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Principles and a model for advancing future-oriented and student-focused teaching and learning

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Abstract

A major agenda of higher education institutions is to equip students to be employable and 'future ready' graduates; achieve their professional and personal goals; and respond, in a socially responsible way, to the challenges of the 21st Century. These aspirations require quality teaching and learning that is future-oriented and student-focused. This paper will describe the first phase of an initiative carried out in an Australian university to afford these aspirations as well as promote transformative and sustainable curriculum and pedagogy. An extensive review of literature was conducted to ascertain traits of Generation Y students. The findings from this review highlighted the diversity of preferences, goals, values and motivations of Generation Y compared to Generation X and Baby Boomers. This review informed the subsequent conceptualization of a suite of principles and a teaching and learning model, intended to have broad cross-disciplinary applicability and assist academics in the design, delivery and review of curriculum and pedagogy. A synopsis of the review findings, an explanation of the principles and model and an overview of the next phase of the initiative will be provided in this presentation. Additionally, a description of how generational information could more broadly inform higher education progress will be explained.

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1. Introduction

The expectations and purpose of higher education institutions can vary depending on the individuals' or groups' perspective. Society broadly presumes that institutions will equip students with discipline-specific competence.

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Current research suggests that higher education programs endow graduates with attitudes, beliefs and cognitive skills that will enable them to be effective citizens in the 21st Century. Students perceive multiple purposes aligned to their extrinsic professional goals and their intrinsic personal goals (Chan, Brown & Ludlow, 2014; McArthur, 2011).

The most successful higher education institutions will be those who can predict future societal and student needs and accommodate these in the educational programs that they design and deliver. However, ascertaining what these needs might be is challenging and subsequently, program design and delivery is often informed by conjecture. The first phase of an initiative, which sought to tackle this challenge is presented in this paper. This initial phase focused on reviewing and analyzing generational research and literature and in light of the findings rationalize an evidence-based suite of principles and a teaching and learning model that could inform the design, delivery and review of future-oriented and student-focused curriculum and pedagogy. Traits that were specifically investigated through a generational lens, to appropriately inform the suite of principles and ensuing model were career motivations, personal and professional goals and characteristics, educational preferences and societal values (Chan, Brown & Ludlow, 2014; Salmon & Wright, 2014). Phase two of the initiative will investigate the veracity and value of the principles and model through interviews and focus groups with academics using these resources.

2. Context for a Generational Focus

Rationalizing the basis for informing curriculum and pedagogy design and delivery, which is future-oriented and student-focused requires firstly an in-depth understanding of the student cohort and secondly an awareness of potential future needs and opportunities. In the Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health (SMAH), at the University of Wollongong (UOW), where this initiative transpired, 86% of the student cohort were classified as belonging to Generation Y, born 1980-1995 (Henry, 2007). Conversely, 84% of the academics were classified as belonging to Generation X (50%), born 1965-1979, or a Baby Boomer (34%), born 1946-1964, (Henry, 2007). In an attempt to understand the current student cohort, this initiative undertook an extensive review of research and literature into the traits of Generation Y, with a view to determining the significant career motivations, personal and professional goals and characteristics, educational preferences and societal values of this generation.

Curriculum and pedagogy decisions are most significantly influenced by the personal beliefs, views and assumptions of teachers (Nicholls, 2002). According to Walker *et al* (2006), the teaching preferences of Generation X (Gen X) and Generation Y (Gen Y) are considerably dissimilar. Thus, the hypothesis that underpinned this initiative was that in SMAH if the beliefs, views, assumptions and pedagogical preferences of the Gen X educators are contrary to those of their Gen Y students then the curriculum and pedagogy designed and delivered would not be student-centered or potentially future-oriented. Subsequently, the broad review undertaken as part of this initiative also examined the career motivations and educational preferences and characteristics of Gen X and Baby Boomers in addition to the Gen Y investigation. This was undertaken as a means of ascertaining the disparate motivations, preferences and characteristics of Gen Y students compared to their Gen X and Baby Boomer teachers and in doing so, highlight the specific curriculum and pedagogy elements that needed to be addressed in the developed suite of principles and ensuing teaching and learning model.

3. Methodology

An extensive review of generational literature and research was conducted on papers and studies published from 2005 onwards. The decision to restrict the data sources to this time period was based on a premise that the Gen Y information would not be adequately relevant or contemporary if the source was published prior to 2005, which is ten years post the end of the Gen Y time span. Data searches used specific terms including generational differences/traits/characteristics/comparisons and Generation X/Y and Baby Boomer. Papers and studies sourced were also limited to those that had pertinent application to adult learning, career motivations, societal values and/or personal and professional characteristics. Further, the selected papers and studies were contained to only those that provided descriptions of traits for each of the Generations X/Y and Baby Boomer.

A thematic analysis of the gathered research and literature data was conducted and the resultant findings were synthesized and organized into a data collection matrix that mapped the characteristics and traits of each generation

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