LEARNING BRIEF

**UCT’s Global Citizenship: Leading for social justice programme**

**Interim report 1 April – 30 September 2013**

**Introduction& background**

The programme awarded funding by the DG Murray Trust is UCT’s Global Citizenship: leading for social justice programme (‘GC’ for short), a co-curricular programme open to all UCT students and supported initially by the Vice Chancellor’s Strategic Fund[[1]](#footnote-1). UCT’s revised mission and strategic plan were adopted at the end of 2009 committing the university to producing graduates “whose qualifications are internationally recognised and locally applicable, underpinned by values of engaged citizenship and social justice” (UCT, 2009)[[2]](#footnote-2).

In this Learning Brief, we pay attention to the processes and activities aimed at institutionalizing the programme for longer-term sustainability. Linked to this will be a reflection on progress and questions about going forward. The progress of the overall GC programme itself is reflected in the Implementation Dashboard and has not been repeated here.

1. **Institutionalisation: opportunities and challenges**

This is an increasingly important aspect of the programme and where we are putting a lot of our effort at present. Through this, we aim to contribute to UCT’s efforts to put increasing emphasis on graduate attributes, at both an institutional and a faculty level.

**Faculty level work**

GC in the engineering curriculum

This has been a significant development, work on which began late in 2011. As we have noted in previous reports, the current UCT Strategic Plan places an emphasis on defining and embedding, in its students, key graduate attributes such as the ability to learn in an electronic and global age, the capacity for critical comparative thinking and effective cross cultural communication. Internationalisation and social responsiveness is linked through a focus on issues of global citizenship and social justice that provides exposure to debates of global significance and opportunities for engaged policy research and service learning. In addition to programmes like GC, which is outside of the formal curriculum, the intention is that these attributes should be imparted in the normal course of the curriculum.

EBE Faculty strategic goals align with this intention, as well as with the Engineering Council of South Africa’s requirements that engineering students demonstrate multidisciplinary work and understand the impact of their decisions on the personal, social and cultural values and requirements of those they affect and interact with. The new ‘Social Infrastructures’ course aims to meet all these goals. It is tailored to all undergraduate students in EBE with the hope that it will also attract students from other faculties to allow a fully interdisciplinary experience for the students involved.

In the introduction to the course, we discuss the idea that in an increasingly divided world where the gap between poor and wealthy nations is ever increasing, we need ‘engaged citizens’ who can respond to pressing global concerns and address local realities. We argue that we would therefore like our graduates – as citizens – to be prepared to think and act in new ways: thinking and acting that is aimed at problem-posing and critical reflection, linked to understanding and improving the lives of communities, locally and globally. Through an approach to learning that combines classroom-based learning and reflection, with community-engaged, experiential learning (2 fieldtrips) this course provides a space to ask questions, to reflect and to develop ideas about these issues.

The course is entitled ‘Social Infrastructures: engaging with community for change’. The term ‘social infrastructures’ in the course title refers to the facilities and mechanisms that support the establishment of services like education, health care, community development and social welfare. The term also recognizes that urban development is a socio-technical process, giving rise to particular relationships between households and communities, and materials and technologies, shaped by the institutional and political context. The concept of ‘social’ thus implies that development and any other form of ‘service’ cannot be looked at without considering the needs of people, of communities.

At the end of this course, it is hoped that students will leave the course more socially aware, reflective and with some understanding of the many challenges facing cities in the context of inequality. Students will constantly be asked to think critically about an issue, drawing on both their own experiences as well as on what others have said and written about it. Through this process of learning, active listening, critical thinking and engagement, it is hoped that students will find a voice to locate their views on the relationship of people to infrastructures in contexts of extreme inequality - as students, as emerging professionals and as citizens.

The Convenor of the EBE course is the GC programme convenor from CHED; however given its focus, she does not teach the whole course. Developing the course has necessitated initiating an interesting cross-faculty project whereby colleagues from across the EBE faculty contributed to the teaching. We shall reflect further on these experiences in the Learning Brief at the end of this funding period but suffice to say that a very interesting curriculum project has emerged through experiences of convening the course. Part of our project is also to consider whether the course, or components of it, could be taught in other faculties.

**Institutional-level work**

The GC Award

When we initially conceptualised the GC Award, we wanted to explore whether the university, as part of its project on graduate attributes, would be willing to offer an Award on graduation to students who completed all three components of the GC programme. We made tentative moves to explore this with senior decision-makers in the university. However at the same time, we became aware of a number of other units different from ourselves, but doing complimentary work. These include the Careers Service and the Department of Student Affairs, both units with which we have historically had strong ties (members of both units sat on the original Steering Committee). As part of our movement towards institutionalisation, it made sense to engage them in discussions around this issue.

We have thus initiated discussions with both of them to look at opportunities for linking together with various other extracurricular experiences under the ‘graduate attributes’ definition. We are investigating the possibilities for using a virtual ‘e-portfolio’ to collect and display students’ achievements and activities which contribute to their holistic development as young leaders. This work will carry on into 2014 and is significant in building a profile for initiatives that are aimed at addressing graduate attributes and recognising students’ experiences beyond the formal curriculum. This programme is in line with a similar and growing trend in higher education[[3]](#footnote-3).

Establishing the GC Advisory Committee

When the GC programme was established in 2010 we had a Steering Committee that worked with us in getting the programme off the ground. As part of the broader approach to embed this programme in the institution, we needed a more representative and strategic advisory structure. Responding to this, we thus set up the GC Advisory Committee (AC) in July; members include deputy deans, students, institutional planning, student affairs and career services. The AC is chaired by the DVC: Social Responsiveness and Transformation, with a reporting line to the DVC Teaching and Learning. This is significant: a new UCT teaching and learning committee has been established at the university and this means that concerns about the GC programme’s relationship to the university have been formalized through key structures.

University curriculum review task team

The Convenor of the GC programme has been appointed to a university-wide curriculum review task team, looking specifically at breadth in the curriculum. This comes directly out of her role on the GC programme and provides further visibility for the programme. The task team is in the process of finalising its role and mandate.

University funding for 2 core staff

Until this year, the salaries of the two core staff on the programme - the project administrator (now eCitizenship project coordinator) and the programme convenor – were paid out of GC funding. As of late this year both these posts are university-funded. This reduces our demands on external funding, and signifies an implicit willingness to support the GC programme.

1. **Reflections**

**Blend of co-curricular and curriculum-embedded elements**

As was mentioned in the Implementation Dashboard, in our process of working towards institutionalization, we have met with a number of the programme’s supporters to help us think through some issues. This is particularly in relation to scale, as we have been made aware of UCT’s desire for this programme to reach more students. We reflected on the fact that the model we have developed, with its focus on intensity and deep engagement, is quite difficult to scale-up – if by ‘scale’ we mean student numbers alone.

At our meetings, we asked colleagues what they thought the GC programme ought to look like in 5 year’s time. We asked that they not dream about an ideal programme; rather, taking into account institutional realities, including funding cuts, how ought we to plan going forward? What our meetings have made clear is that we need to think about a dual model i.e. both credit and non-credit bearing. There was total agreement that the small, intense and deep learning experience is good in its own right, and clearly working for students. Structurally we are also forced to continue with a dual model as many students cannot take additional credit-bearing courses as their degrees do not have space for electives. Additionally as a credit-bearing course it would cost them additional fees. Lastly, in addition to the EBE Faculty, only the Commerce Faculty has thus far listed it as they offer their students electives.

**GC: A catalyst for institutional change?**

However, what we need to think about going forward is whether there is an inherent ‘**multiplier**’ that we can ‘take to scale’. Phrased differently

* Can the GC programme (or core aspects of it) act as a **catalyst** for broader institutional change?
* If so, how will we take this forward?

In addressing these questions, we believe our experience of developing a different kind of pedagogy, and dealing with contemporary issues to engage and connect with students, is important to share with others within the institution. From the outset, we have argued that GC is a learning programme (and is recognized on the academic transcript as a UCT Short Course) but it is not a conventional academic project. Rather it aims to engage students as thoughtful and opinionated scholars and citizens, who are keen to learn, think about, critique and respond to key contemporary issues. From the outset we bring social justice into the framing of our questions and considerations and use this lens to think about whether and how we might be responsive to and responsible for the world in which we live. Matters of global import have clear local impact and so we are concerned both with ‘the global’ and its connections with ‘the local’.

The global debates course considers global issues as well as how these are realized or represented locally; it therefore focuses on how we respond to global issues, locally manifested. The service learning course focuses more specifically on how in our engagement and partnerships with community organizations and representatives we have the potential to mirror global dynamics and relationships in microcosm. At both levels we challenge students to confront the centrality of power in local and global relationships and dealings.

**Broader debates in higher education**

Our approach, while pedagogically innovative, is not without theorisation and context. GC is located within debates on the need for students to acquire new knowledge for a global and complex future, and similar programmes have emerged both locally and internationally (see earlier footnote). Nussbaum (2007) suggests that because higher education is producing the next generation of citizens, we need to ask ourselves about the kinds of values, dispositions and attributes our students hold as they go out into the world after their studies.

A number of authors are beginning to talk about HE’s role in relation to issues of globalisation and argue for curricula to begin to take on some of these issues. Barnett and Coate (2005), for instance, explore curricula in five subject areas across six UK higher education institutions, with a specific focus on the relationship between three domains or components of curriculum: knowing, acting and being (as distinct from knowledge, action and values). They show how elements of each were evident in all examples, but in very different relationships to each other (Barnett & Coate, 2005).

They make the argument that ‘knowing’ can never be separated entirely from ‘being’ as knowledge is taken in by students, thereby shaping their being to some extent – i.e. knowledge cannot be separated from knower. Acting is also not formed through a simple process of identifying skills (2005, p. 94). Skills are deemed desirable because they are embedded within notions of what counts as competency within a certain subject area. However, it is the domain of ‘being’ that Barnett and Coate argue is the significant area for curriculum change in contemporary times – times of on-going uncertainty and ‘supercomplexity’:

A world of uncertainty poses challenges not just of knowing and of right action but also, more fundamentally, on us as beings in the world. How do I understand myself? How do I orient myself? How do I stand in relation to the world? ... Curricula in higher education therefore, have this challenge in front of them: how might *human being* as such be developed so that it is adequate to a changing and uncertain world? (2005, p.108; emphasis added)

An additional pedagogical “informer” of the curriculum is the post-Apartheid South African context. For South African students, the future is uncertain not only because of general trends regarding the nature of change in contemporary global society (Barnett, 2004), but also because the country is undergoing its own internal processes of transformation. The national project of social transformation is one that requires substantive and purposive change toward a more equitable, just and free South Africa (Reddy, 2008). Therefore, “being” in a South African context should be heavily infused with a social justice orientation.

**Going forward**

Taking our work forward, the challenge exists in translating the innovative components of our approach to teaching and learning (both in terms of pedagogy and content) into an approach that can be taken up in other ways through more conventional, credit-bearing courses. In our initial project documents, we argued that while this programme is important in its role in building active citizens, it also has an important role in the making of the intellectual. In other words, the programme is also sound, credible and even innovative in scholarly terms. It is about building a sense of citizenship and social activism through intellectual engagement. We want students to have the opportunity to be critical thinkers – not just through opportunities for social activism and engagement but critical thinkers who also have sense of the world of ideas and how these two aspects are related.

This is the work that will become the focus of our efforts for the next 2-3 years – embedding these ideas, values and this kind of learning, into different spaces in the university. We are under no illusions that it will be easy; however the alternative of not doing this work is something that we cannot imagine. As Nussbaum (1997) has argued, this is an important project in higher education globally, and we need to be a part of this. This does not mean stopping the co-curricular programme: while it is an important project in itself, it is also an important incubator for our institutional work. Going forward therefore, we aim to do development work in multiple sites at the university.

**References**

Barnett, R. (2004). Learning for an unknown future. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *23*(3), 247-260.

Barnett, R., & Coate, K (2005). *Engaging the curriculum in higher education.* Berkshire: SRHE and Open University.

Beall, J., McMillan, J. & Small, J. (2010). UCT global citizenship programme: Curriculum framing document. University of Cape Town.

Nussbaum, M. (2007). Cultivating humanity and world citizenship. [Excerpted from *Forum Futures* 2007. 37-40.] Cambridge, MA: Forum for the future of higher education. Available from: < http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ff0709s.pdf> [28 April 2013].

Reddy, T. (2008). Transformation. In N. Shepherd, & S. Robins. (Eds), *New South African Keywords.* South Africa: Jacana Media.

Sperandio, J., Grudzinski-Hall, M., & Stewart-Gambino, H. (2010). Developing an undergraduate global citizenship program: challenges of definition and assessment. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 22*(1), 12-22.

1. [www.globalcitizen.uct.ac.za](http://www.globalcitizen.uct.ac.za) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. www.uct.ac.za/about/intro/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For example: The Global Citizenship Program at Lehigh University, USA (see Sperandio et al, 2010), The Manchester Leadership Programme, University of Manchester, UK (www.mlp.manchester.ac.za), Global Exchange, University of South Australia (http://www.unisa.edu.au/globalexperience/) , Life, Knowledge, Action: The Grounding Programme, University of Fort Hare, South Africa (www.ufh.ac.za/lkaweb) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)