

# Returning Home: The value of an Australian Business Degree in Vietnam

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*Internationally governments, employers and universities themselves have questioned whether graduates have been adequately prepared to enter an internationalised workforce. Education is now Australia's third largest export industry, but there is little evidence about the utility of learning outcomes for international students from developing countries who study a business degree in Australia and return home after graduation.*

*My research investigated the relationship between the outcomes a Group of Eight University (Go8 University<sup>1</sup>) in Australia suggests its graduates possess, in the context of its internationalisation and graduate attributes policies, with the actual outcomes that have utility for international students from a developing country. This was explored through the experiences of a group of Vietnamese business graduates who studied in Australia and then returned to the world of work in Vietnam after graduation. Vietnam's adherence to Marxism and Leninism provided an opportunity to test the efficacy of the university's pedagogies and policies for graduates returning to a country where tension is caused by the duality of communist ideals and free market economics as it opens its doors to the western world following its admission to the World Trade Organisation in 2006.*

*Using a snowball technique to recruit graduates to the study, data was collected from business graduates through the conduct of individual interviews in Vietnam and afterwards through the completion of a graduate attributes questionnaire. Focus group interviews were later conducted in Vietnam in the final phase of the data collection process. The learning outcomes that have utility to the business graduates involved in this study were then compared with the Go8 University's policies about internationalisation and the attributes it suggests its graduates possess. The research was informed by university policy and the literature relating to internationalisation of higher education, internationalisation of the curriculum and the development of graduate attributes.*

*The attainment of a business degree was the sole focus of the business graduates when they left Vietnam. It helped them meet their employment and social ambitions when they returned to Vietnam. Whilst the disciplinary knowledge graduates learned in their degree has proved useful, graduates advise that not all knowledge can be applied in a developing country where culture and the duality of communist social principles and free market economics conflict. It is the development of an international perspective, graduate attributes and a world view that has actually prepared the graduates to meet the ongoing challenges in the workplace as Vietnam opens its doors to the western world.*

**Keywords:** *focus groups, globalisation, graduate attributes, internationalisation, international perspective, international students, snowball technique, world view.*

## **GLOBALISATION AND THE DEMAND FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION**

Human endeavour is always challenged by change, but in the last two decades of the twentieth century the pace of change accelerated as a result of increased speed in trans-border flows relating to transport (people and equipment), finance and communication (information and ideas) (Austrade, 2005). The world grew smaller as time and space condensed (Giddens, (1990). The knowledge economy developed. Traditional industries were transformed by new technologies. Some industries disappeared and new ones emerged. Multinational Corporations (MNC) transferred manufacturing and communications industries from developed to developing countries. Workplace and employment practices changed. The notion of employment for life in the one industry was challenged (Delors, 1996). An international workforce was created as developed countries competed for skilled labour world-wide through skilled migration programs (Ziguras and Law, (2006).

Communism collapsed in the Soviet Union. Vietnam, as a developing country had been reliant on the Soviet bloc for education, trade and investment. It changed its economic philosophy from communist ideals towards free market ideals seeking new untapped markets globally by joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2006 (World Bank. 2008). Communist China moved towards free markets as a way of increasing economic prosperity and power.

The world had changed as contemporary globalisation accelerated. The ideology and reality of free markets had gained greater acceptance. Economic prosperity was considered to be aligned to the development of knowledge economies and technical competence (DEST, 2002).

Education systems, especially higher education systems, had to adapt their curriculum to educate and retrain society and the workforce to meet these challenges (Bradley, 2008). Developing countries, such as Vietnam, needed to develop their human capital in a changing global environment to ensure that the government's changing economic policies were successful. The demand for tertiary education worldwide was forecast to grow from just under 100 million places in 2000 to 260 million places in 2025 (IDP Education, 2002). International student mobility increased dramatically with growth doubling over the past twenty years with 85% of international students studying in OECD countries (OECD, 2002).

In the current context of globalisation, the economic need to be international and internationalise intensified worldwide in all areas of education (Dolby and Rahman, 2008). The recruitment of international students to replace declining state income support in higher education gained momentum. Globally, higher education became deregulated, privatised and market-oriented, providing a more diverse income source for higher education providers (Marginson, 2006a). It moved from a national affair to a worldwide service industry, traded on the world market (Ziguras, 2003). The world now provides a competitive market place where universities compete for international student enrolments (Australian Government, 2009). The English speaking countries such as USA, the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia have become the more popular destinations for international students (OECD, 2009).

## **UNIVERSITY ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN AUSTRALIA**

Australia ranks fifth (7% of international student enrolments worldwide) as a country of study for international students behind the United States of America (USA) (19.7%), the United Kingdom (UK) (11.6%), Germany (8.6%) and France (8.2%) [15]. Education is Australia's third largest export industry valued at \$12.50 Billion (OECD, (2009). Non-citizens constituted 29% of enrolments in 2006 (IDP Education, 2008). The increasing

number of full fee paying international students has placed a strong focus on government and universities to internationalise the curriculum and ensure that graduates develop attributes that meet the needs of a diverse international stakeholder group.

Universities in Australia have responsibility and accountability for ensuring graduate outcomes such as graduates with generic and core graduate skills, abilities and attributes; graduates capable of making professional and social contributions; graduates with the capacity to perform; education that equips graduates to adapt to change in the new globalised world; graduates who contribute to the understanding and development of Australia's social and cultural structures and its national and regional economies; a smooth transition from university to work; emphasis on process and praxis and discrete content knowledge; closer demonstrated association between universities and industry and demonstrated quality assurance and quality improvement processes.

The Bradley Review of Higher Education (2008 p.5) stated that Australian higher education should ensure that all students (both domestic and international) experience “self-fulfillment, personal development and the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself; [and the provision of] skills of critical analysis and independent thought to support full participation in a civil society”.

These expectations are congruent with the policies of the Go8 University where I work. Its international plan highlights the challenge of “capacity building in research and education within the Asia Pacific Region [and] to produce graduates with attributes such as cultural awareness and language capacity that lead to international employment and capacity to make a contribution” (Monash University, 2006).

The University's graduate attributes policy states that “the explicit claim is that when [students] graduate they will be equipped to live, learn, work and contribute globally. They will have been inspired by our internationally-focused, research-led teaching and wish to use their talents to improve the world” (Monash University, 2008).

The business faculty, where the graduates involved in my research studied, expects that graduates are “critical and creative scholars and responsible and effective global citizens who have a comprehensive understanding of their discipline...able to provide discipline-based solutions to business problems ...and have a well developed understanding of multi-disciplinarity in decision making in organisations” (Faculty of Business and Economics (Monash University), 2009).

I wanted to gain an understanding of whether this was achieved in the context of a cohort of Vietnamese international students who studied a business degree at my university in Australia and then returned to their country immediately after graduation. What did they learn that has utility to them now they have returned to live and work in Vietnam? Are these learning outcomes congruent with the university's internationalisation and graduate attributes policies?

## **THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM**

Vietnam is a densely populated country with a population of approximately 85 million people (World Bank, 2008). The country is governed through a highly centralised system dominated by the Vietnamese Communist Party, (formerly known as the Vietnamese Labour Party). It is pursuing goals of economic prosperity through industrialisation and modernisation through its economic policy of *Doi Moi* (meaning economic renovation), but is retaining its communist philosophy (World Bank, 2008). The ruling Communist Party is thus embracing contradictory themes of market economics and adherence to Marxism and

Leninism (Tran Hoa, 1999). That is, Vietnam is in transition to a market economy with a socialist orientation. The revolutionary economic process of *Doi Moi* has already been associated with a significant reduction in poverty. Per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has doubled from USD200 during the 1990s to USD815 in 2007. Poverty levels reduced from 58.1% in 1993 to 16% in 2006 (World Bank, 2008). Gaining membership of the WTO was crucial for Vietnam in terms of aligning itself with the world economic community and to propel its economic growth and prosperity (Jha, 2006).

The WTO focus on human capital development to aid this process has led to a demand in Vietnam for tertiary education related to business and free market principles. There is great demand for knowledge at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, but the higher education sector in Vietnam is not in a position to meet this demand locally; although reformation of the higher education sector has commenced (Hayden and Thiep, 2006). The student participation rate in higher education is 124.7 per ten thousand (Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), 2006). Universities in Vietnam currently contribute to society through teaching, but they have under-qualified lecturers, poor infrastructure and curriculum (World Education Services Canada, 2004).

Historically, the higher education system in Vietnam followed the former Soviet Union model where teaching and research were separated. It was inherited from the period of centralised planning where higher education was segmented by economic sectors. All enterprises were publicly owned and education and training were narrowly focused towards a particular economic segment. Graduates were guaranteed employment in their sector of study. Lacking financial capital, human capital and infrastructure, higher education in Vietnam was historically supplemented by allowing scholars to study in former (communist) Soviet-bloc countries with aid provided mainly from the Soviet Union (World Education Services Canada, 2004). With the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union in 1989, all Vietnamese students were sent home and the focus of international student mobility changed to the western world (Kelly, 2000). Australia was, and is, well placed to provide such education (McBurnie and Ziguras, (2007).

By allowing their scholars to study overseas, with the requirement that they return home to increase the technical and educational capacity of their country after graduation, human capital development and economic development should occur more rapidly (Knight, 2007). Some of these scholars are privately funded from their own financial resources, but most of them are funded through educational aid programs provided by the western world. In terms of offshore destinations for Vietnamese students, USA is only marginally more popular than Australia.

Vietnam is one of the largest recipient countries of Australian government funded scholarships in the Asia Pacific Region. An annual allocation of 150 scholarships has been maintained by the Australian government in Vietnam since the late 1990s costing AUD19 million, representing approximately a quarter of Australia's total bilateral aid program to Vietnam (AusAID, 2004). A condition of each scholarship is that recipients return home for at least two years after graduating in Australia. Between January 1998 and December 2005; 926 Vietnamese awardees graduated with Australian qualifications; 36% in governance (accounting, economics, banking and finance and law) and 16% in education (AusAID (Australian Government), 2006). The attainment of a business degree qualifies for aid in the areas of governance and education. This is a targeted and strategic approach to match education and training to labour market needs in Vietnam (AusAID, 2003).

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of my research was to gain an understanding of the relationship between the outcomes that my university's policies suggests that its graduates possess, in the context of internationalisation and graduate attributes, with the actual outcomes that have utility for international students by exploring the experiences of a group of Vietnamese business graduates who studied at my university in Australia and then returned home to Vietnam after graduation.

The research objectives were firstly to gain an understanding of the academic, social and cultural experiences that contributed to the development of knowledge and skills of Vietnamese business graduates while in Australia. The second objective was to compare the relationship between the learning outcomes that have utility to these graduates now they have returned to Vietnam with the university's policies about internationalisation and the attainment of graduate attributes.

The research was informed by the literature relating to internationalisation of higher education and university policy related to internationalisation of the curriculum and the development of graduate attributes.

The research undertaken by Barrie, in particular, was used in analysing and summarising the data obtained from the graduates involved in the research. Barrie (2004) outlines the development of an empirically based graduate attributes policy at the University of Sydney; also a Go8 University in Australia. He conceptualises the graduate attributes policy of the University of Sydney in a form that enables a diverse number of graduate attributes to be summarised into five major translational clusters of research and inquiry, information literacy, ethical, social and professional understanding, personal and intellectual autonomy and communication. He also conceptualises three enabling graduate attributes of scholarship, lifelong learning and communication. This is depicted in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1 - Conceptualisation of Graduate Attributes at the University of Sydney**



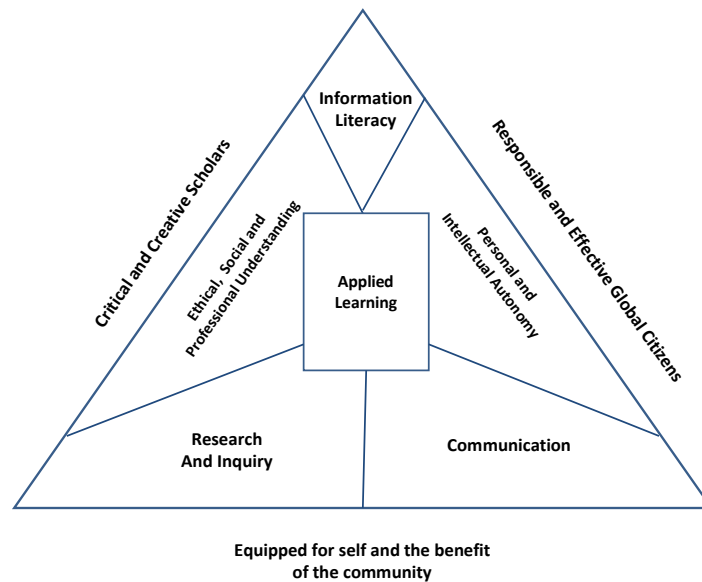
**Source: Barrie, 2004.**

The model suggests that there are two layers in the hierarchical approach to the development of graduate attributes. Firstly, there are translational clusters of graduate attributes relating to 'personal attributes, cognitive abilities and skills of application' (Barrie,

2004). Secondly, there are three overarching holistic attributes that embrace an enabling conceptual approach; the highest level of conceptual relationships between discipline knowledge and graduate attributes, where graduate attributes development focuses on ‘giving graduates a particular perspective or world view (a way of relating to the world, or to knowledge, or to themselves) [that] transcends the disciplinary context in which they were acquired’ (Barrie, 2004). These enabling attributes are those outside the triangle in Figure 1 and are difficult to assess in the context of disciplinary knowledge.

The model shown in Figure 1 was adapted by me to reflect the internationalisation and graduates policies of the Go8 University where I work. It conceptualises twenty four graduate attributes into Barrie’s five translational clusters with an added sixth translational cluster of applied learning. The three enabling graduate attributes outlined by Barrie were also changed to reflect my university’s policies that conceptualise graduates as critical and creative scholars, responsible and effective global citizens and equipped for self and the benefit of the community. This is reflected in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2 – Monash University’s Enabling and Translational Graduate Attributes**



**Adapted from Barrie (2004).**

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

My research participants were Vietnamese nationals who had studied in Australia and graduated between the years 2000 and 2006 with an on-campus business degree at my University. Confidentiality laws prevented me from using the University’s database of graduates so a snowball technique was used to recruit graduates to my study.

A mixed methodology (using qualitative and quantitative data) was adopted for the study with three sequential, time ordered stages. Firstly, semi structured interviews (recall conversations) of sixty to ninety minutes duration were conducted with graduates in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to gather data about their experience in Vietnam prior to studying in Australia, their experiences of living and studying in Australia and their experiences upon return to Vietnam after graduation (qualitative data).

Secondly, a graduate attributes questionnaire was provided to graduates after the individual interview, asking them to rate the personal development of 24 graduate attributes taken from the business faculty's graduate attributes policy statement at my Go8 University. A five point rating scale was used to rate each of the 24 graduate attributes; representing the graduates' perception of the attribute before leaving Vietnam (before) and after graduating in Australia and returning to Vietnam (after) (1= below average; 2 = average; 3 = good; 4 = very good; 5 = excellent). The 24 graduate attributes were categorised into the six translational clusters depicted in Figure 2 above as follows:

**Research and Inquiry;** capacity for research and inquiry, capacity to analyse and solve problems and the ability to develop new or innovative ideas directions and opportunities.

**Information Literacy;** numeracy and information literacy.

**Personal and Intellectual Autonomy;** time management skills, the ability to cope with pressure and stress, the capacity to learn new skills, the capacity to work autonomously and leadership skills.

**Ethical, Social and Professional Understanding;** the ability to operate in an international/multicultural environment, developing an understanding of professional ethics and the capacity to understand different points of view.

**Communication;** oral and written communication skills, the capacity for co-operation and teamwork and interpersonal skills with colleagues & clients.

**Applied Learning;** the ability to develop professional knowledge & practice, broad background general knowledge, general business knowledge, develop work skills specific to the functional area, understanding of fundamentals of business performance, understanding of business operating systems & processes and the ability to apply knowledge in the workplace.

Graduates could also make comments about the development of each graduate attribute after providing a rating (quantitative and qualitative data).

Thirdly, focus group interviews of sixty to ninety minutes duration were conducted six months after completion of the individual interviews to provide graduates with preliminary findings obtained from the individual interviews and the graduate attributes questionnaire to develop group discussion about all aspects of graduates' experiences related to their education prior to leaving Vietnam, living and studying in Australia and their return to Vietnam after graduation (qualitative data). Interviews with students about their experiences can provide feedback about outcomes so that the curriculum can be modified in line with any findings (Le Blanc, 2005).

I adopted a sequential approach in the data collection process because I wanted graduates to firstly discuss their experiences freely without being led by a list of questions related to graduate attributes. This was the reason for providing the graduate attributes questionnaire after the conduct of the individual interviews.

After gaining ethics approval from the university's human ethics committee and after the conduct of a feasibility study in Hanoi, four visits were made by me to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to collect data. To gain background information whilst conducting fieldwork in Vietnam, information meetings and seminars were convened by me with the Australian

government agency AusAID, employers and universities to gain an understanding of local issues. A journal was kept by me to record comments and perceptions whilst completing fieldwork in Vietnam.

After the data collection phase, all qualitative data was segmented, coded and categorised using NVivo7 software program to search for themes, patterns, hierarchies and relationships that would assist the data analysis and reporting phase. Quantitative data from the graduate attributes questionnaire was analysed using SPSS software program.

I also reviewed publicly available information about my Go8 University's policies related to its mission, internationalisation, graduate attribute outcomes and teaching and learning practices. These were compared with similar policies of other Australian universities to obtain a further understanding about university policy and practice in Australia.

Significance of the study

Although studies about internationalisation of higher education have examined themes about international students in Australia, internationalising the curriculum, student support and meeting international student expectations, most research has focussed on international students before they returned to their home environment. Research about graduate outcomes and its utility for graduates when they return to the home environment of a developing country is scarce. My study addressed this issue.

Creating an understanding about the development of graduate attributes has gained prominence over the past decade. In Australia it is recognised that the development of graduate attributes and business education sustainability are areas that require immediate action by universities (ALTC (Australian Learning and Teaching Council), 2008). Topics that are 'on the radar are curriculum mapping for developing graduate attributes, internationalisation of the curriculum and developing intercultural competencies' ALTC (Australian Learning and Teaching Council), 2008).

The research findings of this study are most directly relevant to my University's administrative and academic staff in the context of their business degree offerings at undergraduate and postgraduate level, the Australian government in the context of its educational aid program to Vietnam, international employers and prospective students from countries outside Australia who are looking to study a business degree overseas.

Findings

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE ONE – ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES**

Most of the data obtained for research objective one came from the individual and focus group interviews.

Graduates had moved from a prescriptive communist environment to a more open multicultural environment in Australia; both at university and in society. At University in Australia, graduates' learning was directed away from reproductive learning towards analytical and extending learning. At university, graduates had to firstly learn to overcome cultural differences. In achieving this they developed independence and an empowerment to learn in an environment that, for the first time in their formal learning experience, was fully equipped with the resources to help them meet this goal. Resources were available at university to help them overcome personal difficulties (through counseling services provided by the university) and expand their knowledge (through the library and information technology). The personal stress caused by the graduates' new learning environment and the resources available set graduates down the path of developing an international perspective and the attributes the University expects its scholars to possess. It provides utility to them



now in Vietnam by understanding how to deal appropriately to meet their workplace goals. The graduates are also able to deal with foreigners as Vietnam changes to meet the market economy objectives of the government (*Doi Moi*) as it opens its doors to trade and investment with the western world.

Graduates extended their thinking towards balanced arguments rather than “one right way”. They were able to experience and observe the importance of governance and transparency in the university community and how it creates equality in the learning environment. Their learning community was enhanced through collaboration with academic staff (although a much greater level of social integration would have been preferable). This collaboration was reinforced with peers through the completion of group assignments with students from other nationalities. It helped graduates to develop an understanding of similarities and differences that has contributed to the development of their own world view. Graduates sought commonality of language with other students and this improved their communication and teamwork skills in the English language in thinking, speaking and listening.

Outside of the university environment, most graduates were living outside of their family home for the first time. They had to create a new support group to help them during their period in Australia. It is this environment that helped graduates further develop their own world view by living with other nationalities and working part time. Graduates learned about other cultures, religions, how to overcome tensions between nationalities, differences in motivation to study, problem resolution, aggression where required and equality. By living with other nationalities and working part time, graduates also improved their English communication skills, decision making, how to admit to mistakes, how to laugh at themselves, negotiation skills and how to have fun at work. This added to the graduates’ personal development in developing attitudes towards scholarship, global citizenship and community. Those graduates who did not live with other nationalities, or did not work part time, readily admit that they restricted their own vision of the world. They did not take advantage of the personal development opportunities. Now they have returned to Vietnam they regret that they did not take advantage of working and living with other nationalities.

Research objective two – learning outcomes and university policy

Most of the data in this section came from the graduate attributes questionnaire where graduates rated each of the 24 graduate attributes included before leaving Vietnam (before) and after graduating in Australia and returning to Vietnam (after) (1= below average; 5 = excellent).

I used the quantitative data to gain an understanding of the extent to which the business graduates perceived that they developed graduate attributes whilst studying at my University in Australia. The mean for each of the six clusters was calculated in terms of the mean before and after for the total research sample ( $n = 42$ ), the undergraduate group ( $n = 21$ ) and the postgraduate group ( $n = 21$ ). The total research sample and each of the groups were also analysed according to gender, type of degree (undergraduate or postgraduate), funding of degree (AusAID scholarship or private), employment sector (public or private) and city (Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City). Tests for statistical significance were conducted where  $n > 30$ . Nonparametric techniques were used where  $n < 30$  and a normal probability distribution could not be assumed. Means, statistically significant differences (*t-tests*) and significant differences (non parametric tests) for each of the six clusters for the total sample, undergraduate group and postgraduate group are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 - Means for the Six Translational Clusters**

Attribute and number of attributes in cluster	Total Sample (n=42)		Undergraduate Group (n=21)		Postgraduate Group (n=21)	
	Mean Before	Mean After	Mean Before	Mean After	Mean Before	Mean After
Research and Enquiry (3)	2.27	4.03*	2.16	4.19**	2.29	3.95**
Information Literacy (2)	2.83	4.01*	2.73	4.11**	3.00	3.90**
Personal and Intellectual Autonomy (5)	2.72	4.02*	2.51	4.01**	2.94	4.03**
Ethical, Social and Professional Understanding (3)	2.23	4.13*	2.02	4.27**	2.44	4.00**
Communication (4)	2.57	4.10*	2.35	4.08**	2.81	4.12**
Applied Learning (7)	2.55	4.10*	2.09	4.12**	3.02	4.05**

\*Statistically significant increase in mean (paired *t-tests*, before and after) ( $p < 0.01$ ).

\*\*Significant increase in mean (Wilcoxon signed-rank test (non parametric; before and after) ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 1 above suggests that graduates involved in my study ( $n=42$ ) perceive that there was a statistically significant increase in mean for all six translational clusters of graduate attributes. There is also a significant increase in mean according to gender, type of degree, funding, employment sector and city of residence. It is interesting to note that graduate attributes were mentioned directly on 26 occasions (out of 40 graduates), during the individual interviews when I asked graduates what they learned in Australia, even though the graduate attributes questionnaire was provided to graduates after the conduct of the individual interviews.

Internationalisation of higher education and the curriculum should improve intercultural understanding and communication (Leask, 2001). It should be counter hegemonic and seek to provide an equitable process of learning by all students valuing social inclusion, cultural pluralism and world citizenship ahead of the local environment (in Australia in this study) with a level playing field for all students (Leask, 2001). My analysis shows that females rated themselves lower in nearly all of the 24 graduate attributes before leaving Vietnam, but by the time of graduation in Australia they had achieved a similar level (as measured by average mean after) in terms of each attribute. In terms of mean after for each of the six clusters, this was also true by type of degree (undergraduate and postgraduate), funding (private and AusAID scholarship), employment sector (private and public) and city of

residence (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City). This suggests a level playing field for this cohort of students with equal opportunity for learning being provided at the University.

The key finding is that both groups perceive that the change in mean for the six translational clusters of graduate attributes were significant. Importantly, apart from research and inquiry and information literacy for the postgraduate population, they all rate the development of graduate attributes (as measured by average mean after) as better than very good (average mean greater than 4.00) after graduating at the University and returning to Vietnam.

That is not to say, however, that each of the individual graduate attributes included within each cluster provided this conclusion. For example, numeracy within the cluster of information literacy, did not show a statistically significant increase for this research sample ( $n=42$ ) ( $p<0.01$ ), or a significant increase within the undergraduate group ( $n=21$ ) ( $p<0.05$ ) and postgraduate group ( $n=21$ ) ( $p<0.05$ ). Also, there are sub-groups of graduates (such as graduates working in the public sector) where the development of these outcomes need some review. In the context of applied learning, there are aspects of the teaching and learning processes at the University that need to be addressed to ensure a more engaging experience for international students. Despite the criticism about this cluster of graduate attributes by the graduates involved in this study, however, graduates readily acknowledge that they have developed the disciplinary knowledge and skills that will help to contribute to their own and Vietnam's development in the future.

During the focus group interviews, I asked graduates what they valued most about their experience in Australia. I also asked them about the value they take to their employers in Vietnam. The graduates involved in this study told me that the things they value most (and have utility in their lives in Vietnam) about their experience of living and studying in Australia include overcoming shyness, learning in an impartial environment, the memories, being more open to learning, a competitive advantage when applying for jobs, the ability to network, readiness for Vietnam's integration with the world, willingness to change, being a more confident person, understanding what is going on around them, lecturing skills, listening skills, organisation skills, an active and effective approach to work, how to grow up and be responsible for themselves, reputation and status, learning more about society, how to get straight to the point, not being afraid to fail or make mistakes and acceptance of people.

When I interviewed employers whilst conducting fieldwork in Vietnam, I asked them about our graduates. They told me that the major qualities the University's graduates bring to their employment are their ability to work in teams and take responsibility for their actions. They advised that, generally, local graduates are not prepared at university for the workplace in Vietnam. My University's graduates have greater proficiency in English, can solve problems, and are able to understand the world outside of Vietnam. They also have good time management and report writing skills. The conversations I had with employers whilst I was in Vietnam provided affirmation of the data I collected from the graduates involved in my study. Because the University's graduates have developed these skills, the major problem employers have is in retention of staff because they are in demand.

Employers also told me that the University's graduates are able to integrate back into society in Vietnam far quicker than graduates from USA because they still hold their cultural values. They told me that graduates who study in USA and return to Vietnam take a longer period of adjustment back into the Vietnamese culture and society. This suggests that graduates involved in my study were able to benefit from the plurality of cultural learning experiences in Australia where they developed an international perspective, whilst at the same time retaining their cultural identity. It suggests they have developed a hybrid application of their learning and development rather than a homogenised application.

The initial motivation of business graduates to study in Australia was to gain an international degree that would provide them with professional employment, financial security and status in Vietnam when they returned. Prior to studying in Australia, graduates perceived that they would gain “knowledge” about business.

Graduates readily admit that they developed disciplinary knowledge, but found much of it to be difficult to implement in the local environment of Vietnam. They found aspects of the discipline knowledge transient. It is the development of graduate attributes that has the most utility and relevance to them in Vietnam.

## Conclusion

Now that graduates have returned to Vietnam their attitude to learning, and what has utility to them in their local environment, encompass disciplinary knowledge, but more importantly the “thinking skills” and graduate attributes that are helping them adapt and learn into the future. In the context of this study, the enabling conceptions of graduate attributes of critical and creative scholarship, responsible and effective global citizenship and the ability of graduates to equip themselves to benefit themselves and the community can be recognised as developing.

The learning outcomes that have utility to the graduates involved in this study, in the local environment of Vietnam, align with the University’s policies about internationalisation and graduate attributes. This includes disciplinary knowledge, graduate attributes and a world view. The graduates involved have been able to construct their own meaning of their educational, social and cultural experience in Australia and have had the opportunity to observe and adapt their behaviour whilst firstly in Australia and then when they returned to Vietnam after graduation.

The graduates involved in my study also acknowledge that they have developed both the disciplinary knowledge and graduate attributes in Australia to adapt to the international workplace. This has been confirmed by the seven graduates involved in my study who now work overseas in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. They have told me that they have successfully integrated into the workplace and society in those countries, but still have a loyalty to Vietnam.

Whilst the University needs to take more effort in ensuring that graduates develop personal and intellectual autonomy and applied learning whilst students are under its pastoral care, my study enables me to conclude that the international qualities and graduate attributes the University suggests its graduates possess were achieved by the business graduates involved in my study. My study leads me to conclude that it is these qualities, ahead of disciplinary knowledge, that have the greatest utility to these international graduates now they have returned to Vietnam. This contributes to both human capital and capacity development in the area of governance; a key priority area of Australia’s educational program to Vietnam. It is a demonstration of how the University experience has contributed to the educational aid programs of the Australian government in Vietnam.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Group of Eight (Go8) is a coalition of leading Australian universities, intensive in research and comprehensive in general and professional education. The Go8 exists to enhance the contribution of its member universities to the nation’s social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being and prosperity; extend the contribution of its member universities to the generation and preservation of the world’s stock of knowledge; strengthen Australia’s capacity to engage in and benefit from global developments, respond to global and local

challenges; expand opportunities for Australian students, regardless of background, to participate in higher education of world class (see <http://www.go8.edu.au>).

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