



# UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN CAPE (UWC)

POLICY:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN CAPE

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UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

# The Development of Graduate Attributes at UWC

## Introduction

This report is the outcome of a reflective process by members of the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee who were tasked to develop an initial draft document for faculties to engage with. The importance of developing UWC graduate attributes has been flagged and foregrounded in the previous and current Institutional Operation Plan (IOP) documents and was given specific attention in the HEQC audit report where it was stated that, “*The features of the UWC graduate might need to be more widely discussed to increase awareness of these attributes.*” *The Panel would like to encourage the University community to discuss these characteristics more systematically, so that they can be included as educational outcomes at the appropriate level and be assessed accordingly.*

The task team engaged with the mission and vision of UWC in addition to reviewing international literature regarding graduate attributes and their adoption at higher education institutions across the world, in order to deliberate on the attributes a UWC graduate should have.

Graduate attributes can be understood as the qualities, values, attitudes, skills and understandings that a particular university sets out as being important for students to develop by the end of their studies. These attributes are both intended to equip them for future employment and as critical and responsible citizens, contributing to the social and economic well being of society. The Education White Paper emphasises that South African higher education institutions should be producing

‘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’ (Education White Paper 3- A Programme for Higher Education Transformation, 1997).

The development of graduate attributes is complex, requiring an institutional commitment across the board if the process is to succeed. The institutional climate, student development initiatives and Human Resources (HR) and other support personnel will need to be active contributors to the process. Graduate attributes have important consequences for the renewal and alignment of teaching activities, assessment tasks and learning outcomes.

## **Way Forward**

This document is intended for faculties and co-curricula centres (e.g. Student Development and Support) to scrutinise and give feedback and suggestions to the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee in order to come to some common agreement as to what constitutes a UWC graduate.

Once generic attributes have been agreed upon across the institution, the UWC graduate attributes will provide a starting point for discussion on how these will be further elaborated from a faculty, Student Development and Support Services (SDSS) and disciplinary perspective. The process should be seen as part of the faculty and SDSS rolling plans for implementation of the IOP in the next five years.

The Strategic Plan on Teaching and Learning will be instrumental in driving the process and the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee will support the process and monitor its implementation.

## **Towards a the Concept of a UWC Graduate**

The task group perused a number of different sets of graduate attributes and built the following set of attributes which were based both on a commonly used framework<sup>1</sup> and the UWC vision and mission:

### **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

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Barrie and also the University of Sydney have used a similar set of attributes see for example Barrie, S. C. (2004). A Research-based Approach to Generic Graduate Attributes Policy, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 23, 3, 261-275.

Barrie, S.C. (2006). Understanding What We Mean by the Generic Attributes of Graduates *Higher Education*, 51,2, 215-241.

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.