

**15.2.2026****Author**

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**Title**

Understanding what we mean by the generic attributes of graduates

**Publication year**

2006

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education. - 51 (2006) 2, S. 215 - 241

**Inventory number**

20598

**Keywords**

Ausland : Australien : Studenten, Studium, Lehre ; Ausland : Australien : einzelne Hochschulen ; Lehre

**Abstract**

One way in which universities have sought to articulate the outcomes of a university education is through a description of the attributes of their graduates. Recent calls for universities to demonstrate the quality of their outcomes and processes have prompted a re-examination of the generic graduate attribute outcomes many Australian universities have espoused for the past decade. As university communities struggle to identify what combination of skills, attributes and knowledge to include in these statements of graduate outcomes, and begin to come to terms with how to develop curricula to effectively achieve such outcomes, the fundamental nature of these is a vital preliminary question to address. What are these things that universities call generic graduate attributes? This is a more fundamental question than what combination of skills, attributes and knowledge should be included on the graduate ?shopping-list?, it is about the nature of the things on the list, and the nature of the list itself. In seeking to further our understanding of the meaning of generic graduate attributes, the research described in this paper used phenomenographic analysis to explore academics? conceptions

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of generic graduate attributes in the context of contemporary teaching and learning practices at one Australian university. A way of describing the key aspects of the variation in academics? understandings of the concept of graduate attributes is presented. The contribution of discipline background to conceptions of generic attributes is considered and the implications of the observed variation for universities? current curriculum reform initiatives discussed. (HRK / Abstract übernommen), Barrie, Simon C., E-Mail: S.Barrie@itl.usyd.edu.au