

Dr Jason Bohan – Psychology

GAs Case Study Video Script

YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/o2jed61b6qU>

Who are you?

I'm Jason Bohan and I'm a senior lecturer in the School of Psychology, and a member of the Graduate Attributes Roadmap project.

What was the activity and who were the participants?

In collaboration with my colleague Dr Maxine Swingler I developed a method of assessing student Graduate Attributes. The reason for doing this was that we wanted to help our students understand what their own developing 'graduate attributes' and devise ways that as educators we could help support and promote the development of these attributes.

Our starting point was by asking what are they? On one hand, they may be being a subject specialist in your field of study. A psychology student has a detailed knowledge of psychological work. But education is about so much more than learning a bunch of facts. It includes the development of a range of useful skills that can be applied to many other contexts. So, when you're learning, you also become a critical thinker, a reflective learner (that is, understanding how you like to learn). You also develop interpersonal skills such as how to work in a group; and because you have to tell people about what you've learnt, you become an effective communicator. To learn these new facts you learn how to investigate something, and along the way you will be learning all these facts within a broader context, making you an ethically and socially aware member of society.

So, these skills are really valuable and we wanted to know how we could promote awareness of these developing skills and track this development over time. To do this, we measured a student's level of each graduate attribute before and after a simple reflection exercise. The reflection exercise was extremely simple – all they had to do was write down when they had had an opportunity to develop each attribute either at university or from extra-curricular activities. In other words, recall specific examples of when you had had to Investigate something, think critically about something, Communicate ideas and knowledge to someone.

This video script is part of the 'Graduate Attributes – Roadmap for Staff' resource:

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/leads/goodpractice/graduateattributes>

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Why the chosen activity?

Being able to measure ‘how much’ any one person has of each attribute allows us to track changes over time. So, a student may not feel that they are subject specialists on their first day at university, but by the time they complete their studies and are ready to graduate, we would expect them to say that they were.

From a teacher’s perspective it allows us to assess whether our teaching methods help students become aware of their developing skills and, in turn, hopefully promote engagement with their studies. There are a number of reasons why this is important, but we just focus on two main reasons – educational and employability success.

- **EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS:** At university, students are assessed in a wide variety of ways such as exams, essays, presentations, etc. All of them obviously assess knowledge and ability but they also develop a range of graduate attributes. A clear example is that writing essays develops communications skills while working in groups develops collaboration skills. Understand this allows learning to go beyond the individual essay, but across all essays, as students learn from writing and receiving feedback, how they can develop a valuable transferable skill, such as communication. Students who understand this are more likely to be engaged in their studies and this may lead to greater academic success.
- **EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS:** The other important aspect of being aware of GA is employability. Let’s continue to think about communication skills. When you write an essay or give a talk, you obviously learn about the topic, but you also learn how best to communicate – how do you set your ideas down on paper, develop a convincing argument, take complex ideas and communicate it to a general audience. These are skills are not just specific to the subject or that one assignment, these are skills which can be used in many different contexts. Employers are looking for graduates with these skills and self-awareness of having them. Focusing student’s awareness on their own skill development throughout their studies will give them more confidence when they enter the work place. They will be able to say to an employer that they have these skills and be able to give examples of how they developed them. This is very attractive to an employer.

What worked well?

We found that simple reflection exercises like this one helped promote student's awareness of their own abilities. We also found that students with well-developed graduate attributes also felt better about themselves overall, as measured by a self-esteem scale, so they felt generally better about themselves. These students were also more likely to see how these attributes linked to their education as well as why they would be relevant to their future employment.

What were the challenges?

It can be difficult to convince students that thinking about their graduate attributes matters to them. Some may just want to focus on their next essay or exam. But, what we believe is that those students who do think in this way are more confident and likely to be successful. So, it's important to find ways to introduce these activities into our teaching practices.

Would you recommend this to other academics?

I would recommend that strategies like this one can easily be embedded within a range of learning activities. Just taking a little bit of time to reflect helps learning, but also leads to a greater sense of self and self-worth.