

Developing student leaders' graduate attributes: How student learning support can play a part

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Abstract

Victoria University of Wellington's *Pathways to Success* (2006) document stresses commitment to "social engagement in teaching and learning" (p. 8), as a means of preparing graduates to succeed in a complex society. To this end, the Student Learning Support Service established the PASS (Peer Assisted Study Support) and Campus Coaches programmes. These leadership training schemes not only enhance the First-Year Experience, but senior students' involvement in the programmes as a whole, help develop 'communication, creative and critical thinking, and leadership skills': the graduate attributes outlined in the Victoria University of Wellington *Strategic Plan* (2005-2015). Supported by qualitative and quantitative evidence, this paper details how such programmes can contribute to the holistic success of university graduates.

Introduction

Twenty-first century demands for global citizenry have led to a marked rethinking of "the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution" (Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell & Wells, 2000, p. 2). Alongside traditional mastery of subject-specific knowledge and skills, graduates are now required to exhibit "qualities that also prepare [them] as agents for social good in an unknown future" (Bowden et al, p. 2).

To this end, as outlined in the 'Bologna Agreement' (1999), universities worldwide have sought to define their desired 'graduate attributes'. These come in a wide variety, as revealed by a web search of Australian and New Zealand institutions, from Sydney's all-encompassing 'Scholarship, Lifelong Learning and Global Citizenship' (University of Sydney, 2008) to Waikato's qualities customised to each degree programme (University of Waikato, 2008a, b, c).

Effectively offering a midpoint between these extremes, Victoria University of Wellington's 2005-2015 *Strategic Plan* (2004) aims to produce graduates who:

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Will be distinguished by their capacity for independent, creative and critical thought, their excellent communication skills and their ability to take a leadership role in an increasingly diverse, technologically sophisticated and complex global society (p. 3).

These goals inform the university's *Pathways to Success* (2006) document, which advocates that all programmes clearly articulate expected student outcomes and, where necessary, revise and realign academic courses to establish a clear sense of "connection and progression" (Victoria University of Wellington, 2006, p. 10) between core elements at each successive level, as a means of developing students' expertise.

The imperative for graduates to develop such qualities was further endorsed by a 2006 survey conducted by Vic Careers, which identified the 'top 10 skills and attributes' valued by employers:

- 1) strong interpersonal skills
- 2) strong verbal communication skills
- 3) strong written communication skills
- 4) a flexible & adaptable 'can do' attitude
- 5) sound academic achievement
- 6) being self-motivated
- 7) being a team player
- 8) energy and enthusiasm
- 9) problem-solving skills, and
- 10) analytical & conceptual skills

(Vic Careers, 2006a, p. 2).

Such emphasis represents a significant shift in direction for institutions that have traditionally concentrated solely on disseminating knowledge. Moreover, it is one thing to stipulate that graduates should achieve these requisite attributes; quite another for tertiary providers to impart them.

Certainly, it can be argued that the skills acquired during one's university career depend largely on the individual. Nevertheless, a significant number of institutions are now imbedding the teaching and assessment of 'graduate attributes' within their academic programmes, as exemplified by the Australian national GAP (Graduate Attributes Project) programme (Barrie, 2008; Institute for Teaching and Learning, University of Sydney, 2008). Moreover, studies such as those by Clanchy and Ballard (1995), Robinson and Kabanoff (2003) and Bath, Smith, Stein and Swann (2004) have begun evaluating universities' contribution to graduates' workplace competencies.

A similar process is underway at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW). As part of its accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the Faculty of Commerce & Administration (FCA) is currently determining

its students' desired graduate attributes, and considering how and where they can be embedded into the curriculum. For example, according to the director of the FCA's Academic Accreditation Programme, 'communication skills' could be taught and assessed through discipline-specific writing tasks (reports, case studies, etc), oral presentations, and teamwork. This year (2008), FCA is conducting a pilot assessment of the academic writing skills, such as grammar, style, and vocabulary, of a sample of 100-level (first-year) to 500-level (Masters) students (Personal communication, Martin Boswell, 13/11/08). The second stage in implementing this pathway will be to embed subject-specific attributes into the curriculum for each discipline, a process all Schools and faculties at Victoria look to follow.

While tertiary institutions may seek to impart communication and critical thinking skills, it is less easy to foster intangible attributes such as 'interpersonal skills and leadership' within formal teaching programmes. Therefore, at Victoria University of Wellington, the Student Learning Support Service offers a range of targeted student leadership opportunities, both paid and voluntary. For example, SLSS employs Peer Writers, graduates who work 1-on-1 with ESOL students to improve their written expression., while volunteers lead Conversation sessions (weekly social gatherings of Kiwi and International students) and participate in Excell workshops, designed to promote intercultural competencies (Student Learning Support Service, 2008). The two most significant programmes, producing the greatest number of student leaders, are PASS (Peer Assisted Study Support) and Campus Coaches. Although primarily directed at enhancing the First-Year Experience, both schemes offer training and provision for on-going reflection, thereby empowering the student leaders as well.

This paper outlines these two leadership programmes and the underlying training philosophy of 'active learning', reports on the findings of a preliminary 'Graduate Attributes and Employment Skills' survey of former and current PASS Leaders and Campus Coaches, and describes how involvement in such schemes contributes towards VUW's new Victoria Plus Award, which has been specifically designed to acknowledge students' achievement of transferable skills.

PASS Leadership programme

The PASS (Peer Assisted Study Support) programme offers voluntary study groups in core 100-level courses², providing a relaxed and supportive environment in which students can meet regularly to work together at their own pace, engage in active learning, make friends, and develop study skills. PASS's philosophy of 'active learning' is based on the concept of Supplemental Instruction (Blanc, De Buhr & Martin, 1983) developed by Deanna Martin at the University of Missouri, Kansas in the 1980s to support students in 'at risk' courses, and further adapted for a New Zealand context in accordance with the University of Queensland's PASS programme

² In 2008, participating courses at VUW included Accounting, Law, Psychology, Politics, International Relations, English literature, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, Chinese, Management, Sociology, Social Policy, Media Studies, Art History, Religious Studies, and Theatre Studies.

(Laurs, 2002). Traditionally, university teaching involves “teacher-centered, transmission-of-information” (Smith & MacGregor, 1992, p. 2) modes such as lectures and tutorials, in which students remain passive and often disengaged. In contrast, active learning demands equal participation from all concerned, involving discussion and problem-solving, application of skills and knowledge, and reflection on experiences (Meyers & Jones, 1993; Silberman, 1996; Sivra, Leung, Woon & Kember, 2000,). In this way, PASS seeks to foster meaningful learning environment, developing participants’ communication and thinking skills in the process.

PASS has been operating at Victoria University of Wellington since 1999. Initially funded by Victoria International, it was introduced in the Faculty of Commerce & Administration as a way of familiarising students from other cultures with expectations within the New Zealand context, such as tutorial participation and expression of individual ideas (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Laurs, 2002). Building on this introductory programme (5 study groups attended by 60 international students), the Trinity Newman Foundation generously funded a pilot scheme (2001-2005), enabling the programme to be opened up to all first-year students in the Faculties of Commerce, Law, and Humanities and Social Sciences, and the School of Psychology, as outlined below:

2001: 6 courses, 100 students, 10 leaders
2002: 8 courses, 180 students, 20 leaders
2003: 17 courses, 500 students, 39 leaders
2004: 19 courses, 700+ students, 36 leaders

As a result of this successful pilot, PASS is now funded³ by the respective academic units, while still administered by SLSS. Over time, the scale of the programme has stabilised, but student participation continues to grow:

2005: 31 courses, 950 students, 41 leaders
2006: 33 courses, 1000+ students, 58 leaders, 3 supervisors
2007: 34 courses, 1200 students, 60 leaders, 3 supervisors
2008: 34 courses, 1300 students, 66 leaders, 4 supervisors.

PASS’s role in enhancing the First-Year Experience was acknowledged as one of the factors contributing to SLSS receiving the university’s General Staff Excellence Award for 2007.

PASS groups meet for one hour each week, led by a ‘peer’: a fellow student who has achieved success in the course in the previous year (Arendale, 1994). Leaders undergo a rigorous selection process, beginning with recommendations by academic

³ On average, PASS costs \$190 per leader (\$13 per hour. for one study session per week, and up to four hours’ training). A further leadership dimension exists in large courses such as LAWS and ACCY (which may have up to 10 study groups apiece), where a PASS supervisor, ideally a former leader and current tutor, is appointed to liaise between leaders and course coordinators. PASS supervisors are paid \$18 per hour. to a maximum of 20 hours per trimester. Campus Coaches are also paid \$13 per hour. (or may opt to undertake the role in a voluntary capacity)

staff and culminating in an interview with the SLSS PASS coordinator. The main role of leaders is to be “an appropriate model of thinking and languaging behavior in the field” (Blanc, et al. 1983, p. 3). The role of PASS leaders, then, is not to teach, but to reinforce effective learning behaviours, motivate group members to meet their own learning needs, and foster a community in which students feel comfortable to ask questions they may feel too shy to ask a lecturer or tutor. Accordingly, a number of international studies (Arendale, 1994; Blanc et al, 1983; Longfellow, May, Burke & Marks-Marans, 2008; Peterfreund, Rath, Xenos & Bayliss, 2008; Smith & MacGregor, 1992) highlight PASS’s potential to develop participants’ graduate attributes. Only latterly have commentators such as Stout and McDaniel (2006) and Skalicky (2008) begun to recognise the benefits for leaders as well.

Leader candidates already possess sound academic ability and good people skills, as attested by the selection process. Nevertheless, the fluid nature of the study sessions, whose weekly agenda is determined by participants’ immediate needs, requires leaders to demonstrate particular adaptability and flexibility. As pointed out by Smith and McGregor,

In collaborative endeavors, students inevitably encounter difference, and must grapple with recognizing and working with it. Building the capacities for tolerating or resolving differences, for building agreement that honors all the voices in a group, for caring how others are doing -- these abilities are crucial aspects of living in a community (Smith & MacGregor, 1992, p. 3).

This achievement is all the more remarkable given that PASS leaders are ‘peers’, generally only one exam removed from members of the group themselves. In order to equip PASS leaders to undertake this role, the SLSS PASS coordinator oversees and trains a team of some 40 leaders per trimester, with subject-specific support provided by the academic staff and/or PASS supervisors. The training comprises an initial two-hour workshop the week before PASS commences, a one-hour session in the mid-trimester break, and a final one-hour debrief at the end of the teaching term. During these training workshops, leaders are encouraged to reflect on their own learning needs and personal strengths and clarify expectations, in preparation for the upcoming first session. Activities also include role-plays and multi-choice quizzes covering scenarios that might arise, as illustrated in Figure 1:

During a session, it becomes obvious students have been given contradictory information about the upcoming assignment by their different tutors:

How do you handle their concerns about the assignment right now?

How do you deal with their concerns about the way the course is being run?

A couple of new students raise something that was covered last week, when they weren't there. You say, "We went over that last time..."

(a) *...Let's go quickly round the room — everyone say one thing they remember about what we discovered.*"

(b) *...That's why it's really important to come each time.*"

(c) *...Make arrangements to talk about it with some of the others later.*"

(d) *...Wait after the session, and I'll explain it to you then.*"

Figure 1. Sample PASS leader training scenarios

The use of open-ended questions and active learning techniques such as 'think-pair-share' (McTighe & Lyman, 1988, p. 19) within the training sessions encourages leaders to employ critical and creative thinking and exercise communication skills in determining their responses. At the same time, the training workshops introduce and model communication and thinking strategies that leaders can apply within their own study groups.

Once PASS begins, individual leaders have a great deal of autonomy, planning and preparing materials for weekly sessions as they see fit. Subject support is provided by the course coordinator, the PASS Supervisor (where applicable) and fellow leaders. There is also a comprehensive series of PASS resource kits (worksheets, previous exam papers, flash cards, etc), which has been compiled over the years. The SLSS PASS coordinator remains in regular contact, with daily office hours, weekly emails, and visits to observe PASS groups in action at least twice a trimester. Leaders also submit a weekly report reflecting on performance and outlining future direction, which contributes to both the PASS coordinator's overview and leaders' personal development, as shown by the following example (see figure 2).

While the leader displays considerable self-awareness in terms of both subject knowledge and people skills, others are less insightful, limiting their observations to comments such as 'covered assignment topics' and 'Next week: prepare for terms test'. Certainly, the potential offered by PASS programme for leaders to develop facilitation and interpersonal skills varies considerably, depending on groups' size and composition, the personalities involved, and the topic under discussion.

Name: Sam	What we did and what went well...
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Course: ACCY111	<p><i>Firstly I had more new people! This mandated an ice breaker, unfortunately I couldn't think of any interesting ones so ended up doing the old "which 3 people would you have to dinner" – modified this a bit by getting people to explain some of their choices, so it worked ok in the end.</i></p> <p><i>Moved onto looking at the theory, as I had 7 people I could (just) keep them all in one big group and still keep everyone reasonably engaged (although they probably could have done things in separate groups). Went round like last week getting people to teach the class. Unfortunately (as I know some of the other leaders have also found) no one seems to know much about this topic. However there was usually 1 person that could explain.</i></p> <p><i>As we went along I purposely made a couple of semi-ridiculous statements (for example "a company with no debt is perfect"), and got them to identify what was wrong with these. This seemed to be quite a good way of getting students involved (perhaps it's because people like to argue with people who are saying silly things?) in the discussion. Finally we worked through q5 from the 2007 exam – FYI (other leaders) I think this a good question (if you want to use one) as it covers more aspects of the topic than most exam questions.</i></p>
Date: 12/08/08	
Attendance: 7 (regulars: 4 newcomers: 3)	
	Aspects to work on...
	<p><i>As noted above, students don't seem to know a lot about this topic so I ended up having to fill in gaps (cash flow ratio's and accounts receivable turnover measures, despite being in class slides, couldn't be explained by anyone in my group), although overall I didn't do too much lecturing.</i></p> <p><i>I'm still yet to think of a sure-fire way to get students competing/arguing – although the silly statements sort of got this happening. It just works (i.e. really helps people learn/remember) so well in Law tutorials that I would love to get it happening in my group (although I suspect Law just lends itself somewhat better to this type of thing than Accounting does).</i></p>

Figure 2. Sample PASS leader's weekly report

Despite this, whether leaders work with one or 15 students, feedback from the final training session indicate that the majority rise to the challenge, experiencing personal growth in the process, as shown by the following responses to the informal 'end-of-trimester' survey question, "What have you learned about yourself from being a PASS leader?"

- Feeling of achievement and having made a difference for others
- Seeing people suddenly 'get' something. It's great when you have that breakthrough and people's faces go from blank to understanding
- Gaining confidence to lead a group of students
- Learning skills about planning, creativity, relating to very different people, teamwork (PASS Leader Survey, 2007).

Anecdotally, then, it seems that involvement in PASS has a part to play towards leaders' attainment of graduate attributes and employment skills, which the research findings presented later in this paper will confirm.

Campus Coaches programme

Similar to PASS, the prime driver for setting up the Campus Coaches scheme was to enhance the First-Year Experience and improve student retention (Glaser, Hall & Halperin, 2005; McInnis, James & McNaught, 1995), in accordance with Beatty-Guenter's (1994) Transition Strategy. Based on Auckland University's Uniguides (Clark & Crome, 2004), the Campus Coaches programme was introduced at VUW in 2007 to provide relevant and timely mentoring in the first weeks of term:

personalising the campus experience by putting a friendly, informed and interactive interface in place [which] extends academic integration to the social as well as personal aspects of campus life (Clark & Crome, 2004, p. 9).

To this end, Campus Coaches are selected through a process of group interviewing intended to gauge candidates' people skills and suitability as role models. Some 70 coaches are recruited each year, to support students across all degree programmes:

2007: 440 students, 47 groups, 68 coaches
2008: 550 students, 49 groups, 70 coaches
2009: 700 students, 61 groups, 71 coaches

The Campus Coaches scheme offers a leadership opportunity for students who may be less academically able than those involved in PASS (although, in 2007-2008, 15 students performed in both roles). The programme is funded and administered by VUW's Student Services Group, overseen by the Campus Coaches' coordinator (ideally a former Campus Coach, appointed for 20 hours per week, October-April), with training again provided by SLSS.

Training takes place the week before Orientation, over two half days. During these sessions, Campus Coaches get together with others within their School or Faculty, hear from 'first-year students' and former Campus Coach panel members, and meet representatives of the services on campus (Students' Association, Library, Student Services Group [Counselling, Health, Finances, Accommodation, Learning Support, Kaiwawao, Disability Support, Crèche, Careers and Manaaki Pihipihinga mentoring scheme]). They also engage in group activities designed to develop their understanding of communication theory (Thompson, 2002), and the First-Year Experience (McInnis, et al. 1995), comprising self-reflection and role-plays similar to the PASS training:

- | |
|--|
| <p>(i) <i>Think back to your first day at uni:
What did you know? What didn't you know? How did you find out?</i></p> <p>(ii) <i>How do you see yourself? Rank the following, and be prepared to explain your choices:</i></p> |
|--|

Senior Student/Expert/Fellow Student/guide/Friend/Counsellor/Other.....

(ii) *What's the main thing you'd like students to get from working with you?*

Figure 3. Sample Campus Coaches training activities

Campus Coaches' parent programme, Auckland Uniguides, operates for the first 6 weeks of term. However, evidence suggests that the first sessions are the most crucial, with the Auckland 2004 survey reporting 82% attendance at the first meeting, falling away to 35% in subsequent weeks (Clark & Crome, 2004, p. 13). The Campus Coaches programme has not captured comparable data, but a similar pattern emerges, in that, out of "729 'pre-registrations', 550 [VUW] students were coached at least once, with 50% returning for the second session" (Brain, 2008, p. 6). Rather than representing a failure of the mentoring programme, this lessening involvement suggests the majority of participants rapidly develop the strategies necessary to establish their own support networks.

For this reason, VUW's programme is offered for only three weeks. An invitation to join the scheme is included in first-year Enrolment Packs, and interested students are matched with a coach in groups of 10-15 (occasionally further sorted into Mature, International or postgraduate groups) during respective Faculty Orientation sessions. On this day, groups take part in a campus tour and a range of games and activities, designed to foster interaction and build confidence. Once the group is underway, subsequent meetings and activities are arranged according to members' needs, with coaches maintaining contact through email and text messages. Activities vary, with some groups opting for weekend visits to the zoo or other local attractions, while others simply meet on campus between classes. The programme culminates in early March with a Quiz and Pizza evening, attended in 2007 by 200 students and their coaches (Brain, 2008, p. 26), and the presentation of Campus Coach Certificates in early April.

Although first-years' participation fluctuates, the majority of coaches reported a high level of enjoyment at being involved in the scheme (a mean of 4.73 on a 1-5 scale, with '5' being 'very much') (Brain, 2008, p. 30). However, involvement varies markedly, with timetabling issues often making it difficult to organise meetings, and the reporting system focuses more on administrative details rather than on coaches' personal reflection. Also, as the prime purpose of the scheme is to empower first-years, the more skilled the coach, the less time he or she may actually spend in the role.

Graduate attributes and employment skills survey

As already noted, the majority of research on student mentoring schemes tends to stress the benefits for participants (Blanc, et al., 1983; Glaser, et al., 2005; Longfellow, et al., 2008; McInnis, et al., 1995; Peterfreund, et al., 2008; Smith & McGregor, 1992), rather than for the senior students involved (Skalicky, 2008; Stout & McDaniels, 2006). Similarly, informal end-of-season surveys at VUW have

previously touched on this aspect, but generally only in terms of leaders' and coaches' personal satisfaction.

To this end, the SLSS PASS coordinator recently conducted an email survey of 2007-2008 PASS Leaders and Campus Coaches. The survey (customised according to audience) had two parts: VUW's Graduate Attributes, and the Employment Skills identified by the 2006 Vic Careers Survey. The first section of Part One, Graduate Attributes, asked respondents to indicate on a Likert scale, ranging from 1: 'strongly disagree' to 5: 'strongly agree', whether 'Being a PASS Leader [Campus Coach] has helped develop my creative thinking/critical thinking...skills', with a second section requesting respondents to give supporting examples. Part Two followed the same pattern, calling for Likert scale responses in terms of Employment Skills, together with examples of how 'Being a PASS Leader [Campus Coach] has contributed to my ability to demonstrate to an employer that I have strong interpersonal skills/ am a team player...'.

Approval was granted by VUW's Human Ethics Committee, with replying to the email taken to signify respondents' consent. Sent as blind copy from 'student-learning@vuw.ac.nz' to ensure confidentiality, the questionnaire was emailed to current and former student leaders: 105 Pass Leaders, of whom 19 replied (18% response rate) and 140 Campus Coaches, of whom 14 (10%) responded. Given that the survey was conducted during the October exam period, the low response rate was understandable, but clearly indicates a need for further research. Results have been aggregated to highlight the main findings, as discussed below.

Graduate attributes

Common to all tertiary institutions, communication, thinking and leadership skills are now seen as a vital complement to graduates' academic achievement, with survey results indicating that involvement in student leadership programmes can play a role in their development (see figure 4).

Pleasingly, all the PASS leaders who responded agreed that involvement in the programme had played a significant role in developing their leadership skills (with 9 of the 19 'agreeing' and 10 'strongly agreeing').

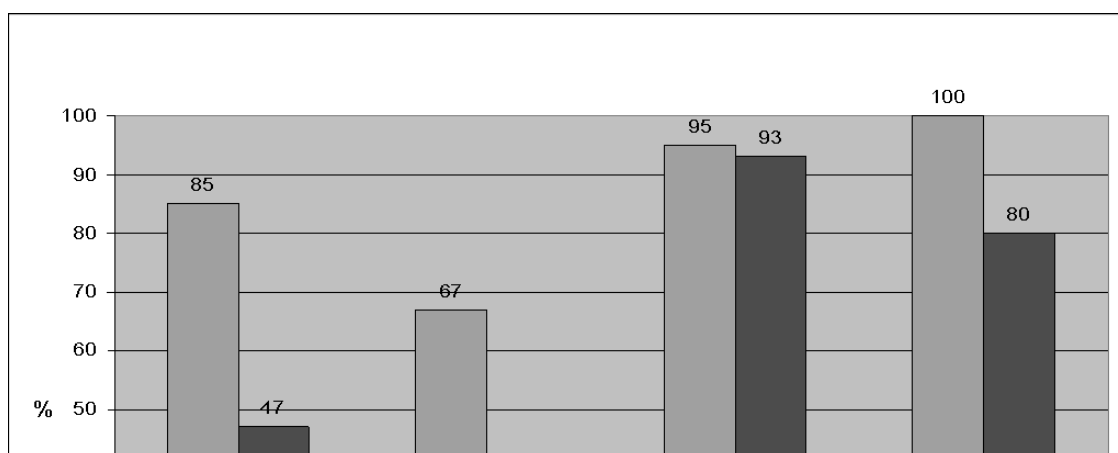


Figure 4. Graduate attributes (% of respondents who agreed or 'strongly agreed' that "being a PASS Leader/Campus Coach has helped develop my xxx")

As previously mentioned, PASS leader candidates are recruited based on already existing leadership qualities. Nevertheless, leaders actively sought opportunities to enhance their repertoire, as indicated by the following representative feedback:

Being a PASS leader has helped develop my leadership skills, by the training provided, and by the preparation, coordination, and actual study group leading. It has challenged me to lead by drawing others out, rather than simply taking charge.

PASS leaders also considered the programme made a strong contribution towards their overall Communication skills (8 'agreed', 10 'strongly agreed' and only 1 remained neutral), with comments noting how the role challenged them in new directions:

- By giving me further experience in facilitating group discussion and interaction. I also found it rewarding trying to lead students to find answers themselves, which meant communicating in different way to simply answering their questions
- Communication to a group in a learning/teaching environment (or facilitating as should be ideally) was a new experience for me so this helped me develop communication skills for a whole new situation.

Thinking skills were the attributes regarded as least developed through involvement in the PASS programme. Even so, both creative and critical thinking categories ranked highly, with differences often relating to how leaders interpreted the question. For example, most clearly acknowledged an impact on their creative thinking: only two remained neutral ('3' on the Likert scale), while 14 of the 19 responses 'agreed' and three 'strongly agreed', appending comments such as:

Having to devise (often on the spot) activities that would engage a group of often tired and slightly disinterested students in the study of accounting — a topic very few find gripping, to say the least!

In terms of critical thinking, however, responses were less clear (one leader ‘disagreed’, 7 were neutral, 8 ‘agreed’ and only one ‘strongly agreed’). Despite this, all provided supporting examples, although some comments related to content knowledge rather than personal thinking skills. Often, respondents regarded creative and critical thinking skills as interlinked, with variations on comments such as needing ‘to critically assess the likely learning outcomes of any given activity, in order to determine whether to proceed with it’. Even the leader who ‘disagreed’ (2 on the Likert Scale) conceded that PASS contributed to ‘my critical thinking skills by getting me to look at all sides of a debate’.

Although the survey data reveals that PASS has less impact on the development of leaders’ thinking skills, this area is already covered by the university’s academic endeavours. That PASS can augment this, while making a significant contribution to able second-year students’ leadership and communication skills in the process, speaks to the value of the scheme in preparing student leaders for the wider socio-economic context in which they will find themselves as graduates.

Such conclusions are endorsed, albeit to a lesser extent, by the Campus Coaches’ findings (see figure 4). The difference in relative weightings between responses reflects not only the differing roles, but also the emphasis within the programmes themselves. The Campus Coach has a limited frame of reference, required to provide practical advice to new students in the first few weeks of trimester only, in contrast to the PASS leader’s more intense commitment over ten weeks. Moreover, thus far, Campus Coaches training and reporting requirements have focused primarily on the necessary leadership and communication skills to enable coaches (often already in their final year of study) to address to first-years’ immediate needs, whereas the four-part PASS training programme and ongoing peer engagement (over a whole trimester) allow for a broader spectrum of personal growth.

Therefore, while acknowledging the contribution of the experience in terms of communication and leadership skills, the majority of Campus Coaches who responded considered that the role had made little impact on thinking skills, because, as mentioned earlier, their duties were relatively clear-cut. While ensuring group members remained motivated required creative thinking to a certain degree, few Campus Coaches felt they developed critical thinking skills in the process. Five of the 14 respondents left this section blank, while others maintained, ‘it didn’t really’, ‘I’m neutral on this’, or ‘Not much of critical thinking was involved because the tasks were very guided & we were advised on how to deal with different situations & which department to point students to for additional help’. Nevertheless, this last respondent went on to concede, ‘Then again, I had to employ critical thinking when adapting the material to different situations and personalities’. Therefore, both Campus Coaches

and PASS programmes seem to offer a useful vehicle for students to refine their leadership and communication skills, in conjunction with the cognitive development already provided by academic programmes as part of the university's Pathways (2006) project.

Employment skills

Sound communication, thinking and leadership skills are vital in the workforce, as shown by the Vic Careers (2006a) survey of the 'Top 10 Employment Skills and Attributes', which categorised the 'Graduate Attributes' into more applied aspects. For this reason, the survey findings are similar to those in the Graduate Attributes' section, albeit with notable differences, as shown in figure 5 below:

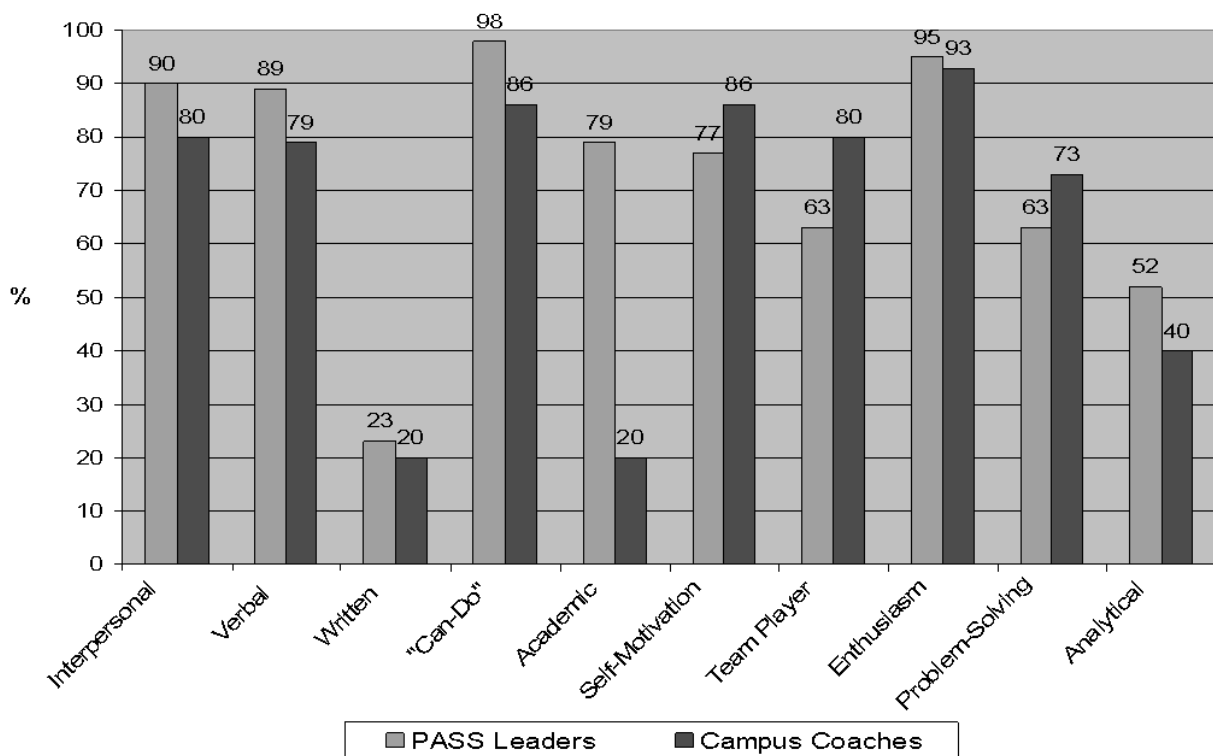


Figure 5. Employment skills and attributes (% of respondents who agreed or 'strongly agreed' that "being a PASS Leader/Campus Coach has contributed towards my ability to show an employer that I am/have xxx...")

The survey focused on transferability of skills, by asking respondents to consider how they might draw on their leadership experience in a job interview or workplace situation. Again, the graph illustrates that the main strength of PASS in particular is in providing a vehicle for leaders to further their interactive skills ('interpersonal' and 'verbal' communication), and personal qualities ('academic achievement', 'flexible and can-do: attitude', 'self-motivation' and 'enthusiasm'), with respondents providing strong evidence in support of each:

Interpersonal skills:

Because much of our role as a PASS leader was to develop a learning environment in which students would feel comfortable sharing with the group course material that they were having trouble with. Furthermore the role of PASS leader is more akin to that of an older friend than a teacher. Thus in order to facilitate such an environment and such a relationship between leader and student, good people skills, particularly an understanding attitude, are crucial.

Verbal Communication:

Much of the role involved talking to people and verbally explaining things. I gained a lot of confidence in verbal communication; this was one of my goals.

'Can-do' attitude:

- Being able to balance responsibility between my own learning and that of others
- Often we would have to improvise as we had little idea of exactly what was being covered in their classes, how many would turn up, what stage they'd be at, or what they would be finding difficult. Thus flexibility was key.

Academic Achievement:

- PASS leaders are chosen from successful students of the previous year, and being able to say on a CV that teaching staff recommended you for the position is a great advantage!
- The motivation I had being a PASS leader flowed through into my studies.

Self-motivation:

Being a PASS leader is a largely undirected role. Thus a high degree of self motivation is obviously needed.

Enthusiasm:

- My group could definitely attribute to the fact that I tried to be enthusiastic every week... especially as I tried to motivate them all. It wasn't too hard for me tho as it is a subject that I am very passionate about so I wanted them to see how interesting and enjoyable it can be.
- It's helped me learn to fake energy and enthusiasm when things are rough!

Despite the fact that most felt PASS made little impact on written communication skills (because their only requirement was a weekly email to the coordinator), the comments above are eloquently expressed. Moreover, as well as endorsing how being a study group leader can contribute to the development of such skills and attributes, these observations pay testament to the perceptiveness of respondents' self-awareness. As shown by the data in figure 5, 'being a team player' and the higher-level cognitive skills were adjudged to be less well-developed through involvement in PASS than other skills. Although responses were confidential, the range of responses for 'teamwork' (five 'strongly agreed', six 'agreed', seven 'neither agreed nor disagreed' and one 'disagreed') possibly reflect differences in individual Leaders' experience. In large, compulsory courses such as law and accounting, high demand for study groups means a 'team' of 8-10 leaders per course, whereas language and literature courses may have only one leader, working in relative isolation. Even so, the qualitative comments reveal a greater appreciation than suggested by the quantitative data alone,

with most leaders (as befitting the programme's 'peer-support' nature) locating themselves firmly within the study group:

- Pass really develops the skill of delegation. If you are just facilitating people's study rather than teaching them you are effectively delegating the work to them. I think this is a very important skill in a team working environment
- As I wasn't a 'tutor', but rather a 'peer leader', I was like part of the class and basically on the same level as the students. We all came up with ideas about the texts together

Likewise, the lower ratings for 'analytical and conceptual skills' and 'problem-solving' represent the high number of neutral responses ('neither agree nor disagree'), with comments frequently noting the difficulty of distinguishing these skills from the 'flexibility' and 'creative thinking' required to accommodate the needs of different students and present materials appropriately. Moreover, as indicated earlier, the main responsibility for developing graduates' cognitive skills rests with the academic programme.

In terms of employment skills, Campus Coaches rated their overall experience somewhat less highly than PASS leaders, with a larger number of neutral ('neither agree nor disagree') responses in Part One, and more than 50% unwilling or unable to provide evidence in Part Two under 'written communication', 'academic achievement' and 'analytical skills'. Moreover, one respondent 'strongly disagreed', offering the same comment for each statement, 'While I may have gain skills in this area, I do not believe this has effected [sic] my position within the current company I work for', apparently misunderstanding the questionnaire's purpose.

That 'analytical skills', 'written communication', and 'academic achievement' received low rankings is unsurprising. The Campus Coaches' scheme is not designed to develop cognitive skills, nor, during its brief run, are coaches expected 'to write much', other than an occasional email to clarify group members' contact details or organise a meeting. Although one respondent did observe that having 'to email and text members of my group [meant I] learnt to say what was important first', the bulk of the role entails face-to-face and verbal interaction rather than written communication.

Furthermore, in terms of 'academic achievement', as already noted, the Campus Coaches' programme provides a leadership opportunity for less academic students. Having learnt what it takes to succeed at university the 'hard way' and the desire to share this knowledge with others are commonly cited in interviews as applicants' motivation for participating in the scheme. Moreover, the coach's role is to provide social and pastoral rather than academic support. Again, a significant number of respondents remained neutral, made no comment or were unsure of how Campus Coaches could be construed as contributing to their academic achievement, possibly because many undertook the role in their final year of study. Nevertheless, of those who did respond, the following observation is representative: "Although we were not

coaching them academically, our attitudes towards learning and grades will reflect on our students. I think I managed to show a good example”.

Conversely, the more personal, less-structured nature of the Campus Coaches’ role (requiring often ‘on-the-spot’ responses to the needs of a group of first-years united only by their subject major) allows for greater development in terms of ‘self-motivation’ and ‘problem-solving’ than leading a PASS group, as illustrated by the following comments:

- While we were given ample resources, each group is so different that it fell to the coach to keep things going.
- Each meeting varied, and I had to be able to adapt to the needs of the people who turned up. The programme is really for the students, so I had to be ready to do whatever they needed.

Similarly, as Campus Coaches wore bright red t-shirts with the slogan ‘been there, done that’, their high visibility around campus and the intensity of involvement over a short timeframe fostered a strong sense of being part of a team. As already noted, PASS leaders operate with a great deal of autonomy, which – for some – meant initiating little contact with their fellows in other courses.

Clearly, the majority of students selected to participate in the PASS and Campus Coaches programmes demonstrate considerable maturity in terms of interpersonal and communication skills in the first instance. Moreover, this survey only measured respondents’ perceptions, without factoring in feedback from the students in their groups. Nevertheless, the comparative graphs (Figures 4 and 5 above) suggest that SLSS’s provision of leadership training, oversight and opportunities for reflection play a useful role in complementing the more formal skills development imbedded within academic programmes.

As a natural corollary to these leadership schemes, VUW has sought to formally recognise the achievement of graduate attributes and employment skills, by instituting a dedicated award for service and leadership, which is acknowledged on students’ academic transcript.

Victoria Plus Award

Directly targeting the goals identified in the 2005-2015 *Strategic Plan* (2004) and *Pathways to Success* (2006), the *Victoria Plus Award* (Te Tohu Rauhi), first offered in 2008, has three components: Activities, Professional and Personal Development, and Reflection. Administered by Vic Careers (within the Student Services Group), the award offers students the opportunity to:

- Raise your awareness and understanding of social responsibility, leadership and employability
- Develop skills to help you in future life and work
- Gain recognition from the University for your contribution (Vic Careers, 2006b).

Students who enrol in the scheme need to amass a total of 300 points during their time at university through participating in a variety of extra-curricular pursuits on campus and in the community. The range of university-based activities includes the SLSS leadership schemes (PASS and Campus Coaches, Conversation, Excell and Peer Writers), mentoring Maori and Pasifika students within Manaaki Pihipihinga, acting as a Residential Assistant, class representative, office-bearer in a club or society, or note-taker or driver for Disability Support Services. Likewise, participation in church groups, sports clubs, cultural societies or organisations like Volunteer Wellington, Youthline, or Age Concern also qualifies. Points are awarded based on the level of commitment and whether the role is paid or voluntary. Being a Campus Coach for example is worth 40-60 points, a PASS Leader between 60-100 points, and a voluntary note-taker between 60-120 points.

Complementing the activities, the Professional and Personal Development component requires candidates to attend a minimum of six lectures, two each from the categories of 'leadership and social responsibility', 'skills development' and 'career development' (Vic Careers, 2006). Presentations include guest speakers from the business world, and seminars on the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator, IT skills (including the 'E-portfolio' requirement for the Reflection component) preparation for interviews and psychometric tests, and effective CV writing (Vic Careers, 2006b).

Successful completion of the Award relies on the third element, Reflection, in the form of an 'eportfolio', created with a software programme that enables users to generate a CV online, by uploading documents, and evaluating each entry in terms of personal growth. As noted by McAlister, Hallam and Harper (2008), eportfolios are increasingly being employed at all levels of education to actively engage learners in the developmental process. In this way, the Victoria Plus Award provides the ideal vehicle for student leaders to identify and reflect upon the graduate skills and attributes they have developed during their time at university, as well as giving them the tools and language to best present themselves to a wider audience.

Already, 16 students have successfully completed the requirements, and will be the first to receive the Victoria Plus Award, presented by the Vice Chancellor at a ceremony in December. Figure 6 is an excerpt from the 'Reflection' of one of the recipients, for whom leading a 2007 PASS group for French literature comprised one aspect of the Award. This evaluation reveals not only an insightful appreciation of what 'leadership' truly entails, but also the way in which the opportunities provided by SLSS have complemented the student's development in terms of people skills and self-awareness.

PASS FREN124 -Graduate Attribute - Leadership

Institution: Victoria University of Wellington (Student Learning Support Service)

Description: As I had a group of approximately 5 students to lead, I had to make sure that they stayed on task (especially as they got to know each other quite well

during the year, and tended to enjoy having a chat!), include everyone in the activities and, to an extent, negotiate with the students what they wanted to cover during the 'class'.

Reflection: It was interesting to be the 'leader' of a group of students who were not much younger than me, and some were older, but, as attendance was voluntary, they were a good group. Maintaining a good group dynamic was probably the hardest challenge, because some people seemed to enjoy contributing a lot more than others but I felt that it was important not to have one person dominating. This also developed my 'passive leadership' skills because I was supposed to be facilitating, not 'teaching'.

Figure 6. Sample VicPlus eportfolio entry

Granted, the participants in such schemes often possess strong interpersonal attributes from the outset. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the personal observations of the SLSS PASS coordinator and Campus Coaches' trainer and findings from a pilot survey of current and former student leaders, Victoria University of Wellington's Peer Assisted Study Support and Campus Coaches' schemes appear to offer an effective platform for developing the graduate attributes and employment skills required for success in the twenty-first century.

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