

Higher education guarantees global citizenship, or does it?

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Statements of graduate attributes have gained prominence in universities nationally and internationally in recent years (Barrie, 2006; Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, & Watts, 2002; Jones, 2009). Increasingly, such statements include global citizenship as an “attitude or stance towards the world” that students develop during their studies (Barrie, 2004). This paper draws on a comparative analysis of Australian university graduate attributes statements from the last fifteen years (Bosanquet, Winchester-Seeto & Rowe, 2010) to examine the meanings of global citizenship in a higher education context. In describing global citizenship, institutions frequently refer to a plethora of related concepts including intercultural awareness, cross-cultural competency, inclusivity, diversity, globalisation, sustainability, leadership, multiculturalism, internationalisation and community engagement. A review of the literature around graduate attributes demonstrates four broad conceptions of their purpose: employability; lifelong learning; preparing for an uncertain future; and acting for the social good (Barnett, 2004; Barrie & Prosser, 2004; Bridgstock, 2009; Pitman and Broomhall, 2009). The latter two are closely aligned with the attribute of global citizenship, with an emphasis on transforming the student, the curriculum and the future (Bowden & Marton, 1998) and acting to benefit the broader community (Bowden et al, 2002).

This paper examines three challenges in embedding global citizenship – however it might be defined – as a graduate attribute. First, the values and assumptions concerning the purpose and nature of higher education evident in graduate attribute statements (Barrie & Prosser, 2004) and institutional definitions of global citizenship. Second, the difficulties of impacting on teaching practice (Harvey & Kamvounias, 2008; Hughes & Barrie, 2009) in a context of rapid curriculum development. Third, the impact on students. In Australia, this is a particular challenge in light of the Bradley Review of Higher Education, which has prompted a major change in student cohort, with a 20% increase in students from lower socio-economic populations (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, Sacles 2008).

Keywords: Global citizenship, graduate attributes, higher education review

Introduction

Statements of graduate attributes have gained prominence in universities nationally and internationally in recent years (Barrie, 2006; Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, & Watts, 2002; Jones, 2009). Increasingly, such statements include global citizenship as an “attitude or stance towards the world” that students develop during their studies (Barrie, 2004, online).

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The aim of this paper is to critically question, and to prompt reflection, on the complexities of the definition, implementation and evaluation of global citizenship as a graduate attribute. Underpinning this are the questions: to what extent can higher education meet its claim to develop students who are (in a mashup of institutional statements) active, involved, inclusive, informed, engaged and responsible local and global citizens? And what is at stake in holding such ideals? To explore these questions, this paper briefly summarises the broader scholarship on graduate attributes, then examines specific institutional definitions of global citizenship, and finally looks at three challenges in embedding global citizenship as a graduate attribute.

These include: first, the values and assumptions concerning the purpose and nature of higher education evident in graduate attribute statements (Barrie & Prosser, 2004) and institutional definitions of global citizenship. Second, the difficulties of impacting on teaching practice (Harvey & Kamvounias, 2008; Hughes & Barrie, 2009), particularly in a context of rapid curriculum development and review. Third, the impact of graduate attributes on student learning (Winchester-Seeto & Bosanquet, 2009). These challenges are intensified in Australian universities in the context of the current Bradley Review of Higher Education, which has as one of its goals widening participation, including a 20% increase in students from lower socio-economic populations (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, Sacles 2008).

The title of this paper is drawn from the 1997 science fiction film *Starship Troopers*. For those who have seen it, you may remember the phrase “service guarantees citizenship” and its educational context. For those who haven’t, or whose recollections are hazy, the film depicts a future world in which military service is a requirement for global citizenship. A number of interesting ideas are evident in the early school or college scenes of the film – social scientists are blamed for bringing the world to the brink of chaos; voting is described as an act of violence; exam results are publicly displayed on a smartboard; and a citizen is defined as one who accepts “personal responsibility for the safety of the body politic, defending it with *his* life” (emphasis added). Enrolling in the military and fighting arachnid aliens guarantees citizenship of the Federation of Earth (assuming survival). Citizens (as opposed to civilians) have the right to vote, can acquire a license to become a mother, and have their higher education expenses paid by the Federation. In *Starship Troopers*, global citizenship offers the opportunity for higher education. At many universities, it seems that the opposite is true.

Graduate attributes

According to Barrie and Prosser’s definition:

Graduate attributes seek to describe the core outcomes of a higher education. In doing so, they specify an aspect of the institution’s contribution to society and carry with them implicit and sometimes explicit assumptions as to the purpose and nature of higher education (2004, p. 244).

A review of the literature around graduate attributes demonstrates four broad conceptions of their purpose: employability; lifelong learning; preparing for an uncertain future; and acting for the social good (Barnett, 2004; Barrie & Prosser, 2004; Bridgstock, 2009; Pitman and Broomhall, 2009). The latter two are closely aligned with the attribute of global citizenship, with its emphasis on transforming the student, the curriculum and the future (Bowden & Marton, 1998) and acting to benefit the international community (Bowden et al, 2002).

Within these conceptions, students are characterised as entering an unknown and uncertain future in need of social reform. Higher education will equip students with the capacity to manage ambiguity and complexity; with flexibility and creativity to solve problems; and with a commitment to social justice. Barnett refers to the future as one of “supercomplexity” in which graduates are witnessing a “new world order” that challenges their understandings of themselves and their place in the world (2004, p. 248). Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, and Watts, (2002) argue that graduate attributes prepare students to be “agents of social good”, as does Barrie who frequently cites the common good agenda (see; Barrie, 2005; Barrie, 2006; Barrie & Prosser, 2004). Leask (2008) notes the framing of the notion by Hough who argued that universities have a responsibility to be outward looking, community-focused and oriented towards peace, unity and justice. This is also evident in UNESCO’s *World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century*, which emphasises the role of higher learning and research in the “cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations ... so that our society ... can transcend mere economic considerations and incorporate deeper dimensions of morality and spirituality” (1998, online).

My curiosity about the ideals underpinning global citizenship in a higher education context was piqued by a comparative analysis of Australian university graduate attributes statements from the last fifteen years (Bosanquet, Winchester-Seeto & Rowe, 2010). In this research, still in progress, statements of graduate capability were sorted into three time slices according to the year they were formally adopted by their institution: 1996-2000, 2001-2005 and 2006-2009. The method and findings of a pilot study have been previously reported (Bosanquet, Winchester-Seeto & Rowe, 2010). For the purposes of this paper, several interesting themes emerged. In the last five years, there has been a shift in the language describing graduate attributes and the institutional statements justifying their inclusion in the curriculum with a move away from a concentration on the individual student towards a notion of community. Similarly, emphasis has moved from gaining skills for employability fifteen years ago, to action-based approaches between 2000 and 2005, and finally towards a focus on participation, with a sense of imperative or obligation in the last five years. Evident in these shifts is an increasing focus on the concept of global citizenship and the affiliated notions of adapting to or promoting change and community leadership, as well as a shift in emphasis towards experiential learning, participation, and sustainability (Bosanquet, Winchester-Seeto & Rowe, 2010).

Global citizenship

Global citizenship is an ambiguous and contested notion. In describing it as a graduate attribute, institutions frequently refer to a plethora of related concepts including intercultural awareness, cross-cultural competency, inclusivity, diversity, globalisation, sustainability, leadership, multiculturalism, internationalisation and community engagement. This multiplicity of terms and consequent “conceptual fuzziness” has been noted in the literature (Lunn, 2008; Leask, 2008) and is demonstrated in Figure 1.

It is worth reading these statements alongside a student conception of global citizenship synthesised from research on the experiences of global health students at a Canadian university:

A good global citizen is involved locally, nationally and internationally; is conscientious, informed and educated about issues; exhibits environmental and social responsibility; advocates alongside of the oppressed; or lives by the dictum, ‘Be the change you want to see in the world’ (Hanson, 2008, p 80).

A number of issues are worth noting in these statements, concerning the purposes of higher education and the impacts of global citizenship on teaching practice and student outcomes.

The social good and uncertain future conceptions of the purpose of graduate attributes are clearly evident in the above statements. Global citizenship is closely aligned with globalisation, and there is a risk of the terms collapsing into one another. Globalisation is itself a contested notion in the scholarly literature. On the one hand, it can be understood as the breaking down of borders between cultures, nations, economies, regions, and institutions as a worldwide network of communication and transport opens up; on the other, it may refer to the amalgamation of multiple peoples and places into “a single world society” which is underpinned by imperialist values (Marginson, 1999; Leask, 2008). The latter risks reinforcing existing power relations and entrenching inequality, rather than celebrating difference and diversity. The potential of this ambiguity (and a reminder of the educational philosophy of *Starship Troopers*) is evident in Figure 2. Within this continuum, higher education promotes a vague meaning of world citizenship (which may seem preferable to the precise meaning).

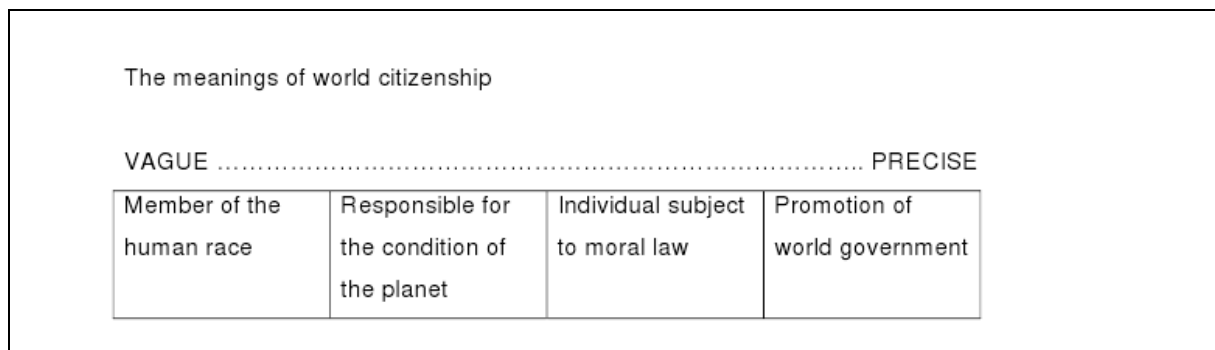


Figure 2: The meanings of world citizenship (Heater, 1997; cited in Davies, Evans & Reid, 2009).

An underlying assumption in the interconnection of global citizenship and globalisation is that the notion of citizenship is changing as a result of globalisation, and that in response university education must also change. Global citizenship as a graduate attribute is based on a transformative philosophy of higher education (Hanson, 2008). This discourse is evident to varying degrees in the above institutional statements and in much of the literature around graduate attributes and global citizenship. For instance, Hanson’s findings on student conceptions quoted above are a response to the “need for radical reform of curricula to foster engaged global citizenship” (2008, p 70). Leask, writing in the context of internationalising the curriculum, similarly emphasises the requirements for “radical, rather than incremental, innovation – that is, new ways of conceptualising knowledge and the curriculum” (2008, p 13). This echoes Barrie’s discussion of the need for graduate attributes:

Our world is changing. Not only are the students who come to us different, what they need from an education is different. The world our graduates need to thrive in is one of change and uncertainty ... What is needed is not simply more knowledge or new skills; what is needed is a new way of being in the world. This has some fundamental implications for how universities conceive of their educational role and with this some challenges for what we teach and the way we teach it (Barrie, 2005, online).

Davies, Evans and Reid are more explicit in their call for educational revolution:

We believe that national citizenship is now being weakened and that a new form of education is necessary ... The long established frameworks associated with the relationship between statehood and education are ... ready to be dismantled (2009, p. 69).

But to what extent does globalisation merit the dismantling of the curriculum? And what is at stake here? It is worth heeding that the embedding of any graduate attributes in the curriculum – even those that are less contentious than global citizenship – has been “sporadic, patchy or lumpy” (Hughes & Barrie, 2009, online). There is to date little empirical evidence of the impact of graduate attributes on students, and a lack of alignment between institutional policy, teaching practices and student learning (Winchester-Seeto and Bosanquet, 2009).

Bennett et al (2008) are critical of the sensationalist language, implied threat, and proclamations for profound and urgent change that pervade much of the higher education literature; a discourse that is evident in institutional plans and policy documents, national research projects, and reports from sector and government bodies that refer to global citizenship as a graduate attribute. Such approaches detract from considered, research-based investigations into the possibilities for curriculum review, and the impact of global citizenship on students, teachers and universities. There is, as yet, little evidence for the need to radically “rethink the concept of the university itself” (Barnes & Tynan, 2007, p 198), no matter how beguiling the notion.

Reading institutional policies on graduate attributes also raises questions concerning the impacts of global citizenship on students. Leask argues that an internationalised curriculum “must, at a minimum, cater to the rapidly changing and divergent needs of all students as global citizens” (2008, p 12). What are the needs of students as global citizens? Leask recognises that these needs are divergent, but do universities have the capacity to engage *all* students in activities that promote global citizenship? Are the ideals of global citizenship consistent with a mass education system?

These questions of inclusion and participation in higher education are particularly pertinent in the current context in Australia. The Bradley Review has set in motion a major change in student cohort, with a target of a 20% increase in participation from lower socio-economic status students; enrolment targets for equity groups; higher proportions of young people receiving degrees (40% of 25 to 34 year olds to hold a Bachelor degree or above by 2025); tighter regulatory frameworks and performance-based funding (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, Scales 2008). The Australian government’s response, entitled *Transforming Australia’s Higher Education*, is explicit in its vision of the purpose of higher education:

Self-fulfilment, personal development and the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself; the provision of skills of critical analysis and independent thought to

support full participation in a civil society; the preparation of leaders for diverse, global environments; and support for a highly productive and professional labour force should be key features of Australian higher education (2009, p. 4).

It is worth emphasising the diversity of student cohort of the future: increasing numbers of students from families and communities who may not have participated in higher education in the past; students with disabilities; from low socio-economic status backgrounds; students balancing study with paid work or caring responsibilities; mature-age students; and external or off-campus students. What will be the impacts of institutional visions of global citizenship for these students? Will the values underpinning global citizenship entrench disadvantage for students from low socio-economic backgrounds? Will students share the institution's vision? The answers to these questions – as yet unknown – could dramatically affect the way we think about graduate attributes and supporting curriculum design. These students may well have different interests, aspirations and needs to those assumed by current graduate attribute statements. They may also be more restricted in their full participation in curriculum initiatives designed to support attributes such as global citizenship, including unpaid internships, work-integrated learning, volunteering for credit and travel.

Conclusions

This paper has critically questioned the values and assumptions that underlie the articulation and implementation of global citizenship as a graduate attribute. It has asked (rather than answered) whether universities can develop engaged and responsible local and global citizens, and indicated some of the ambiguities and challenges of curriculum reform. For global citizenship as a graduate attribute to be enabling, it is imperative to include the broader context of internationalisation and social inclusion in higher education (Lunn, 2008; Leask, 2008). This includes the complex interactions between the education of international students; offshore teaching; international research partnerships; increasing community and industry engagement; higher mobility of staff and students between institutions; the massification or democratisation of higher education; sector-wide funding pressures; and an increasing emphasis on measuring the standards and quality of research, teaching and learning and contributions to the community.

The transformative philosophy of higher education that underpins global citizenship asks students to “‘think, argue and act’ out alternative visions of the world” (Hanson (2010, p 84). It is possible that such alternative visions will undermine and resist traditional forms of citizenship. Might this also include the citizenship aspect – that is, the obligations and responsibilities – of belonging to a university community? Those calling for radical upheaval of curriculum or the dismantling of universities might yet get what they want – but I would suggest that this is in the hands of students. These students would be global citizens in the fluid and questioning sense that Tormey (2007) uses the term: not seeking a utopian world without borders, but critically aware of their own boundedness within institutions and systems, and willing to put their citizenship at risk by challenging these binds.

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