**DGMT Learning Brief April 2015**

**Lessons from reality: how does individual and institutional change play out in reality?**

The University of Cape Town’s (UCT) current 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 are linked in the Strategic Plan through a focus on issues of global citizenship and social justice providing students exposure to debates of global significance and opportunities for engaged policy research and service learning. The intention is that these attributes should be imparted in the normal course of the curriculum. However, curriculum transformation is a long process that, while often espoused as an inherent ‘good’, has to contend with both ideological and structural barriers. The UCT global citizenship programme (GCP) was initiated to explicitly address these intentions and has been run over the past 6 years largely through extracurricular short courses (see [www.globalcitizen.uct.ac.za](http://www.globalcitizen.uct.ac.za)). More than 1200 students have attended one or more of the short courses. In 2013, a credit-bearing course ‘Social Infrastructures: engaging with community for change’ was established in the faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment (EBE). It draws strongly from the work on the GCP and as of July this year, close to 200 students would have elected to do this course.

In our last Learning Brief, we discussed the issues of the relationship between individual and institutional change, and used the example of the GCP ‘s GC-Act (then called GCAP) project to explore this issue. In this brief, we have been asked to reflect on lessons from reality – how this relationship between individual and institutional change plays itself out. To reflect on this question, we will provide a progress report on the GC-Act project. However, with recent events on campus around the Rhodes Must Fall campaign and related activities, to not discuss the GCP within this broader context would be amiss. Finally we will reflect briefly on a very recent discussion of the GCP Advisory Committee (13 April) in which, given our recent events on campus, the GCP was discussed in relation to broader curriculum transformation issues.

**GC-Act: global citizenship, leadership and collaborative action**

One of the goals of the GCP has been to encourage students to find a voice to take leadership on a range of global issues in their local context. Despite some efforts, this is an aspect of the GCP that we have not had much success with – and we have reflected on this in previous reports. Given this, we have allocated dedicated resources – small amounts of funding and a senior tutor – to spearhead activation in 2015. We are calling it ‘GC-Act’ and have earmarked 11-15 May as activation week. During this week, we hope to see at least 10 projects that we will have supported have a presence in one way or another on campus. Students have been invited to submit ideas for projects and a set of criteria for projects will be used to guide students in developing their project concept (see application forms and rating sheets attached to this report).

We have argued that it is important for the GCP through GC-Act to link with other organisations, as this reflects a different and more collaborative understanding of leadership that is emerging across high education. According to Longo and Gibson (2011) student leadership models are moving away from what they would call a ‘command’ style of student leadership to a leadership style more reflective of a ‘community’ orientation[[1]](#endnote-1). This newer understanding of student leadership reflects the reality of the global world we live in and the ‘new set of skills needed in an interconnected world’ (2011:3). Such an understanding,

flows from a growing disillusionment with traditional top-down, hierarchical leadership models that dictate to, rather than work with, real people in real communities trying to find solutions to real problems (2011:3).

Leadership conceived of in this way is seen as collective rather than top-down ‘and as an ongoing iterative learning process that stresses inner reflection coupled with external and collaborative action’ (ibid: 3). Universities therefore need to provide opportunities for students to engage in such processes and practices as part of a growing awareness of the importance of ‘life-wide education’ and ‘life-wide learning’ i.e. a more holistic understanding of the learning students acquire in HE. Supporting collaborations amongst student organisations and groups to facilitate leadership development aimed at confronting global concerns rather than only leading people from the top is the kind of leadership that the GCP strongly endorses.

Other South African scholars also make the case for the development of students as “citizen leaders.” For instance, Waghid argues that attributes such as “compassion, criticality and a sense of responsibility” are necessary to enable students to contribute towards what he calls “civic reconciliation and transformation.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Soudien brings the past and present together in writing about the relationship between education and citizenship, stating that there are two positions: needing to teach young people their history and culture in order to “build their dignity and feelings of self-worth;” and needing education to provide young people with the “high skills knowledge” – the cultural capital – that will enable them to operate within the complexity of a globalized world. As challenging as it is, Soudien believes we need to give students *both* a sense of local history, as well as a connection to kinds of knowledge that can enable them to become citizen leaders.[[3]](#endnote-3) The GCP convenor has also written recently on these issues in a forthcoming chapter co-written with a colleague at Providence College in the US.[[4]](#endnote-4)

It is this understanding of leadership that is also behind the GC-Act pilot for 2015. Based on it, we have decided to link GCP with 4 more overtly activist orgs on campus doing work linked to 4 debates in GC1

* + Inkulufreeheid – inequality & democracy
  + Green Campus Initiative (GCI) – climate change & sustainability
  + Equal Education – public education
  + Amnesty international – war & peace

It was felt that these organisations would be a good link for GCP students as their main focus was activism which, while considered an important output for GC as well, is not as overt an objective in GCP, which is more focused on active learning. We have also got 2 ex-GC1 students to act as mentors for students who wish to develop projects. We have decided to fund 6-10 projects, each to be given up to R500 for their campaigns.

As this is a pilot project, we will be mindful of developing a set of critical questions to ask of this work and to shape our thinking going forward. In particular, does this project provide an opportunity for the GCP and its students to link to broader institutional change such as what we are currently experiencing on campus? Although we aimed to address this question more directly in the Learning Brief, our ideas are far more provisional at this stage.

**Rhodes Must Fall and GCP**

The recent events on and off campus related to the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement have been dramatic and intense. In some ways, and from some perspectives, it could be argued that they came as a surprise. However on reflection, perhaps the broader issues around transformation – of teaching staff, of the curriculum, and perhaps most challengingly, of the institutional culture – should have been expected. UCT is not an island outside of a broader context; as a publically funded institution it reflects the myriad challenges in the broader South African and even African context, given the large number of students the university attracts from other countries on the continent. Student leadership through the SRC and other bodies has been vocal its call for transformation for some time and the symbolism of the Rhodes statue falling perhaps serves to capture these transformation issues quite graphically.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Rhodes Must Fall campaign from a GCP perspective was the development of an active learning programme within the RMF movement. Staff and students engaged on wide-ranging issues linked to transformation, black consciousness and broader social change. While the GCP itself was not involved in these activities, a number of current and ex-GCP students were active in these discussions.

Throughout the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, the GCP has strived to offer students a learning and reflection space to engage and grapple with these complex issues. One of the topics heard often and loudly on campus is the fact that we do not know how to speak about, and listen to, different views on these issues – students and staff alike. Engaging in transformation is not just about the ‘what’; it is also crucially about the ‘how’, and this is the role that the GCP has tried to play during the RMF activities. In light of this, and based on student interest, we opened up a specific space on the course to provide students with an opportunity to listen, learn and reflect on the issues. Here is the email that went out to all GCP from the GCP convenor inviting students to the session:

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| Dear GC students,  I really appreciated your interest and high level of participation at the session last night. I also found myself moved and inspired by your interest in pursuing the discussion on the Rhodes statue and broader transformation issues on campus. As I said, students like yourselves on a programme like GC have a lot to contribute to these debates. It is a chance to show leadership by becoming informed about a complex issue, something that we all feel strongly about one way or the other. As I said last night, it is not about ‘taking a position’ or that GC has a position. GC can’t have a specific position on the actual issue because GC is you, with all your different views, backgrounds and ways of making sense of the world. However while GC does not have a position on the issue, we do have a position about our responsibility and commitment to providing opportunities for debate, discussion and learning. An issue like transformation in our context is so important and is so much more than about black or white. It is about understanding the complexity and interconnectedness of history, of lived experience and present realities, about feelings of inclusion and exclusion, and about how we build our democracy going forward. All of these issues I think you would agree with me, are core values of the GC programme.  In making good my commitment at Tuesday's session, the GC programme will be organising an opportunity for discussion and reflection on the current issues on campus and their wider consequences. As per all our GC sessions, this will be a space for reflection and discussion; for listening and learning. Please come in that spirit. |

A second email went out reminding students of the event. It simply said:

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| One of the first slogans that sparked the national debate around the Rhodes statue and Transformation was "Think Deeper, Do Better".  I encourage everyone to attend this discussion so that we can continue to do exactly that. It will be a safe space to openly and honestly share - and explore - your views, listen to those of others and learn together.  #ThinkDeeperDoBetter |

When initially planned, these sessions came sometime before the final decision was going to be taken by UCT Council and many students indicated their desire to be there. However by the time we held the session (delayed due to the university vac and exams and tests), the Council decision had been moved to the following day, and our session clashed with a meeting of Convocation. We therefore had a smaller group of students than we had anticipated. Despite this, the session was vibrant and thoughtful: we had carefully planned the ‘how’ structuring in many opportunities for listening and learning. Based on student feedback, a very important space had been created. We had also invited an external facilitator for this event – a past SRC president and someone with a lot of experience in youth facilitation and dialogue. He was impressed with the level of student engagement. As he put in an email afterwards:

Your students are really such a wonderful example to us all. They think deeper, draw connections beyond what is immediately visible and were so respectful in engaging one another honestly.

What is important for us on the GCP is to maintain this space and opportunities for reflection, listening and learning. However equally important is the need to find ways to link the GCP with other activities on campus so that the active learning so valued on the programme can be linked to opportunities for leadership and activation more broadly at the institution.

**Transformation through GCP in the curriculum: the case of the SI course**

The big problems of the world … are far too big for engineers to solve by themselves. Engineers may make useful contributions, but they may also be less than useful if they are implicated in causing these problems in the first place, or if they seek tidy solutions when there are none. (Williams 2002: 29-30)[[5]](#footnote-1)

I think it's made me think more critically. To see the people behind the constructs that stand before them. For example, *a building isn't just a building anymore*; it serves a purpose for something and most probably someone (UCT Engineering student 2014)

The credit-bearing course ‘Social Infrastructures: engaging with community for change’ was designed to provide students (across all faculties) to understand the complex relationships between people and infrastructure, particularly in contexts of deepening inequality. 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 increasing, we need ‘engaged citizens’ who can respond to pressing global concerns and address local realities. 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.

The focus of the course is on community engaged learning. Through an approach to learning that combines classroom-based learning and reflection, with community-engaged, experiential learning fieldtrips, the course provides a space to ask questions, reflect and develop ideas about the issues outlined above. Students are positioned in relation to 3 interlinked identities or voices on the course: student, emerging professional and citizen, and the assignment tasks set have attempted to reflect these identities and provide an opportunity for the expression of these voices.

This has been an important curriculum innovation and one that we hope to take into other faculties. However as alluded to in the introduction, curriculum transformation is a challenging process and needs to take into account both structural and ideological issues into account. Some of the structural barriers include lack of elective space in curricula; different credit weightings for courses across faculties; and the potential tension between breadth offerings (of which GCP type courses are seen as) and issues of throughput and success, made visible in initiatives on campus like the First Year Experience (FYE) project. However given the popularity of the course and support for it within the EBE faculty and the GCP Advisory Committee, we are hopeful that initiatives similar to this can be taken up in faculties.

GCP links have are however visible in a number of other ways across the faculties. These include in Commerce where in Orientation and core courses for 1st years aspects of GCP themes have been introduced. A postgraduate course in Commerce has also made the GC1 short course compulsory for its students. A number of other opportunities in Law and Health Sciences are opening up. Lastly, the Humanities faculty is currently considering whether to offer the SI EBE course as an elective for its students from 2016. We will know this by the end of this week.

What I think is important about the curriculum opportunities, and how it links to this Learning Brief, is the need to think about broader issues of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and role of educators. These issues link to the broader transformation project under discussion on campus currently. If we wish to bring about new and different kinds of learning aimed at active citizenship, pedagogy and the experiences and approaches of educators is a crucial part of the picture.

**Concluding thoughts: going forward**

In our original course planning we drew up a document that we called our ‘curriculum framing’ document (2010). It was our attempt to articulate and make explicit the concerns and values shaping the programme. In it, we stated the following:

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| The GCP is a learning programme 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 therefore 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 UCT Global Citizenship is concerned both with ‘the global’ and its connections with ‘the local’. At both levels we challenge students to confront the centrality of power in local and global relationships and dealings.  However, 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. |

Given where the programme is today, and where the institution and its students stand in relation to recent events, it is important that we ask how the GCP can play a role in both individual student (and staff) development as well as broader institutional and curriculum development. These are not easy asks; however, not addressing these questions is not an option in our current and future context. If we are to position GCP as a transformation space on campus, we need to seize the opportunity to engage as soon as possible. This was also the feeling at the GCP Advisory Committee that met recently (13 April 2015). This was very encouraging to note. So while perhaps we have not fully addressed the issue of how individual and institutional change play out in reality, we are beginning to understand the real challenges in understanding this relationship: work that is ongoing for the GCP in the next few years.

1. Longo, N. and Gibson. C. (Eds.) (2011). *From command to community: a new approach to leadership education in colleges and universities*. Medford, MA: Tufts University Press. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Waghid, Y. (2009) Cosmopolitanism and education: Learning to talk back. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 23(1): 5-7; in Leibowitz, B. et al (Eds.) (2012). *Community, self and identity*. South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council, p. xi. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Soudien, C. (2006). The city, citizenship and education. *Journal of Education* 40: 103-118. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Longo, N.V. & McMillan, J. (Forthcoming) Educating for global leadership. In Knight Abowitz,K. & Evans, M. (Eds) *New Directions in Student Leadership: Engagement and Leadership for Social and Political Change*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Kabo, J., Day, R. & Baillie, C. (2009) Engineering and Social Justice: How to help students cross the threshold. *Practice and Evidence of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 4(2): 126-146. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)