

EMBEDDING HEALTHY SYDNEY UNIVERSITY WITHIN THE  
GENERIC ATTRIBUTES OF GRADUATES  
CONCEPT PAPER – JULY 2013

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**Purpose:**

This paper discusses embedding Healthy Sydney University within the University of Sydney's statement of Generic Attributes of Graduates.

**Overview:**

Healthy Sydney University is a settings-based approach to achieve the concept of a healthy university across all aspects of student and working life in the institution. Recognising that Universities are key influencers for the health and wellbeing of their students and staff, Healthy Sydney University takes a whole-of-university approach to making the university setting one that offers the tools, knowledge and infrastructure necessary to promote and support good physical and mental health and wellbeing.<sup>i</sup> To achieve this, implementation of knowledge is focused across three key action areas: Healthy People, Healthy Places and Healthy Policies. In June 2012, the Senior Executive Group endorsed the Healthy Sydney University Implementation Plan. A whole-of-university approach has been adopted, with DVCs, Directors of Professional service Units and Deans of Faculties working alongside academics, general staff and student and staff representatives to develop and progress HSU activity<sup>ii</sup> (Attached as [Appendix A](#)).

A distinguishing characteristic of the Healthy Sydney University approach is the commitment to embedding and sustaining the concept of a healthy university via existing structures and resources within the university. Healthy Sydney University aims to achieve this via a comprehensive and embedded university response, a significant part of which entails ensuring the vision of a healthy university occurs within the University's broader plans and policies.

In this regard, the University of Sydney's statement of [Generic Attributes of Graduates](#) has been identified as a key university framework with which Healthy Sydney University intersects. The Generic Attributes policy sets out those attributes, gained through time spent learning at the University of Sydney that characterise graduates of the University of Sydney. The overarching attributes of Scholarship, Lifelong Learning and Global Citizenship are said to result from a combination of the process of higher education and a graduate's

experience of learning and teaching aspects of University as well as their participation in the University community and their engagement in University life more broadly.<sup>iii</sup>

Indeed, supporting students to experience a rich University life is already clearly indicated within the University's 2011-2015 Strategic Plan, Strategy 4, pg. 13 as follows<sup>iv</sup>:

Enrich the experience of University life for all our students. We aspire to build upon our reputation for the high-quality student experience enjoyed at the University. Our aim is to increase student participation in University life by enriching the services and support that we offer, and enhancing the ways in which they integrate with one another....

At its very core (and the reason for its existence), Healthy Sydney University aims to enhance the experience of University life by offering a broad framework to support student and staff engagement with a healthy university learning and working environment. Through Healthy Sydney University we see an opportunity to formally recognise this link between health and wellbeing and the broader student experience.

## **Proposal**

We propose that the link between students' health and wellbeing and their experience of university life is extended to, and becomes clearly articulated in the statement of Generic Attributes of Graduates of the University of Sydney.

Our rationale is that this would enhance continuity of the University's acknowledgement of the role of health and wellbeing on the student experience and would better articulate how graduate attributes are embedded within the process of life at Sydney University. This would also formalise an existing objective of the University around providing a rich university life ([see Strategic Plan, Strategy Four](#)), and endorse the role of the University in fostering an environment supportive of the health and wellbeing of its students. Most significantly, incorporating Healthy Sydney University within the Statement of Generic Attributes signifies an explicit shift on the part of the University to acknowledging its' role in supporting graduates to develop a healthy orientation to themselves and their community – attributes that ultimately transcend the context within which they were acquired, and which will remain as lifelong characteristics of University of Sydney students.

## **Background:**

Generic graduate attributes are generally accepted in the literature as describing the 'skills, knowledge and abilities of university graduates' that extend beyond traditional disciplinary outcomes.<sup>v</sup> Statements of generic attributes typically conceptualise a breadth of outcomes of higher education from technical and disciplinary abilities, skills relevant to employability and the world of work, and at a more complex conceptual level, skills that 'prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future'.<sup>vi</sup> In the Australian context, there has been particular emphasis on how the process of higher education equips graduates as 'global citizens and effective members of modern day society'.<sup>vii</sup>

Sydney University's Statement of Generic Attributes of Graduates identifies three overarching attributes of Scholarship, Lifelong Learning and Global Citizenship as reflective of the University's 'research intensive nature, its scholarly values in relation to research-led teaching and the place of its graduates in a global society.' These higher level attributes are recognised as representing combinations of a second tier of more specific attributes that can be contextualised for different faculties and disciplines, they include: research and inquiry; information literacy; personal and intellectual autonomy; ethical, social and professional understanding and; communication.

Since the University of Sydney revised its Graduate Attributes policy in 2004, The University has committed to a University-wide program of curriculum renewal to 'foster the development of graduate attributes'. Simultaneously, the University's 2011-2015 the strategic plan sets out a goal to 'enrich the experience of University life for all our students' outside of teaching and learning contexts, citing quality of the student experience as being 'core' to the University's mission as an institution.

## **Supporting health and wellbeing to enrich the experience of University life:**

It is explicitly recognised in the literature that graduate attributes are developed not only through the learning and teaching experiences of higher education, but equally through students' participation in University life.<sup>viii</sup> We propose that taking the initiative to incorporate health and wellbeing into the Graduate Attributes will demonstrate to Sydney University students and staff, prospective students, employers and the community at large, how the University is working at a practical level to support a rich University life.

Currently and critically, the impact of health and wellbeing on the experience of student life is acknowledged in the 2011-2015 Strategic Plan, in Strategy Four with sub-strategy (4a) to: 'review and develop the University's provision of services for student health, wellbeing and

welfare.’<sup>ix</sup> Indeed, the provision of the University’s existing health services represents an essential, admirable and critical function for student life. By its very nature, Healthy Sydney University seeks to enhance and increase the visibility of existing structures by providing a framework to integrate, promote and expand existing health and wellbeing services available to all. However by actively seeking opportunities to support the health and wellbeing of students in their day-to-day interaction with University, Healthy Sydney University plays a unique and important role in being able to influence health and wellbeing at an organisational and population level.

This demonstrates but one point at which the University of Sydney’s Generic Attributes of Graduates statement, Strategic Plan and Healthy Sydney University intersect; the statement of Generic Attributes recognising from a policy level the importance of University life in developing graduate attributes, the Strategic Plan identifying enhanced support for student health and wellbeing as a vehicle for enriching the experience of university life, and Healthy Sydney University working at a practical level to provide a framework to support students (and staff) to engage with university life in health-promoting ways. Through interaction with a setting that promotes good health and wellbeing in its day-to-day business, the experience of participating in University life becomes synonymous with the experience of participating in a health-promoting community.

### **Health-related impacts and outcomes of higher education:**

Articulating the link between health and wellbeing and the experience of University life at the level of the Statement of Graduate attributes provides an opportunity to formally recognise the health-related impacts and outcomes of higher education.<sup>1,x</sup> It would also provide an opportunity to acknowledge the influence a Sydney University education has in developing health-related attributes that ultimately extend beyond the context of the University setting to influence the broader community. The tacit reflection of changing community values has already seen the emergence of a trend for Universities to emphasise in their graduate attributes statements the way in which higher education equips graduates to contribute positively to their communities.<sup>7,xi</sup> For example, The University of the Sunshine Coast (among others) assert the development of ‘sustainability-focused’ graduates:

A sustainability-focused person purposefully connects discipline knowledge and practice to advance wider social, environmental and economic objectives. They can identify potential impacts of an action, product, process, communication, experiment, social interaction, policy or plan and devise solutions. They participate actively in discipline-based discourses and in raising community awareness to encourage positive changes in social behaviour towards increased inclusion of sustainable practices.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, a number of Australian Universities have recently embedded specific Indigenous attributes into their graduate attribute statements. In the University of Sydney's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy, *Wingara mura-bunga barrabugu* a plan is outlined to incorporate cultural competence as a graduate attribute, with a wider objective of achieving a vision of a 'Uniquely Australian University' that 'sets up ripples that extend beyond the university to the wider circle of life in the Australian and international community.'<sup>xii</sup> Recent conceptualisations of graduate attributes have gone as far as describing universities as 'institutions that should create a social benefit and have outcomes congruent with a healthy and happy society'.<sup>xiii</sup>

Despite this, an audit of graduate attributes in Australian universities (Piper, 2013) demonstrates that no Australian University has yet explicitly acknowledged the interplay between university life and health and wellbeing via their statement of graduate attributes. This provides an opportunity for mutual enrichment; an explicit acknowledgement of the University's pursuit to provide a high-quality and healthy experience for its students and better articulation of how University life works to develop graduate attributes. *This presents a unique opportunity for the University of Sydney to differentiate itself from and lead its peers.*

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## References

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## Appendix A

### Healthy Sydney University Implementation Plan

May, 2012

#### 1. Aims

- 1.1 To apply and implement the expertise of our health researchers to the well-being of the University ('walk the talk'), so that both students and staff have the knowledge, skills and infrastructure to lead healthier lives.
- 1.2 To achieve integration of the concept of a healthy university across all aspects of life in the institution.
- 1.3 To achieve aims 1 and 2, in the first instance, by addressing the identified health needs of students.

#### 2. Principles

- 2.1 That projects carried out under the name of, or associated with Healthy Sydney University should be evidence-based and evidence-generating.
- 2.2 That projects affecting student life be developed in collaboration with student representatives and organisations. At a later stage, projects affecting the work life of staff will be developed in collaboration with staff.
- 2.3 That projects implemented and/ or endorsed by Healthy Sydney University adopt an holistic interpretation of health and wellbeing, recognising the relationship between physical health and mental health and wellbeing.
- 2.4 That projects adopt an integrated, population-based approach, rather than address individual health needs.
- 2.5 That the approach adopted is top down and bottom up, with DVCs, Directors of Professional Service Units and Deans of Faculties (top-down) and champions across all sections of the university, including student organisations (bottom-up) working together.

#### 3. Components/elements

##### *3.1 Implementation of Healthy Sydney University in the DVC portfolios*

- DVC (Strategic Management) with responsibility for implementation and oversight of HSU through the Professional Service Units.
- DVC Research leading implementation and oversight of HSU through the work of the funded SyReNS Health & Work Research Network.
- DVC Education, through the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs) Professor Marie Carroll, leading implementation and oversight of HSU in curriculum matters and curriculum reform, and with Student Support Services, responsible for student

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mental health and distress issues and the VC Student Wellbeing and Development Workslate Project.

- DVC Indigenous Strategy and Services leading implementation and oversight of HSU in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Integrated Strategy.
- DVC International leading implementation and oversight of HSU by integrating the achievements of Healthy Sydney University within the university's international profile. Additionally, taking the lead, through the Worldwide Universities Network <http://www.wun.ac.uk>, to initiate a worldwide research-intensive healthy universities network.
- DVC and Provost, ensuring implementation at faculty level by inclusion of HSU implementation as a key performance indicator for Deans and Chairs, Divisional Boards.

### ***3.2 Implementation of Healthy Sydney University in the Professional Service Units***

- The Vice Chancellor, Dr Michael Spence and Professor Ann Brewer, DVC (Strategic Management) overseeing implementation in the Professional Service Units. Professor Ann Brewer is a member of the Healthy Sydney University Implementation Team.
- Human Resources through the Director, Colin Streeter taking the lead in embedding Healthy Sydney University in all HR functions. There are active Healthy Sydney University champions in Human Resources and this PSU is well represented on the HSU Implementation Team. A desired outcome is securing lower insurance premiums in relation to work, health and safety, improving staff health and wellbeing overall, and reducing illness related absences.
- Campus Infrastructure Services through the Director, Greg Robinson expand health-supporting activities and projects (e.g. bubblers and bike racks, walking pathways and exercise routes), and badge these as part of HSU to advance the university reputation for health and wellbeing for staff, the local community and external stakeholders.
- With the Sustainability Initiative under the chairmanship of Professor Archie Johnston, coordinate and leverage health and sustainability initiatives internally, with the local community and external stakeholders.

### ***3.3 Implementation through the Faculties***

- In the first instance the SyReNS Health & Work Research Network to identify and link together all research in the institution relevant to making the University a healthier place to work and study.
- Provide substantive content (existing and university generated) to inform HSU implementation in the Professional Service Units and DVC Portfolios.

## **4. Process**

4.1 Develop, in collaboration with student organisations and their representatives, (i) a set of priorities for projects that integrate student physical and mental health, and (ii) a

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- process by which students can engage in evidence generating projects for HSU, through taught courses or research programs.
- 4.2 Develop working groups to work on the implementation of the Healthy Sydney University strategy (e.g., developing priorities and process in 4.1, nutrition and physical and mental health, curriculum change, branding and leveraging and so on). The Framework for Healthy Sydney University presented in the Submission to SEG 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012 provides useful headings for these working groups.
  - 4.3 Align the activities under 4.1 and 4.2 to university experts, including but not limited to the expertise in the SyReNS, the Charles Perkins Centre, the Boden Institute, the Brain and Mind Research Institute, the George Institute, and the faculties.
  - 4.4 Establish and support a network of HSU champions stretching across the different faculties and units.
  - 4.5 In collaboration with the Director, Charles Perkins Centre utilise available resources to fund the projects in 5.1, and identify additional sources of funding including working with the Development Office to do so.
  - 4.6 Draw on 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 to identify medium and long term Healthy Sydney University priorities for the period 2013-2015.

## **5. Projects**

- 5.1 Develop two flagship projects which adopt an integrated approach to physical and mental health and wellbeing from the process outlined in 4.1. These flagship projects will set the tone for how students and staff understand Healthy Sydney University without being so ambitious or expensive that outcomes cannot be achieved within 12-18 months.
  - 5.2 Identify opportunities which can be incorporated under Healthy Sydney University and widely promote these (such as the expansion of the bubbler strategy), through a coordinated communications strategy in the University Staff Bulletin, the Office of Policy Analysis and Communication, and the Office of Government Relations. An initial step could include promoting the work of the SyReNS Health & Work Research Network in bringing together researchers related to making the University a healthier place to work and study.
6. **Timeframe** for the short term implementation as detailed above is 2012 – 2013 with development of a three year strategic and implementation plan for the remainder of the University Strategic Plan time period as a priority within the next quarter, end September, 2012.