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Chapter Eleven

What Employers in Christian-based Organisations Desire in Graduates from a Christian Business School

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Abstract

Employers from Christian-based organisations expect certain attributes from business school graduates; of particular interest is whether they expect different and/or additional skills from graduates of a Christian business school. The purpose of this study is to engage with various Christian-based employers of business school graduates and discover their views, requirements and expectations of graduates from a Christian business school. An initial review of the literature reveals no published works on the attributes expected of Christian business school graduates by Christian-based employers. This study seeks to add knowledge to the existing gap in this literature.

One way that Christian business school academics can maintain awareness of employers' preferred graduate attributes is to consult with a range of employers. This study utilised both qualitative and quantitative approaches to determine if there are different and/or additional requirements from Christian-based organisations for graduates who attended a Christian business school.

* * * * *

Introduction

Employers' needs change over time, and thus academics are well advised to ensure their curricula keeps pace. This research was conducted in 2019 by staff at the Avondale Business School, part of Avondale University College. Avondale was established in 1897 by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church and is a Christian-based university college which operates under a Christian value system.

Business school graduates expect to find employment at the conclusion of their study. Key to their employment is potential employers seeing desirable attributes in the graduates. This is evident, for example, in the accounting discipline (Long, 2018); O'Connell et al. (2015) reported that 'accounting academics face the difficult task of delivering the requisite professional knowledge while also trying to develop the professional skills of future professionals' (p. 29). To ensure that the university experience truly prepares students for employment, it is critical that business school academics maintain awareness of preferred graduate attributes by consulting with prospective employers.

According to Christian Worldview:

Study itself is a spiritual discipline, and the very act of study can change the self. One who undergoes the discipline of study lives through certain types of experiences where certain skills are developed through habitual study: framing an issue, solving problems, learning how to weigh evidence and eliminate irrelevant factors, cultivating the ability to see important distinctions instead of blurring them, and so on. The disciplines of study also aids in the development of certain virtues and values; for example, a desire for the truth, honesty with data, an openness to criticism, self-reflection and an ability to get along nondefensively with those who differ with one. (Moreland & Craig, 2003, p. 16)

This chapter will first review the literature on graduate attributes and pose research questions. The methodology section then describes the survey administration and the interviews of potential employers of graduates from a Christian business school. The data is presented and discussed, and based on the research findings, conclusions are drawn at the end of the chapter.

Literature Review

According to the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) (2009), there is no international or specific disciplinary definition of the term 'graduate attributes' (Kearns, 2001; Yeo, 2004). One popular Australian definition of graduate attributes is 'an orienting statement of education outcomes used to inform curriculum design and the provision of learning experiences at a university' (Barrie, 2009, p. 2). Much research has been conducted on the link between learning environments and graduate outcomes (Kember & Leung, 2006; Smith & Bath, 2006). Other research on the creation of graduate attributes, however, has found that 'it is apparent that Australian university teachers charged with responsibility for developing students' generic graduate attributes do not share a common understanding of either the nature of these outcomes, or the teaching and learning processes that might facilitate the development of these outcomes' (Barrie, 2012, p. 13). Graduate attributes are also particularly important for students who complete industry accredited under-graduate programs, such as those endorsed by the Certified Practising Accountants of Australia (CPA) and Chartered Accountants of Australia and New Zealand (CAANZ) (CPA Australia, 2020).

A study completed at the University of Technology Sydney found 'no matter how desirable features of graduate attributes might be, they will not necessarily be actively taken up at the local level, and may indeed be resisted, unless there is a strong and immediate pedagogical imperative for doing so' (Boud & Solomon, 2006, p. 12). It is important then that when reviewing graduate attributes, not only should academics be involved in their creation, but other external stakeholders should be consulted. According to the ALTC (2009), stakeholders 'have different stakes in the articulation and development of graduate attributes' (p. 2).

The importance of this study is the additional consideration of any unique expectations employers in Christian-based organisations may have of Christian business school graduates as compared to those of other business schools. Anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers who work in private schools have strong ideas about how teacher education graduates from Christian institutions differ from institutions that are not Christian. The problem is that many of these opinions are not based on evidence or experience; 'this is a sector

where organizations have been “on the horns of a dilemma” for quite some time, caught between maintaining their religious identity and solidifying their academic reputation’ (Pizarro Milian et al., 2019, p. 295). This study interviews participants who are Christian-based employers with experience in dealing with business graduates from both Christian and secular business schools. The findings will help fill the identified gap of how these employers’ expectations of graduate attributes vary between graduates from secular business schools and Christian business schools. The overarching research problem and accompanying research questions are as follows:

Research Problem: *What do employers in Christian-based organisations want in potential employees from a Christian business school?*

Research Question 1: *What are the desired attributes of Christian business school graduates?*

Research Question 2: *How are Christian business school graduates differentiated from other secular business school graduates?*

Methodology

This study utilised both qualitative and quantitative approaches to address its research questions (J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018; O’Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). The participants were employers from Christian-based organisations and will remain anonymous. Data was initially collected through the use of chapter-based questionnaires provided to attendees at a (1) Christian Business Professionals Conference and at an (2) Educators Conference, both of which were organised by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to provide professional development opportunities for the accountants and teachers within the church. The survey addressed the research questions as well as the participants’ demographics, e.g., industry type, role in the organisation, etc. (Cavana et al., 2001).

Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of employers chosen by the researchers to further explore the research questions and any themes that emerged from the questionnaire (Cavana et al., 2001; J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018; Robson, 2011). The qualitative responses from the questionnaire and the transcribed interviews were analysed using

NVivo for emergent themes, whereas the quantitative responses and demographic data were analysed through the use of spreadsheets (J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018).

Attendees of the Business Professional Convention 2019 held on the Gold Coast from the 4th to the 6th of June (arranged by the Seventh-day Adventist Church for business professionals within the organization) were the initial target population; this extended to include the Educational Directors Conference 2019 (organised by Adventist Schools Australia) attendees, too. These conferences were specifically designed for employees working in the financial and commercial areas of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a Christian-based employer. Postgraduate students participating in Winter School (mid-year, on-campus studies) at Avondale University College as part of the Masters of Leadership and Management program were also targeted as they work for Christian-based employers and are responsible for employment of graduates. The final recruitment of participants included senior staff from the Sanitarium Health Food Company (owned by the Seventh-day Adventist Church) and the South Pacific Division (SPD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (administration), who have experience in dealing with the employment of business school graduates from Christian and secular business schools.

Participants received information about the project (including information about the project's aim, design and participant requirements) and a consent form when they were invited to contribute. The survey and interview responses were evaluated using NVivo content analysis. The project was implemented in two phases across the 12-month period: Phase 1) Survey conducted at Professional Development Conference 2019, Educators Conference 2019 and Winter School 2019; Phase 2) Interviews conducted post conference using convenience sampling of participants. The Avondale Human Research Ethics Committee approved the research design in 2019 (approval code ETH.2019.009).

Archival data analysis of websites was used to initially compare the graduate attributes of three Christian higher education institutions and one regional university (a distinct competitor to the other institutions due to size and location). Of these attributes, 20 were selected as survey targets. The institutions analysed were Avondale University College (AVC), University of Newcastle (UON), Alphacrucis College (Alpha) and the Australian Catholic University (ACU).

Avondale University College's mission is 'Fostering a Christian higher education learning community that is dedicated to serving world needs' (AVC, 2020). AVC was chosen for the research project due to its affiliation with the Seventh-day Adventist church and is where the research team was based. The Australian Catholic University was chosen for its mission: 'within the Catholic intellectual tradition and acting in Truth and Love, Australian Catholic University is committed to the pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person and the common good' (ACU, 2020). The ACU was also chosen for its Catholic faith as a comparison with the other two Christian institutions. Alphacrucis College's mission is to 'equip Christian leaders to change the world' (Alpha, 2020); it is smaller than ACU, but larger than Avondale, and Christian in its ethos. The University of Newcastle was chosen for this research as it is a regional secular university in close proximity to Avondale University College (and the researchers). UON's mission is to 'build and sustain a vibrant learning community that advances business knowledge' (UON, 2020). It is not a Christian higher education institution. Table 11.1 shows a comparison of the four institutions' graduate attributes.

Table 11.1 Comparison of Graduate Attributes

Avondale University College (AVC)	University of Newcastle (UON)	Alphacrucis College (Alpha)	Australian Catholic University (ACU)
The ability to reflect constructively on Christian values	Professional in their presentation and communication style	Christian worldview	Demonstrate respect for the dignity of each individual and for human diversity
An orientation to service	Enthusiastic, interested and engaged	Integrity and justice	Recognise responsibility to the common good, environment and society
Capacity to respond ethically and legally in various situations	Prepared to ask relevant and specific questions	Leadership	Apply ethical perspectives in informed decision making
An informed respect for individual worth, cultural and social diversity and environmental sustainability	Skilled and have relevant experience	Communication	Think critically and reflectively

Avondale University College (AVC)	University of Newcastle (UON)	Alphacrucis College (Alpha)	Australian Catholic University (ACU)
The facility to lead and to work collaboratively in professional and community contexts	Able to demonstrate their employability skills	Personal and social skills	Demonstrate values, knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the discipline and/or profession
Relevant professional employability skills and literacies	Going to be a good fit in their organisation	Critical and creative thinking	Solve problems in a variety of settings, taking local and international perspectives into account
The aptitude for critically informed professional practice			Work both autonomously and collaboratively
A capacity for reflective and research-informed life-long learning			Locate, organise, analyse, synthesise and evaluate information
			Demonstrate effective communication in oral and written English language
			Utilise information and communication and other relevant technologies effectively

Similar attributes were mapped together to determine the most prominent 20 graduate attributes across the institutions. For example, attributes 7, 8 and 9 in Table 11.2 are all cited by three of the four institutions and were consequently chosen for this research. Table 11.2 shows the mapping of the attributes of Table 1 with the addition of one attribute specific to this survey. The added attribute of ‘An awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos’ relates to the fact that all survey and interview participants work in Seventh-day Adventist organisations and was included to see if employers considered this attribute to be important.

Table 11.2 Top 20 Graduate Attributes Mapping

Graduate Attribute	Avondale (AUC)	Newcastle University (UON)	Alphacrucis (Alpha)	Australian Catholic University (ACU)
Knowledge of the broad business operating environments	AUC 7			
Knowledge of the content and concepts of business disciplines				ACU 5
Commitment to continuing and independent learning	AUC 8			
Skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and research		UON 3		ACU 4 ACU 8
Skills of problem recognition and problem-solving		UON 4		ACU 6
Efficient and effective decision-making skills in business		UON 5		
Ability to work cooperatively in a team and as an individual	AUC 5		Alpha 3	ACU 7
To communicate ideas orally, in writing and using technology		UON 1	Alpha 4	ACU 9
A commitment to apply personal standards of integrity	AUC 3		Alpha 2	ACU 3
The ideals of stewardship and servant-leadership	AUC 2			
An awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos		Survey Specific		
Respect for ethnic, cultural, gender and spiritual diversity	AUC 4		Alpha 5	ACU 5
To balance personal and corporate rights and obligations			ACU 2 ACU 5	
Demonstrate relational skills in various situations		UON 4		

Graduate Attribute	Avondale (AUC)	Newcastle University (UON)	Alphacrucis (Alpha)	Australian Catholic University (ACU)
Enthusiastic, interested and engaged		UON 2		
Prepared to ask relevant and specific questions		UON 3		
Ability to demonstrate employability skills	AUC 6			ACU 10
Are a good fit for the organisation		UON 6		
Capacity for research informed life-long learning	AUC 8			
Commitment to life of the wider Christian community and mission	AUC 1		Alpha 1	

For the interview, participants who had previously employed graduates from Avondale University College and other higher education institutions were invited to contribute. These employers were chosen from Seventh-day Adventist Church affiliations as they could understand the expectations of graduate attributes that Christian organisations may have. The following employers were targeted based on previous employment of graduates.

Table 11.3 Interviewees Targeted by Employment of Graduates

Entity	Graduate (GR) Number	Graduation Year
	GR 14	2018
Sanitarium Health Food Company	GR 7	2014
	GR 8	2014
	GR 12	2016
ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) Australia	GR 9	2014
	GR 5	2012
Northern NSW Conference (of the Seventh-day Adventist Church)	GR 3	2012
	GR 6	2013

Entity	Graduate (GR) Number	Graduation Year
Avondale University College	GR 11	2016
	GR 4	2012
Adventist Media Network	GR 1	2007
	GR 2	2008
South Pacific Division (of the Seventh-day Adventist Church)	GR 13	2017
	GR 15	2018
Australian Union Conference (AUC)	GR 10	2015
Greater Sydney Conference (of the Seventh-day Adventist Church)	GR 16	2018

Data Analysis of Surveys: *Graduate Attributes*

There were 57 participants in the survey; however, every participant did not answer every survey question. The questions that were answered were collated and analysed. Thirty-nine surveys were completed at the Business Professionals Conference (69%), 11 were completed at the Education Directors Conference (19%) and Masters students completed the final 5 surveys (12%). This distribution is shown in Figure 11.1.

Figure 11.1 Survey Participants

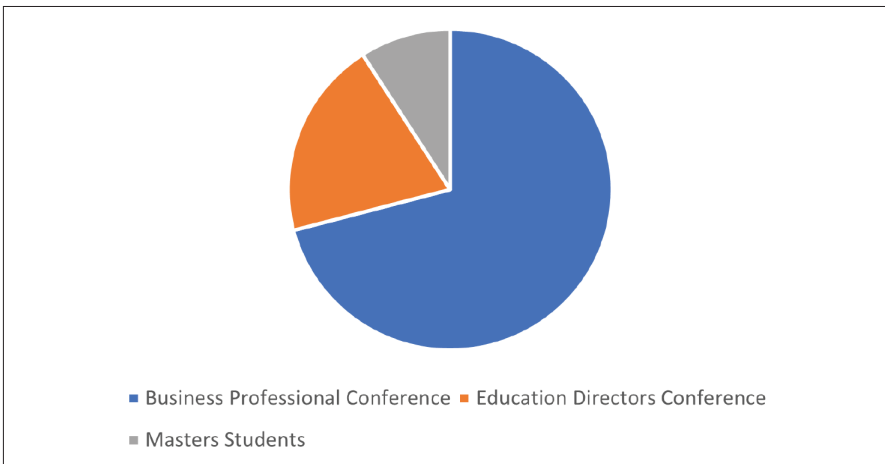
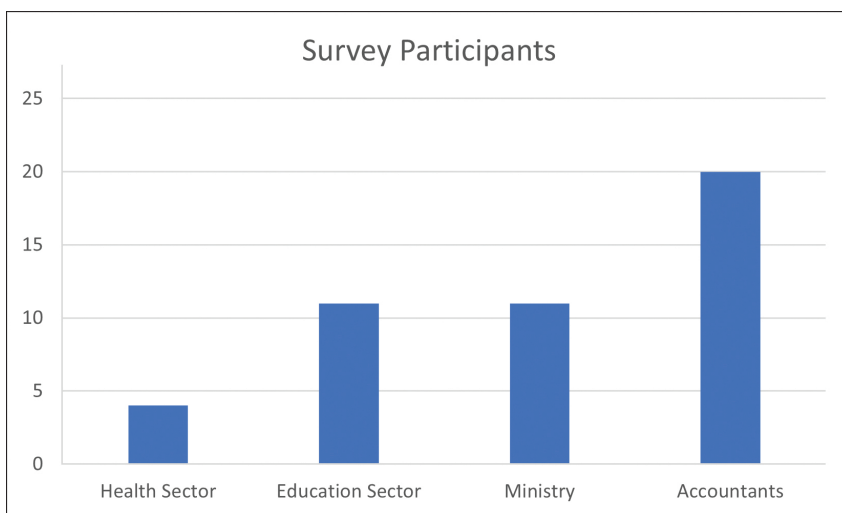


Figure 11.2 shows the breakdown of the participants' industry sectors. The 'Health' sector composed 9% (4) of the surveys and the 'Ministry' and 'Education' sectors composed 24% (11), respectively. The 'Accountants' category (43.48%, 20 surveys) contained accountants, senior accountants and chief financial officers (CFOs) who attended the Business Professionals Conference.

Figure 11.2 Survey Participants by Industry Sector



Participants used a 5-point Likert scale to rate the importance of the 20 graduate attributes compiled in Table 2 (J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2018). All 20 attributes mainly scored either a 4 or 5, where 1 was 'not important' and 5 was 'very important', showing that participants felt that all 20 attributes were important for graduates. The top attributes were:

1. A commitment to apply personal standards of integrity (100%, Rank 1)
2. Skills of problem recognition and problem-solving (97.8%, Rank 2)
3. Efficient and effective decision-making skills in business (93.48%, Equal Rank 3)
4. To communicate orally, in writing and using technology (93.48%, Equal Rank 3)

5. Respect for ethnic, cultural, gender and spiritual diversity (91.3%, Equal Rank 4)
6. Prepared to ask relevant and specific questions (91.3%, Equal Rank 4)
7. Skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and research (91.3%, Equal Rank 4)
8. The ideals of stewardship and servant-leadership (89.1%, Equal Rank 5)
9. An awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos (89.1%, Equal Rank 5)

Table 11.4 shows the ranks of all 20 attributes along with the number of participants that considered the attribute ‘important’ or ‘very important’ (also expressed as a percentage of the total responses for each attribute). Note that some attributes were ranked equally.

Table 11.4 Important Graduate Attributes

Graduate Attribute	# of Important or Very Important (out of 46)	Important or Very Important %	Ranking
Knowledge of the broad business operating environments	36	78.26	9 (1 of 2)
Knowledge of the content and concepts of business disciplines	38	82.61	8 (1 of 3)
Commitment to continuing and independent learning	38	82.61	8 (2 of 3)
Skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and research	42	91.3	4 (1 of 3)
Skills of problem recognition and problem-solving	45	97.8	2
Efficient and effective decision-making skills in business	43	93.48	3 (1 of 2)
Ability to work cooperatively in a team and as an individual	36	78.26	9 (2 of 2)
To communicate ideas orally, in writing and using technology	43	93.48	3 (2 of 2)

Graduate Attribute	# of Important or Very Important (out of 46)	Important or Very Important %	Ranking
A commitment to apply personal standards of integrity	46	100.0	1
The ideals of stewardship and servant-leadership	41	89.1	5 (1 of 2)
An awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos	41	89.1	5 (2 of 2)
Respect for ethnic, cultural, gender and spiritual diversity	42	91.3	4 (2 of 3)
To balance personal and corporate rights and obligations	40	87.0	6 (1 of 3)
Demonstrate relational skills in various situations.	39	84.8	7 (1 of 2)
Enthusiastic, interested and engaged	40	87.0	6 (2 of 3)
Prepared to ask relevant and specific questions	42	91.3	4 (3 of 3)
Ability to demonstrate employability skills	39	84.7	7 (2 of 2)
Are a good fit for the organisation	38	82.6	8 (3 of 3)
Capacity for research informed life-long learning	28	60.9	10
Commitment to life of the wider Christian community and mission	40	87.0	6 (3 of 3)

Participants were then asked to rank their top five graduate attributes. As Table 11.5 shows, the top attributes are as follows:

1. A commitment to apply personal standards of integrity (Rank 1)
2. To communicate ideas orally, in writing and using technology (Rank 2)
3. Skills of problem recognition and problem-solving (Rank 3)
4. Ability to work cooperatively in a team and as an individual (Rank 4)
5. The ideals of stewardship and servant-leadership (Equal Rank 5)

6. Commitment to life of the wider Christian community and mission (Equal Rank 5)
7. Efficient and effective decision-making skills in business (Equal Rank 6)
8. An awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos (Equal Rank 6)

It is interesting that employers expected graduates to have a ‘commitment to life of the wider Christian community and mission’ (Rank 5) and ‘an awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos’ (Rank 6). Both attributes being Christian oriented and selected by participants indicates that these employers expected more from students attending Christian institutions. Table 11.5 shows the rankings of all 20 graduate attributes; there were several attributes with the same ranking.

Table 11.5 Ranking of top 5 attributes

Graduate Attribute	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Ranking
Knowledge of the broad business operating environments	1	3	2	2	1	9	Ranking 7 (1 of 3)
Knowledge of the content and concepts of business disciplines	1	2	2	3	1	9	Ranking 7 (1 of 3)
Commitment to continuing and independent learning	1	2	1	1	2	7	Ranking 9
Skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and research	0	3	1	2	3	9	Ranking 7 (1 of 3)
Skills of problem recognition and problem-solving	1	1	3	1	11	17	Ranking 3
Efficient and effective decision-making skills in business	1	2	2	3	3	11	Ranking 6 (1 of 2)
Ability to work cooperatively in a team and as an individual	2	4	5	2	2	15	Ranking 4
To communicate ideas orally, in writing and using technology	2	1	1	7	7	18	Ranking 2
A commitment to apply personal standards of integrity	6	5	7	3	2	23	Ranking 1
The ideals of stewardship and servant-leadership	2	3	4	2	1	12	Ranking 5 (1 of 2)

Graduate Attribute	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Ranking
An awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos	8	1	1	0	1	11	Ranking 6 (2 of 2)
Respect for ethnic, cultural, gender and spiritual diversity	0	1	2	2	1	6	Ranking 10 (1 of 2)
To balance personal and corporate rights and obligations	0	0	0	2	1	3	Ranking 12 (1 of 4)
Demonstrate relational skills in various situations	0	2	0	1	0	3	Ranking 12 (1 of 4)
Enthusiastic, interested and engaged	2	1	2	3	0	8	Ranking 8
Prepared to ask relevant and specific questions	0	0	0	1	2	3	Ranking 12 (1 of 4)
Ability to demonstrate employability skills	2	2	1	0	0	5	Ranking 11
Are a good fit for the organisation	0	1	0	2	3	6	Ranking 10 (1 of 2)
Capacity for research informed life-long learning	1	1	1	0	0	3	Ranking 12 (1 of 4)
Commitment to life of the wider Christian community and mission	7	1	2	0	2	12	Ranking 5 (2 of 2)

The highlighted boxes in Table 11.5 show the highest counts of each ranking. Notably, although ‘An awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos’ ranked 6th overall, 8 out of the 11 participants that chose this attribute in their top five ranked it at number 1, which shows a strong commitment to this attribute. It is interesting that 17 participants indicated the ‘Skills of problem recognition and problem-solving’ attribute (overall rank 3) as part of their top five, however 11 of the 17 ranked it at number 5. Also worth noting is that the ‘Commitment to life of the wider Christian community and mission’ attribute ranked 5th with 12 participants but 7 of them ranked it at number 1.

We can now compare the ‘important’ graduate attributes against the ‘top ranking’ attributes, as shown in Table 6. These include the nine most ‘important’ attributes compared with the top five ranked attributes (including those of equal rank). The results show an alignment of six attributes on *both* lists:

- A commitment to apply personal standards of integrity (light blue shading)
- Skills of problem recognition and problem-solving (dark blue shading)
- Efficient and effective decision-making skills in business (red shading)
- To communicate orally, in writing and using technology (light orange shading)
- The ideals of stewardship and servant-leadership (light green shading)
- An awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos (dark green shading)

Table 11.6 Graduate Attribute Importance v Graduate Attribute Ranking

Important Graduate Attributes to Stakeholders/Employers	Top Ranked Graduate Attributes
A commitment to apply personal standards of integrity	A commitment to apply personal standards of integrity
Skills of problem recognition and problem-solving	To communicate ideas orally, in writing and using technology
Efficient and effective decision-making skills in business	Skills of problem recognition and problem-solving
To communicate orally, in writing and using technology	Ability to work cooperatively in a team and as an individual
Respect for ethnic, cultural, gender and spiritual diversity	The ideals of stewardship and servant-leadership
Prepared to ask relevant and specific questions	Commitment to life of the wider Christian community and mission
Skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and research	Efficient and effective decision-making skills in business
The ideals of stewardship and servant-leadership	An awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos
An awareness of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and ethos	

It should be noted that ‘Commitment to life of the wider Christian community and vision’ is ranked number 6 overall and number 10 in

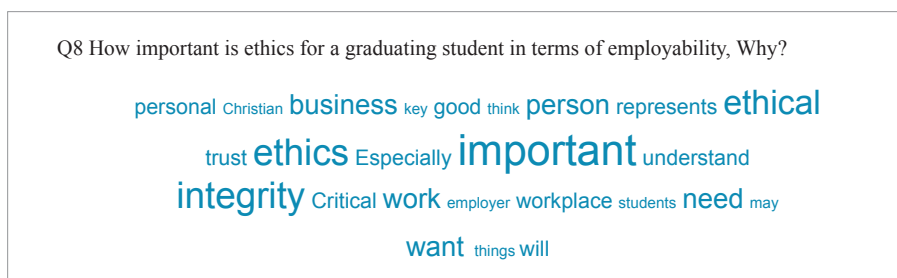
terms of importance, showing again that participants felt it was an important attribute.

These rankings demonstrate that Christian organisations expect graduating Christian business students to have additional attributes specifically aimed at awareness of faith and a commitment to life in a Christian community. The results demonstrate that Christian business schools should embed Christian values in the learning environment to meet the needs of Christian employers and ensure students are ‘work-ready’. As stated by one participant, there is an expectation that graduates from a Christian business school will ‘reflect stewardship and responsibilities for God’s financial blessings’.

Data Analysis of Surveys: *Ethics*

Figure 3 shows a word cloud generated through word-frequency analysis of participant responses when asked if ethics were important and why. Significant words included ‘important’, ‘ethics’, ‘ethical’ and ‘integrity’.

Figure 11.3 Ethics Word Cloud



Respondent comments to ‘How important is ethics for a graduating student in terms of employability?’:

- Absolutely — a person’s moral fibre determines how they approach work life + personal life.
- Very! Especially in the digital realm where there is less face-to-face interaction and to adequately understand they represent the past, present & future self (integrity) and their company.
- Very important. Being ethical is paramount within business. Especially from a religious perspective.

- Very important — it shapes decision making and personal work choices.
- Critical, we do not want to have to teach ethics in the workplace, we want to trust that the people we hire will have that foundation. If they wait to learn it in the workplace where things are busy, they may not get it all.
- Very important. Ethics = trust. You work for someone and you hear, see, participate, observe, so need to be ethical. Extra ‘pressure’ being a Christian.
- High — important in a Christian organisation and the business world.
- Very important. In upholding Christian principles ‘do unto others as you want them to do to you.’
- Very, core of Christianity.
- Of course. Who wants to employ a person without ethics? No one.
- Very, the church as an employer should/does have this as a key focus, and society surely does.
- Critical. There is no room for dishonesty, self-interest or laziness, especially working for God.

Data Analysis of Surveys: *Baptised SDA Church Members*

The final question on the survey asked, ‘How important is it for a student to be a baptised member of the SDA (Seventh-day Adventist) church?’ Of the 38 responses, 12 felt that it was important for employment while 14 preferred a general Christian perspective, not necessarily a strictly Seventh-day Adventist view, and 12 felt it was not important. Some respondent comments included:

Examples from the 12 ‘Important to be a baptised member of the SDA’ responses:

- In terms of employability, a baptised committed member is critical to the work of the church. We will not employ non-SDA’s - it does not work. Avondale can ‘teach’ as many non-SDA as they like, but in the end, we will only employ baptised (committed SDA’s).

- They've made a commitment to God. Working for the church takes on a different meaning after making this commitment.
- It is important for a person to be committed to the SDA church, which is shown by baptism.

Examples from the 14 'Christian perspective' responses:

- I think it will be helpful if the student has general info regarding SDA.
- Not the 'be all' but relatively important - showing some level of commitment to the church.
- Depends on the role and how strict Church is being on employability. E.g. Teachers - Yes or no? Pastors Yes. Accountants - Yes or no? Nurses - Yes or no? Baptised represents SDA values &/or beliefs &/or morals.

Examples from the 12 'Not important' responses:

- Less important than it was in the past, considering the highly professional environment we now work in compared to a highly evangelistic past.
- Not essential. Baptism doesn't always equate to upholding the Adventist/Christian ethos.
- It is not important because the university must be open to anyone. As it is another way to preach the gospel within the university.

A final thought from one of the participants: 'We need more Adventist business graduates but not all your students need to be Adventist...Avondale can be a major Christian pipeline for "Christian Management Australia"'.

Data Analysis of Interviews: *Participants*

Ten participants agreed to be interviewed for the study. All participants worked for organisations aligned with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, for example schools, aged care, higher education, church administration and other church affiliated businesses. All but one participant had employed graduates from other institutions, and all had employed graduates from the Christian Business School of

Avondale University College. This is summarised in Table 7.

Table 11.7 Interview Data

Position Held	Years in Position	Number of Avondale Graduates Employed	Have you employed other graduates?
Finance Professional	6	3	Yes
Internal Auditor	15	3	Yes
School Business Manager	20	4	Yes
Senior Accountant	2	2	Yes
Marketing Manager	8	6	No
Chief Financial Officer	16	5-10	Yes
Chief Financial Officer	17	5	Yes
Senior Manager	12	Many	Yes
Communications Director	3	1	Yes
Communications Manager	29	4	Yes

Data Analysis of Interviews: *Negative Attributes*

Some interview participants indicated that there were graduates who demonstrated some negative attributes in the workplace. Some students who move into the church sector (mostly into the Seventh-day Adventist church system) enter in an entitled fashion, expecting to walk straight into a management role. One interviewee stated, ‘They don’t seem to understand that there is still a – apprenticeship that one has to follow in the accounting profession.’ Expectations are that because it is a ‘church job’, they will not need to work very hard for it, or else they see it as a ‘cushy’ role. This attitude can lead to employees coming across as ‘lazy’ or negatively affecting the teams they enter.

The employers also mentioned how potential employees would arrive at interviews in a very casual manner, in both dress and attitude, rather than properly preparing themselves for the occasion. Overall, most employers stated that the things that came across negatively from any Avondale Business School (ABS) graduates they had employed

or who had interned with them were due to more personal/behavioural issues rather than things taught by the Avondale Business School.

Data Analysis of Interviews: *Importance of a Christian Business School Graduate*

The interviewees noticed that ABS graduates have certain commonalities: they understand mission attitude, they have a greater understanding of why they are doing their jobs, and they are committed to the purpose of the church. The interviewees remarked that because a large number of ABS graduates are either Adventist or Christian, they understood the purpose of Christian organisations. One interviewee stated, ‘So, for us, having graduates from a Christian environment makes our life so much easier ‘cause we’re not spending half our time explaining what Christian is.’ Especially when graduates move into a Seventh-day Adventist or Christian organisation, the ability to have at least a basic understanding of the organisation’s principles greatly assists in both the hiring process and the general work environment, as demonstrated by the following participant quote:

I think we have a particular Christian world view. We have a different standard of ethics — higher standard of ethics, I’d like to say. We’re certainly a lot more compassionate. We’re certainly very — I’d like to think that we’re missional. We want to teach a sense of service and mission and it’s so important for me. I’m trying to create a team that sees the importance of what we do and why.

The importance of graduates coming from a Christian business school was also underscored by one participant who said, ‘I would argue they have come with the attitude of actually wanting to work for the church. So, they’ve got a mission focus and that’s probably one of the main reasons why they came to work for the church’.

Data Analysis of Interviews: *Graduate Work Readiness*

It is no secret that having ‘real world’ experience greatly increases a graduate’s ability to find work straight out of university. As such, employers noted that having any kind of on-the-job training was a clear positive in potential employees’ job applications. The interviewees also noted that, while Avondale Business School’s graduates may

not have all of the technical skills that are required for their role, if they have the willingness to learn their craft, employers would have minimal hesitation hiring them. One interviewee stated:

...but you're wanting people who are prepared to learn and have common sense and who are prepared to back themselves, and one of the things that we do with our grads is we expect them to not – we train them not to come and just ask question. We train them to come with a question but also provide a solution that they think and then we work them through the solution.

Data Analysis of Interviews: *Graduate Applications and Interviews*

Applying and interviewing for positions is a necessary and sometimes stressful and arduous task that can take a lengthy period of time. In order to speed up the process, job hunters look to stand out from the crowd. A few basic steps need to be followed, including simple things like listening, being respectful, and being humble. Graduands need to recognise that holding a degree will not place them straight into management positions. Multiple interviewees asserted that a job seeker must be willing to learn. One stated that even if a candidate's technical abilities may not be as good as others, as long as they show a spirit willing to learn their system, they are seen as a better candidate.

First impressions are key, and as such, there are a few easy things graduands can do to be more successful. Firstly, have an appropriate email address. One interviewee remarked that some of their applicants still had their childhood emails that were, frankly, unprofessional. Simply creating a new email that touches on either their first or last name will suffice. Secondly, have a professional, balanced Curriculum Vitae (CV). A majority of one's CV should be related to previous experiences as well as education. Some interviewees, however, indicated that interests like team sports show that an applicant is a team player and can work in a group setting. Thirdly, in regard to the interview itself, graduands need to make sure that, as an applicant, they research the company. Most interviewees mentioned that they are looking for future managers and CFO's, not just junior accountants. Consequently, they want graduands to know about the company and its mission. Graduands must also know why they want to work for

the company. The answer of ‘I need to buy food, pay rent, etc.’ does not meet interviewers’ requirements. Knowing one’s strengths and weaknesses can also help, particularly that knowing one’s weaknesses shows a level of humility.

Data Analysis of Interviews: *Positive Graduate Attributes*

The employers observed that Avondale is doing a great job creating business professionals and is not being outdone by the bigger universities. Rather, Avondale is producing technically skilled workers who understand their employers’ mission and are ready to start work. One employer when asked whether they thought that graduates from bigger universities were more professional employees stated, ‘No, definitely not — as good as, if not better.’

Interviewees also reflected on Avondale and its ability to offer personalised education:

I think Avondale does have the edge because they have such a personalised higher education experience here and you get to know every student and you know every student how they’re doing, you can tell me whether they’re a good student or not a good student.

Also:

One thing that differentiates Avondale graduates, business graduates, from the external universities, is that they had worked in an office environment before, compared to a graduate from Newcastle University, which had book knowledge but no office routine next experience or practical staff.

As one interviewee summarises, ‘They have very good team spirit they hold on to. We are really privileged that we have Avondale graduates come to our office.’

Data Analysis of Interviews: *Graduates in Comparison to ABS*

In comparison to graduates from other universities, Avondale graduates appeared more aligned with the church ethos and ethics in general. For example, one participant said, ‘I think the real difference

that Avondale business grads have that [is] different is their Christian focus. I mean they're potentially going to bring more values, ethos, that kind of thing'. Others felt that due to the smaller class sizes, Avondale students demonstrated a better understanding of the technical aspects of business; 'I really think that Avondale certainly could hold its head proud around technical level — they weren't any different to Avondale grads really, no'.

One participant reflected on the larger class sizes: 'whereas if they're in any of the universities in Sydney, for example, they're just like a sausage factory really'. In comparison to other university graduates, one participant said students are 'able to perform only to a certain level, but I found that the graduates who came out from Avondale, they really pretty much picked up quite quickly.' There was a common preference for Avondale graduates by church organisations, as suggested by one participant: 'I would probably look at [an] Avondale grad a little bit more from the point of view that they've had a Christian context'.

Data Analysis of Interviews: *Potential Improvements*

Experience was a reoccurring theme in the conducted interviews. Graduands with real world experience are often looked at more favourably than those who are graduating without any job experience. One interviewee said they believed it 'wouldn't hurt for internships to become mandatory.' Another pointed out that it is important for students to also look outside of the church when looking for 'real world' job opportunities. This enables them to bring new perspectives to the workforce no matter what organisation they are employed by.

For students with a marketing major, an understanding of social media marketing should be considered basic knowledge. Due to social media's prevalence in today's world, it is imperative that marketing graduands understand at least the basics of social media marketing. A candidate with social media know-how can also be attractive as an aid to aging employers who did not grow up with or study social media.

Another small step that was recommended was that students need to work on their communication skills. This includes email communication (noted previously) as well as other media, like texting and face-to-face communication. It is important to communicate

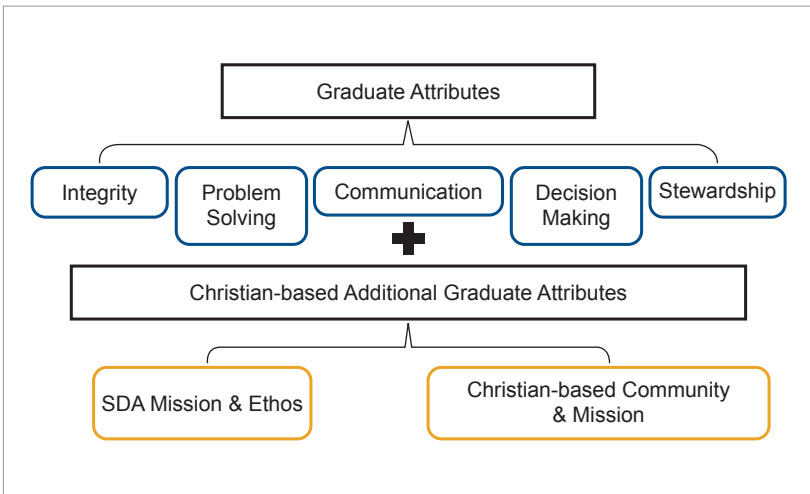
across different age groups and not use ‘slang’ or uncommon phrases that can lead to misconceptions and misunderstandings.

Discussion

Regarding **Research Question 1**: *What are the desired attributes of Christian business school graduates?*

Based on the survey data and interview question analysis, the top five graduate attributes that Christian employers would like to see in graduates include integrity, the ability to problem solve, good communication skills, the ability to make decisions and stewardship (servant leadership). Additional graduate attributes identified include 1) an understanding of SDA and their mission and 2) a commitment to the wider Christian community and mission. What this demonstrates is that organisations affiliated with Christian organisations expect that graduates from Christian higher education institutions understand the Christian community and mission and those of their specific religion, like the Seventh-day Adventists, if they follow one. There was no overall agreement that students needed to be a baptised SDA member, but many felt that understanding Christianity and the SDA church would be an advantage if working in the Church sector. Figure 11.4 shows the additional attributes expected by potential church affiliated employers of students who graduate from a Christian business school.

Figure 11.4 Graduate Attributes of Christian Business Schools



Regarding **Research Question 2**: *How are Christian business school graduates differentiated from other secular business school graduates?*

The following key elements are noted:

- Some graduates did not try hard enough in interviews and felt that church positions were almost an entitlement or ‘cushy’ roles.
- Graduates from a Christian business school understood Christian organisations.
- Graduates did not necessarily have to follow a specific religion, but there was a preference for Christianity.
- Work readiness can be encouraged by the continued use of student internships.
- Applications and interviews need to be taken seriously and prepared for professionally.
- AVC’s Christian Business School created ‘personalised education’ for graduates.
- Graduates from AVC’s Christian Business School were at least equal if not better than other larger and non-Christian institution graduates.
- Further improvements to communication skills can improve graduate employment prospects.

Conclusion

What, then, do employers of graduates really want overall? There is an expectation that graduates from a Christian business school will have additional graduate attributes which align with their Christian ethos and that they are equal to, if not better than, graduates from other (usually larger) institutions. It is up to a Christian business school to deliver on these expectations. Two recommendations can be made on the outcomes of this research:

- Christian-based business schools must align their mission and ethos to that of their Christian-based potential graduate employers

- Christian-based curriculum should be embedded in the teaching of the Bachelor of Business undergraduate degree

As one stakeholder/employer commented, ‘They come from a Christian environment into a Christian environment...rather than a secular to a Christian’. This process provides employers with graduates who come with an understanding of faith into employment within a Christian organisation, which in turn, aligns ethics, integrity and faith whilst creating an environment of trust and understanding, in harmony with the words of the Psalmist, ‘Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true wisdom. All who obey his commandments will grow in wisdom’ (Psalm 111:10 NLT).

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