Learning experiences for the transition to professional work

1. Introduction

A better educated workforce contributes to a more informed and tolerant society with higher economic output, and this is also associated with higher levels of personal health, interpersonal trust, and civic and social engagement (DEEWR, 2008; Daly *et al*., 2009; OECD, 2012; Eacott, 2013). Against this backdrop the role of universities has expanded, as university learning has moved beyond providing an education to preparing students for leadership positions within society (Abrandt Dahlgren *et al*., 2008). Recent shifts in education and labour market policy have resulted in universities also being placed under increasing pressure to produce employable graduates (Bridgstock, 2009). In response, research about higher education has delved into curriculum design and the delivery of university courses and the links with learning for the professions (for example, Abrandt Dahlgren *et al*., 2008; Starr-Glass, 2010), in the context that employability involves far more than possession of the generic skills desired by graduate employers.

Are graduates leaving university with the necessary skills for a successful transition to the professional workforce? Harvey (2003) suggests that recent graduates go through a major phase of development in terms of the extent of their employability within the first few months of beginning their career. This may not be the result of the shortcomings of the higher education system per se, but in the transfer to work itself (Wood *et al*., 2012).

This paper examines the reflections of 412 recent Australian undergraduate business alumni who have made the transition to professional work. Using the results of a survey based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches, we explore these graduates' perceptions of different learning experiences and assessments in preparing them for their professional transition. This paper increases our understanding of how the senior-year

experience at university can assist graduates in the transition to professional work from the viewpoint of the graduates making the transition.

The paper explores two major questions:

- How do recent graduates perceive the value of *in-class learning and teaching activities* in the context of preparing them for the workplace?
- How do recent graduates perceive the value of *assessment items* in the context of preparing them for the workplace?

We also discuss implications for curriculum design and undergraduate education more generally.

2. Transition to professional work

The transition from student life to the world of professional work is often thought of as the next big challenge for teachers of undergraduate students. University education is generally perceived as a key factor in providing graduates with the skills to make them 'employable' and enable them to contribute to the nation's workforce, improve productivity and create economic opportunities (Chong and Ahmed, 2014).

The higher education sector has been a controversial topic of debate and reform in recent times in Australia and many other countries. According to a recent report produced for the British Council by Oxford Economics (British Council, 2012), a combination of economic and demographic changes will completely resize the global higher education landscape by 2020, for instance the study forecasts enrolments to grow by 21 million students worldwide by 2020.

Australia's higher education sector has also been receiving much scrutiny from government and private sector organisations. In March 2008, the Australian Government

initiated a *Review of Higher Education* (DEEWR, 2008) to examine the future direction of the higher education sector, for the purpose of meeting the needs of the Australian community and economy. In light of this review, the Australian Government has set a target of increasing the proportion of 25-34 year olds with a qualification at a bachelor level or above to 40% by 2025. The aim is to ensure that Australia has enough highly skilled people to be able to adapt to the uncertainties of a rapidly changing future, and for Australia to compete effectively in a globalised economy.

There are multiple transitions that students experience as they move from school, to university, and then into the professional workforce. The transition from secondary education to university education and the challenges that arise with such a move are well recognised, and have been the focus of numerous studies (for example Knox, 2005; Wood, 2011; Briggs *et al.*, 2012). The literature on first-year experience is predominantly focused on student adjustment to university life (such as Taylor *et al.*, 2007) and Briggs *et al.* (2012), for instance, highlight the significant social displacement that students may experience when they transition into university.

The transition then broadens as students move from the academic discourse of university study to the professional discourse specific to their discipline (Taylor *et al.*, 2007), but this transition is less well understood, as is the importance of the senior year experience in assisting students to recognise the value of their university experience (Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998). Harvey (2003) proposes that most educators and students believe it is one of higher education's purposes to prepare graduates well for working life, yet there continues to be a concern expressed by employers that higher education is not effective at producing work-ready graduates. A report generated by Graduate Careers Australia (2013) showing that *'interpersonal and communication skills'* was the most important selection criterion for employers when recruiting graduates from 2009 to 2013 (Table 1). Other skills like the

problem solving, critical reasoning, and analytical thinking were considered by the employers when recruiting graduates.

Insert Table 1 Here

Wood and Solomonides (2008) suggest that when preparing students for the transition to university, more emphasis needs to be placed on where students are heading in terms of professional employment and on foreshadowing the future transition to professional work.

Wood and Solomonides (2008) also suggest that when students make the transition to professional work, they must take on the role and status of a professional to gain acceptance and respect in a work environment. These stages are summarised below (Table 2).

Insert Table 2 Here

In an overview of the transition to professional work, Reid *et al*. (2011) describe how graduates move from expert learners to novice workers. Their focus is on the importance of graduate capabilities; specifically, this entails linking what students have learnt with professional work, encouraging learning to learn, integrating discipline-specific discourse and creating a professional identity. Another study linking graduates and the workplace, conducted by Martin *et al*. (2000) found that the degree of graduates' satisfaction with their university experience could accurately predict their perceived level of employment preparation. Similarly, albeit from a different perspective, Pike (1994) concluded that graduates who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to report satisfaction with their education experience.

Some students and graduates may be fortunate enough to have a high level of self-awareness and well-developed sense of their own abilities (Hay, 2001). Hay suggests that others, however, do not realise the extent to which they have developed desirable (and

transferable) skills through their studies and other aspects of university life (for example, part-time work or extra-curricular activities). Students often find it difficult to communicate these skills to other people and to potential employers, with this problem most evident when graduates correspond with prospective employers at the end of their studies (Hay, 2001).

Much has been done to highlight the employment capabilities developed in university study including the introduction of capstone experiences (The Business Capstone Project, 2012), internship opportunities and case studies. However, previous studies were carried out either using small sample size (Udlis, 2008) or from a single university (Crebert *et al.*, 2004). Most of them were in disciplines like computer science, engineering, health care or human sciences (such as Dunlap, 2005; Danielson and Berntsson, 2007; Jarman and Willey, 2007; Nystrom *et al.*, 2008) but not many were targeted at business graduates. Thus, this study seeks to systematically address the limitations in this research area. In particular, this ~~This~~ paper investigates the perceived success of learning strategies from the viewpoint of the participants: the alumni who have made the transition to professional work.

3. Methodology

As part of a larger study of final-year capstone unit experiences within Australian Business Schools, we developed an online survey for distribution to local and international business alumni at five Australian universities[1] in 2011. Online surveys are beneficial in accessing a global audience and the younger audience comfortable with computers and the internet (van Selm and Jankowski, 2006). The five business schools were from the Regional University Network, the Innovative Research Network, and the Australian Technology Network. Members of these universities were party to this project and they provided the necessary

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[1] Griffith University, Macquarie University, Queensland University of Technology, University of Newcastle, and University of Wollongong.

access to the alumni offices for approvals to undertake the study. This convenience sample allowed us to explore the experiences of a broad range and a substantial number of business alumni, including international students who had returned home. However, without probability sampling these understandings cannot be generalised to other graduates.

We used quantitative questions and qualitative open-ended questions to allow for a breadth and depth of data and responses.

The questions were developed from the literature on final-year university experiences and the transition to professional work. A pilot study was undertaken using students and academics from the participating institutions and the questions and page layouts consequently were adapted to allow for ease of use and completion within fifteen minutes. Online surveys seldom achieve response rates comparable to those of postal or telephone surveys (van Selm and Jankowski, 2006), so in order to increase the response rate we used a number of measures. The alumni were sent an initial invitation and one reminder, one week after the initial invitation. We limited the number of approaches to two to limit any sense of annoyance. A prize draw for a Nintendo DS was also announced in the invitation.

Invitations to participate in the survey were sent out to 1,135 business graduates in 2011. Ultimately, 412 responses were received from graduates who had completed their degree program in the previous three (3) years. The response rate was 36% which was above the average in web-based surveys (Sax *et al.,* 2003).

Standard frequencies and means were calculated using SPSS 19. Additional tests, including ANOVA and chi-square, were utilised to test for statistical significant differences between different cohorts of graduates and also to identify possible effects. No significant difference was detected by the ANOVA and chi-square tests among respondents from different universities in terms of all the interval scaled measurement items and the categorical

variables respectively. Hence, the data from different cohorts of graduates could be combined for subsequent analyses. Qualitative comments were grouped into themes.

Of the 412 respondents, 214 were female (51.9%) and 198 were male (48.1%). The majority were aged less than 25 years (73%). In general, around half either studied Accounting, Finance or Financial Planning (Figure 1), with the others widely dispersed among other business areas. The majority of respondents from other universities also graduated from Accounting, Finance or Financial Planning. The percentage ranged from around 40% to 60%.

Insert Figure 1 Here

Data were collected from a list of four on the types of work experience graduates undertook while completing their undergraduate studies (Figure 2). These responses were not mutually exclusive and graduates could pick as many options as were applicable; certainly many respondents had more than one type of work experience.

Insert Figure 2 Here

Each participant was then asked to rank the importance of six in-class types of activity (Figure 3) and ten assessment items (Figure 4) in preparing final-year students for the workplace.

Insert Figure 3 Here

Insert Figure 4 Here

Participants were asked four open-ended questions for which a qualitative response was required:

Question 1: Are there any other in-class activities (not shown in the list …) that you found useful in preparing final-year students for the workplace?

Question 2: Are there any other assessment items (not shown in the list …) that you think are useful in preparing you as a final-year student?

Question 3: What sort of content, learning activities and/or assessment would you include in a final-year subject to help students prepare for the workplace?

Question 4: Describe the most useful learning experience in your final year at university (it could be a lecture, an assessment item, a whole subject etc.). How did it help to prepare you for work in your field?

Content analysis was utilised to identify themes in the data from the open-ended questions. Content analysis is culling meaning from the words and behaviours framed by the researchers' focus of enquiry (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994) and we were able to code these themes as they became apparent to us during the analysis.

4. Findings

4.1 In-class activities

The distribution of the most important in-class activities is shown below (Figure 5). One hundred and twenty seven graduates (30.8%) rated case studies and/or problem-based learning activities as the most important in-class activity in preparing them for the workplace. ~~This is not a surprising outcome, as~~ The rationales are case studies and problem-based learning activities are intended to mimic business problems that students would be likely to encounter in the workplace. Graduates also considered that discussion and guidance about assessment items were valuable in-class activities with 20.9% of respondents holding this view. In addition, 15.8% and 14.1% of graduates perceived that student presentations and group exercises were, respectively, the most important activities in preparing them for the workplace.

Insert Figure 5 Here

It is noteworthy that traditional lectures and practitioner guest lectures rated poorly as preparation for the workplace with only 18.4% of students rating either one of these items as the most useful. Consistent with this view, 202 of the respondents (49%) ranked traditional lectures as the least important in-class activity in preparing students for the workplace (Figure 6). Students' perceptions of the value of having a practitioner present guest lectures were surprisingly not positive. This item was ranked equal last in terms of "most important", and as the second least likely activity to prepare them for the workplace. Nearly a quarter of respondents (i.e. 92, 22.3%) believed that practitioner guest lectures were the least important in-class activity.

Insert Figure 6 Here

While it is somewhat surprising that practitioner guest lectures were not rated more highly, it is noteworthy that they still were considered more valuable than the traditional lecture. This might be explained by the perceived greater 'real-world' relevance of the guest lecture. For instance, the open-ended statements showed that several graduates did in fact value having outside experts come into the classroom. One graduate responded that they would have benefited by "more real-world guest lecturers", while another suggested that it would be useful to have:

> … an industry speaker to really explain what is involved in the workplace. How you need to be on time, work over time, present professionally, speak clearly and directly to people, support firm values, and the list goes on.

From the perspective of curriculum design, the message appears to be reasonably clear. Having practitioner guest lectures is potentially valuable, but only where the guest lecture is a coherent part of the subject and students can see relevance to real-world scenarios.

4.2 Assessment types

Participants were asked to rank ten assessment items from most important to least important in terms of their perceived usefulness in preparing final-year students for the workplace (Figure 7).

Insert Figure 7 Here

Work placements were rated as the most important assessment item in preparing students for the workplace by 107 of the respondents (26%), well above any other assessment item. The association is intuitively obvious, and indeed the written comments to the open-ended questions further confirmed the importance of work placement as a valuable component of final-year study. One respondent stated simply but powerfully, "work placement is the most important" part of final-year study. Many other respondents referred to workplace "experience", "culture", "dynamics" and "ethics" as being crucial.

Oral presentations rated highly as preparation for the workplace, with 59 respondents (14.3%) rating them as the most important assessment item. Similarly oral presentations were rated highly as an in-class activity (15.8% perceived them as the most important in-class activity). Of note, graduates rated oral presentations more highly than any written assessment task in preparing them for the workplace. Clearly graduates perceived oral communication skills as integral to the professional workplace, but did not appear to see the same benefit in written communication skills. Furthermore, graduates did not differentiate significantly between the different types of written assessment tasks they were required to do in terms of their value in preparing them for the workplace. Put simply, essays, project proposals, literature reviews, and reflective journals all rated poorly in terms of their importance. In many respects it is surprising that not one of the formal written tasks was considered to be more important in preparing students for the professional workplace. Presumably graduates

do not see the link between academic writing tasks and the professional workplace. Possibly this might be due to the subject nature of the essay or proposal, or that the formality of such writing tasks is not perceived to be part of current business communication.

Graduates considered that exams were the least valuable assessment item in preparing students for the workplace. In fact, nearly half the respondents (189; 45.9%) perceived exams as the least valuable assessment item in preparing students. One graduate suggested a reason for this: "At no place in my workplace have I come across a similar situation".

4.3 Analysis of qualitative data

The four open-ended questions in the survey provided a rich addition to the survey results and over 800 qualitative responses were gathered. Using content analysis with NVivo 9 several common themes were identified and responses were grouped around the core graduate capabilities frameworks of the five participating universities. These have been listed below, along with direct quotes from participants highlighting the issues raised.

4.3.1 Communication

Graduates were very aware of the importance of high-level written, verbal and interpersonal skills in the workplace.

> LOTS OF GROUP WORK – you can be great at what you do, but if you don't have soft skills/people skills, your success will be capped.

> Utmost importance is placed on interpersonal communication skills in the workplace. Group activities and individual presentations would assist with this.

4.3.2 Discipline-specific knowledge and skills

Graduates were concerned about developing the skills and knowledge in their field that they would need in their first year of professional work. Many of these comments related to

developing practical, discipline-specific skills.

> Project proposals and marketing portfolios. If students had a flowing portfolio that they could put together from all subjects as an example of the 'real-life' work they have done.

> Econometric modelling for an industry problem. Including gathering data, model design and report writing – as group work. For example, using ABS data to forecast inflation using a vector auto regression model.

> First-year trainees in my field are required to prepare income tax returns, simple accounts and BAS's, none of this is touched on in final-year subjects, and it is only briefly touched on in first-year studies.

4.3.3 Critical thinking, problem solving, research capabilities

Graduates were concerned about developing these skills to use in the real world.

> Writing concise briefs, analysis of complex issues, and government policies. Project management activities that involve obtaining firsthand information from real-world external clients.

> The final year should focus on activities and assessments that mirror common tasks in the workplace, such as presenting pitches and writing reports. Those that succeed in the workplace can also think creatively and back up their ideas with solid research, so a self-directed research project in final-year subjects would help with this.

4.3.4 Surviving in the workplace

Many graduates emphasised the importance of learning business etiquette and how to behave in a professional environment.

> Workplace dynamics, personalities, strategies and understanding the operations of a business and not the requirements to only do your job. Interaction with colleagues in the workplace is critical, therefore personality traits and workplace etiquette along with appropriate conduct is an area that really should be explored while students are at university.

4.3.5 Practical work experience

An area that received much discussion in the open-ended questions was practical work experience. Having prior work experience was perceived as a key influencing factor in graduates obtaining their first professional job, and gave them an advantage over other university graduates.

> Universities should look to engage students in work experience throughout the course. Make it mandatory. Experience is more important than an undergraduate degree (everyone has one).

> Work experience in a related field before it becomes too late and you enter a degree or field that is completely different in the corporate world compared to material studied during university.

5. Discussion

This study investigated the perceptions of business alumni on a range of learning activities and assessment types that higher education uses in the teaching and learning process to provide graduates with skills for the workplace. The final year at university should be an opportunity to apply the knowledge students have gained throughout their undergraduate degrees in a practical way, further developing graduate capabilities in students and enhancing their employability. As Harvey (2003) explains, employability is about developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner.

Several common themes emerged when analysing the responses. Graduates felt strongly that case studies and/or problem-based learning were the most important inclusions to help their transition to work. This finding is consistent with the view that graduates value activities which mimic real-life situations and provide situations and tasks that they are likely to encounter in their first year of professional work. In contrast, graduates regarded lectures

as the least useful in-class activity whether provided by the subject lecturer or a practitioner guest lecturer.

Common themes also emerged with the perceived value of assessment items, with work placements and oral presentations being deemed most valuable by graduates. Writing tasks and exams were rated least valuable. It was somewhat surprising and disappointing that graduates did not appear to see the benefits in developing their writing skills while at university. It is also in contrast to their much more positive impression of the need to improve their oral communication skills while studying. Exams were not regarded highly as a vehicle to prepare students for the workplace; however the finding neither surprises nor gives concern. Exams often create a scenario that students are unlikely to encounter in the workplace; that is, they are often conducted in an environment where there are no resources available (i.e. closed book), no ability to consult with others, and significant time constraints. There is an extensive literature on examinations and the purpose they are intended to achieve, but in the main they generally only enable students to demonstrate their understanding of concepts (Hoadley, 2008).

There was some inconsistency between how graduates rated the importance of in-class activities and assessment items and their responses to the open-ended questions, particularly for the work placement. One hundred and seven graduates rated work placements as the most useful assessment item; many also commented that work placements and internships were by far the most valuable activity in their final year and recommended it as something universities should be including for final-year students. However, although they may feel that work placements are important, most of the respondents had not engaged in a formal work placement or internship as part of their degree. Only 33 of the 412 graduates (8%) actually undertook work experience or industry placement and, of those graduates, only

eight ranked this as the most important activity. Therefore there seems to be a gap between the perception and the reality around the benefit of work placements.

This revelation begs the question, should universities be incorporating compulsory work placements and internships as a compulsory part of their business degree program? Harvey *et al*. (1998) suggest that for students to benefit from work experience universities need to ensure it is meaningful; it is assessed or accredited; its quality is monitored; it adds to the student's work experience portfolio; and there is a process for articulation and reflection. The apparent lack of acknowledgment of the value of work placement or industry placement by students who undertook these activities might indicate that universities are not meeting these criteria well enough to ensure a genuinely fulfilling experience.

Another area that received conflicting results and feedback from graduates was the practitioner guest lectures in-class activity. Practitioner guest lectures were rated by only 9.2% of the respondents as the most valuable in-class activity, and in fact 22% ranked them as the least valuable in-class activity in preparing them for professional work. In contrast, in the open-ended comments, graduates quite often replied that guest lectures should be included in their final year at university. The comments included ideas such as that having alumni or industry speakers in class was 'insightful' and that they benefited greatly from hearing about the speakers' experiences. These results again could reflect the quality of the experience, such as the skill of the individual speaker and the relevance to the subject matter.

Another recurring issue for graduates was the perceived value of group exercises as an in-class activity. Group exercises were mentioned frequently in the qualitative results of the study and it was clear that graduates had very differing opinions regarding the benefits. For example, while 14 % of graduates ranked group exercises as the most important in-class activity, a slightly larger percentage (15%) considered them to be the least important activity.

The data in Figure 8 highlight the divergence of views on the value of group activities with significant variability in its ranking by graduates.

Insert Figure 8 Here

There has been much research into both the benefits and negative consequences of group work in academic learning. Strong theoretical and empirical support for cognitive and motivational benefits of group assignments has been found, with productive engagement in peer interactions, collaborative reasoning and co-construction of knowledge leading to cognitive gains and the promotion of higher level learning (Boud *et al.*, 1999; Barron, 2003; Amato and Amato, 2005; Kimmel and Volet, 2010). Boud *et al.* (1999) also report other benefits of learning from peers at university, including the promotion of skills related to lifelong learning, communication and critical reflection. These positive outcomes are paralleled by negative perceptions and experiences of group work, with problems such as unmotivated peers (Bourner *et al.*, 2001; Buckley *et al.*, 2004) communication difficulties (Salomon and Globerson, 1989) and frustration with group assessment (Livingstone and Lynch, 2000). It has been suggested that key elements for successful group assignments include task interdependence, teacher support, clear task instructions, cohesiveness of the group and optimal small group characteristics (see, for instance, Johnson *et al.*, 1998).

One graduate summed up the difficulties raised by group assignments very well:

If group work is going to be a pillar of tertiary education then maybe teaching people how to establish and work in a group would be beneficial rather than leaving it to them to work out for themselves. Even in third year, many students still don't understand the dynamics of participating equally in groups. Groups should be selected on a random or tutor evaluation basis rather than be formed by students themselves. In the workplace you do not get to choose only your friends as team mates.

Despite the difficulties of group work, the benefits are so strong that academics need to improve their technical ability to use appropriate group learning and assessment in final year classes.

6. Conclusion

An important area but one which is apparently rarely researched concerns graduates transitioning from university studies to professional employment. We obtained the reflections of an informed stakeholder group (i.e. recent alumni) to determine the university activities (in-class and assessment) that they believe best prepared them and their fellow alumni for the transition to professional employment. It was clear that the in-class activities and assessment items that were rated as the most valuable by graduates were those that mimicked real-life situations and what graduates would actually experience in their first year of professional work. In-class activities such as case studies, and assessment items such as work placements, oral presentations, written analyses of case studies and simulations, were the highest rated activities for these graduates.

Perhaps not surprisingly, traditional lectures were considered to be the least important in-class activity in helping with the transition to professional employment. Traditional lectures might play an important role as part of the entire educational package for a subject, but they do not 'hit the spot' when it comes to helping students transition to the workforce. Having lectures delivered by guest practitioners could be more beneficial to students than the traditional lecture, but they were still not valued highly by students in helping with their transition. This finding is counter-intuitive and disappointing.

Notwithstanding the broad findings, there was an interesting mix and degree of variability in the views of the alumni. The value of group work to the transition process provided an interesting case in point. A sizeable proportion of the alumni considered group

exercises to be the most important in-class activity in helping with the transition to the professional workplace. However an even larger proportion of alumni considered it to be the least important activity! One respondent indicated that their views changed significantly once they commenced their professional employment.

> At the time, working in group assignments felt like a waste of time and unfair (I think most students would agree). But now that I'm in the workplace, office politics and the differing input from colleagues affect me every day. Group assignments are an important learning vehicle but it should be made clearer why they are used for assessment.

The perceived value of work placement also provides an interesting conundrum. Alumni perception was clearly that work placement is the most valuable item in preparing students for the workplace. However, only about 8% of the respondents had actually experienced a work placement. Further, of these respondents only around one quarter of them considered it to be the most important factor in preparing them for professional employment. On this theme, two observations can be made. First, presumably work placement should have as its central focus the need to prepare students for the professional workforce; based on the evidence of this study that appears to be only marginally successful. Second, in spite of the push towards work placement and work integrated learning as an integral part of the university experience, relatively few students engage in this experience.

As Holdsworth *et al.* note in their 2009 report, many traditional university subjects do not provide the opportunity to experience activities that mimic real-world situations; however, capstone subjects can. Capstone subjects encompass activities such as case studies, internships, and simulations and these were activities that rated well with the alumni in assisting the transition to the professional workforce. Consequently, capstone subjects quite possibly can make a major contribution to providing final-year university students with a culminated academic experience that "brings together the knowledge of an academic

discipline and the student transition to the working world" (Holdsworth *et al*., 2009, p. 3). One of the respondents put forward a strong case for capstone subjects and how they can help with the transition to the professional workplace:

> Universities should be helping students to understand what professional roles mean, and what is encompassed by them. My capstone course on business case development has been the only activity where all areas of study have been reflected upon. A capstone course would refresh this information for job market entrants.

Finally, university assessment tasks and in-class activities that mimic real-world situations are considered by alumni to play an important role in achieving a successful transition from university studies to professional employment. However, from a curriculum design perspective, including them in subjects and degree programs comes as a double-edged sword. Students can appreciate their benefit when they are well designed and it is explained how and why they fit into their professional transition. Conversely, it would appear that merely having an assessment task or in-class activity without proper planning and explanation of its relevance detracts substantially from the graduate's perception of its value.

While one limitation in this research is that our study is Australian in context, we suggest that as business programs are accredited internationally, the results are generalisable to Western contexts. A comparison study with alumni from other international universities could provide insightful results.

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Table and Figures

Table 1. Most important selection criteria when recruiting graduates, 2009 - 2013 (Rank) (Graduate Careers Australia, 2013)

Selection Criteria	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Interpersonal and communication skills (written and oral)	1	1	1	1	1
Passion/Knowledge of industry/Drive/Commitment/Attitude	2	2	2	2	2
Critical reasoning and analytical skills/Problem solving/Lateral thinking/Technical skills	3	3	3	3	3
Calibre of academic results	4	4	4	4	4
Work experience	6	6	5	5	5
Cultural alignment/Values fit	7	5	6	6	6
Emotional intelligence (incl. self-awareness, strength of character, confidence, motivation)	8	8	8	7	7
Teamwork skills	5	7	7	8	8
Activities (incl. intra and extra curricular)	10	10	10	9	9
Leadership skills	9	9	9	10	10

Table 2. Student transitions and contexts (Adapted from Wood & Solomonides, 2008, p. 122.)

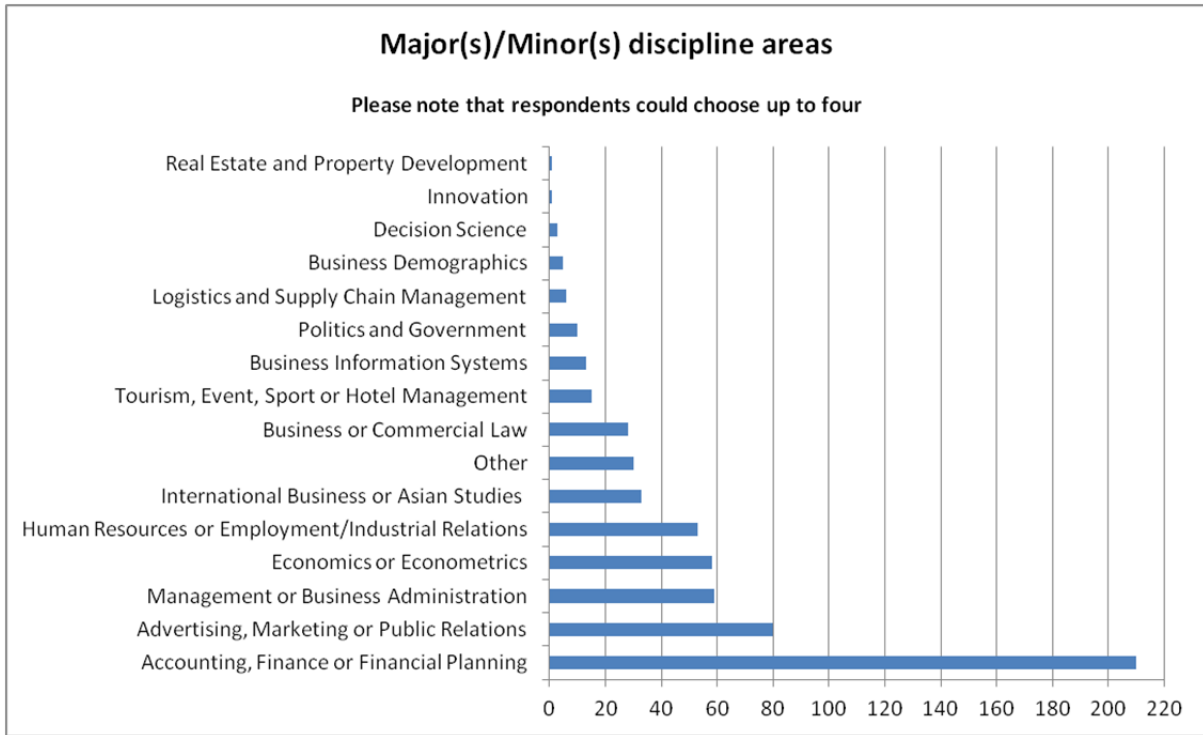| Transitions and contexts	School	University	Professional
Discourse	Limited academic	Academic	Discipline-specific
Identity	School student	University student	Professional
Learning	Very structured	Structured	Self-directed
Discipline	Loosely connected ideas	Structure and theory	Flexible application in context

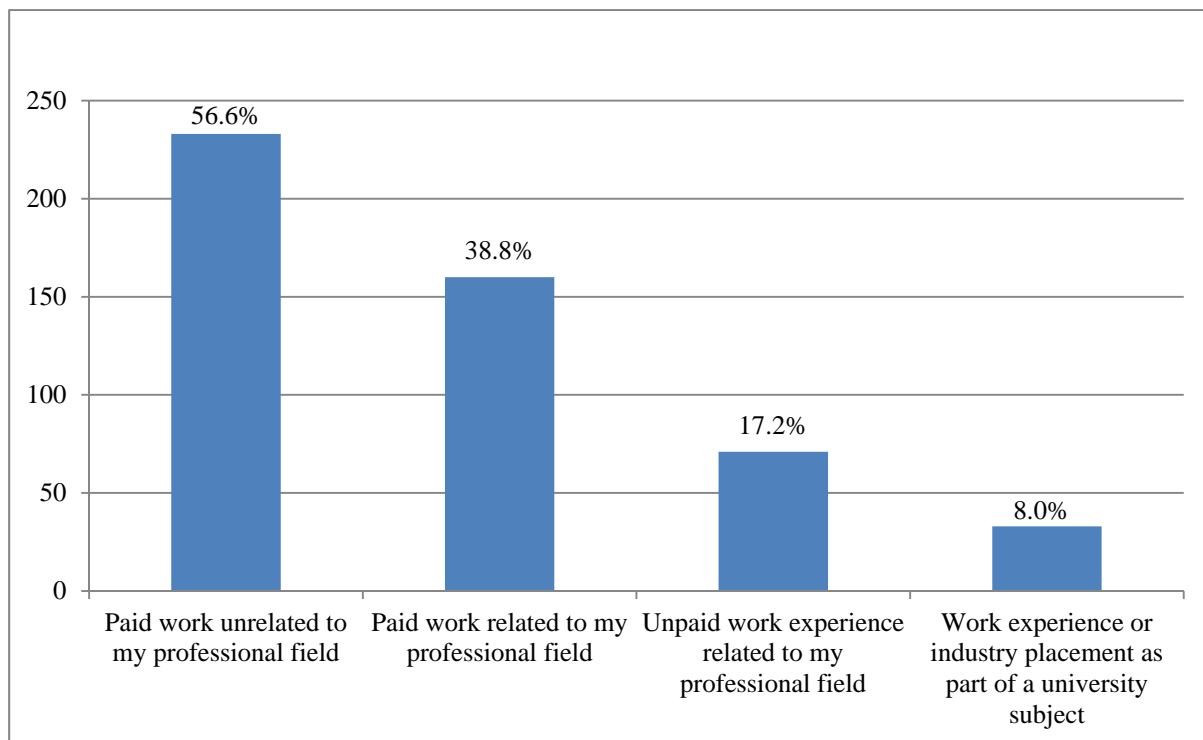**Figure 1.** Major/minor discipline areas (The Business Capstone Project, 2012)

Figure 2. Work experience while completing studies

Based on what you know now about how to succeed in your field, look at the following list of in-class activities and rank them according to how important they are in preparing final-year students for the workplace:

- Practitioner guest lectures
- Preparing and participating in student presentations
- Discussion and guidance about assessment items
- Traditional lectures
- Case studies and/or problem-based learning
- Group exercises.

Figure 3. Survey question on in-class activities

Based on what you know about how to succeed in your field, look at the following list of assessment items and rank them according to how important they are in preparing final-year students for the workplace:

- Written analyses of case studies
- Reflective journals
- Oral presentations
- Simulations or games
- Work placements
- Essays
- Project proposals or reports for lecturer
- Exams
- Project proposals or reports for external client
- Literature reviews.
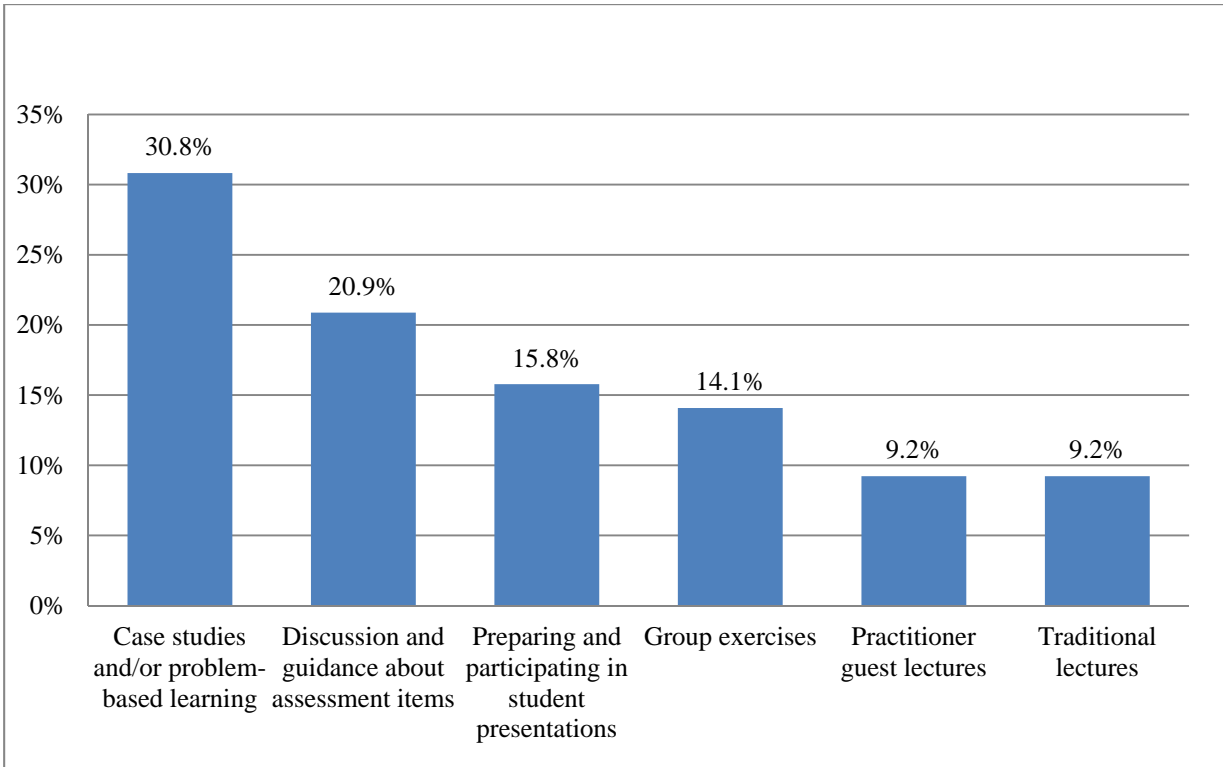
Figure 4. Survey question on assessment items

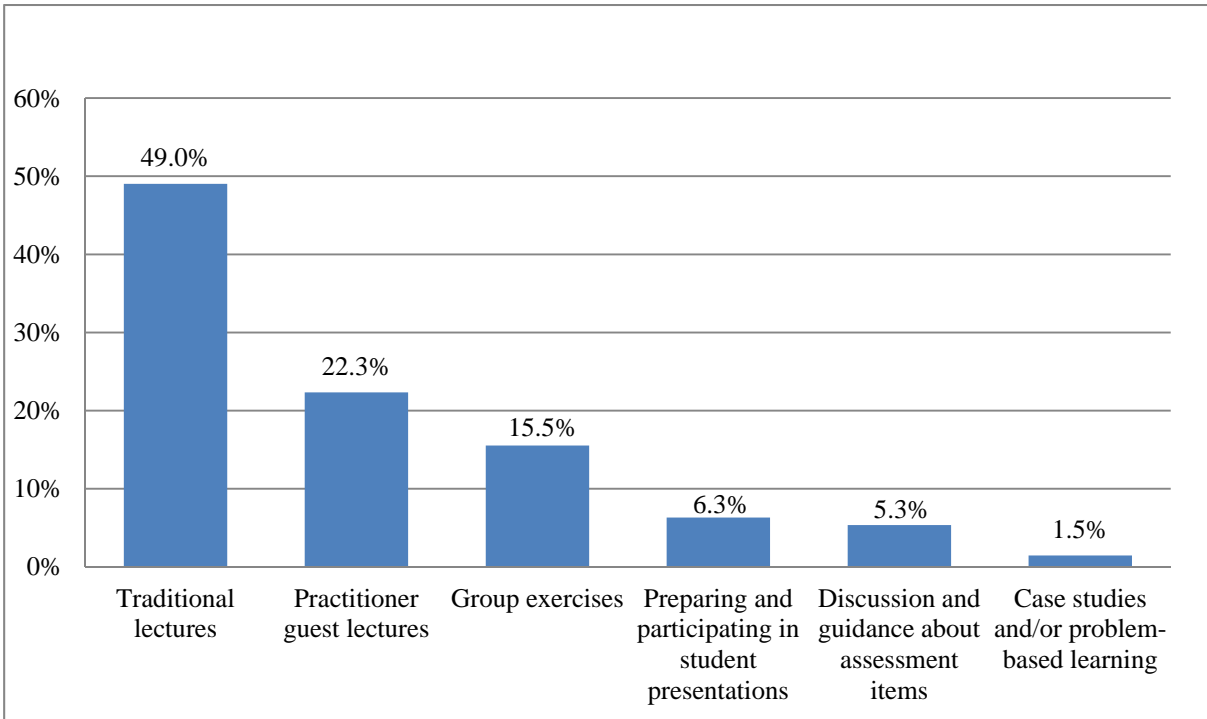**Figure 5.** Highest ranked in-class activities (percentage of respondents)

Figure 6. Lowest ranked in-class activities (percentage of respondents)
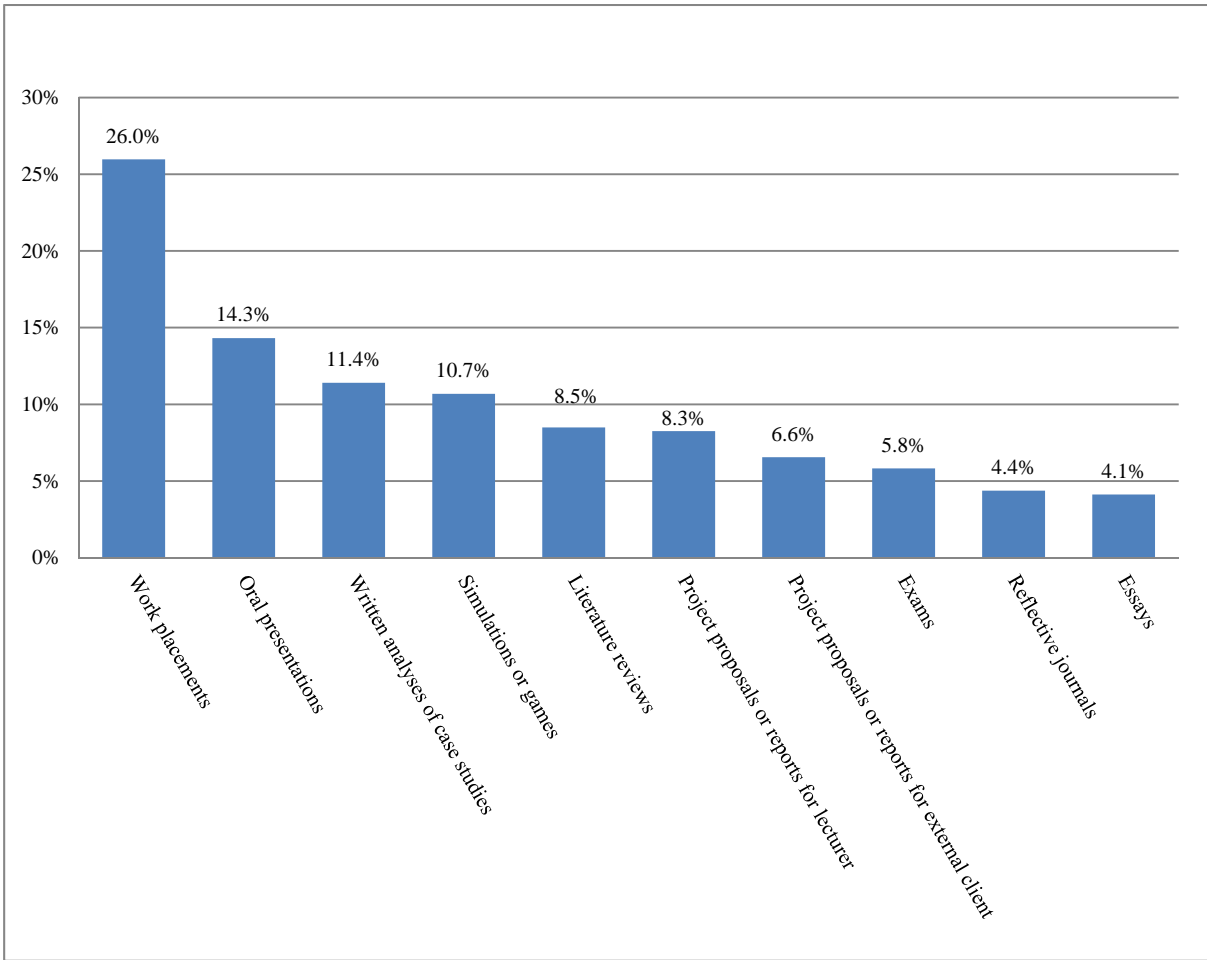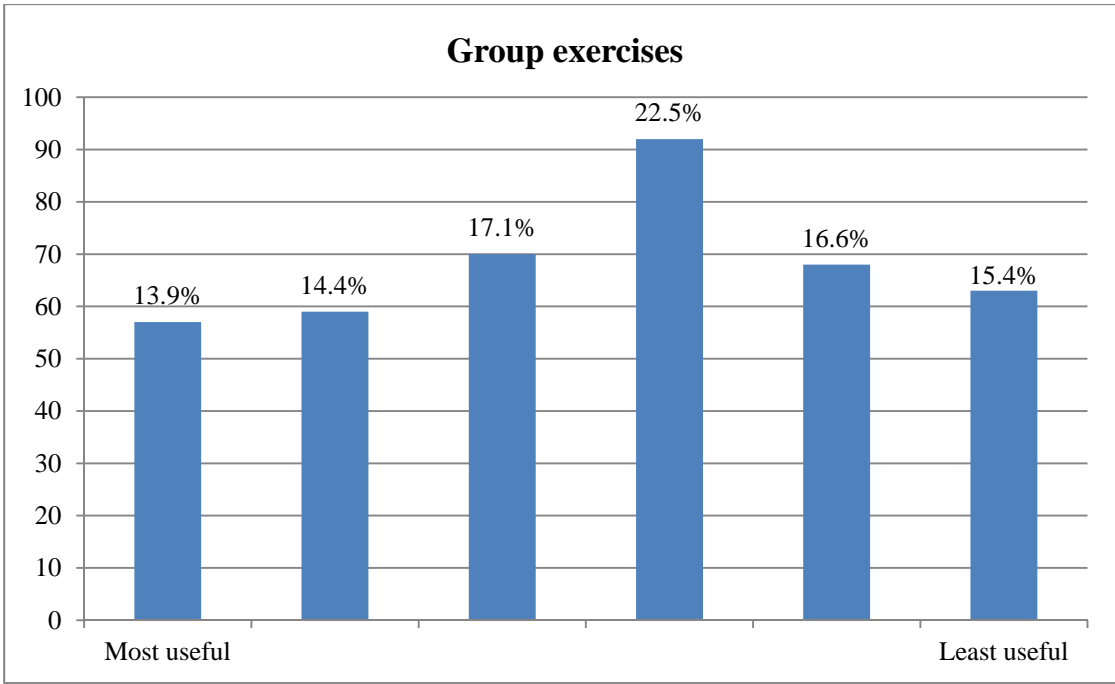
Figure 7. Ranking of assessment items

Figure 8. Rankings of group exercises in-class activity