Dr Matthew Barr – College of Arts

GAs Case Study Video Script

YouTube link: https://youtu.be/cLGHENJn3ys

Who are you?

I'm Matthew Barr and I'm the Graduate Attributes Champion for the College of Arts.

What was the activity and who were the participants?

I took the reflective activities developed by Maxine with colleagues in the College of Science and Engineering and the College of Social Sciences and piloted them in the College of Arts.

These activities included asking students which attributes they felt they had already been developing, and which attributes they'd like to work on in the coming year or semester.

The outcome of the exercise was quite practical in nature, with students encouraged to identify specific action points and SMART goals, which they developed in pairs or small groups.

In the end, I ran sessions with pre-Honours students in a range of Subjects, including Music, History, Film & TV, French and Portuguese.

Why the chosen activity?

As the Graduate Attributes Champion for the College, I was responding to requests from colleagues for some kind of easily-administered graduate attribute activity that could be integrated into any class.

So, Maxine and colleagues kindly permitted me to take the activities they had developed in their Colleges and try them out in Arts.

In addition to developing our students' awareness of graduate attributes, I was also interested in gauging the current level of awareness and understanding, which was part of my remit.

I also wanted to understand which attributes our students felt were most in need to attention, so the reflective activities were ideal, that that sense.

What worked well?

The activities were a success, I think.

I ran them with cohorts ranging in size from a couple of dozen to over 300 students, and the activities scaled well because most of the work was carried out in pairs or small groups.

In feedback, students talked about finding it helpful to consider how best to plan their time to develop as a student, and to identify areas of their development that needed work.

Also, for many of the students I worked with, this was their first exposure to graduate attributes, and I really think that introducing these concepts at pre-Honours – rather than scrambling to cover them all just before graduation – was a good move.

What were the challenges?

Not all of our students were convinced of the importance of graduate attributes.

So, as I moved around the room during the activities, a lot of my energy went into convincing sceptical students that this stuff is really important in term of getting a job.

And that's maybe where the larger class sizes were more challenging.

For some of the sessions, I was lucky enough to have my colleague, Anna, in the room to talk to students while they carried out the activities.

So that helped our students get the most out of the experience, because the two of us could move around the room and speak directly to students who weren't yet sold on the idea of graduate attributes.

Would you recommend this to other academics?

I think that, having taken the activities – which were developed in other Colleges – and successfully used them in the College of Arts, it's pretty clear that they can work in a wide variety of contexts.

There are no special technological requirements and the activities work with any size of cohort, particularly if students are asked to collaborate with their peers.

So, I'd recommend the reflective activities approach to any colleague with an interest in developing their students' awareness of graduate attributes, and I think it works particularly well at pre-Honours, to plant the seeds sufficiently early on.