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**Abstract**

In contemporary times there is a renewed focus on the purposes of university education in science or engineering, especially in emerging economy contexts like South Africa where the massification of higher education is in its early stages. The contributions by Muller (High Educ 70(3):409–416, 2015) and Walker (High Educ 70(3):417–425,2015) both recognise the crucial importance of expanding epistemological access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, but their visions offer different emphases on how to proceed. Muller (2015) argues for the centring of disciplinary knowledge, while for Walker (2015) it is the concerns of society that should be central. In this article we argue that both of these are partial answers. We draw on a longitudinal study with ten South African engineering graduates, who were interviewed both in their third year and then approximately a decade later. Our analysis shows how the engagement with disciplinary knowledge is at the heart of the shaping of ‘graduateness’. Thus we argue for a coming together of the two perspectives in this issue towards a nuanced perspective on graduateness that recognises the significance of disciplinary knowledge but

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that also holds a space for the development of student agency in higher education. (HRK / Abstract  
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