree in engineering to align accordingly (Garimella and Nalla, 2014:1). A few of the attributes outlined in the Washington Accord include communication, ethics, individual and teamwork and environment and sustainability (Garimella and Nalla, 2014:8).

2.4.3.2 Chinese higher education and graduate attributes

China is seen as an efficiency driven economy, according to the World Economic Forum’s Global Competiveness Report (GCR), (GCR, 2016-2017). China is considered the 28th most competitive country out of 138 measured. The GCR highlights that China has made significant progress partly due to the focus on and improvement in the area of higher education. The GCR also stresses the importance of higher education, especially to efficient and innovation-driven economies, which comprise four of the five BRICS nations (except India, which is seen as a factor-driven economy). In these environments, research and development, as well as university and industrial partnerships, are paramount (Playdon, nd). What has not been given great consideration, according to Henderson (2011), are skills for employment success.

Henderson (2011:iv) contends that in China there are “... few studies which have looked at what skills are necessary to ensure initial employment success ... [and that] little has been done to make the curriculum the explicit medium for developing employability skills in China.” Chinese employers also differ in their employability skill requirements, compared to other countries, with Henderson (2011:iv-v) indicating, “... there are connections between educational and business

practices in China which have unique historical and contemporary political drivers.” Henderson points out that the responsibility for the development of graduate attributes is not always clear and that there is a high degree of “... overlap between graduate attributes and employability skills” (Henderson, 2011:iv-v).

As in other countries, the impact of massification is of concern for China due to the potential impact on the quality of higher education. Li (2015) contends that in order to assess this quality, it is necessary to develop a set of quantifiable attributes. Higher education is seen as having undergone major changes in the last 20 years, moving from an elite to a mass system. Li (2015:556) identifies that “... English, as well as analytical and problem-solving abilities are ranked the three most important attribute aspects”. Divergence in the relative importance rankings of the attributes among stakeholder groups is inevitable. What seems important is that higher education institutions must incorporate these attributes into their curricula and explain to students what employers need. Li (2015:556) points out that different stakeholder groups had different views on quite a few attributes. For example, employers ranked ‘sense of responsibility and commitment’, academics and graduates ranked ‘problem-solving ability’, and students ranked ‘expression of ideas in oral English’ the most important. This may explain why students at times complain about having to take courses outside of their discipline and therefore it provides some insight on how to align the expectations and perspectives of different stakeholders.

What these two latter examples highlight is that, despite BRICS countries prioritizing higher education, there is a long way to go in addressing the skills gap and the promotion of graduate attributes in particular.

2.5 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES IN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The impact of globalization and massification on higher education has had a worldwide impact and is a “... widely discussed phenome[non]” (Jowi, 2009:263). Higher education can therefore no longer be viewed strictly from a national context. The impact of massification and globalisation has resulted in a need for African universities to prioritize higher education to ensure that the African continent does not lag behind (Griesel and Parker, 2008). The reality of higher education

in Africa is influenced by a variety of factors ranging from its colonial past, to the brain drain of graduates and staff and to politics, poverty, global inequality and the low output and quality of research across the continent - to name a few (Frick, 2015). Teferra and Altbach (2004:21) argue that African higher education faces "... unprecedented challenges" while at the same time being recognised as a "... key force for modernisation and development."

Not only are the inequalities in African higher education becoming more obvious, but those who are able to invest in the massification agenda due to their country's prioritizing social good and economic success, are reaping rewards. At the same time, those countries that cannot keep pace, suffer the consequences. The consequence of lagging behind for the African continent is severe. It shifts the academic knowledge to the East and West, resulting in African talent being diverted elsewhere and further widening the gap between 'developed' and 'developing' nations. This also has a severe impact on the type of knowledge that is presented on the African continent as well as the homogenisation of the knowledge base in favour of Eurocentric knowledge. By focusing on graduate attributes, institutions across the continent can begin to address these kinds of difficulties.

Friesenhahn (2014) is of the opinion that Sub-Saharan Africa in particular is "... struggling to produce more and better trained graduates." Sub-Saharan Africa has focused much attention on basic education as this was thought as the way to alleviate poverty and to aid development. Friesenhahn (2014) contends that it is only since the 1990s that the value of higher education to the socio-economic development of many African countries has been recognised.

In terms of employment in Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, there seems to be a mismatch between higher education and the world of work. In Africa, the focus in the past has been on preparing students to join the public sector, to the neglect of the private sector. This cannot remain the case, however, as it will lead to increased unemployment, since the public sector will be increasingly unable to absorb graduates. Friesenhahn (2014) highlights that "... although university degrees have been the entry requirement for government jobs, skills needed for such work have not been specified, nor taught. So degrees tend to cater to bureaucratic and procedural tasks, rather than innovative work: a problem for both public and private employers." The weak links with employment have also extended to postgraduate education. For some, the breadth and flexibility of higher education is even more important. While graduates need to 'know their field'

to find work, professional skills are also essential including behavioural, interpersonal and transferable skills.

Kroeze, Ponelis, Venter, Pretorius and Prinsloo (2012) argue that there is an increased importance placed on graduate attributes, especially within Sub-Saharan Africa. Discussions increasingly revolve around what attributes are needed for those graduates from Sub-Saharan Africa which might be unique to the region. They argue that entrepreneurship is important and perhaps more relevant to the African context than it would be in more developed countries, "... since small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have proven to contribute significantly to the economic growth" in the region.

Akanmu (2011) makes the case that in Nigeria there is a decline in employability skills and fit among graduates of higher education for the few jobs available with employers having less trust in the quality of graduates which has knock-on effects of "... increasing preference by industry for overseas university degrees". Thabane (2011) puts forth that there are numerous challenges facing young African professionals including societal, national and personal pressures. Thabane (2011) and Akanmu (2011) emphasize that a partnership must exist between government, higher education and employers if there is to be any change in the way students are trained. Higher education also emphasizes research and creating local and regional networks with a stronger focus on incorporating internships and experiential learning into the curriculum.

Shivoro, Shalyefu and Kadhila (2018) point out that in Namibia graduate attribute development has received increased focus with employers, especially making the claim that university graduates do not possess the attributes necessary for the workplace. The authors cite the Namibian National Human Resource Plan 2010-2025, having identified "... inadequate attention paid to the development of graduate employability attributes, which has a negative impact on the preparedness of university graduates for high-skilled jobs..." (Shivoro et al., 2018:217). The authors highlight that there is a mismatch in perception between various stakeholders regarding the attributes necessary for optimum job performance with key differences in the priorities of stakeholders such as graduates, employers and institutions.

Shivoro (2018:2) further highlights that besides teaching students, Namibian higher education institutions are mandated to "... prepare students to enter, qualify and progress into their occupations and professions". The author puts forth that the Namibian presidential commission on higher education "... recommended that graduates from Namibia's higher education institutions should be thoughtful, questioning, creative, well-informed, clear-minded, intellectually honest, self-confident, self-critical, and tolerant".

2.6 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES IN SOUTH AFRICA

The university system in South Africa has a long history, which dates back to the 1800s. Prior to 1994, the main focus of higher education policy was directed at advancing institutions for white citizens. There was segregation permeating the sector, which was separated not only by race, but also by geography and language, with the majority of urban institutions being reserved for white students. Within universities that catered for white students, there was a differentiation between Afrikaans and English institutions.

The institutions created for people of colour had a purpose of ensuring continued separation and education of black and coloured people in homelands and rural areas. The universities were classified according to ethnicity and had to adopt Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Much of this was reinforced by the University Education Act of 1959. There was no equity prior to 1994, neither in terms of funding, study options, capacity nor students enrolled in certain programmes. This led to an under-representation of black people in areas such as science, technology and engineering as many people of colour did not have access to such programmes of study. As Hay and Monnapula-Mapesela (2009:12) state: "... the system was characterised by fragmentation, inefficiency and ineffectiveness".

Carrim and Wangenge-Ouma (2012:8) have highlighted that the end of apartheid facilitated a need for a change in the way the sector was structured, functioned and populated. This transformation of the sector was necessary to address the need for greater participation, responsiveness and cooperation. Apartheid had resulted in much fragmentation of access and opportunity for students along the lines of race, gender, geography and the "... mismatch between higher education output and the needs of a modernising economy" (Carrim and Wangenge-Ouma, 2012:8).

Many past policies and practices have gone on to shape the context of higher education in South Africa. In order to change the higher education sector and create a more unified system, the 36 institutions, which existed under the apartheid system, were merged or incorporated into 23 public universities. This was thought of as a way to equalise institutions, rationalise budgets and to increase student access.

According to Hay and Monnapula-Mapesela (2009:6) there have been over 30 different policies initiated within the higher education sector since 1994. After 1994, it was clear that there were no bodies or structures to deal with all the changes needed. There was a desire to transform the system quickly and radically, which resulted in rapid policy developments and implementation with no clear thought and direction given. This initial rush resulted in what Hay and Monnapula-Mapesela (2009:6) mention as the many problems in South African higher education related to what higher education in a transforming country should be and how it should model itself. While it is important for governments and the public to define what it is they want from higher education, it also needs to be "... commensurate with the purposes it expects those institutions to help achieve, balancing mandates with incentives and to bring into alignment state interests with those of institutional interests" (Hay and Monnapula-Mapesela 2009:6).

It is necessary to develop the skills base of South Africa to counteract the impact of the apartheid system, which limited access and enrolment in certain fields. Despite this focus on developing the skills base, Carrim and Wangenge Ouma (2012:21-22) contend that skills development has not been keeping pace to meet the employment and developmental demands of the country. Bawa (2014:v) states that "[t]he dramatic changes in the global arena have significantly impacted on South African higher education". South African higher education therefore faces a challenging but critical role as it continues to navigate the legacy of its past through the "... production of graduates who are critical and engaged citizens" (Clowes, 2013:709). The sector is mandated to develop "... critical, active participants in our democracy ..." through the development of high-level graduates (Bawa, 2014:v). Despite this focus on developing the graduate skills base, Carrim and Wangenge-Ouma (2012:21-22) contend that skills development has not been keeping pace to meet demands. This skills shortage has been identified as one of the key impediments to growth and economic development in South Africa and coexists along with the phenomenon of graduate unemployment

(Carrim and Wangenge-Ouma, 2012). There are increasing pressures placed on higher education - not only by governments but also by the labour market – to provide graduates who are able to contribute towards growing developing economies. Whether this should be the sole purpose and responsibility of higher education, is open to debate.

South Africa's higher education system faces public and other pressures to transform and redress inequality, meet national needs and contribute to societal transformation, while also meeting labour requests. This requires that employers, government and the public should define what they want from institutions so that it is "... commensurate with purposes it expects those institutions to help achieve, balancing mandates with incentives to bring into alignment state interests and the interests of institutions" (Hay and Monnapula-Mapesela, 2009: 6).

Kew (2014:2) makes the point that institutions have a choice to either accept the current situation in South Africa as "as unavoidable, and therefore, not their responsibility, or to willingly make an effort to adjust their practices in the delivery of education, to try and make a contribution to development and the need for graduates." The Department of Higher Education and Training's Programme for Higher Education Transformation (1997) outlines that in South Africa the role of higher education is to:

... promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes, produce graduates with the skills and competencies that build the foundations for lifelong learning, including, critical, analytical, problem-solving and communication skills, as well as the ability to deal with change and diversity, in particular, the tolerance of different views and ideas.

The need for graduates to participate in growing the national economy of South Africa was emphasized more than ten years ago in the National Plan in Higher Education (Van Schalkwyk, Herman and Muller, 2010). Increasingly, higher education is called upon to assist the South African economy "through the production of skilled graduates" (Winberg et al., 2018:234). The attributes which are desired for graduates, have been articulated at different levels in South Africa. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has defined these attributes as "... those generic outcomes that inform all teaching and learning" (Kew, 2014). They have further identified seven key outcomes, including the ability to problem-solve using creative and critical thinking,

the ability to work within a team, to work independently, responsibly and effectively, to critically evaluate information, and communicate effectively (Kew, 2014). SAQA (1997) has outlined a number of critical cross-field and developmental outcomes which “... emphasise the qualities an individual requires in order to learn and live successfully in a diverse and complex world” (Leibowitz, 2011:214).

Kew (2014:6) and Mashiyi (2015) are of the opinion that there is a paucity of research on graduate attributes in the South African context. Kew (2014:6) puts forth that often employability is equated with graduateness, which sees someone having demonstrated the ability to employ generic skills and attributes. Often employability is emphasized, because as Bester (2014:66-67) highlights, in South Africa, with its small middle class which contributes the majority of tax to the country's growth, employability of graduates is necessary as this “... moves more people into the middle class and out of poverty”.

Griesel and Parker (2008) have highlighted that Higher Education South Africa (HESA), which is the “... leadership organisation of the 26 public higher education institutions in South Africa” undertook to study the phenomenon of graduate attributes in order to obtain a more accurate picture of graduate attributes and the way that these are perceived by employers. However, review of higher education in South Africa by the Council on Higher Education (2016) has painted a bleak picture of the higher education system. The authors of the report highlighted that higher education is in a volatile space, despite being the most progressive in terms of achieving the national goals of equity, transformation and quality at a policy level.

It appears overall that there has been little focus on graduate attributes in South Africa. This can be explained by a number of different factors: overworked academics, under-resourcing of the higher education system and a focus on getting students out of the system as quickly as possible which leaves little time to focus on the development of anything else.

2.7 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

UWC was established in 1965 under the apartheid system to serve as a training institution for Coloured students. As it was seen as having limited importance and value, it was placed far from

resources and public transport, and offered little in the way of academic programmes. Many early programme offerings aimed at educating students to fulfil low level positions within law, teaching and the civil service. The University was strongly opposed to the apartheid system and struggled to gain autonomy from the state. When it eventually did, the institution became the first in the country to welcome all races. It then became a first choice for many academics returning from exile (Tapscott, Slembrouck and Pokpas, 2014:14-18).

However, between 1994 and 2000 the university faced extreme difficulties related to the loss of academics to government positions, funding constraints and low enrolment rates amongst many others. When former rector, Professor Brian O’Connell, assumed office in 2001 he faced three key challenges to get UWC back on track, namely financial recovery, to increase student enrolments and to restore public confidence in the institution. Shortly after 2001, it was determined by the National Working Group that UWC should be merged with another institution. This was a wake-up call for the university community who rallied against this recommendation. In the years following, UWC has built itself into a dynamic institution which is financially stable, academically strong in the areas of research, science and mathematics and increased student numbers from less than 10 000 prior to 2001 to in excess of 20 000 in 2015 (Tapscott et al., 2014).

The institution is a traditional contact university, which offers basic formative degrees and professional undergraduate degrees as well as opportunities for postgraduate study. The institution has seven faculties: Arts, Economic and Management Sciences, Community and Health Sciences, Dentistry, Education, Law, and Science. The University can be classified as medium-sized, given an enrolment of between 20 000 and 29 999 students (Bunting and Cloete, 2010). The mission of the institution states that it is

... alert to its African and international context as it strives to be a place of quality, a place to grow. It is committed to excellence in teaching, learning and research, to nurturing the cultural diversity of South Africa, and to responding in critical and creative ways to the needs of a society in transition. Drawing on its proud experience in the liberation struggle, the university is aware of a distinctive academic role in helping build an equitable and dynamic society” (UWC, 2013).

Over the last ten years, UWC has focused increasingly on developing programmes to further student success in both the curricular and co-curricular spaces. These programmes are aimed at

developing students' skills outside of their professional context with an aim for them to be better prepared and capable of entering the labour market. As stated: "UWC embarked on a democratic and inclusive process of developing a charter of graduate attributes in 2008 and 2009" (Bozalek and Watters, 2014:1071). The institution attempted to embed graduate attributes within all its degree programmes. The UWC Teaching and Learning unit took up this mandate. The Unit outlined within their Strategic Plan for teaching and learning (2009:1) that the development of graduate attributes "... is complex, requiring an institutional commitment across the board if the process is to succeed." Within UWC, it was prioritised within the Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) 2010-2014, which sets the direction for the institution over a specific period. This process, however, occurred separately within the academic and co-curricular spaces which resulted in little integration between divisions, and as the Teaching and Learning unit at UWC identified, "... little talking between or engagement between the divisions around implementation" took place, which has been shown not to be best practice when implementing graduate attributes. This resulted in an overlap of services and a shifting of graduate attributes as the priority of the co-curricular space with little integration into the institutional curriculum.

The UWC Charter of Graduate Attributes (2009:2-4) groups the attributes into three generic areas: that of scholarship, critical citizenship and the social good and lifelong learning. The charter unpacks the attributes that UWC graduates should possess on completion of the undergraduate programme as follows:

GRADUATE ATTRIBUTE 1

SCHOLARSHIP: A critical attitude towards knowledge:

UWC graduates should be able to demonstrate a scholarly attitude to knowledge and understanding within the context of a rapidly changing environment. UWC graduates should have the ability to actively engage in the generation of innovative and relevant knowledge and understanding through inquiry, critique and synthesis. They should be able to apply their knowledge to solve diverse problems and communicate their knowledge confidently and effectively.

GRADUATE ATTRIBUTE 2

CRITICAL CITIZENSHIP AND THE SOCIAL GOOD: A relationship and interaction with local and global communities and the environment:

UWC graduates should be engaged, committed and accountable agents of social good. They must aspire to contribute to social justice and care, appreciative of the complexity of historical contexts and societal conditions through their roles as professionals and members of local and global communities. They should demonstrate leadership and responsibility with regard to environmental sustainability.

GRADUATE ATTRIBUTE 3

LIFELONG LEARNING: An attitude or stance towards themselves:

UWC graduates should be confident Lifelong Learners, committed to and capable of continuous collaborative and individual learning and critical reflection for the purpose of furthering their understanding of the world and their place in it.

OVERARCHING SKILLS AND ABILITIES:

1. Inquiry-focused and knowledgeable: UWC graduates will be able to create new knowledge and understanding through the process of research and inquiry.

2. Critically and relevantly literate: UWC graduates will be able to seek, discern, use and apply information effectively in a range of contexts.

3. Autonomous and collaborative: UWC graduates will be able to work independently and in collaboration with others, in a way that is informed by openness, curiosity and a desire to meet new challenges.

4. Ethically, Environmentally and Socially Aware and Active: UWC graduates should be critical and responsible members of local, national, international and professional communities. They should also demonstrate a thorough knowledge of ethical, social, cultural and environmental

issues relating to their disciplines and make professional and leadership decisions in accordance with these principles.

5. Skilled Communicators: UWC graduates should recognise and value communication as a tool for negotiating and creating new understanding, interacting with diverse others, and furthering their own learning. They should use effective communication as a tool to engage with new forms of complexity in social and working life.

6. Interpersonal flexibility and confidence to engage across difference: UWC graduates should be able to interact with people from a variety of backgrounds and have the emotional insight and imagination to understand the viewpoints of others. They should be able to work in a productive team, to lead where necessary and to contribute their skills as required to solving complex problems.

Overall, there seems to be a paucity of research in South African higher education on how universities have developed and implemented GAs, but UWC is one of a few local universities that have adopted the notion of GAs. This research study aims to contribute to the overall research within this area, specifically within the South African context.

2.8 STUDENTS AND GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

Shivoro (2018) makes a key point, namely that students participate in higher education for different reasons. Students cannot be seen as a homogenous group as they come into the university system from different points, that is, directly from secondary school, as older working adults, and with prior experiences. What they do have in common is the view that the “end-point of their time at university will better enable them to succeed in professional employment, assist them to make career changes, strengthen their potential for a more personally fulfilling life, or some combination of these” (Bowden et al., 2000:np). This raises questions such as who our students are and what they think about the development of graduate attributes, which will be addressed next.

2.8.1 Who our students are

Reflecting upon the diversity profile of the students with whom I currently engage at UWC, I was able to conceptualize categories based on general characteristics. The key facets of diversity which are generally looked at which make up the student profile include gender, age, race, sexual orientation, religion and social class. At UWC, a large proportion of the student body are ‘first-generation students’, meaning they are the first members of their family to attend or graduate from a higher education institution. First-generation students generally have some shared experience based on similar diversity traits. They are often, at least in the UWC context, from poorer working class homes, and are from previously disadvantaged population groups. There is diversity within this similarity.

These students are often from rural areas and historically “poorer” provinces, but many are also from urban areas. It is not possible to generalize regarding schooling because although many of these first generation students received sub-standard schooling, many more were from former Model C schools or private schools. While there is a common thread in shared experience within this group, it should not be said that they are completely homogenous as there is much diversity within the group such as rural and urban, male and female, and diversity in cultural background and race. Along with this comes a host of difficulties for students that relate to, for instance, navigating a very complex university system, which has a direct impact on the attainment of graduate attributes.

Felder and Brent (2005:57) indicate that diversity in the higher education context usually refers to the “... effects of gender and ethnicity on student performance.” Scott, Yeld, and Hendry (2007:39) have noted that diversity in South African higher education has increased drastically since the 1980s in terms of race, language, nationality and educational background. Diversity in culture and experience is accepted and regarded as enriching to the process of education. However, despite such educational enrichment there is little change in educational processes to account for changes in the student body. In South Africa, the effects of apartheid continue to have a lingering effect on students, especially black African, coloured, and Indian students. UWC as a historically black institution reflects these challenges, as the student profile primarily constitutes students of colour. While the number of white students at the university has steadily increased year on year, it is not reflecting national higher education enrolment trends. Despite this, the shift in racial demographics

at the institution is positive as it encourages interaction across racial lines. As Strydom, Basson and Mentz (2012:1) indicate, student success is enhanced when they "... have serious conversations with those from a different racial, religious, or political background".

Students may be presented as homogenous by virtue of being students; however, there are key differences. So who are this group and what are the diversity factors amongst them? In spite of all these differences (and similarities) within the student body, there is one aspect that transcends race, parental education and gender, namely their generation, being referred to as 'millennials'.

2.8.2 The 'millennial' generation of students

The students who participated in this study were born between 1990 and 1997 and comprised the millennials or Generation Y group. Within South Africa, they are often seen as the 'born free' generation. The born free generation have a shared non-experience of apartheid. Worldwide, there are key features attributed to this generation. They differ vastly from previous generations and are often seen as narcissistic, lazy, materialistic and addicted to technology, thoughts echoed by both Stein (2013) and Twenge (2009). Millennials also have a strong sense of entitlement having been raised by parents who encouraged individualism instead of a focus on the group. They have high levels of self-esteem because of the pervasive 'yes' culture which they have been surrounded by growing up, which could be seen as both a blessing and a curse. This generalization cannot be made to the entire South African generation due to wide income gaps and high levels of inequality (Stein, 2013:33).

Millennials are also neither respectful of authority, nor resentful of it, a sentiment echoed by Stein (2013:33-34) and Halligan (2013:1-3). What this means in reality is that they often do not go against their parental authority figures, but rather include and seek their opinions when making important decisions. Halligan (2013:1-3) states that it is important for us to understand who millennials are if we are to engage with them more effectively. They have a different approach and attitude towards work, which is important to understand as this impacts on how they learn and behave in a formal learning environment. They have a different set of motivators, mission and purpose and seek greater flexibility and balance in all they do. Twenge (2009:403) asserts that

having a more clearly articulated meaning and purpose is necessary for this generation, as they need to understand the potential impact and contribution they will be making.

2.8.3 The South African ‘millennial’ generation of students

Haldenwang (2015:1) argues that despite the broad generalizations that can be made about this generation, there are differences within the South African context. This is mainly due to the large number of the South African cohort having grown up in poverty and under disadvantaged circumstances. This is a view supported by Burrows (2013) who asserts that South African millennials are similar to their global counterparts in their approach to technology, motivation and collaboration, but the main difference comes from many having emerged from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. The issue of race and its impact on teaching also cannot be ignored. Soudien (2008:674) notes that the issues of race and their “... ancillary feeling of superiority and inferiority... are present as teaching and learning take place.” This can be interpreted as the students’ own self-construction around what a good student looks and sounds like which can, in turn, impact on performance in the classroom. In consultations, I have experienced students who express issues of self-esteem and confidence, where, for example, they do not raise their hands to ask a question as they are fearful of how they sound and of using incorrect vocabulary in front of their peers. This is in contrast to the profile of the global millennial who is seen to have an inflated sense of self-esteem.

South Africa is currently in a position of having a large number of young people between the ages of 15 and 24; they form part of our ‘born free’ generation or those born after the dismantling of apartheid. This means they need to be acknowledged, recognised and validated, as they constitute the future South African generation. According to Haldenwang (2015:1), the relatively young population in South Africa presents the country with unique opportunities for economic and societal progress. As a ‘young’ population, it is imperative that we focus on efforts to grow and develop the youth section of the population and invest in their health, education and development. The largest proportion by race of youth is in the Black African population followed by the Coloured, White and Indian population groups.

The students with whom I engage come predominantly from the Black and Coloured communities. These population groups still have the lowest levels of throughput and completion in higher education despite increased access. This position continues to perpetuate issues of poverty and inequality. They are also often first-generation students with limited social capital, compared to White students who have, in general, a higher likelihood of having university-educated parents and stronger financial, family and other support systems. This limited social capital can be attributed to a number of different factors. Common in my discussions with students are issues of support, finance, residence and health, a view confirmed by Lewin and Mawoyo (2014:41). The authors state that South African university students do indeed face challenges around finance, living conditions, nutrition and academic infrastructure, which have a direct impact on student learning and success. Haldenwang (2015:2) highlights the importance of education in general, with it being a "... powerful instrument known for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth".

2.8.4 Students' views of graduate attributes

According to Kavanagh and Drennan (2008:295), "... students are a key stakeholder group when it comes to examining views about developing skills and attributes to equip them for a career ...". However, when we refer to graduate attributes, we usually imply the interests of institutions, governments, employers and curriculum alignment without much thought being given to the voices of students. Donleavy (2012:350) highlights that "graduate attributes are often assessed for rather than with students." A key point made by the author is that graduate attribute development can fail if students are "not actively engaged as partners in the assessment process" (Donleavy, 2012:350). It can be stated that students are often ignored in discussions around graduate attributes, with Su (2014) highlighting that often a 'top-down' approach is adopted. This latter view is supported by Barrie (2006) and Leggett et al. (2004) who suggest a paucity of research on students' perceptions and their own construction of graduate attributes.

Barrie (2006) and Leggett et al. (2004) have pointed out that students are often excluded from discussions on graduate attributes. This is against a background of the varied perceptions academics have of graduate attributes and the differences within how it is implemented in different

education systems. We therefore fail to realise what students' understanding of graduate attributes is as they are often merely the 'receivers' of such processes rather than the co-constructors thereof. Su (2014) outlines that students need to be treated as equal participants "... rather than onlookers external to the process, given that graduate attributes need to address levels of concern that rise through the self." Students often also engage in developing particular graduate attributes based on their intentions, choices and actions, which form part of an intentional process of acting and choosing as emerging adults.

Crebert et al., (2004) point out that it is unrealistic for universities to guarantee the skills and attributes students will obtain having graduated. These authors argue that what universities should guarantee is that their students will have the opportunity to learn and develop these attributes and skills during the course of their time at the institution. The level to which this is achieved depends on each individual student but cannot be separated from the other external influences that impact on the student as highlighted.

Collier et al. (2009) make an important point, namely "... that an understanding of student perceptions of the importance of graduate attributes will inform development of effective, inclusive learning activities that meet the needs of students from all backgrounds." However, Oliver et al. (2000) point out that defining the full range of generic and transferable skills that are useful for university students is a difficult and exhaustive process.

2.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored a range of relevant literature sources in an attempt to analyse and understand the notion of graduate attributes. The main body of the chapter focused on providing a theoretical basis for the research with the adoption of Barrie's (2007) model for the development of graduate attributes (see 2.2). I have also attempted to address the concept of graduate attributes which is a mammoth undertaking given the varied views on the topic within different contexts. A table (see table 2.1) of commonly agreed-upon attributes was highlighted which did not provide an exhaustive list but will aid in comparing and contrasting such attributes with other studies and with those of participants in the present study. This issue will be explored further in Chapters Four

and Five. Another important aspect addressed within the chapter is that of the employability agenda which is often viewed interchangeably with that of graduate attributes.

International perspectives regarding graduate attributes were explored with particular focus on Australia as a leader in the field of graduate attribute development and research. I have also attempted to outline how fellow BRICS countries such as India and China view graduate attribute development given the similarities among some of these nations. It can be concluded that given massification, globalisation and an increased thrust by both employers and governments for better skilled graduates, the Indian and Chinese higher education systems had to reprioritise with more attention to the development of ‘soft skills’.

I have also briefly touched on graduate attributes within African higher education, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where education is increasingly being seen as a means to grow various countries’ economies and solve societal problems. Closer to home, the educational context of South African higher education was examined, particularly around the various policies and practices which influence graduate attribute development. In the final sections of the chapter, the UWC as an institution was examined as the locality for the present research and the graduate attributes charter the institution has adopted was also examined.

One might conclude with the observation that the concept of graduate attributes is highly nuanced and deeply contextual. I have therefore only attempted to outline a few of the key features related to the complexities of graduate attributes, making the point that students are often not involved in determining graduate attributes, something that the present study wants to explore further. The next chapter outlines the research design and methods of inquiry, which will further explore UWC students’ perceptions of their learning of graduate attributes.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to provide an overview and justification for the choice of the research design and methodology adopted for this study, which was briefly alluded to in Chapter One. What will be discussed thus includes the research design employed, the unit of analysis and the selection of research participants. Furthermore, the strategies for generating data and ensuring data quality through measures such as validity, credibility and trustworthiness, as well as the ethical issues relevant to the research, will be addressed. I shall also outline the practicalities of how I went about conducting the exploration into how students perceive the learning of graduate attributes at UWC.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

“To ensure a strong research design, researchers must choose a research paradigm that is congruent with their beliefs about the nature of reality” (Levers, 2013:3).

The above quote for me succinctly indicates the importance of a research paradigm underpinning the research process. Different authors have understood paradigms differently. Babbie (2008:34) sees a paradigm as “... one of the fundamental models or frames of reference we use to organize our observations and reasoning.” He makes an important point that paradigms are “... difficult to recognise as such because they are so implicit, assumed, taken for granted” (Babbie, 2008:34).

A research paradigm or philosophical stance can be seen as the lens used to evaluate reality or the worldview adopted by the researcher. An understanding of the research paradigm is important as this often links to the purpose of the research. As Bitzer (2013:np) indicates, it helps the researcher to determine “... whether you set out to prove something, to better understand something, to change something or merely to solve a practical problem”. The

term can also be used to refer to a "... research culture or tradition with a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common regarding the nature and conduct of research" (Bitzer 2013:np.). Levers (2013:4) outlines importantly that a research paradigm can be seen as "... the net that holds the ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs ..." of the researcher. Babbie (2010, cited in Bitzer 2013:np.) cautions however that "... different 'paradigms' relate to different understandings of the world and phenomena". This means that not any one paradigm can fully explain reality. A paradigm can therefore be seen as a framework, worldview or belief system that is used to guide research and practice.

I have adopted an interpretive knowledge position in this study. I tend to subscribe to an interpretive epistemological, ontological and methodological position as I believe knowledge is not 'uniform and identical' but rather formulated on the individual level. Knowledge is generated through intention, consideration and the individual point of reference. The personal interpretation especially is of importance for me as our backgrounds and experiences have a direct impact on our views and knowledge. Interpretivism, according to Bryman (2012:29), is built on "... the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action."

Interpretivist research is therefore as Levers (2013:3) outlines, "guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied". The author outlines that an interpretivist lens tends to accept multiple ways of knowing and acknowledges that "... objective reality can never be captured" as this paradigm focuses primarily on "... recognizing and narrating the meaning of human experiences and actions". Thanh and Thanh (2015) hold that researchers who adopt this approach tend to "... discover reality through participant's views, their own background and experiences... [and] allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants" (Thanh and Thanh, 2015:24). In the present study, the understanding of students' construction and perceptions of graduate attributes were under investigation and therefore adopting an interpretivist view was fitting. A final point on interpretivism is that it has the

benefit of being able to “... accommodate multiple perspectives and versions of truths” (Thanh and Thanh, 2015:25). As the initial quote indicated, a research paradigm or philosophical lens helps the researcher towards the development of an appropriate research design which is discussed next.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The choice of a research design is an important research decision to make. Creswell (2012:5) outlines that the research design can be seen as “... the plan or proposal to conduct research, involves the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and specific methods”.

Bryman (2012:715) sees the research design as “... the framework for the collection and analysis of data”, while Bitzer (2013:np.) contends that the research design can be seen as “... the broad architecture (plan) of a research project in order to help you decide on how to think through and to conduct the research”. Research designs are sensitive to (a) the research problem – what exactly needs to be investigated, (b) the research questions or hypotheses and (c) the research purpose (exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, evaluative or transformational).

Bryman (2012:715) makes an important point, namely that the choice of a design “... reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions of the research process.” The design decisions include “... expressing casual connections between variables, generalizing to larger groups of individuals than those actually forming part of the investigation, understanding behaviour and the meaning of that behaviour in its specific social context.” Bitzer (2013:np.) outlines different kinds of design such as the interventional, grounded theory, case study, ethnographic and experimental designs among others.

An exploratory case study design, focusing on the phenomenon of graduate attributes at one South African higher education institution, was employed for the present study. The use of a case study design offered the opportunity for some in-depth exploration of the research question and subsidiary questions. As the data generated for this case was qualitative in nature, and involved a

small sample size, the case study proved the most appropriate design. Stake (2000:435) outlines that one of the most common ways to employ the use of qualitative data in research is using a case study design. In turn, Yazan (2015:134) contends that, despite the popularity of case study designs, it often lacks legitimacy because of less defined and structured protocols. Creswell (2009:13), however, contends that in case study research, the researcher does an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon, an event, an activity, a process, a programme or an institution in order to better understand any of these phenomena or entities.

Within the present study I conducted an in-depth exploration of students' constructions and understandings of graduate attributes within one institutional context (UWC). The case was bounded and limited to selected students at one higher education institution. As a result, the findings are not generalizable but may assist to understand similar cases within other institutional contexts. Within case studies, researchers generate detailed information using a range of different data methods. Creswell (2009:13) and Yin (2003:21) emphasise areas of importance within the case study design, namely the unit of analysis, the criteria for interpreting findings, the study question(s) and the resulting propositions (see 3.5 onwards).

A key benefit of a case study design is that it allows for deep, rich and textured accounts of a particular bounded case and can provide "thick descriptions" which, in turn, allows for measures of data trustworthiness and ecological validity (Plowright, 2011). As noted in Chapter One, Yin (2003:1) argues that the case study is "... used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organisational, social, political and related phenomena." The case can be either simple or complex. Along this vein, Stake (2000:439) argues that the "... case is a complex entity operating within a number of contexts, physical, economic, ethical, aesthetic..."

While Yin (2003:13) provides a clear definition of a case study as "...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident", there are multiple writers on the topic that drew their own definitions. For instance, Stake (2000:437) indicates that, as with many other areas within research, there are differing views, definitions and opinions on the definition of a case study. He suggests that a case study is "... both a process of inquiry about the

case and the product of that inquiry” (Stake, 2000:437). A further argument for utilising a case study research design stems from an interpretivist stance in that the case study design allows the researcher to deconstruct and then reconstruct the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2003).

Hancock and Algozzine (2006:33), as well as Rule and John (2011:8), argue that there are at least three purposes attached to research and case study research designs in particular, namely an explanatory, exploratory or a descriptive purpose. The present study can be viewed as exploratory as it sought to “... explore any phenomenon in the data which serves as a point of interest to the researcher” (Zainal, 2007:3). As Streb (2010:2) outlines, exploratory case studies seek to investigate “... distinct phenomena characterized by a lack of detailed preliminary research, especially formulated hypotheses that can be tested, and/or by a specific research environment that limits the choice of methodology.” Streb (2010:2) argues that this kind of study allows for “... a high degree of flexibility and independence with regards to the research design as well as the data generation for the researcher, as long as these fulfil the required scientific criteria of validity and reliability.” In the case of the exploratory case study, using the analogy provided by Yin (1984:30), it is akin to discovering a new land. You will need to have some “... rationale and direction” in the beginning which might later be proven wrong (Yin, 1984:30). Explanatory cases, according to Hancock and Algozzine (2006:33), “... are often a prelude to additional research efforts and involve fieldwork and information collection prior to the definition of a research question.” Rule and John (2011:8) are of the view that the exploratory case often looks at an area that has not been investigated before and can lay the basis for future studies. They argue that often, with this kind of case study, the questions are quite open-ended and broad as they are meant to generate data, which will provide better insight into the chosen case. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001, cited in Rule and John, 2011:28), there are a number of purposes for exploratory cases. These purposes include:

- satisfying the researchers’ curiosity and desire for better understanding
- testing the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study
- developing methods to be employed in subsequent studies
- determining priorities for future research
- developing new hypotheses about an existing phenomenon

Stake (2000:438-439) has argued that in case study research the researcher researchers seek both what is common and what is particular about the case but the end result regularly portrays something of the uncommon drawing from: the nature of the case, the case's historical background, the physical setting, other contexts, other cases through which this case is recognised, the informants through whom the case can be known".

According to Stake, it remains the duty of the researcher to generate sufficient data related to these areas (2011:438-439). Cases are usually bound by time and activity, with a variety of data generation methods used to provide detailed information (Creswell, 2009:13). A further strength of a case study design is the potential to "... deal with the subtleties and intricacies of complex social situations" (Denscombe, 2003:36).

3.4 THE UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Once the decision around a design type, underpinning philosophical paradigm and strategy of inquiry has been made, the unit of analysis needs to be specified and accurately determined to allow for a meaningful and appropriate sampling procedure. Long (2011:2) suggests that a unit of analysis is "... the most basic element of a scientific research project ..., it is the subject (the who or the what) of study..." An important point made by Long (2011:2-3) is that within the social sciences, units of analysis should be seen not as "things" but as "... the relationships or networks connecting the families, neighbours, or, at the most basic level, the interests of individuals." The unit of analysis in the present study was the phenomenon of graduate attributes in one higher education institution, and in particular, student perceptions of how they understand and learn (or have learnt) such attributes.

3.5 PARTICIPANTS

The present study involved participants who were registered as undergraduate UWC students and selected from the programme offerings of the LSR) office. The LSR office was established in 2008 as a directive of the division for Student Development and Support under the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS). As part of the IOP 2010-2014, the development of students was identified as a key focus area. The IOP's eighth goal identified leadership development as a

strategic imperative of UWC and “... in order to give effective leadership at all levels ... to maintain and develop a vibrant and viable institution of high repute” (PowerPoint IOP and CSSS alignment). The result was the development of the LSR office with the primary purpose to:

- develop leadership programmes
- provide training and support to student societies
- provide support and training for special groups with a focus on leadership development
- as well as provide various other development and support programmes which equip students for leadership.

The students who participated in this study were conveniently drawn (see 3.6.2 below for sampling criteria) from the cohort of ¹Emerging Leaders (ELP), ²Advanced Leaders (ALP) and ³InitiAct Leaders (ILP) students in 2016. The ELP and ILP, according to the LSR Yearbook (2015:6), “... are co-curricular programmes designed for student participants who want to develop their leadership skills. It is designed for participants who want to grow, who want to be challenged and who see the need for responsive and responsible citizenship. They are challenged to apply leadership theories and principles in their everyday life, organisational behaviour and project delivery.” According to the same document, the Advanced Leadership Programme is an extension of the ELP and ILP. In this programme, participants are exposed to leadership and challenged to deepen their knowledge by analysing issues within the framework of the university, their communities and the global environment.

¹The Emerging Leaders Programme is a co-curricular programme designed for participants who want to develop their leadership skills. It is designed for participants who want to grow, who want to be challenged and who see the need for responsive and responsible citizenship.

²The Advanced Leaders Programme is an extension of ELP and ILP. Participants are exposed to leadership and challenged to deepen their knowledge by analysing issues within the framework of the university, their communities and the global environment.

³The InitiAct Leaders programme is offered over five sessions on selected Saturdays throughout the year. The sessions cover four pillars of leadership development: General Leadership, Self-Development, Building Sustainable Support Networks and Practical Project Skills.

3.5.1 Socio-demographic characteristics

A breakdown of the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants is outlined in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Socio-demographic details of participants

| Gender | Female (N = 4) | Male (N = 6) |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Year of study | 2 x 3 rd , 2 x 2 nd | 5 x 2 nd , 1 x 3 rd |
| Faculty | EMS x 1, CHS x 1, Law x 1, Science x 1 | Arts x 1, EMS x 2, Law x 2, CHS x 1 |
| Age | 21 x 3, 22 x 1 | 21 x 2, 20 x 1, 22 x 2, 29 x 1 |
| LSR programme | 3 x ALP, 1 x ELP | 4 x ELP, 2 x ILP |
| Race | Coloured x 1, Black x 3 | Black x 3, Coloured x 2, 1 chose not to answer |
| Nationality | 3 x South African, 1 x Zimbabwean | 6 x South African |

[EMS - Economic and Management Sciences, CHS - Community and Health Sciences]

From the socio-demographic data (see Table 3.1), it can be seen that there was more male than female participation in the focus group interview with four (4) female participants and six (6) male. There was a majority of second (2nd) year students with no representation from the first (1st) or fourth (4th) year cohorts. Of the seven (7) faculties at UWC, five had representation with the faculties of education and dentistry (dentistry faculty is not located at the UWC main campus) not represented. Participating students were between 20 and 29 years of age and the racial distribution comprised Coloured and Black participants with all but one who was South African. There was an equal distribution of participants from the various LSR programme offerings. The sample also needs to be viewed with the understanding that there was a lack of representation from the White population group as well as not having year 1 and 4 students included. This further limits the generalizability of the study.

3.5.2 Sampling

A general call was issued requesting the participation of students in the study through email (see Addendum D - Request to participate in research email). These students represented differences in age, race, study year and gender. However, they have a common shared experience of being enrolled at UWC, being involved in co-curricular programmes linked to graduate attribute development as offered through the office of LSR and in completing their undergraduate studies. This research therefore employed a non-probability, convenience sampling procedure. This sampling technique was used to select participants who were willing to participate, who were accessible and were convenient to reach. As Bryman (2012:201) indicates, a convenience sample is one that is "... simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility."

The key criteria for participant inclusion in this study were the following:

- Participants had to have been registered students at UWC at the time
- Would be completing an undergraduate degree programme
- Were involved in co-curricular offerings
- Were involved in the co-curricular offerings with the LSR office specifically ELP, ALP and ILP; and
- Were involved in the programmes during the 2016 academic year

In order to access the students to participate in the study I requested permission from the Centre for Student Support Services at UWC which oversees the LSR office (see Addendum J). An email request (see Addendum D) was sent to the 2016 database of ELP, ILP and ALP students. The researcher received responses from eighteen (18) students who were initially interested in participating. Of the eighteen who had initially indicated interest, only ten (10) students arrived on the day of the initial focus group interview. Of the ten, seven (7) students agreed to participate in the photo elicitation exercise. Four (4) out of the seven students eventually returned photos and continued with the photo elicitation aspect of the study. At the initial focus group interview, all participants were asked to complete a participant data information sheet (see addendum H - Participant data information sheet) which allowed for the capturing of demographic characteristics.

3.5.3 Exclusionary criteria

Velasco (2012:2-4) outlines that exclusion criteria can be seen as a “... set of predefined definitions that is used to identify subjects who will not be included”, also guided by the aim of the study. Velasco (2012:3) contends that exclusion criteria should be used sparingly as adding in a number of exclusionary criteria may have added implications of decreasing the sample size and result in selection bias which can affect the validity of results.

For this study participants were screened and the following exclusion criteria applied:

- Students who were not registered at UWC
- Students not involved in the programme offerings within the LSR office
- Students in postgraduate study; and
- Students from LSR, but involved prior to 2016

3.6 STRATEGIES FOR GENERATING DATA

In order to generate relevant focus group interviews, conversations were guided initially by a set of nine open-ended questions (see Addendum G - Interview protocol). Additionally, a semi-structured individual interview was conducted for generating further data from one participant who could not attend the focus group interview. Visual-based data were generated by photo elicitation where participants were tasked with taking photographs of how they observe and interpret graduate attributes within the UWC environment. These photographs were then presented and discussed in a second focus group interview and individual interview with the four participants who had agreed to the photo elicitation activities. These data generation methods afforded participants the opportunity for shared ownership in the data process and the opportunity to share their personal experiences and respond in their own words.

3.6.1 Focus group interviews and individual interview

As indicated, two focus group interviews as well as one face-to-face interview were conducted in order to generate narrative data. Van Zyl (2002:28) puts forth that focus group interviews "... are used to obtain data from a small group of participants and these participants must have common interests that are linked to the subject that is researched". In this case, the students were all undergraduate students registered at UWC and participated in programmes offered via the LSR office. The first focus group focused on an introduction to the topic of the research and discussed the methodology, study process and core concepts. This provided an opportunity to understand how the participants thought about, experienced and felt in relation to graduate attributes. A set of nine (9) questions were initially constructed by the researcher as a means of eliciting information (see Addendum G – Focus Group Interview protocol). These nine questions were broadly constructed in order to facilitate discussion with participants around graduate attributes. Having a participatory approach allowed me to pick up on areas that participants highlighted during the course of the focus group. I picked up on the areas raised, facilitating further conversation in a non-judgemental way, allowing for deep conversations to occur as directed by participants.

A second focus group interview was conducted two weeks after the initial interview with the four participants who had agreed to complete the photo elicitation component of the research. This focus group allowed for both individual and group elicitation of the meaning of the photographs in relation to graduate attributes. This process linked to the work of Schulze (2007:541) who has highlighted that photo elicitation interviews are deemed effective in focus groups.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 835) have highlighted that some of the key ways that qualitative data is generated is through the usage of individual interviews and participant observation. The focus group aspect of both is fitting, as it allows access to "...research participants who may find one-on-one, face to face interaction scary or intimidating". By creating multiple lines of communication, the group interview offers participants a safe environment where they can share ideas, beliefs and attitudes in the company of people from the same socioeconomic, ethnic and gender backgrounds. This was evident during the focus groups with participants interacting and engaging with one another, sharing experiences both similar and dissimilar around the questions

being posed. Rule and John (2011:66) indicate that through the focus group, the researcher can effectively facilitate a discussion with a group of participants. Part of the purpose of the focus group, these authors highlight, is the shared dialogue and interaction amongst the participants. The usefulness of this form of data generation is that a range of different opinions and viewpoints can be gained and it can yield "... large amounts of data suitable for a case study" (Rule and John, 2011: 66).

A key strength of focus group interviews is that it allows participants to engage with each other rather than with the interviewer who facilitates the flow of data from the interaction of group members (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001: 289). The engagement amongst participants also increases the opportunity for reflection and allows for deeper levels of exploration and agency within the research process. Morgan (2006: 121), for instance, puts forth that participants in the focus group share their thoughts and experiences whilst at the same time comparing and contrasting their contributions with those of others. This process of comparison and contrasting is especially useful in gaining an understanding of a range of responses related to the research topic. A successful focus group therefore does not only provide data on what participants think, but also why they think the way they do. It is important to note that the researcher, as a facilitator of the focus group, has an impact on the data generation as the researcher's interest drives the focus group and this has the potential to influence data, as echoed by both Sifunda (2001:42) and Morgan (1997).

3.6.2 Photo elicitation

Given my chosen paradigmatic stance and the main research question formulated for the study, photo elicitation was used as another data generation method. Harper (2002:14) and Lapenta (2011:201) both indicate that photo elicitation was first described by the researcher John Collier in 1957. Collier proposed that photo elicitation could be used as a means of overcoming practical problems in research. Pink (2007) puts forth that the use of photographs can represent certain elements of the human experience and better reflect how everyday experiences can be constituted. Harper (2002:13) has argued that photo elicitation has a great deal of usefulness; however, it goes "largely unrecognised", a point that is confirmed by Rule and John (2011:70-71) and who also

acknowledge that photography is a "... relatively under-utilised data collection method" (Rule and John, 2011:70-71). Those who are strong proponents of this method put forth that it can overcome various barriers related to culture and language and assist participants to tap into "... unconscious and unquestioned domains of experience and beliefs" (Rule and John, 2011:70-71).

Photo elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview (Harper, 2002). This allows for active engagement in the research process by participants as photographs taken by themselves or someone else evoke meaning beyond the obvious and "...extend personal narratives that illuminate lives and experiences" (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004:8). As the present study sought to understand students' perceptions of reality, the facilitation of personal narratives was important. The images generated by the students themselves did not necessarily have intrinsic meaning, but participants assigned different meanings to them and then had to explain these in photo elicitation interviews (Schulze, 2007:540). Photo elicitation is also a process whereby research participants are tasked with taking photographs that depict an aspect of their unique experiences (Warren, 2005). These personalised photographs are then used within the research interview to act as a catalyst towards communication between researcher and participants. A common question when utilising photo elicitation is around why participants would choose a particular photograph. In this research, participants were asked about their choice of photographs to understand the particular meaning behind each as related to graduate attributes and to ensure that the researcher did not make any assumptions about the photographs taken. This was the starting point when discussing photographs as it opened up the conversation between researcher and participants.

As Harper (2002:23) indicates, the usefulness of images in interviews helps elicit "... deep and interesting talk" on often complex topics. Additionally, what drew me to the use of photo elicitation is that it allowed for the levelling of power dynamics in the researcher-participant relationship as we sat together, engaged in unpacking the meaning of the photographs. Photo elicitation also holds an inherent dimension of empowerment through the choice, justification and construction of the meaning of photographs, which can "... promote participant agency in the interviewing process making the interview seem more participant directed" (Richard and Lahman, 2015:15). Such interviews reveal "... unconscious perceptions individuals hold about the social

and psychological environment, providing insight into how people perceive and organise their worlds which provides useful data” (Schulze, 2007:541).

In the present study, a participatory version of photo-elicitation was employed. This aided in bringing the student voice more to the forefront as the voice of the student is often seen as absent from academic discourse on graduate attributes. Furthermore, it made the process more engaging, created a sense of shared agency, and equalled the power dynamics that often arise within research. Participants were asked to take photographs that represent their “lives and social worlds”; this is often referred to as respondent generated photography, auto photography or photo voice (Rule and John, 2011:70-71). Harrington and Schibik (2003:23) have argued that the use of this method allows for a “... more open and creative analysis of student perceptions”. In the present study, participants were asked to take photographs that, in their opinion, were linked to graduate attributes in and around the campus and to provide a short, written description or narrative of each photograph. The students had the freedom to be creative, while at the same time acknowledging that they needed to motivate clearly, why each picture was relevant to the topic. They were provided with photo elicitation instructions (see addendum C) to clarify any areas of confusion and assist with the process. This was done as visual research methods are not restricted to only the visual; they also include the use of words to add to the description and interviews which extend meaning (Bryman, 2012:458).

Lapenta (2011:206) outlines that when deciding to make use of photo-elicitation as a data generation method, certain key questions needed to be taken into consideration, namely:

- Who is going to make or select the images to be used in the interviews?
- What is the content of the images going to be?
- Where are the images going to be used, and how?

In the present study, participants took the photographs and selected what they wanted to share with the researcher in the second focus group interview. This included brief written and verbal narratives. The participants themselves decided on the content which had meaning to them, and

they also had the right to decide whether the photographs could be included for use in the study or not.

During the second focus group, printed copies of each of their photographs were presented to participants. A discussion was then facilitated around the photographs, which allowed participants to choose what they considered to be significant. As Rule and John (2011:70-71) write, photo elicitation interviews are able to generate "... rich descriptions of subjective experience and can sometimes yield unexpected data from the participant's perspective." I found that an additional benefit of conducting these interviews in a group was that the shared dialogue and comparisons of photographs were able to generate new understandings of experience "...for both researcher and participants", as highlighted by Rule and John (2011:70-71). It can therefore be argued that the present study also aimed at being a participative project.

There are many benefits related to participatory data generation (see these benefits as summarised by Rule and John, 2011:71 in Figure 3.1). These aspects were also beneficial in the present study as it included a fun and enjoyable aspect, which reduced the "burden" of the research on the participants and created a sense of shared power and agency within the process. The shifts in power relations also enabled a shared sense of agency within the research process, which allowed for increased engagement and dialogue. Using this form of participatory research allowed for the participants to be at the centre of the research process, allowing me as the researcher to analyse and reflect on what emerged within the focus group sessions, and for the participants to reveal within a group the meaning behind their experiences and photographs.

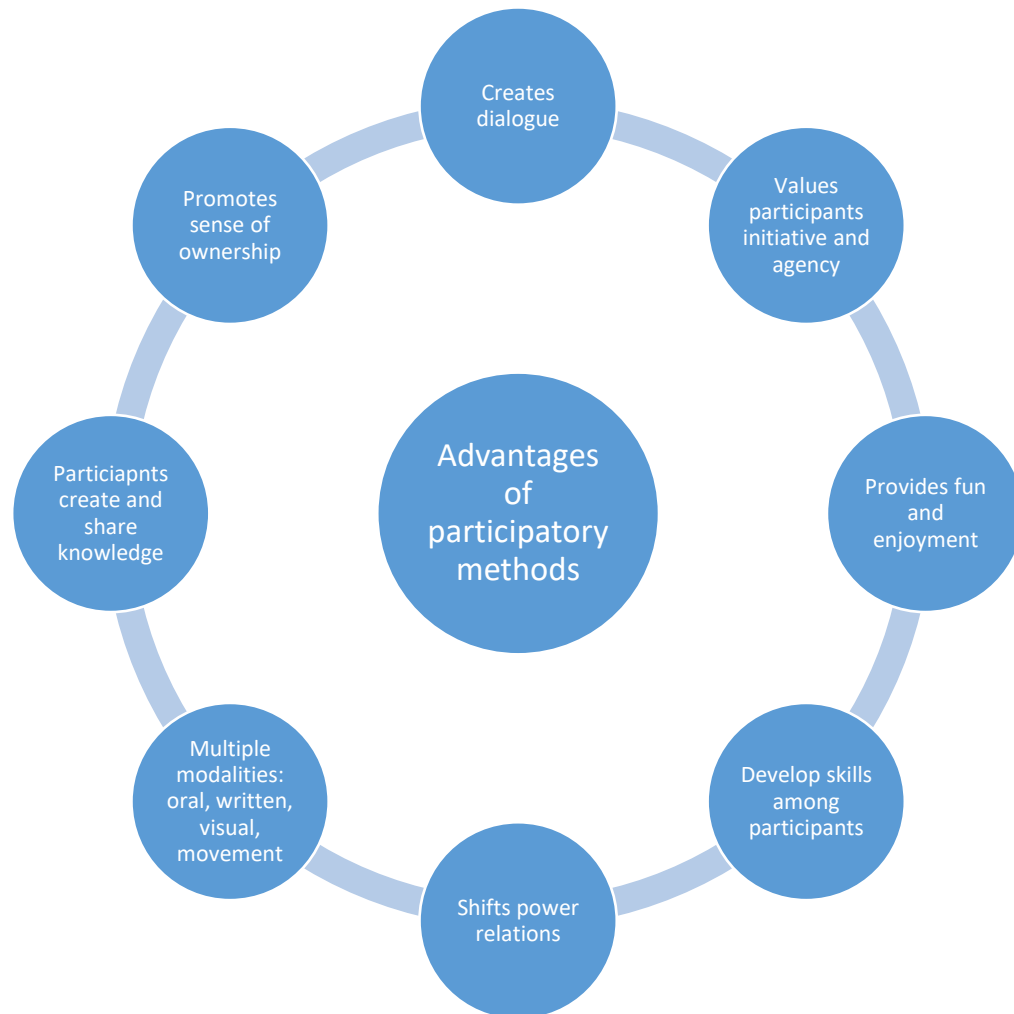


Figure 3.1: Benefits of participatory data generation (Source: Rule and John 2011:71)

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The focus group sessions were recorded with the full permission of participants. I transcribed the two focus group sessions and the individual interview myself. The transcriptions included what was said as well as pauses, hesitations, and acknowledgement of the inaudible. Analysing the data was an opportunity to engage with the transcripts in a way I had not considered previously. I initially read the transcripts and then grouped the data into broad categories. These categories were then further broken down into themes. In the present study, I aimed to understand the meanings participants attached to their mental constructions of graduate attributes. I aimed to understand this

bearing in mind the context of UWC and with the awareness that participants arrived with various life experiences, identity, gender and a host of other factors that might influence their perceptions.

Koen (2011:12) argues that working with qualitative data “...also involves cutting away those details that are of no consequence in order to concentrate on what is important. This is done by data analysis, coding and reduction.” The narratives from the individual sessions and focus groups were therefore recorded, transcribed and reviewed for themes, which have been coded in the same way as the photographs and accompanying descriptions and narratives. These codes, according to Saldaña (2009:3), are most often a word or short phrase that “... symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” Coding involves breaking down the data for analysis and categorisation of units of meaning. The researcher decides on the units of meaning, which might be specific words, particular ideas or events, which frequently occur in the data. These occurrences inevitably change as the research process progresses.

The initial stage of analysis, which is often termed ‘open coding’ is used to discover, name and categorise phenomena and to develop categories in terms of their properties and dimensions (Denscombe, 2003:271-272). Koen (2011) argues that the aim of analysing the data that originate from focus groups and interviews is to break the data down into segments in order to determine the categories, relationships and assumptions that informed the participants’ views and then to make sense of the information. This process was done manually as there was a relatively small sample to analyse.

What was also considered in the process of data analysis was Carney’s Analytical Abstraction Ladder as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994:92). The ladder comprises three levels:

Level 1: Summarising and packaging the data

Level 2: Repackaging and aggregating the data

Level 3: Developing and testing propositions to construct an explanatory framework.

These three levels can be briefly summarised as follows:

Level 1: Summarising and packaging data

The first level can be seen as summarising interviews and documents. In this level, two activities are carried out, namely the transcription of the recorded data, and coding of the data in order to obtain a suitable overview. The recorded focus group interviews as well as the individual interview were transcribed and then read through in their entirety. By reading the transcriptions numerous times to gain a general understanding of what was being reflected, various themes began to emerge. These themes were established by using open coding as described by Saldaña (2009:3).

Level 2: Repackaging and aggregating the data

This level is mainly focused on the identification of themes and trends from within the data. The various themes, which emerged from the initial analysis, were the basis of the findings and interpretations. Here I focused on finding the links within the data and forming connections for further exploration. These findings will also be highlighted in Chapter Five.

Level 3: Developing and testing propositions to construct an explanatory framework

This level involved overall identifying patterns and proposing explanations and providing a possible explanatory framework in answer to the main research question and subsidiary questions.

3.8 DATA QUALITY (VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, MEASURES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY)

An important consideration when conducting research is around data quality, which is known variously as rigor or trustworthiness. Measures of trustworthiness can be difficult to ensure within a qualitative study, as there are no instruments with clear metrics. Therefore, ensuring transferability, conformability, credibility and dependability is important. Trustworthiness can be seen as "... the level of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study" (Connelly, 2016:435). Connelly (2016:435) points to four measures of trustworthiness, first suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- credibility

- dependability
- confirmability
- transferability

Credibility is concerned with consistency, with Connelly (2016:435) indicating that credibility is around “confidence in the truth of the study, and therefore the findings”. Morrow (2005:252) asserts that credibility is about how to “... ensure rigor in the research process and how we communicate to others that we have done so”. This, according to the author, can be achieved through a process of observation, engagement, peer debriefs, researcher reflexivity, validation, as well as “thick descriptions” which Morrow (2005: 252) describes as

transcending research paradigms, involve detailed, rich descriptions not only of participants’ experiences of phenomena but also of the contexts in which those experiences occur. The ‘thickness’ of the descriptions relates to the multiple layers of culture and context in which the experiences are embedded.

In the present study, rich descriptions were achieved through reflecting on student experiences and engaging in discussion around their perceptions of the development of graduate attributes. Further, to ensure credibility, understanding the environment is important. This was achieved through having worked at the institution over a period of six years which afforded me access to a variety of documentation before commencement of the study. In addition, using different methods of collecting data, i.e. focus group and individual interviews as well as photo elicitation, allowed for a critical review of findings.

Dependability looks at how easily the study could be replicated and whether its results would be similar. This can be determined by an inquiry audit where the data analysis and research process are seen as a research process and the data analysis is reviewed externally. Morrow (2005:252) sees dependability as concerning how the study is conducted and that it should be “... consistent across time, researchers, and analysis techniques”. Therefore, findings should be explicit and repeatable as far as possible. Morrow (2005:252) provides that this can be achieved by keeping track of the “... emerging research design and through keeping an audit trail, that is, a detailed chronology of research activities and processes; influences on the data collection and analysis;

emerging themes, categories, or models; and analytic memos”. It is very difficult to say conclusively that findings would be repeatable in future.

Confirmability is mainly concerned with the level of objectivity/neutrality within the research findings. Confirmability is concerned with whether the “findings are consistent and could be repeated” (Connelly, 2016: 435). It is important to acknowledge that “research is never objective” (Morrow, 2005:252). It is focused on the findings being able to represent for the most part the “situation being researched rather than the beliefs, pet theories, or biases of the researcher” (Morrow, 2005:252). Connelly (2016:435) provides measures of ensuring confirmability, which include; “maintaining an audit trail of analysis and methodological memos of log”. Detailed notes are kept and these would need to be reviewed by an external person. In this instance, I have been keeping notes and reports on the research process, and each step in the research has been reviewed by the research supervisor as a “respected qualitative researcher”. This enhanced the prevention of bias in the study.

Transferability is also known as generalizability. Connelly (2016:435) defines transferability as being concerned with the applicability of the research findings to other situations, circumstances and settings. In order to determine transferability, it would be necessary for the researcher to provide “... sufficient information about the self (the researcher as instrument) and the research context, processes, participants, and researcher participant relationships” (Morrow, 2005:252). However, Morrow (2005:252) makes an important point that given the small sample sizes in qualitative studies it is important not to “... imply that the findings can be generalized to other populations or settings.” In order to ensure some measure of transferability and repeatability in this study, I have aimed to provide sufficient information about the studied case as well as about my own position and potential bias.

Ecological validity

Ecological validity is primarily concerned with “... the degree of naturalness of the research location and situations” (Plowright, 2011: 30). An important criterion of ecological validity relates to “... the extent to which the research studies a natural and everyday situation without the researcher intervening to contrive, create or construct the research context”. As the present study

was an exploratory case study it fulfilled part of the requirements for ecological validity in that it was not a contrived situation, and that the researcher had much ‘insider’ knowledge of the workings of leadership development programmes at UWC.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Cox, Drew, Guillemin, Howell, Warr, and Waycott (2014:7) point out that research ethics have primarily emerged as a way “...to protect research participants from incurring harm through their involvement in research.” Research that involves human participants is grounded in four key values: respect, integrity, justice and beneficence. Koen (2011:13) outlines that ethical considerations are not restricted to a specific time within the research process; rather they are worthy of consideration throughout. This thought is echoed by Bryman (2012:130) who highlights that ethical issues arise at different stages of the research process and they cannot be ignored as they relate to the “... integrity of a piece of research and of the disciplines involved.” Within this research process, certain key ethical issues were taken into consideration, namely that of confidentiality, informed consent, and anonymity, the right to withdraw and ethical approval. In addition, the specific ethical issues related to visual research methods were also considered as this requires particular ethical challenges.

Confidentiality: The issue of confidentiality is one at the forefront of many research studies. Cox et al. (2014:9) define confidentiality as the “commitment to protecting an individual’s privacy when that individual has disclosed information in the context of a relationship of trust in research.” The participants in the study’s right to privacy was acknowledged, with focus group interviews and photographs discussed, and conducted through a relationship of transparency and trust. The identities and records of individual participants in the study were kept confidential, and each participant had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym by which they would be referred to in the study (see addendum H). This, according to Bryman (2012:136), is a common practice and aids in confidentiality.

Informed consent: This is an area which Bryman (2012:138) highlights is often contested within social research ethics. In this study, participants were briefed about the purpose of the study, and

this was confirmed in writing, with participants understanding that participation was voluntary. The information provided by participants was freely given. Participants were fully aware of their right to refuse participation. The responsibility was on the researcher to ensure that the participants fully understood in a way that was appropriate to them the purpose and reason for the research, any financing and who was carrying out the research. Informed consent was obtained both verbally and in writing (see Addendum A, B, and F for the range of consent forms shared with participants).

Anonymity: The research participants were assured that they would not be identified at any stage of the research process and that the information they provided would be treated anonymously. They were afforded the opportunity at the start of the focus groups to choose their own pseudonym by which they would be identified throughout the research process. This also served a participatory purpose as it allowed participants more agency in the overall research process.

Right to withdraw: Participants were assured that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the research and would not be disadvantaged in any way. This was stated to them both verbally and in writing.

Ethical approval: Ethical approval was obtained from the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) (see Addendum I - Human Research (Humanities) Ethics) as well as permission to conduct research at UWC (see Addendum E -UWC Institutional Permission), from the office of the registrar. All documents related to the study were approved by the Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) at Stellenbosch University.

As this study has made use of photo elicitation (PE), it is fitting to provide an overview of the special ethical considerations undertaken. This is due to what Bryman (2012:462) refers to as the "... especially difficult issues of ethics" raised through the use of visual research methods. Cox et al. (2014:5) put forth that visual research methods require researchers to "rethink how they need to respond to key ethical issues, including confidentiality, ownership, informed consent, decisions about how visual data will be displayed and published, and managing collaborative processes." In order to ensure confidentiality and privacy of those who were photographed and to protect

anonymity, the researcher blurred the photographs generated to ensure privacy was protected and to remove all identifiable information of individuals. Special consent forms were created around the photo elicitation instructions (Addenda C) and the consent for use of photographs (Addenda F) which again reiterated the participant's right to withdraw at any stage of the research.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the methodology and research design used for this study. The research strategies employed were unpacked and an overview of the participants for the study, the sampling and social demographic details were provided. An overview of photo elicitation as a data generation tool was also provided. In Chapter Four, the findings from the data will be discussed in detail. In the final chapter, the conclusions from these findings, the resultant implications and the limitations of the study will be considered.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an outline of the research methodology and design used for this study as well as an explanation of the instruments used to generate data. In this chapter, an analysis of the findings from the individual interview, focus-group interviews and photographs are presented and discussed. The findings are presented and discussed in relation to addressing the research question posed for the study.

The main research question was formulated as:

How do students perceive the learning of graduate attributes at the University of the Western Cape?

The question will be addressed in relation to the findings from the empirical part of the study and relevant literature. Pseudonyms will be used in all instances when referring to participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS' DEFINITION OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

It was necessary to understand how students define the concept of graduate attributes as a starting point. A total of 10 students participated in the initial focus group during which the definition of graduate attributes was discussed. When asking participants to provide their definition of graduate attributes, a range of different responses was received. This echoes what has been discussed in Chapter 1 section 1.1 that providing a definition of graduate attributes is a complex undertaking. Many of the responses echoed aspects of the definition provided by Bowden et al., (2000:np). Bushido in particular touched on graduate attributes being about "... all-encompassing things that you've learnt throughout your degree". This echoes Bowden et al. (2000:np) particularly regarding

attributes going “... beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses”.

When participants shared their definitions of graduate attributes Gio, for instance, contributed in his own words that “I think about graduate attributes is ... uhm, it’s away from the textbook, knowledge that can’t be found in the textbook”. Bushido, on the other hand, was able to share that “... graduate... uhm ... attribute: it’s something that you should be able to do after your degree... skills you acquired”. There seemed to be some indications from participants that graduate attributes go beyond disciplinary knowledge.

Participants were also asked with which terms they would describe graduate attributes. As Table 4.1 indicates, a variety of different views emerged.

Table 4.1 Participants’ views of what graduate attributes entail

| | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Graduate Attributes | Creative thinking |
| | Ethical awareness |
| | Reader |
| | Proficient |
| | Research |
| | Communication |
| | Independence |
| | Tenacity |
| | Interpersonal skills |
| | Critical thinking |
| | Collaboration |
| | Logical thinking |
| | Emotional intelligence |
| | Conflict resolution |
| | Punctuality |
| Reflection | |

These terms, as highlighted by the participants, were quite similar to those presented by Kew (2014:09) and Bester (2014:76) regarding the shared graduate attributes which are of importance. This was highlighted in detail in Chapter Two, Table 2.1. The shared terms included: Critical thinking; Communication skills; Creativity; Oral and written skills; Ethical practice; Ability to work independently; Ability to work within a team. These also correspond with the UWC Charter of GA 2009 in that participants highlighted certain keywords such as research, collaboration, ethical, communication, critical thinking and interpersonal skills as being of importance. Such correspondence seems to indicate that

- graduate attributes are understood by students even if they are not made explicit during their courses, and
- students would decide the relative importance they place on certain attributes over others based on a number of different criteria of what is important to them.

It is worth noting what Penny (one of the participants) has pointed out, namely that graduate attributes is about perception and is a highly individual process, sharing "... what I may perceive as a graduate attribute not everyone is going to so yeah perception of a graduate attributes differs per person. It is an individual process". This is a key point as it indicates how graduate attribute perceptions are very individual and how while these are developed for everyone it is also an individual process. Understanding students' perceptions thus moves us away from seeing them as passive recipients in the process, towards seeing them as active participants in the construction of the meaning of graduate attributes. It also connects to the conceptions provided by Barrie (2007) around the participatory conception which sees attributes as being developed through "... the way students participate in the experiences of university life".

4.3 THOSE WHO KNOW AND THOSE WHO DO NOT

Out of the ten students who participated in the initial focus group, four participants had not heard about the term. This fact highlighted the discrepancy between those who knew about graduate attributes and those who did not. This also indicates that the institution has perhaps not made graduate attributes explicitly known to all students. Penny, for instance, emphasised this point by saying: "...I just think there isn't much exposure to the learning of graduate attributes at the university". It was indicated by the participants that although graduate attributes are outlined in

course outlines and as part of module descriptors, they are not highlighted and clarified during the course which, in turn, could account for not all participants being familiar with the concept. This was reiterated by participant Amazon who stated: "... for each of my modules in the course outline, there would be graduate attributes but they don't read them, so I'm not sure if they are specific to the module". This could be related to what Winberg et al., (2018:235) have highlighted as university staff lacking understanding of graduate attributes and how they are achieved, thus demonstrating a general sense of apathy or resistance to them which hinders their development beyond course descriptions. This is also despite the institution's commitment to having graduate attributes as part of the university outcomes as has been highlighted in Chapter Two (see section 2.7). This lack of sensitivity clearly connects to Barrie's (2007:446) concern about how generic graduate attributes are developed specifically around the point that graduate attributes still remain secondary to disciplinary teaching.

Chiddy, another participant, shared that "...like for it to be the students that actually want to be... uhm ... have those attributes. I think it's more of the way the whole thing is structured". She continued: "I think if that were something that the university would rectify, more students would be aware of it and it would ...be something that everyone that has to do because when you get into the university there are certain things that everyone knows. I think we should make the graduate attributes something that everybody should know, not only those who want to further themselves".

4.4 VIEWS ON THE UWC ATTRIBUTE CHARTER

Participants had mixed awareness around whether UWC had a graduate attributes charter and there was even less awareness around the specifics of the charter. This was highlighted clearly by participant Chiddy who shared "We did it in first year. I don't recall ... I know there are five of them, I just don't recall them specifically". Other participants corroborated this statement with Sisonke sharing, "I've never heard about them in class; I just knew that 'okay maybe it's something that you should have', but then I was just like 'maybe I'm wrong, let me just keep quiet because I don't know where this is going". This raises the point of who should be responsible for graduate attribute development, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

Student participant Gio provided an alternate account of his experience, which also relates to the theoretical framework provided by Barrie (2007) which is discussed in section 2.2. He specifically touched on an aspect within both the remedial and associated conception. Gio shared that “... there was one course in my first year...they made it explicit... so it was just those specific people in the academic development department, in foundation year because the mainstream doesn't get, I don't think the mainstream gets ...” A few key points were raised in this contribution, namely that graduate attributes were made explicit in the first year of study and then not touched on again. Many institutions do focus on the first year experience (UWC: First years First, Stellenbosch University: First-year Academy (FYA), University of Free State: Gateway First-year College) but subsequent years do not receive the same level of focused support. Another point raised by Gio is that exposure to graduate attributes came through a co-curricular programme and was offered to foundation-level students. UWC also provides opportunities for students who often would not have access to university due to, for instance, matriculation results to be admitted to the university if they enrol for the foundation programme. This programme offers support in the form of intensive assistance in helping students to gain skills for success at university coupled with a lighter course load (UWC, 2013). This connects again to the referential conception of Barrie (2007:445) as outlined earlier in this chapter and in particular where it addresses a parallel module or workshop for students run by either the teacher or a generic skills ‘expert’ as part of an additional curriculum offering.

4.5 GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES: CURRICULAR OR CO-CURRICULAR

Another key question around graduate attributes relates to where they fit in. Should it be purely a co-curricular exercise, embedded in the curriculum, or layered within the university experience? I tend to adopt the view that it should be embedded within various components of the institution. This view is supported by Hill et al. (2016:157) who write that if we want to increase chances of success, graduate attributes should be implemented “systemically across programmes and institutions..., be embedded in course development ... and incorporated into extra-curricular ...”. For this to be achieved, there often needs to be a shift from a lecturer focus to a learner focus as Barrie (2007) has articulated, and as Hill et al. (2016:156) have highlighted there needs to be “... an embracing of students as partners in their learning journey”. As has also been highlighted earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 2 (section 2.7), UWC has adopted an approach to embed attributes

within university-wide processes. The question was put to participants to investigate how they have encountered graduate attributes within the context of the institution. Some participants such as Gio and Chiddy expressed the view that "... it was basically part of the course". Mo, on the other hand, shared that engaging in co-curricular programmes provided an opportunity to develop graduate attributes. He reiterated: "I think becoming a part of an organization exposes you to various different graduate attributes ... so I think the university provides opportunities for students to develop these graduate attributes before they graduate". Gio also provided how he has experienced graduate attributes within the co-curricular sharing: "... it's called the graduate development programme, in conjunction with CSS- and at the end of that programme so they teach you graduate attributes right, ... if you have attended enough classes because that's where the interest comes in as well ... you get a certificate from CSSS saying that you have these graduate attributes". These participant contributions highlight how the co-curricular programme provides an opportunity for GA development as well as confirming how the institution has embedded attribute development in various structures within the institution and not only as part of the academic project.

4.6 STRUCTURE OF THE INSTITUTION, RESPONSIBILITY FOR AND THE IMPACT ON GRADUATE ATTRIBUTE DEVELOPMENT

An important point of the investigation was whether the facilities within the institution have an impact on the development of graduate attributes. In this sense, practical elements need to be in place, such as not only the relevant policy, but also the necessary resources, environment, classrooms, materials and lecturers. Students questioned the resources and structure of the institution in the development of their GAs. Bushido, for instance, responded: "... how [are] you ... supposed to know about the world when you're reading books that are like from the 19th century"? Respondent Tom added: "I don't think the institution does give us enough platforms where we can like raise our views in terms of like the environment of the school and all that." However, participant Chiddy was able to share her view as follows:

lecturers are not intertwined per se because they are similar to us; they are here to do a work and we are here to learn, and then the university has its own attributes and things but then they don't tell the lecturers and then they don't inform the lecturers to incorporate it into their teaching, because I think if they did that the learners - because the learners have the interaction with the

university via the lecturers, not directly. So that link is not there; I think that's why most students do not know about any of this and that's why it's always on paper because the university is the paper and the lecturers are the face of the university, essentially because that's the only people we see and interact with so I think that where uhm the problem is that there's no link.

Participants also understood that the development of graduate attributes is a dual and joint process between students and the institution. Participant Bushido, for instance, shared the following: "... yeah we can all point fingers at the institution saying, pointing out their flaws, but it's also the work ethic of the student; the zeal of the student, but that's also a reflection of the university, like what the culture of the university is, is it very practical-based, is it research-based, because at the moment we're just getting information". Such feedback in particular highlights participants' recognition that the institution is a 'living' entity which has many layers that impact on attribute development. Chiddy, for instance, shared her view on this issue as follows:

like for it to be the students that actually want to be, uhm, have those attributes. I think it's more of the way the whole thing is structured; I think if that that were something that the university would rectify, more students would be aware of it and it would not be something that the minute people that want to - but then it's something that everyone that has to do it because when you get into the university there are certain things that everyone knows. I think we should make the graduate attributes something that everybody knows, not only those who want to further themselves.

The issue of who takes the responsibility for the development of graduate attributes thus also needs to be addressed. Should GA development be the responsibility of the institution, the academics or the students, or is this a shared responsibility among all three? Within the focus groups there was much discussion about who holds the responsibility for the development of graduate attributes.

One view was that it was all about the students. One participant (Bushido) was of the opinion that: "...there's no development unless you want to", while another (Penny) argued: "I think it falls back on what you perceive as what is needed for yourself, not only for a workplace or academically ... it comes back to you." In addition, Penny made the point that perhaps values and beliefs of the individual play a role in attribute development. This raises an important point around personal autonomy which connects with the last two conceptions in Barrie's (2007) frame, namely engagement and participation. These conceptions have a focus on the students and how they learn,

engage in learning and participate in university life. Within the participatory conception in particular, students' engagement with the university indicates how they will develop graduate attributes. One participant (Chiddy) shared her view on this:

I think if that were something that the university would rectify, more students would be aware of it and it would not be something that the minute people that want to - but then it's something that everyone that has to do it because when you get into the university there are certain things that everyone knows. I think we should make the graduate attributes something that everybody knows, not only those who want to further themselves - theory vs practical. The gap between practical and theory is wide. GA are not made alive for students. This might also be degree specific: if you do a more practically focused course, you would develop certain skills as you are trained in them, for instance in social work communication, teamwork and so on, but not in the science faculty.

Another view is that the interest and engagement of staff at the institution, particularly lecturing staff, have an impact on attribute development with differing views offered. Some such as Bushido held "the university has all these great things on paper, but when it comes to implementing it, we don't even get that enthusiasm from lecturers themselves. So how do you develop as a critical thinker when your lecturer doesn't even seem interested in lecturing the work itself?" Mo offered an alternative by putting forth "... in our faculty, the lecturers build close relations with students, so they encourage us to come to them ... Not just in class, but outside or in their office, I can go consult with them...". Chiddy provided a perfect summarisation of the issue highlighting how she sees students engaging not with the institution but with lecturers who act as the "face of the university" adding, "So that link is not there; I think that's why most students do not know about any of this and that's why it's always on paper because the university is the paper and the lecturers are the face of the university." What this highlights is the importance of lecturing staff in the development of graduate attributes and the necessity of having staff fully understanding the concept. This is problematic however as pointed out by Barrie (2012:79), who shared how academics tend to hold "qualitatively different conceptions of the phenomenon of graduate attributes" which results in a difference in importance or relevance given to attribute development and how it is taught and learnt.

As researcher I am of the opinion that there should be an interplay between the different stakeholders for the development of graduate attributes to be effective. A preferred position might

be one of reciprocal feedback which informs and feeds back to each other, for instance, from university (graduate attributes charter, policy) to lecturers and programmes, to students and, *vice versa*.

4.7 THE EMPLOYABILITY AGENDA

A key issue which often emerges within the discussion of graduate attributes is that of employability. As has been shown in Chapter Two (section 2.3.1), employability is a recurrent feature in many conversations around higher education (Treleaven and Voola, 2008). Within this study participants linked the issue of graduate attributes with that of employability and viewed the one as being in service of the achievement of the other. Student participant Penny viewed this issue as follows:

I think that we spend all this time or all these years in university learning about the work that we're going to go into one day and when you come into the work one day it's obvious that 30 percent might be work and 70 percent might be dealing with a team, or communicating with people or being ethical, so a lot of the time you're going to be in situations where you not going to just have to work.

Participant Gio shared the following: "... when employers are looking for a potential candidate, they're looking for you to have a set of skills". Along the same vein, participant Tom reiterated this, emphasising the necessity of skills for a graduate and how it provides students with an "... advantage over others in the workplace". It can be argued that these student views suggest a clear connection between the development of employability skills and academic skills. For instance, participant Penny said: "I think it falls back on what you perceive as what is needed for yourself, not only for a workplace or academically, but also for yourself to not only be a good employee or a good worker".

My view is that employability as an aspect of the graduate attributes discussion should be given attention as this is an area in which students in particular connect. They are, in my opinion, focused on employment and do not see the acquisition of certain skills as part of their holistic development but more in aid of the employability agenda. This interest could be used to entice more students to engage actively within both the curricular and co-curricular activities within the institution.

4.8 PHOTO ELICITATION

Through gathering photographs of participants, and subsequently the narratives participants provided for each photograph, further themes could be extracted which corresponded with much of what had emerged from the focus group and individual interview. The photographs provided a visual inventory of the participants' understanding of graduate attributes and captured deeper meanings as to how they interact and engage with the institution. The focus group and individual interview was an important way to discuss the photographs and capture their deeper meaning. A total of 15 photographs were collected from the three students who completed the photo elicitation activity. Participants shared their experience with the exercise which I found important to discuss as it had an impact on the photographs taken. For instance, participant Bushido shared, "I had fun with this, because there's a lot to a graduate ... So I went around looking at how our environment impacts us as graduates and I found some paradoxes." Whilst participant Penny shared the view that she came to the realisation through the activity that "... what I may perceive as a graduate attribute, not everyone is going to..." Individual perceptions were thus important and key features from some of the participant's narrative and photographs will be addressed below. In instances where individuals' faces are in view, the researcher has blurred the photographs to protect the individual's identity, confidentiality and anonymity.

Participant photographs: Bushido

Bushido's photographs focused on various signs around the university. The participant was critical of the institution and his interpretation of these were, however, very different to the actual signage. He applied his own understanding and perception to each photograph. Many of the photographs presented by this participant related to questioning, critical thinking and engagement which connects strongly with UWC attribute 1, namely as 'having a critical attitude towards knowledge'. For instance in Photograph 1 (see photograph image below), the participant has highlighted critical thinking as a graduate attribute not accepting things at face value and rather questioning assumptions. The sign in this instance was warning about drinking water and he took this to mean to not accept things at face value but rather to question as that is the role of a graduate. The

participant's narrative to photograph 1 below reads "When a paradox of this magnitude faces an institute of higher education, difficult questions must be asked and it is the responsibility of the student to ask them. One cannot be classified a graduate without having challenged the status quo. A graduate ignites critical thinking."



Photograph 1

In discussing photograph 2 (see photograph image below), the participant highlighted how he defaced a sign but justified this through indicating the need to question what is presented at face value. He shared during the discussion that the environment on campus is often not conducive to the development of graduates and questioning is necessary for graduates to develop critical thinking.

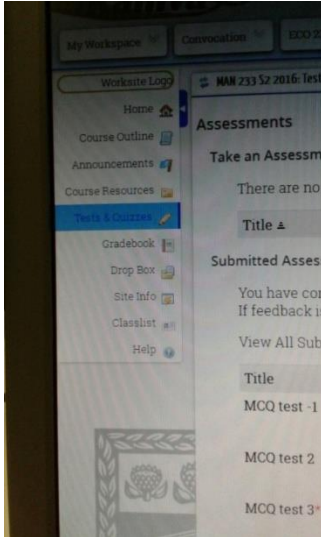


Photograph 2

Participant photographs: Penny

Participant Penny shared photographs that emphasised her views around the development of certain graduate attributes. Her photographs 5-8 listed below (each with a caption taken from her written description of the images) connected strongly with the UWC graduate attributes charter. Her photograph 5 as an example (see photograph image below) spoke to the importance of being ethically aware and responsible, which is highlighted in UWC GA Charter 2009 as students being able to “*demonstrate a thorough knowledge of ethical, social, cultural and environmental issues relating to their disciplines and make professional and leadership decisions in accordance with these principles.*” The full narrative provided by Penny in relation to this photograph connects to the impact of unethical behaviour on employment prospects. She had indicated through the discussion that she viewed the benefits of graduate attributes as being “a good job hopefully”, again reiterating the importance of the employability agenda. Another key area raised by Penny through the discussion is the individuality of graduate attributes in that students would draw on the attributes which connect to them personally and how they envision themselves. She outlined “I think why I chose these types of attributes is because of my values. I think it falls back on what

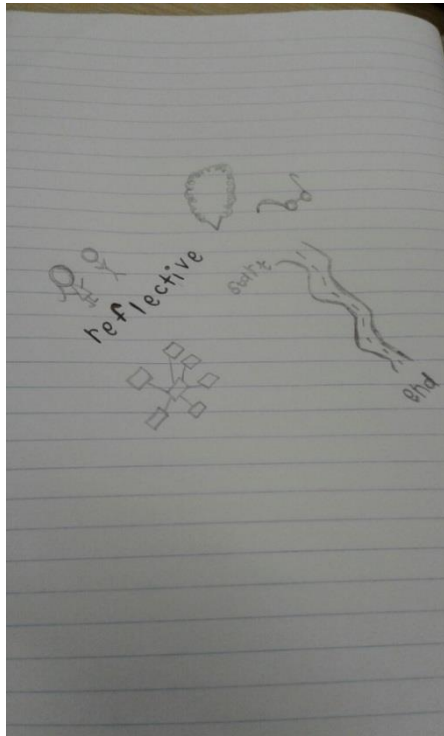
you perceive as what is needed for yourself, not only for a workplace or academically but also for yourself to not only be a good employee or a good worker but a good citizen, an all-around good citizen so it's not just for everyone else. It's not just my qualities or my attributes for everyone else but for myself.”



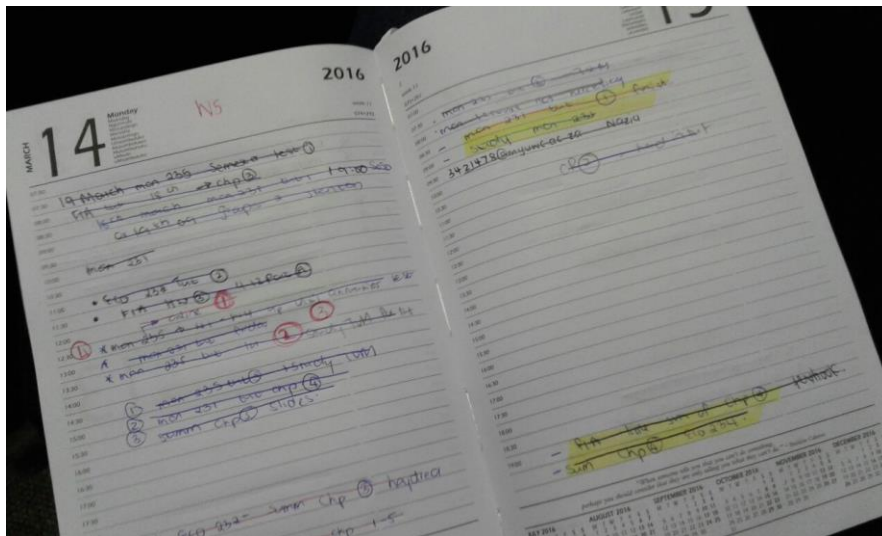
Photograph 5 -“To me being ethical has always been a very how can I say, I always, I don’t cheat. I don’t – it’s not something that I do. If I do something like that I would feel bad about it and I would feel like my work isn’t worthy.”



Photograph 6 -“It’s phones, uhm and to me being – you must be digitally literate, technology wise ... for academic or for your work or for future jobs. I don’t have that, and it makes me feel like I will be excluded because of that ...”



Photograph 7 - “It looks like nothing I know, uhm it – it made me realize that what we actually do in our course like a lot is reflecting and obviously what we do here a lot is reflecting”



Photograph 8 “This one looks like a mess; everything looks like a mess for me. OK, this is my diary on a good day. Uhm, when I looked at this I thought of how a person must be competent, in the sense that if you set out a goal, try to achieve it”

Participant photographs: Mo

What was of interest in Mo's individual interview was that many of his photographs featured people he had connected with; see photographs 9-15 listed below (photographs blurred to protect individual's identity). He highlighted in particular in photograph 9 the importance of engaging across difference. This speaks to the UWC Charter of GA 2009 around interpersonal flexibility and the ability to engage across difference where graduates should be able to "... interact with people from a variety of backgrounds" (UWC Charter of Graduate attributes: 2009). Further in his photographs he presented how he engages with graduate attributes at the institution through participation in co-curricular programmes and working within a team. This in particular connects with the UWC Charter of GA 2009, specifically where it speaks to graduates being autonomous and collaborative, which speaks to the ability to work both within a team and independently. Mo also highlighted through his photographs the importance of communication and this again connects to the UWC GA charter around developing as skilled communicators (UWC Charter of Graduate attributes: 2009).



Photograph 9 - "Making friends in life is very important for me because it exposes me to different beliefs, cultures and backgrounds. Thus, one of the graduate attributes that allows you to learn about other people is a relationship builder."



Photograph 10 - “I also believe that one must be a self-directed and responsible worker.”



Photograph 11- “One of the graduate attributes that I perceive as one of the greatest, is being a good team contributor. This is our street law programme, created by the law resource centre as an extramural activity. We go back to prisons and rehabilitations to educate people about their basic human rights.”



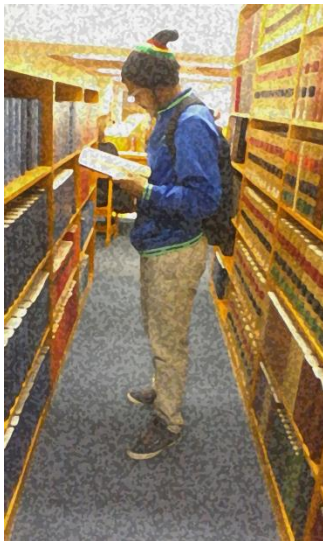
Photograph 12 -“Another graduate attribute is to be able to communicate effectively, be it in front of an audience or not. This image shows our team empowering people who accept the mistakes that they have made to become better individuals for the future.”



Photograph 13 – “One of the most exciting graduate attributes is to be a curious researcher. The degree that I am pursuing requires one to research on daily basis because the law keeps updating.”



Photograph 14 –“The ability to work well with other people to achieve the same goal is also one of the important graduate attributes. Here we had a 3-legged race, carrying a cup of water on our heads to fill the bucket at the end.”



Photograph 15 - “One of the graduate attributes which I feel is the most important one is to be a proficient reader. Although everything has become electronic these days, it still doesn’t stop me from going into our library, taking a book and start reading even if it anything”.

4.9 CONCLUSION

The general view gathered from the responses indicates that participants have a mixed understanding of what graduate attributes at UWC are and how they are developed within the

context of the university. There also seems to be a lack of clarity around who holds the responsibility for the development of graduate attributes. For some, the responsibility rests with the individual and what they hold important, whilst still others view this as solely the responsibility of the institution to impart to students. The chapter focused on the data and photographs collected from the different sources organised under the main research questions and analysed into particular themes. Chapter 5 will focus on the conclusions that can be drawn from the study findings and the implications thereof as well as the limitations to this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to this study, I argued that student voices are absent in the academic discourse around graduate attributes. This is mainly because relevant literature tends to focus on academics', institutions' and employers' understanding of graduate attributes. The key aim of this study was to investigate students' perceptions of their learning of graduate attributes at UWC. In Chapter Two, the various literature perspectives around graduate attributes were addressed. I outlined the theoretical framework which was adopted for the study, which mainly followed Barrie's (2007) graduate attribute framework. In addition, there was an attempt to contextualise graduate attributes from an international, BRICS and local perspective. Chapter Three focused on providing the research methodology used for this study. In particular, my knowledge position was clarified, as this provided the frame through which the study was executed. An explanation of the various strategies for generating data was also put forth. Chapter 4 outlined the empirical findings of the research focusing on students' perceptions of the learning of graduate attributes within UWC. This final chapter focuses on interpreting and discussing the findings from the empirical part of the study as outlined in Chapter 4 and drawing a number of conclusions based on these findings. The conclusions are drawn in relation to the theoretical perspectives that emerged from Chapter 2. The theoretical and practical implications of the study are highlighted and options for future research are suggested. Finally, the limitations of the study are presented.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

As outlined in Chapter One section 1.1, students' participation within the discussion of graduate attributes is relatively absent in academic discourse. Below is a discussion of the findings regarding the students' perception of the learning of graduate attributes at UWC.

5.2.1 Awareness of graduate attributes

This study found that there was a variegated level of understanding amongst participants around graduate attributes. As outlined in Chapter Four section 4.3, four out of ten participants had not heard about this term prior to the study. This mixed awareness was not limited to specific faculties, years of study nor gender. A diverse understanding of their inherent graduate attributes can be a potential drawback to how they articulate that they have certain skills to potential employers, the institute or even for their own understanding. This mixed awareness could be a result of inconsistency around how graduate attributes are articulated to students through the institution via the curriculum, co-curricular and institutional structures and policy. Students highlighted this inconsistency with some sharing how it was offered through the extended programme, in that some students have not had the experience of graduate attributes as a course because these concepts were not included in their coursework and because these students were not in an extended programme (see Chapter Four section 4.4). Additionally, certain lecturers may not highlight these concepts during curriculum delivery or students have not had exposure to these concepts during co-curricular programming.

What this also indicates is that the institutional commitment to graduate attributes is not being fulfilled. As highlighted in Chapter Two section 2.7, the institution recognised the necessity of embedding attributes within the degree programmes. However, this has often been limited to course outlines and as was highlighted in Chapter Two, the lack of engagement between faculties and the curricula and co-curricular projects can be attributed to the disjointed way in which GA were rolled out at the institution.

In terms of student awareness around graduate attributes, it can be concluded that there is an inconsistency around the awareness of these concepts. While the results are not particularly noteworthy, the fact that the majority of students were aware of graduate attributes is positive. However, the inconsistency around the specifics of graduate attributes, how it is taught and learnt, is worth further investigation.

5.2.2 Attributes of importance and awareness of the UWC charter

What could be determined from the participants' feedback is that despite the various differences between students (faculty, gender, age), there were similarities in what they put forward as important graduate attributes. It matched with key attributes outlined in Chapter Two (Table 2.1) as well as those outlined in the UWC Attributes Charter (2009). From this one might assume that perhaps the words 'graduate attributes' are often unfamiliar to students. There is, however, recognition around the importance of certain skills to improve, for instance, employability as participant Sisonke clearly highlighted (see Chapter 4 section 4.4). This also indicates that attributes are not necessarily developed in a standard way. What this confirms is that attributes are developed in a variety of different ways and, as such, the participant students' feedback corresponded with the theory suggested by Barrie (2007) and discussed in section 2.2. Participants in the study were also not fully aware of whether UWC has a graduate attributes charter and exactly what the contents of the attributes charter are (see Chapter Four section 4.4). What this means is that the current approach to sharing graduate attributes at the institution does not seem to reach students in a consistent manner.

5.2.3 Self-interest

What further emerged from the study findings is that participants' understandings of how attributes are developed appear to be vastly different. This aspect speaks again to the perceptions students hold and what is important to one person might not be important to another, as evidenced by the statement from participant Penny (see Chapter 4 section 4.2). The clarity and use of graduate attributes thus seem to be largely individualised for different students. For instance, some students outlined the importance of various co-curricular activities in the development of their graduate attributes (see Chapter 4 sections 4.5 and 4.8; participant photographs of Mo). Others indicated the importance of their interest in their own personal development (Chapter 4 section 4.6; contributions by participants Bushido and Penny). The student feedback thus indicated that not one standard approach to graduate attribute development needs to be offered to students. One of the causes of these differences in perception might be due to differences in self-evaluation and,

consequently, it seems necessary to engage students in the process of graduate attribute development to become meaningful to them.

The study results clearly indicated the importance of recognising students as active agents in the understanding and development of their own graduate attributes. It should thus not be a process ‘done to them’ but rather ‘with them’ as individual- and self-interest play an important part in how students will take up the challenge of developing attributes for themselves outside of the formal institutional curriculum.

5.2.4 Importance of staff in the attainment of attributes

A key finding which emerged from the study is the value placed on teaching staff, in particular with regard to the development of graduate attributes. Participants see lecturing staff as being the ‘face’ of the institution and critical in how they, as students, engage with and experience the institution (see Chapter Four, section 4.6). A recent report by the British Council (2015:1) on South Africa confirms this, highlighting that “... the quality of teaching, and teaching methods significantly influences intellectual and personal development and the formation of critical knowledge and skills for working in a diverse society.”

From the study, it further emerged that there seems to be little consistency amongst lecturing and support staff around how graduate attributes should be developed. This issue has been raised quite prominently by authors such as Barrie (2006) and Green et al. (2009) who shared that differences in teaching and learning and lecturers’ incoherent definitions of graduate attributes lead to, as Barrie (2006:6) describes, “... patchy implementation”, and is often the result of individual understanding around graduate attributes. In the present study participants highlighted that their exposure to graduate attributes came as part of course outlines and module descriptors (see Chapter Four, section 4.3). What this means is that the institutional commitment to attribute development (see Chapter Two, section 2.7) cannot be guaranteed as the ‘face of the institution’ (see Chapter 4, section 4.6; contribution by participant Chiddy), lecturers and staff, often have different priorities, definitions of and understandings of graduate attributes and their importance. Staff are more than often “... disengaged with graduate attributes” as there is a preference to focus on discipline

content, as was outlined by Oliver (2013:453). The lack of awareness from staff and their engagement in the process of graduate attribute development clearly provides for ripple effects on how students perceive and learn about graduate attributes.

The inconsistency amongst staff around graduate attributes is however not a new phenomenon. This is despite a push to the contrary from governments, employers and institutions (see Chapter Two, section 2.6), a factor also highlighted by Barrie (2012) and Bester (2014). Often the reason for graduate attributes not being presented, is that staff themselves do not understand what is meant by the notion of graduate attributes. As has been established in Chapter Two, section 2.3, establishing a meaning or definition of graduate attributes is a complex undertaking with no one definition agreed upon universally. What this means is that lecturing staff also would have fundamentally different views of graduate attributes. The interest of staff in the development of student attributes and skills is also often an indication of whether attributes would be given any additional time within the curriculum. Lecturing staff may place emphasis on discipline content rather than on graduate attributes and this may be a result of the difference between disciplines, some of which might not lend themselves to incorporate or promote graduate attributes into the core curriculum easily. Additionally, the level of interest of the lecturer in the concept of graduate attributes, as well as the limitations provided by practical issues such as amount of teaching time allocated to a particular module, may have a negative impact in the foregrounding of graduate attributes within a particular discipline. Participants in the present study also highlighted (see Chapter Four, section 4.6) that staff interest has an impact on how they perceive and experience the institution (and subsequently graduate attributes) but this trend could be faculty-specific.

It can thus be concluded that apparently, staff at all levels of the institution have an integral role to play in the learning and experience of graduate attributes for students. However, there needs to be a shared understanding on the part of lecturing staff around graduate attributes and their importance towards students' future success.

5.2.5 The employability agenda

Participants in the present study recognised the value of employability skills (see Chapter 4, section 4.7) and that a degree qualification on its own may not be sufficient for preparing them for the world of work.

It is therefore important to acknowledge that employability is an important consideration to students when thinking about graduate attributes and this seems to influence students' perceptions about the importance of such attributes. Being merely 'prepared for a job market' is quite a narrow perspective and this is often how students perceive the employability discussion. In addition, the graduate attributes developed or the "tacit skills" (as pointed out by participant Gio) are necessary to enable students to succeed within the workplace, manage teams, negotiate conflict, and communicate effectively (see Chapter 4, section 4.7 and the contribution by participant Penny). Again, as highlighted by the British Council report on South Africa (2015:15), "...the responsibility to develop the graduate attributes of individual job-seekers lies with a combination of the individual, the university and the society."

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study have implications for institutional policies and practices regarding the learning of graduate attributes and have implications regarding prioritisation, resourcing and integration. These implications relate to theoretical, practical and future research issues as outlined below.

5.3.1 Theoretical implications

In view of the study findings there probably needs to be a review and reengagement with graduate attributes at a theoretical level throughout the institution. As has been pointed out, students are often uninvolved in the process of discussing and debating the underpinning points of departure regarding this domain of inquiry. Staff at all levels, but especially the lecturing staff, need to reach some common understanding of graduate attributes and how it could be developed within the context of UWC. What could contribute to the debate is the setting of "minimum" criteria to ensure that all students are engaged in the basic introduction to the concept of graduate attributes and the notion is not merely relegated to course outlines and the responsibility of the co-curricular context. This might need scholarly discussions of the issue for which the current research provides a basis. It might also require some institutional recommitment to graduate attributes not as a once-off, but as a continuous process of checking and rechecking to ensure their relevance for students, staff,

society and employers. This will inevitably require the staff and students of the institution to rethink the importance and emphasis placed on graduate attributes and whether additional resources need to be directed towards this endeavour.

5.3.2 Practical implications

Based on the study findings, a number of practical implications emerged. One implication is that there seems to be multiple ways in which attributes could be developed. This might necessitate the institution to clarify how it would like graduate attributes to be developed so that there is a greater level of consistency among faculties and year levels. As Barrie (2006, 2007) points out, there needs to be a shift in how teaching is conducted in higher education from merely delivering information and skills to rather, as Bester (2014:4) outlines, the creation of "... curricula that support a holistic, emancipatory, reflective, lifewide and lifelong learning process". This implies some review of how teaching is offered and learning facilitated and in particular, how graduate attributes are placed and developed within the institutional curriculum.

What the current study has also clearly shown is the need for communication between formal curricula and the co-curricular project to ensure that there is no separation and that the development of graduate attributes is not relegated as the responsibility of the one or the other. Embedding attributes within all areas of learning within the institution is important as this offers students the opportunity to develop attributes in ways that best suit their learning styles, approaches and for what they personally regard as important to them.

5.3.3 Future research implications

The study highlighted a clear need for further research to be conducted in higher education institutions regarding students' perceptions of their learning of graduate attributes, particularly within the South African context. More research and analysis seem to be needed as to how students can be more engaged and involved in how graduate attributes are developed within higher education institutions and embedded within various institutional structures. Such research could be strengthened further by inquiring into graduate attributes with a focus on the link between graduate attributes and employability. This is an extremely important issue for both higher education and employers in South Africa.

A final suggestion for a future research agenda item involves further studies around staff at all levels of higher education institutions to determine their engagement with the learning and development of graduate attributes and how new staff could be best orientated towards promoting graduate attributes with students. This could possibly take the form of a staff training programme and its evaluation to show how the graduate attributes can be more universally and holistically incorporated into higher education classrooms and their co-curricular projects. Such research may promote the development of vocational discernment courses which would afford lecturers more time and a firmer platform to make connections between course material and graduate attributes.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

No study is perfect and the aspects mentioned below might be regarded as issues that, to some extent, limited the study and its findings.

The study was limited in scope and size, It focused on a small group of students engaged in the programme offerings of the LSR office during the year 2016 only. Students from the wider UWC community were thus excluded from this study. This was done to limit the amount of data generated and from those students engaged in co-curricular studies, who hopefully had a more nuanced understanding of graduate attributes. Another limitation of the study is the relatively small number of participants selected due to the small pool of available students who had met the participation selection criteria. One limitation of a small sample is that the findings cannot be generalised. However, the advantage of limited numbers is that the student responses, especially those from photo elicitation, could be generated in much more depth.

Another limitation could be the use of photo elicitation of which the researcher and the student participants had limited prior experience. As a result, there were possibly some gaps in the way the method was used. To overcome this limitation to some measure, students were provided with photo elicitation instructions to assist in the process and minimise confusion. Another limitation could be that the focus group sessions and the individual interview were driven by the researcher's own informed understanding of how such interviews should be conducted and which might have also been a limiting factor.

Despite these limitations, the data generated appeared to be of acceptable validity and highlighted important areas for an improved understanding of students' perceptions of graduate attributes at one higher education institution. The data also provided a substantiated basis for drawing a number of important conclusions.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The nature of higher education and the demands of society necessitate that students be equipped beyond mere disciplinary knowledge. Discussions around graduate attributes cannot be dismissed, as to do so will do a disservice to students who need to be prepared to face the uncertain future, which awaits them post-university. This study set out to improve an understanding of how students perceive their learning of graduate attributes within one higher education institution. This was done against the background of the international and local higher education landscape and research conducted thus far on the importance of the learning of graduate attributes as exit-level competences for students. In view of the study results, it would be necessary to rethink how graduate attributes are presented to and facilitated with staff and students in order to increase engagement with this issue. Academic and other staff will probably need to be fully and continually briefed on the possibilities and practices of graduate attribute learning.

When looking at the primary research question that was posed for this study it can be concluded that student learning of graduate attributes is clearly layered. This 'layered-ness' comes down to a combination of students' self-interest and perceptions, the need for staff engagement with developing graduate attributes and the reality that there does not seem to be any linear process that can be followed to ensure that graduate attributes are developed. It also seems imperative that, for graduate attributes to be made "real" to students, their engagement with graduate attributes is necessary so they are active agents in the process of their professional and personal development.

Broadly speaking, it is hoped this study will add to the body of literature around graduate attributes within the South African context especially. Furthermore, it is envisaged that a process can begin through which students are meaningfully engaged in discussions around graduate attributes as this

has a direct impact on them and how they emerge from the institution. The integral role of staff in the dissemination of information around graduate attributes is critical and a process of educating staff around a commonly agreed definition of graduate attributes as outlined by the institution is necessary. Finally, it is my opinion that the development of graduate attributes is not solely the responsibility of the institution but rather through the combination of the individual, the institution and society at large. The value of the current study is probably in the fact that it has been able to clarify how graduate attributes are perceived by a cohort of students within one higher education institution in South Africa.

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SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTS

Sample: Focus Group 1

Starting from: 00:00

Researcher: You qualify for this study due to your involvement in the co-curricular and curricular offerings at UWC, because this provides you with a unique understanding of the concept of graduate attributes. The purpose of this study is really to understand your construction; learning of graduate attributes in the University of the Western Cape. Essentially, universities are saying that they want to prepare students as agents of social good for the future, so not only through your degree would you have just 'expert' knowledge in a specific domain; you would not just be a social worker, a teacher, or a lawyer. But you will be someone who is able to contribute to society in a broader way. The universities are saying that, through these charters, students need to develop teamwork skills and active citizenship skills. We know that these are important for employers; they are looking for these co-curricular skills, or 'graduate attributes', in people that they employ. So essentially, this is what we want to uncover. What we know from the literature is that there is not a focus on students' voice within that. So, often it is coming from academia and employers saying 'this is what we think students should be developing; this is what we think is important for them'. But what I really want to understand is how do students perceive graduate attributes; what do students perceive the importance of it being; is it necessary or not? Do you see it reflected in our UWC curricular space or co-curricular space, and how do you make sense of graduate attributes, so that we can start infusing the students' voice because you are taking more ownership within your learning process. That is in essence what I would want to investigate. Essentially, the procedure would be that we would do a first focus group, and thank you for being here. It's just really to get your understanding of graduate attributes and we will go - it's going to be a semi-structured interview so I'll put a few questions out there and we'll really lead the process together, ok? And that will take place today and whoever chooses to continue, I will then explain to you the photo elicitation. Photo elicitation is a form of ethnography and what we are basically doing is to have you take photos of how you perceive, understand and construct graduate attributes in reality. So when we talk about it, it's one thing, but when you are actually outside and you're in class or

working in a team, how does it actually happen for you? Does it make sense for you outside of this controlled space? How are you seeing graduate attributes actualized? If at all, because it might be that it doesn't, and you're not seeing it. So, the photo elicitation will require you to just take a few photographs, a maximum of ten, five minimum, and provide a short narrative description of each photograph and that will then help with the second part (the second focus group), where we will examine each photograph and then really look at what was the meaning you took from it and why it was important. Some of the photographs will be included in your narratives and in the study. I want to, as much as possible, get student voices into the study and not have it be something where I am just writing out of one focus group, you know, what you perceive graduate attributes to be. So the benefit is an opportunity for us to grow and develop our knowledge around graduate attributes and it will not directly impact you, but it may impact on how graduate attributes are developed in other institutions and how they are voiced at UWC, because they will be provided with a copy of this thesis once it is complete.

Gio: sorry, I'm late

Researcher: Welcome, thank you, welcome. You can take a seat. So in terms of confidentiality, any information that is obtained in connection with the study and can be traced to you will remain confidential and only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by the use of pseudonyms, and that's where the little sheet is coming through. That's why we wanted you to include that sheet. We wanted you to include that sheet where you include your pseudonym and we will know that this is the name we'll use throughout the study for you, and that we will also use pixelization and anonymizing software for the photographs taken so that we can protect the privacy of others who have not consented to be part of the study. All information is strictly confidential. Information regarding your participation will only be made available to my supervisor, Prof. Bitzer at Stellenbosch University and members of the ethics committee at Stellenbosch. Any information not included in the report will be discarded after 5 years and no information will be disclosed to a third party. As the researcher, I will have access to the recordings and transcriptions and you will be able to access these if you would like a copy of them. The study findings could be used in subsequent studies, but it does not imply the need to publish the photographs, because the photographs are used primarily as a prompt to elicit more responses. Participation and withdrawal: You can choose whether to be part of the study or not; it is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. You could refuse to answer a question and any question you

don't want to answer and still remain in this study. If you just want to sit and listen, you're welcome to do that as well. Identification of investigators: if you have any questions or concerns you can contact me, Monique Withering, and I have provided you with both my contact numbers, both my office and cellphone number, as well as the office address, in case you need to come and chat to me or my supervisor, Prof. Bitzer at the Centre for Higher and Adult Education in Stellenbosch. There are no foreseeable risks to your participation in the study. However, there may be an unknown risk, for example, if something does come up for you and you can let me know and we can make a referral through to CSSS for further counselling. You will receive no payment for your participation; it's voluntary and you may withdraw your consent at any time. So, even if, in two months, you do not want to have your voice portrayed in the study, you can come to me and we will exclude your information from the research results or data. This is just stating that you are consenting voluntarily and if you can include your name, and obviously you do not have a legal representative. I trust that everyone is over 18, and then at the bottom is my information that will be included. So that is the first Consent to Participate. Question?

Gio: Can I just ask a question?

Researcher: Sure, of course.

Gio: Maybe I missed it because I came late, but this consent, is it just for the focus group or the focus group and the photographs?

Researcher: The photography will have a separate consent form, if people do choose to participate in the photography or the photo elicitation section of the research. There is also a focus group; so this was what I explained now, the consent to participate in research document and then we also have a focus group consent form which was the first form right on the top which is basically saying that, because we're in a focus group setting we are compromising our anonymity because we can identify each other from this space, so our anonymity and privacy is compromised through this process and that it will also be digitally recorded, and that we are going to respect our fellow participants and not share the information outside of this space. The sheet right at the back is your participant data information sheet and that one is where you can put in your name and surname and the pseudonym you would like to be known by, and this will be the pseudonym that we use throughout the research to identify you and your contributions. Once you have chosen the pseudonym, write the pseudonym on the sheet and as we would do, make it into a little name tent and we would use that and turn it around when we want to say something, because we would like

to create a space where we can all contribute what we like. So if you could put your pseudonyms on there and if possible we could start. As I said, this is going to be a semi-structured process, because I would like you to be able to give your own input. To kick us off, how have you heard about graduate attributes before today? Is this something that you've heard about before?

Participants: "Yes" - "No"

Researcher: So, how many 'no's'? Can you raise your hand? So we have one, two, three, and four. Four 'no's for people who have not heard about the term and one, two, three, four, five, six people who have heard about the term, right? For those who have heard about graduate attributes, what does it mean to you? How do you understand the concept?

Researcher: Bushido?

Bushido: Yes, a graduate attribute is something that you should be able to do after your degree, the skills you have acquired, so if you are a lawyer, you should be able to define certain laws or you should have a knowledge of those laws, as with a sports scientist, you should know the sports and all the injuries - all-encompassing things that you've learnt throughout your degree.

Researcher: Great, so it is about expertise knowledge for you Bushido, having the competencies once you leave university to be an expert in a certain space and be able to be a professional in essence.

Bushido: Absolutely.

Researcher: Great, great, thank you. Chiddy?

Chiddy: Basically what he said, and to add, it is also being able to apply yourself ethically correct and not, for example, take myself; when you are doing a research programme, you should be always objective and not let your personal issues get in the way and always do it with a clear head and so forth, so that is what it means to me.

Researcher: Great, so it's having that expert knowledge but, besides that expert knowledge in a specific domain, being able to be morally aware and ethically guided and to have other things that are not necessarily developed through your expert knowledge within your domain, developed as well once you leave the institution. Great, thank you. Can I go to you?

Gio: So, what I think about graduate attributes is, it's away from the textbook; knowledge that can't be found in a textbook; things like interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, teamwork. When employers are looking for a potential candidate, they're looking for you to have a set of skills. So everyone that has a degree knows the work in the textbook, but do you know how to

conduct yourself in a setting where there are people from different cultures and backgrounds? So, I think it's more about the tacit skills than the actual knowledge that can be found in a textbook.

Researcher: So what are these tacit skills; if I were to ask you from your understanding of which tacit skills are really essential to develop, which would those be?

Gio: Mine would definitely be conflict resolution, and if I can give an example, for instance, you come to your new office and the person sitting next to you has really poor hygiene, but this person is your superior. Now if you go up to them and confront them directly about their hygiene, you're going to come out last, you understand? You need to know how to deal with that, and also interpersonal skills and effective collaboration, leadership, and to be enterprising in the workplace. Otherwise, you will stagnate if you don't take opportunities, but many people don't know this; they just know the textbook.

Researcher: Okay, great. Thank you, Gio. Penny?

Penny: I agree with Gio in the sense that it's not just about if you walk into a workplace. It's not about what you learnt in your degree alone. Like if you look at applications for work or university, they don't ask you just what marks you got. They ask you, what have you been doing culturally; what have you been doing on the sports field, for example, so it's not just about the work and the actual theory, but about other areas you may be good at or other attributes you can bring into an organization.

Researcher: Great, thank you. Right, so for those that have not necessarily heard of this before today or before the email was sent requesting your participation in this study: What did you get once you started, because obviously now I've put this term out to you, what prompted you to say 'you know I'm still interested in this, I'm going to go research it'? What did you find once you Googled or thought about the term a little bit more? If you want to share, of course.

Tom: Honestly, for me, I've heard about it before, graduate attributes, but I didn't really go too much into it. I was browsing it and what I saw, I think there were four, not sure; I just went through them. But like they said, it's more about your ethics, your values, like how you should conduct yourself after university, when you graduate in the workplace. So that's what I got, not the whole thing fully.

Researcher: Great, great. It is really about you leading this process and contributing your voice, and with graduate attributes, there is no one right answer. So if you were to Google the term, essentially, it is about developing expert knowledge, but also about developing those additional

skills required for you to be a more holistically developed person. So that you can contribute to a team, you can engage in conflict resolution and develop all these different skills. So, do you know if UWC has a graduate attributes charter?

Chiddy: Yes, they do,

Researcher: So, you're saying yes, Chiddy. Do you know anything about the graduates attributes charter?

Chiddy: I do. We did it in first year. I know there are five of them; I just don't recall them specifically. But they do have them and urge students to know about them and everything.

Researcher: So where did you hear about them? Where in your first year, because other people have indicated that it wasn't told to them in their first year and we're like all 2nd to 4th year in this room, so where did you hear about it?

Chiddy: It was in my course; it was basically part of the course. For example, for reports or anything that you had to deliver, you had to always go back to them.

Researcher: So, it was infused quite clearly into your curriculum.

Chiddy: Yes.

Researcher: That you developed these additional skills. So for the others, that wasn't something that was very explicit in your curriculum?

Gio: If I may add, also similar to what she said now, there was one course in my first year. I think we're talking about the same course, in the commerce faculty?

Chiddy: No.

Researcher: You're in different faculties as well.

Gio: Oh okay, no then, we are not. But they made it explicit, only one though. They would like you to be, what they like to call a well-rounded student; so if they give you a lot of work, that would determine how good your work ethic is going to be and that would be the graduate attribute that they were working on, or whether you would come for consultation, things like that; your dedication; very tacit, but not like hardcore. So, it was just that, but, other than that, no, I haven't. It was just those specific people in the academic development department, in foundation year, because I don't think the mainstream gets.

Chiddy: Yes, they don't.

Researcher: Okay, so there's a lot of people saying if you're doing foundation, you would have got this additional year, but if you were doing the mainstream course, you would not have got these

additional sessions, where you focused on things such as academic planning, where the academic planning unit spoke maybe more explicitly about the development of these attributes. Sorry, Amazon you wanted to say something...

Amazon: Yes, for me, I think like for each of my modules in the course outline, there would be graduate attributes, but they don't read them, so I'm not sure if they are specific to the module, so for each module where you have a course outline, you're going to get the graduate attribute.

Researcher: So, it's listed there but it's not really made clear to you what these things are, because clearly, if it is put there, but some of us have not heard about it before we got here, or before this was said to us, this means that there is a mismatch, because UWC does have a strong graduate attributes charter and it's one of the best in the country. However, and this is part of what I'm wanting to do through this research, to understand if it is actualized to students and Bushido, you're shaking your head that it's not really, but it is put there, but maybe, it's not coming clear through our academic planning and lecturers are not articulating it in a way that makes it clear. Because sometimes, you know, UWC is saying that they want you to develop a critical attitude toward knowledge and scholarship, and there's the four main graduate attributes that they list and then they break that down further but it may not be clearly articulated through your studies, right? Sorry, Bushido

Bushido: Yes, I feel like the university has all these great things on paper, but when it comes to implementing it, we don't even get that enthusiasm from lecturers themselves. So how do you develop as a critical thinker when your lecturer doesn't even seem interested in lecturing the work itself? Like, we can't be great graduates if our institute doesn't even support us. It's just a building, that's essentially what the place is to me, where your lecturers are so distant and there is no interest when they give the course and the work, is just reading straight from the lecture and there's no enthusiasm, there's no enthusiasm from students to go out and develop themselves as critical thinkers

Researcher: Yes, so that lack of connection between turning the space less from a building that's concrete and more into an active space of learning and engagement and critical scholarship. So in essence, lecturers need to be living those same set of attributes because they are being modeled to you, in a sense, how you want to develop. Thank you, Mo.

Mo: All I want to say is, in our faculty, the lecturers build close relations with students, so they encourage us to come to them, so we have personal relationships. Not just in class, but outside or

in their office, I can go consult with them, so what he was saying, about students not having that connection with lecturers: we in the law faculty, we have that. And I am part of the top achievers programme in the law faculty, so in that programme, they teach you how to be a good student and the good attributes of a being a good student.

Researcher: And it's a great thing that you're mentioning the top achievers programme. It's one example and I'm sure the other faculties also do this where they are providing opportunities outside of your curriculum where you could develop and that is an example of them really putting into practice those graduate attributes, because through those programmes you get exposure to networking opportunities, access to additional sessions which cover things that are not necessarily covered in your curriculum, and building relationships as well with both practitioners of the law but also with lecturers because you're getting a much more personalized experience with them. Great, thank you.

Chiddy; I just want to comment on what they both said. I think they're both right in a sense because I think there is a difference, like it's not - the university and the lecturers are not intertwined, per se, because they are similar to us; they are here to do work and we are here to learn and then the university has its own attributes and things, but then they don't inform the lecturers to incorporate it into their teaching, because, I think if they did that, the learners have interactions with the university via the lecturers, not directly. So that link is not there. I think that's why most students do not know about any of this and that's why it's always on paper because the university is the paper and the lecturers are the face of the university. Essentially, that's the only people we see and interact with, so, I think that is where the problem is, that there's no link.

Researcher: Okay, so it may be beautifully written but the actual reality is not coming through. So this thing might be beautiful on paper and we might have one of the best in the country, but in your opinion and obviously we can't generalize - but in this room, there is maybe a bigger agreement that it is not really very explicit for everyone that graduate attributes are real. Tom, sorry.

Tom: I just want to comment on what Mo just said. He said that there is a group, the top achiever group, so they get exposed to these graduate attributes and they get the opportunity to learn about these things but I'm sure that's a small percentage of students who get that. What about the rest? Why can't they make a platform for students to grow, you know, those who are interested - because you can't force everyone - but those who are interested to kind of get the chance to learn about this, I think that would be ...

Researcher: You see, so, I think that part of that and maybe - okay let me not participate in that. Let me maybe ask others to comment. So Sisonke, you had something to contribute, sorry.

Sisonke: I think it's more of - now that Amazon mentioned it, like it's on the course outline, it's there. But they don't even say 'look at it; this is what we're looking for after you've achieved this course'. They just say, 'okay lecture one, look at that case and that case'. They don't care about what they expect of you after that course. So they expect you to read - but then on the other hand, it's like, you'll figure it out yourself and we know - we're always anxious, we're always scared so we don't want to waste our time reading something that is not prescribed and maybe graduate attributes, I've never heard about them in class, I just knew that 'okay maybe it's something that you should have', but then I was just like 'maybe I'm wrong; let me just keep quiet because I don't know where this is going'. So now as I hear from the others, it's just like, I think it is there, but it is not practised or preached. It's just our Bible. We know it.

Researcher: Okay so it's not really something that you are seeing in practice even though the university is saying that they want all their graduates to, in essence, come out of their degree with all of these things. I see you and I'm coming here, and then we'll go there.

Gio: Just quickly, I would like to synthesize what has been said around the board. I did a paper, not as extensive as this, on graduate attributes. What I found out was that it's more of a distorted focus on the university. So it is there on the course outline, but the focus is distorted. In my faculty, they focus more on theoretical knowledge, without placing the required emphasis on graduate attributes. So if you have a prescribed graduate attributes course, for instance, just based on that I think that it would be much better. I just feel like it is very important to note that it is a distorted focus and not necessarily that they are not doing anything; it is just that maybe they need to balance it better.

Researcher: So it's getting lost in the mix of - the focus is more on 'oh we need to get the theory done because we need to prepare you to be an expert when you leave the institution, so we can't really focus on these tacit - to use your words Gio - we can't focus on the development of these tacit skills, we can't focus on the development of your teamwork skills, we can't focus on the development of your conflict resolution skills, or your time management skills or the other things that employers are saying they need from graduates once they leave the institution, right? Great, Bushido?

Bushido: Just to start again, yes we can all point fingers at the institution saying, pointing out their flaws - but it's also the work ethic of the student; the zeal of the student, but that is also a reflection of the university, like what's the culture of the university? Is it practical based? Is it research based? Because at the moment, we're just getting information. I mean our library is severely outdated. How you are supposed to know about the world when you're reading books that are like from the 19th century? We get developed into just another corporate being, ready to take up a job in some business but no actual thinking, no actual learning skills taken out from university. There's no development unless you want to and the university is fine with taking credit when you achieve, but when you get lost in the system, it is suddenly your own fault; whereas what has the university done? Where do they look after the students? It's fine just capping you and saying 'Cum Laude, well done' when you know that's all your own work. The university has contributed very little to the development of these students.

Researcher: Great and you are mentioning something very key here; it is up to you as a student; I mean I'm not excluding university from taking ownership also, but as a student if you are wanting to - and I know for a fact that you guys are interested because you have been involved. You are all involved in the co-curricular space and in essence, through the co-curricular a lot of universities aim to really solidify and develop these graduate attributes, so through the co-curricular you are then taught these additional things that are not necessarily taught within your faculty, within your course. So they're seeing that there's this division between - and that's why we also talk about the curricular and the co-curricular - through the co-curricular you develop the team work skills, you get to lead projects, but it is up to you as you make mention Bushido, to have that interest so there might be 20 students that decide that they're going to participate in a leadership programme, but what about the other 19 000 out there that aren't involved and don't get exposure to that? Great, sorry uhm Tom, sorry Amazon.

Amazon: Okay, this one is also like for our lecturers, it shouldn't be like, I think for me, lecturing should be like giving back to the community. It shouldn't be about business, about money because you're going to get some lecturers, they have that mindset that if I'm not getting paid for it, I'm not going to do it. You see if you have the time to do something, to spend that one hour maybe to help a student or something so I think we shouldn't look at it as if the university is not paying me for doing this. So you get those lecturers who have that mindset.

Researcher: Yes, so it really needs to be about what can we contribute more as an institution beyond just passion and interest - because that extends to the students so I can't as a staff member of this institution, say that I want students to practice social responsibility if I'm not doing it, because I need to be practising what I preach. If I'm not going to contribute to the community and be interested in what is happening around me and taking a critical view of knowledge and information, how can I expect the same thing from students? Great, thank you. Chiddy?

Chiddy: On the subject of it being a student that actually wants to have those attributes, I think it's more of the way the whole thing is structured, so theoretically it becomes a module. Because a module is something you would use to get there; there is no practicality in it. You have to get there and then have the knowledge and then hope that you're going to practise it accordingly and I think if it was designed in a way that has practicality, just like co-curricular, co-curricular, after you actually partake in it, you know how to do something in a certain way, but when something is on paper, all that you know is how to communicate effectively on paper and how to manage your time on paper, but there's nothing that actually gives you that skill to do it because there is a difference between knowing something and knowing how to do it, so we know that we have these graduate attributes but we don't know how to apply them and how to apply ourselves into those things. I think we should make the graduate attributes something that everybody knows, not only those who want to further themselves.

Researcher: Mhm, so also what you're now saying is that graduate attributes in an essence is setting you apart because if you are aware of it and you're engaging in co-curricular activities or other activities that grow you as an individual, it might set you apart. Am I inferring?

Chiddy: No, you're right.

Gio: You have a competitive edge.

Researcher: You have a competitive edge, ok great. Sorry, C.

C: Well I just want to say something in relation - I think from my perspective when it comes to graduate attributes, us in social work, we actually do both the theory and the practical side so sometimes it might depend with your degree because we do like communication skills. We have lectures on relationship building and then we have lectures on networking, working in a multidisciplinary team and stuff like that. And we also do role plays, so I think that sometimes it depends on the degree.

Researcher: Yes, that's true because your degree is practical-based and from your first year, because of the nature of your programme, you're working with people and engaging with people, they then teach you these other skills, but that is then still part of your coursework right? But it's infused and by virtue of its structure, is then a graduate attribute, as well. Great, sorry, Gio. Sorry, Sisonke.

Sisonke: Okay, just to add on what has been said, when it's not preached, when it's not taught to students and it is just on paper, that is why, I think, is the reason why when we get to the workplace we get lost. We need a textbook constantly because we don't know what is expected of us and it creates that dependency syndrome on the theory or text. You always want to be seen carrying around a book because - but if you know what is expected of you when you start in the workplace you know 'ok, this is property law, this is how I conduct myself, and this is how I approach this'. Because as she said that our degrees are different, mine is not very practical. I'm doing law so we're always like in a study. So now if the graduate attributes kick in, they actually like instil them in us so that when we study, we actually imagine ourselves in those situations. Because some things are not written on a paper: 'this is how you talk to someone, the conversation is going to go like this, like this, like this'. But then if you have those attributes of a graduate, you know 'ok this is how I sit, this is how I conduct with this very wild client'. So now we don't have those so I think maybe if those - are very pushed in there, then we can - I think it will create that enthusiasm to be in class, to want to know because you know you might face this, because we live on the 'might.'

Researcher: Yes and then when you graduate and go into the world of work, it is very disconnected, what you got in theory and what is happening in practice, and that creates a mismatch in how you are able to address clients and work with colleagues and so on. Sorry, Gio yes.

Gio: It sounded like I was bashing my faculty. Let me give them credit, and I know it's not just the EMS faculty. I know someone in the science faculty that did this programme; I think it started last year. It's called the graduate development programme, in conjunction with CSS, and at the end of the programme - so they teach you 'graduate attributes,' a qualified psychologist and such people that also study through the university and at the end of that programme, if you have attended enough classes because that's where the interest comes also - the amount of people that attended that class was abysmal, but you get a certificate from CSSS saying that you have these graduate attributes. To bring the point of competitive edge, let's say I didn't have that and you have that, so you apply for the same job as me but you have those graduate attributes on a certificate actually. I

don't, because I haven't been exposed to it; I don't know anything. I might have gotten an A and you a B, but because you have those graduate attributes, you're more desirable because you will be an asset to the business.

Amazon: That's just on paper.

Bushido: But do you actually need a paper to prove that you have these attributes?

Chiddy: I think it makes it easier when you're looking for a job, because when you look for a job they don't sit with you and find out, how is your personality? Are you a good person? Are you efficient and so forth, so your paper essentially when you have go to a workplace, you are your paper and then having that certificate, proves that you have the skill on that paper, just like when you have your degree. We know that that degree is your knowledge, and you have that.

Bushido: That's all well and true, but having it theoretically ...

Chiddy: But it's not theoretical, it's practice, we literally did all those things, so its practice and it's more of a proof that this person is certified.

Researcher: Okay, let's hear what Bushido is saying, sorry.

Bushido: I was like we do so much theory that we get lost in practice. Like theoretically we should know all of this, but there is no actual practice - only business students are actually practising their entrepreneurial skills but how many are trying to enhance that? There are initiatives and emails but even that is just discontinued. There's that gap between the filter of students and the institute and they expect so much from us but what do we actually get? Yes, the certificate says that you have that, but if I have the skills and I know I have the skills, where do I get my certificate saying that I have it?

Researcher: So you might have developed it but you don't necessarily have the certificate to prove that you have it, so how would the employer know that you actually developed it? So you might have it but the person who is going to give the certificate, it doesn't mean that they necessarily have those skills developed in practice right? Yes, sorry Tom?

Tom: On that point, even if you have the certificate, that doesn't necessarily mean you have the skills. I think I'm going to disagree, because, the people at CSSS, they are qualified. Surely by giving the certificate it's a validation that this person has done this and gone through the programme, so you're well equipped with these skills because some programmes if you don't attend then you will not receive so by giving it to you it's kind of saying that you've done this and we have confidence in you.

Gio: If I can concur, when you talk about having the certificate, but can you actually apply? So that's the importance of casual jobs, right? So if you didn't have the certificate, so before I had this, I had a casual job. I was a cashier when I was 16. Now, you might think it's just a cashier, but you know what tacit skills are incorporated in being a cashier: you have to be responsible, honest, and punctual; you have to have interpersonal skills, and you're working with people every day. That's where the student has to take initiative; you don't need the certificate from CSSS. I'm just giving them credit now, but as for development you just need to recognise that you're developing it because other students will just see it as being a cashier but actually it's important because that allows you to get other jobs as well and you can build up a base because your CV is like your marketing tool. You can implement those skills in your projects that you do, in your organizations. I mean they teach us about many things, now we're fortunate enough to be part of that. As insignificant as you might think, a casual job can mean a lot in your future.

Researcher: Do you think that there is any benefit in developing graduate attributes?

Bushido: Yes.

Researcher: Yes, why Bushido?

Bushido: It adds to your full personal experience as an individual. It makes you a well-rounded individual, how to interact with people, how to come across, how to actually be a leader and not just a follower.

Researcher: Great. Do you think that these are things which your employers are looking for?

Participants: Yes.

Researcher: Yes, sure, so Amazon, Bushido, Sisonke, C, everyone is agreeing. Tom, you are all agreeing.

Tom: Yes, yes.

Researcher: It is something that they look for. I just want to make sure that I get everything because I want to wrap up and I know that you guys have classes and I would not want to impact on your class time if you need to get there. Does your understanding of graduate attributes help shape your understanding of self and your professional development?

Participants: Yes.

Researcher: Why yes, Sisonke?

Sisonke: I think it helps a lot because when you're a graduate and you know what's expected of you and you have those attributes even if - you get to understand the space that you're in like 'ok

I'm a graduate and this is how I am supposed to conduct myself.' So I think it impacts on yourself and then it requires a lot of work from you from within to commit yourself to those attributes.

Researcher: Great, so it's a personal commitment to developing yourself holistically, so it's again student ownership in process, with students being more inclined to develop more of themselves. If I were to ask a final question, but if you could each think about the one attribute that you think is essential for you to develop for either your professional development, your holistic development, your personal development; the one attribute that is necessary for you.

Gio: One?

Researcher: Just one, what do you think is important and I will go around the room and will mention your name so that I can list it off properly.

Amazon: Yes, you can start with Gio.

Researcher: Gio, okay your one?

Gio: I'm deciding, okay. It's between two but I would say interpersonal skills definitely.

Researcher: What is interpersonal, because that is quite big, so tell me just like.

Gio: How you conduct yourself with your colleagues, clients and/or your employer?

Researcher: Wonderful, thank you. Sisonke?

Sisonke: I think it's being able to deliver the knowledge to clients, to your employer and to your employees and to deliver it constantly.

Researcher: Wonderful.

Gio: Yes, you can add employee to mine.

Researcher: Thank you; I will add that, thank you so much. C?

C: I would say, for me it's team work in the sense that we do not live in isolation. Even at work, you have your desk, but the people around you are like your family so you need to be able to communicate properly and work with them effectively.

Researcher: Wonderful, thank you C. Tom?

Tom: Being collaborative and critical thinking comes in place because you're going to work with people; wherever you go there are people you're going to work with. We need creative thinkers, and people who can think out of the box.

Researcher: Great, wonderful. Thank you, Tom. Penny?

Penny: For me, it's tenacity. If something knocks you down, you have to get up and just go forward.

Researcher: Great, thank you, Penny. Bushido?

Bushido: I would say critical thinking, but Tom already took that.

Researcher: It's fine if you have the same thing. It is ok.

Bushido: Emotional intelligence is knowing how to conduct yourself, how not to let your feelings get to you and knowing when it's business hours and knowing when to set aside personal differences, because in the end there is a goal to be achieved and putting emotions in the workplace doesn't help achieve anything; it complicates things.

Researcher: Wonderful, thank you, Bushido. Mo?

Mo: Logical thinking.

Researcher: Wonderful, great, that's perfect. Did you want to add a contribution?

Mo: No, that's okay.

Researcher: Okay, thank you, Chiddy?

Amazon: Mine is being able to think critically and it's emphasized in my course where you must be independent, come up with your own thinking and don't really go with the rest. Apply your own abilities so that you can develop your career.

Researcher: Great, thank you very much. Chiddy?

Mo: Critical thinking is about having your say and putting it out there.

Researcher: Own it.

Mo: Own it yes, basically that.

Researcher: Great, thank you. Amazon?

Amazon: It would be the leadership skill, having the ability to coordinate things and people.

Researcher: Great

Gio: If I can add another one, punctuality. That is important, because I was a tutor last semester, and I always used to tell them, 'If you come late after three times, don't bother showing up because if you're going to come continuously late in the workplace, you're going to be fired, so you are not being taught this in the textbook but I'm going to teach you this now.' So I feel like that's very important because you will bear the consequences if you continuously come late.

Researcher: Good. So thank you, guys. That was essentially the focus group and I'm going to ask if anyone is interested in participating in the next step in the study which is the photo elicitation section. I will explain that more to you but if you are feeling like this is all that you would like to contribute, you are welcome to leave. I say thank you so much first for your contribution, and, of

course, if there are further questions around this you are welcome to come to me. So is there anyone who would like to ask anything or say anything further related to this focus group?

Gio: Thank you for having us involved.

Researcher: I really do hope that we get something great out of this and I really appreciate your contributions. Would anyone like to participate in the photo elicitation? Great, thank you guys. Are there any questions around, so if you do not want to participate, thank you, you can leave the information - the documents?

Gio: If there's anything that I left out you can just let me know.

Researcher: Oh I'm sure you'll be fine, thank you so much. And I'll explain briefly the photo elicitation for those who are remaining....

54:28 end

ADDENDA

ADDENDUM A: FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

I _____ grant consent that the information I share during the group discussions (focus group interviews) may be used by the researcher, Monique Withering, for research purposes. I am aware that the group discussions will be digitally recorded and grant consent for these recordings, provided that my privacy will be protected. I undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity are compromised given the nature of the focus group interview. There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. There may be unknown risks. If you feel that there is any need for debrief or counseling services, please make use of the free counseling services via the Centre for Student Support Services, Therapeutic office, 2nd floor CHS building, telephone 021 959 2299. You will also receive no payment for participation in this research study. Any photographs taken during this study which violate the University of the Western Cape code of conduct or which display any illegal or rule-breaking activity will not be used in the study. It is understood that the researcher may be required to disclose any illegal or criminal activity to the relevant institutional body and authorities by law. The researcher will stop the interview and caution you, if you begin to disclose details of any criminal offence for which you have not been apprehended, charged or convicted previously.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to [me/the subject/the participant] by [name of relevant person] in [Afrikaans/English/Xhosa/other] and [I am/the subject is/the participant is] in

command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [me/him/her]. [I/the participant/the subject] was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to [my/his/her] satisfaction.

[I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I have explained the information given in this document to _____ [name of the subject/participant] and/or [his/her] representative _____ [name of the representative]. [He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [Afrikaans/*English/*Xhosa/*Other] and [no translator was used/this conversation was translated into _____ by _____].

Signature of Investigator

Date

ADDENDUM B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

How do students perceive the learning of graduate attributes at the University of the Western Cape?

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Monique Withering, BA Social Work, from the Department of Higher Education at Stellenbosch University. As a student within the aforementioned department, the results of this study will contribute towards the completion of the thesis for the degree in MPhil Higher Education studies. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you have been involved in both curricular and co-curricular offerings at the University of the Western Cape, which provides you with insider knowledge of graduate attributes as outlined in the University of the Western Cape, Graduate Attribute Charter, (2009).

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

There is a contention that universities should be preparing students for the world of work and to be active agents of social good within their communities, society and the global community. These result in the development of graduate attributes charters which focus on extending the curriculum to generic skills that universities would like all students to leave the institution with. These attributes include but go beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. Literature often focuses on how graduate attributes are developed by institutions through the curriculum, teaching and learning processes, and from the point of view of the various stakeholders such as governments and the private sector. There is, however, a lack of research on student's conception and understanding of graduate

attributes. This study seeks to understand how students perceive the learning of graduate attributes within the context of the University of the Western Cape.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to elect to participate in the following activities:

Focus Group 1

Participate in a focus group together with other students to ascertain your general understanding and conception of graduate attributes. This will take place together with a maximum of ten other students, conducted in the CSSS training room in the student centre during the extended lunch period on Tuesdays 13:00-15:00, date tbc, during the month of April 2016.

Photo Elicitation

Leading from this you can decide to participate in the next section of the data collection which would have you take photographs in and around your campus, which illustrate how graduate attributes are made real to you within the context of either the curricular or co-curricular. You would also need to provide a short (maximum two lines) description of the photograph with its accompanying meaning. This will be open to all ten students who choose to participate. You will be asked to use your cellular phone's camera to take the photographs, and email, Bluetooth or sms this to the researcher. Details regarding photographing participants and requesting permission will be fully explained to you if you choose to participate. The photographs can be taken over a period of two weeks starting immediately after focus group 1, and concluding 10th May 2016. This will be done at your convenience. You are asked to take at a minimum five photographs and a maximum of ten during the designated period.

Focus Group 2

To participate in a second focus group with other students who have also completed the photo elicitation exercise to discuss the meaning derived and share any other information, learnings or understandings gleaned. This will take place on 10th May 2016 during the extended lunch period on Tuesdays from 13:00-15:00 in the CSSS training room in the student centre. Your participation

in this research is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate or stop at any time without stating any reason.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Participants may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on development and growth, which often is not possible in daily life. The bigger benefit will be to the body of knowledge that is being built within the South African context with regard to graduate attributes. This will assist in framing conversations around how students construct graduate attributes and include students as active agents within this process.

4. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be traced to you will remain confidential and only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the use of pseudonyms to protect your identity. All information obtained during the course of this research is strictly confidential.

Information regarding your participation will only be made available to the supervisor for this study, Prof. E Bitzer at Stellenbosch University, and members of the Ethics Committee at Stellenbosch University. Data that may be reported in the thesis will not include any information which identifies you as a participant in this study. Data/information will be published anonymously. No information will be disclosed to any third party without your written permission. The photographs taken and any audio recorded during the focus group sessions will be available to you by request for review and editing. As the researcher, I will have access to the recordings for transcription purposes. These will be erased on completion of the study. The photographs taken may be selected for inclusion in the final research document.

5. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

6. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact (principle researcher) Monique Withering, 021 959 9755 or 0726996959, 3rd Floor Student Centre, Office of Leadership and Social Responsibility, University of the Western Cape or alternatively (supervisor) Prof. E Bitzer, Centre for Higher and Adult Education, Faculty of Education, +27 21 808 2277/78/94.

7. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

| |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|

The information above was described to [*me/the subject/the participant*] by [*name of relevant person*] in [*Afrikaans/English/Xhosa/other*] and [*I am/the subject is/the participant is*] in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [*me/him/her*]. [*I/the participant/the subject*] was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to [*my/his/her*] satisfaction.

[*I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.*] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the subject/participant*] and/or [his/her] representative _____ [*name of the representative*]. [He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [*Afrikaans/*English/*Xhosa/*Other*] and [*no translator was used/this conversation was translated into* _____ by _____].

Signature of Investigator

ADDENDUM C: PHOTO ELICITATION INSTRUCTIONS

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in my study that explores how students perceive the learning of graduate attributes at the University of the Western Cape.

The instructions below detail the photo elicitation project that will be completed between our first and second interviews.

What is photo elicitation?

Photo elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview (Harper, 2002). This allows for active engagement in the research process by participants as photographs taken evoke meaning beyond the obvious and “extend personal narratives that illuminate lives and experiences” (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004:8). The images themselves do not necessarily have any intrinsic meaning. However, the narrative provided in the written description of the photograph as well as the discussion in the focus group elicit deeper meaning (Schulze, 2007:540).

How will this be done?

You will make use of your cellular telephone camera. You will take photographs in and around UWC, which you feel connect to your understanding, perception or lived experience of graduate attributes. The researcher will make use of pixilation and anonymising software to obscure the names, faces and some contextual details to reduce the risk of identifying individuals to protect anonymity and confidentiality. However, please try as far as possible to avoid taking photographs of individuals' faces as they have not provided consent to participate in the study and we would want to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. We will discuss the photos that you took during our second focus group scheduled for the 06th September 2016. When taking photographs, you can choose either to WhatsApp/SMS (0726996959) or email to the researcher together with a short description about the photograph. The written description is essential as this will help the researcher understand your perception and construction of graduate attributes. Write captions from

your heart. Write your captions as if you were talking to someone else about your photos. This will, however, be discussed further during the second focus group.

What should I take pictures of?

Please take photos that capture the meaning that you make of your experience of graduate attributes. Essentially, you may take pictures of anything that captures your experiences. Please note, however, that we must respect the privacy of those outside of the study.

How many pictures should I take?

I encourage you to take a minimum of five photographs and a maximum of ten photographs.

How much time do I have to take my photos?

You have between the 16th August - 5th September 2016.

Do I have to print or pay for the photos?

No, you do not. I have especially chosen to make use of email, sms and WhatsApp as these are the lowest cost options. Any printing done of photographs will be at my expense. If you would like a printed copy of the photographs taken, please let me know and I will make this available to you.

What is the next step?

During our second interview, we will discuss the photographs that you took.

If at any stage you are unsure of the process or encounter any difficulty, please contact me immediately and I will assist.

Thank you,
Monique Withering

ADDENDUM D: REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH EMAIL

Dear student,

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Monique Withering as part of the MPhil in Higher Education through the Department of Higher Education studies at Stellenbosch University.

The study seeks to explore how students perceive the learning of graduate attributes within the University of the Western Cape (UWC). This study will add to the emerging body of research in this area, helping to advance students' voice in higher education within the South African context.

The study requires participants to engage in 2 focus group interviews of one hour each as well as a photo exercise on campus which would take you a maximum of 1 hour. The first focus group is scheduled for the 16th August from 13:00-14:00 in the LSR office boardroom.

This study has received institutional permission at UWC and it has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Stellenbosch University (SU-HSD-002115).

If you would like to participate in this study or would like further information, please email Monique at mwithering@gmail.com.


Your participation in this research would be highly appreciated.

Kind Regards

LSR on behalf of Monique Withering

ADDENDUM E: UWC INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION



STUDENT
ADMINISTRATION 
Administration Building, 1st Floor
ashaikjee@uwc.ac.za, mamos@uwc.ac.za
021 959 2110

17 February 2016

Dear Monique Withering

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

As per your request, we acknowledge that you have obtained all the necessary permissions and ethics clearances and are welcome to conduct your research as outlined in your proposal and communication with us.

Please note that while we give permission to conduct such research (i.e. interviews and surveys) staff and students at this University are not compelled to participate and may decline to participate should they wish to.

Should you require any assistance in conducting your research in regards to access to student contact information please do let us know so that we can facilitate where possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Shaikjee', written over a faint background of purple sunflowers.

DR AHMED SHAIKJEE
MANAGER: STUDENT ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

ADDENDUM F: CONSENT FOR USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

If you are willing to allow the photographs taken as part of this study to form part of the final thesis publication, please complete the following consent form.

I, _____, hereby grant permission to Monique Withering to make use of the selected photographs or the explanation attached to the photograph in the thesis project towards the MPhil in Higher Education at Stellenbosch University. I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any stage up until the moment of publication of the thesis document. I also understand that within the thesis document, identifiers such as face, names and location will be anonymised, pixelated or blurred in order to protect my anonymity and confidentiality as well as that of others. I further understand that I can view these photos and have additional details anonymised or pixelated at my discretion.

Photography licence agreement

The researcher acknowledges that you as the photographer remain the sole owner of all copyrights of the photographs, and through signing the consent form, you grant licence to the researcher to use the photographs for this project and any subsequent projects that might arise out of this publication in pixelated, anonymised format.

Any photographs taken during this study, which violate the University of the Western Cape code of conduct or which display any illegal or rule-breaking activity will not be used in the study. It is understood that the researcher may be required to disclose any illegal or criminal activity to the relevant institutional body and authorities by law. The researcher will stop the interview and caution you, if you begin to disclose details of any criminal offence for which you have not been apprehended, charged or convicted previously.

Rights of research subjects

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research

study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

| |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|

The information above was described to [me/the subject/the participant] by [name of relevant person] in [Afrikaans/English/Xhosa/other] and [I am/the subject is/the participant is] in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [me/him/her]. [I/the participant/the subject] was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to [my/his/her] satisfaction.

[I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

| |
|----------------------------------|
| SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR |
|----------------------------------|

I declare that I have explained the information given in this document to _____ [name of the subject/participant] and/or [his/her] representative _____ [name of the representative]. [He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [Afrikaans/*English/*Xhosa/*Other] and [no translator was used/this conversation was translated into _____ by _____].

Signature of Investigator

ADDENDUM G: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Focus Group 1 Protocol

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Name of study | |
| Date | |
| Start Time | |
| End Time | |
| Place | |

Procedures before the interview:

1. Introductions
2. Review the consent form, focus group consent form
3. Explain the logistics of the first focus group
4. Explain purpose of the study
5. Ask for the participants' permission to record the focus group
6. Turn on recorder

Proposed Questions:

1. Have you heard about graduate attributes before? What does graduate attributes mean to you?
2. Does UWC have a graduate attributes charter? UWC indicates that graduate attributes are focused on scholarship and a critical attitude towards knowledge, a focus on citizenship and interaction with local and global communities and the environment with an interest in lifelong learning.
3. Do you think there is any value in graduate attributes? Do you think it will help with your employment, understanding of self, professional development?
4. Does the UWC graduate attributes charter relate to your experience of university?
5. Do you think enough is done to place these graduate attributes within both the curricular and co-curricular space?
6. How does your faculty or degree programme promote graduate attributes?
7. Do you see it GA evidenced in the co-curricular or curricular space?
8. Do you think that developing graduate attributes will have any benefit to you directly?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to add during our first focus group?

Procedures after the interview:

1. Turn off recorder thank the participants for sharing their narrative
2. Debrief with the participant
3. Review next steps (photo elicitation and second focus group), explain students' choice in continuing with the next stage of the process, time commitment involved (maximum 5 hours), right to withdraw at any stage
4. Explain photo-elicitation instructions and provide hand-out, reiterate importance of not capturing faces of those not in the study due to privacy and confidentiality. Explain how images sent via email and Whatsapp/sms will be downloaded and stored on secured

personal computer. Explain that anonymising and pixilation software will be used to further protect confidentiality.

Focus Group 2 Protocol

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Name of study | |
| Date | |
| Start Time | |
| End Time | |
| Place | |

Procedures before the interview:

1. Revisit the purpose of the study
2. Ask the participant if he/she has any questions following the first focus group as well as the photo elicitation process
3. Explain the logistics of the second interview
4. Ask for the participant's permission to record the interview
5. Turn on recorder

Proposed Questions:

1. To begin, I would like to review my interpretation of the stories and information that you shared with me during our first focus group (provide overview). Is there anything you would like to add to my understanding?
2. Next, I would like to review some of the photos that you took. (Present photos)
3. From the written description of the photographs, is there anything more you would like to add?
4. Tell me more about your photo/s.
5. How does this photo/s represent the meaning that you make of graduate attributes?
6. Why did you take this photo?
7. What does this photo communicate?
8. What is your favourite photo? Why?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Procedures after the interview:

1. Turn off recorder
2. Thank the participants for sharing their narratives and photographs
3. Debrief with the participant
4. Explain the next steps in the research process

ADDENDUM H: PARTICIPANT DATA INFORMATION SHEET

| |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What is your name and surname? |
| What pseudonym would you like to be identified with in the study? |
| What is your gender or what pronoun would you like to be identified by? |
| What is your age? |
| What is your race? |
| What is your nationality? |
| What faculty and degree course are you in? |
| What year of study are you in? |
| What programme in LSR are you participant in? |

ADDENDUM I: HUMAN RESEARCH (HUMANITIES) ETHICS



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JOU KENNISVERMOEEN • YOUR KNOWLEDGE PARTNER

Approval Notice Response to Modifications- (New Application)

26-Jul-2016
Withering, Monique MD

Proposal #: SU-HSD-002115
Title: **How do students perceive the learning of graduate attributes at the University of the Western Cape?**

Dear Miss Monique Withering,

Your **Response to Modifications - (New Application)** received on 06-Jul-2016, was reviewed by members of the Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) via Expedited review procedures on 13-Jul-2016 and was approved. Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: 13-Jul-2016 -12-Jul-2019

General comments:

The researcher has adequately addressed the REC's concerns and may commence with data collection. The researcher is requested to stay in contact with the relevant authorities at UWC and the REC should any adverse events occur during the course of data collection.

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number** (SU-HSD-002115) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

ADDENDUM J: CSSS DATABASE PERMISSION



CENTRE for
STUDENT
SUPPORT
SERVICES

13 June 2016
T: +27 21 959 2299
E: tovarmeyer@uwo.ac.za

Dear Ms Withering

This letter confirms that you have been granted permission to conduct research with Leadership and Social Responsibility students for the purposes of your MPhil studies. You may email your request for participation to our database of students on the Emerging Leaders, Advanced Leaders, and InitiAct Programmes 2016.

I hope that this confirmation satisfies the requirements of the Ethics Committee at Stellenbosch University. Please feel free to contact me, should anything further be required.

I wish you well with your research.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tonia Overmeyer'.

Tonia Overmeyer
Acting Director: Centre for Student Support Services

