

Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership Longitudinal Study Report

September 2018



**CENTRE FOR
HUMANITARIAN
LEADERSHIP**

A Save the Children - Deakin Partnership



Acknowledgements

This study was conducted by Veronica Bell, an independent specialist, and author of this report. The study was managed by Sophie Perreard, Course Director, Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership, and Associate Professor Phil Connors, Director, Centre for Humanitarian Leadership.

This study was approved by the Deakin University (Australia) Faculty of Arts and Education Human Ethics Advisory Group (Project Reference: HAE-17-165).

The author would like to thank everyone involved, particularly the Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership students and faculty members who generously gave their time to contribute to the study.

The author would like to acknowledge the IKEA Foundation, whose generous support made this study possible.

IKEA Foundation



Table of Contents

List of acronyms	i
Executive summary.....	ii
Introduction	1
Study objective	2
Methodology.....	3
Study design & tools.....	3
Participants.....	3
Limitations	3
Study findings.....	5
Graduate satisfaction with the GCHL	5
Delivery of the GCHL.....	11
Feedback, coaching and mentoring.....	15
GCHL evolution	16
Increasing humanitarian leadership knowledge and skills.....	17
Applying GCHL learning in practice	19
Career pathways.....	21
Networking and relationships	23
GCHL student recruitment.....	25
GCHL faculty	27
Discussion	29
Recommendations.....	31

List of acronyms

CHL	Centre for Humanitarian Leadership
GCHL	Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership
HLP	Humanitarian Leadership Programme
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
UN	United Nations
US	United States

Executive summary

The Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership (GCHL) is an accredited tertiary postgraduate course delivered by Deakin University through the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (CHL) in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The eight-month course consists of four units: two cloud-based distance learning units and two residential units. Comprising lectures, facilitated sessions, distance learning, research, coaching, self-reflection and scenario-based learning, the GCHL is designed for senior managers and leaders working in the humanitarian and development sectors.

The GCHL was conceptualised and designed in 2011, with the first unit taught in January 2012. The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade approved seed funding to Save the Children Australia through the Humanitarian Partnerships Agreement, which provided the impetus for Save the Children and Deakin University to create a course focused on improving leadership capability in the humanitarian system. Deakin University also supported the introduction of the course through a fee waiver for the first three student intakes. The GCHL was accredited in 2013 and IKEA Foundation funding was secured as part of a more expansive humanitarian capacity building grant in May 2015. At this time, the GCHL moved from being delivered once to twice a year, with student intakes commencing in July and November. The CHL was launched as a more formal collaboration between Save the Children Australia and Deakin University in November 2015. A second tranche of IKEA Foundation funding commenced in May 2018.

A French language iteration of the course was launched in September 2017 in partnership with Action contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger), with the first intake of students completing the final unit in April 2018. United States (US) Government funding for this course has been received through the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance.

From inception to June 2018, approximately 550 students from 85 countries and 80 organisations have engaged with the GCHL.

This study was commissioned by CHL to complement established evaluative processes, deepen understanding of how the course has impacted graduates, and inform the continuous improvement and evolution of the GCHL. It was designed to assess the extent to which GCHL graduates have been able to apply the knowledge and skills gained from the course in their workplaces and if/how the GCHL has impacted their career pathways.

The study used a mixed methods approach. An online survey questionnaire, comprising both quantitative and qualitative questions, was administered to GCHL graduates. Participant identification purposefully ensured diversity across a number of measures, including gender, nationality, type of organisation, course intake, and employment status at the time they participated in the course (national or international staff member). This was complemented by semi-structured in-depth interviews with a sub-set of survey respondents to gather more detailed information. The same considerations of diversity were applied when selecting the interview participants, as well as availability. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected members of the GCHL faculty, including the Course Director.

Graduate satisfaction with the GCHL overall was high, including the course topics; materials and readings; and the course delivery. Whilst almost all respondents felt the course was sufficiently comprehensive, some felt there were specific topics that need even more attention, given the rapidly evolving contexts in which humanitarians are increasingly operating and the complex leadership challenges they face. These included: gender and inclusion; cultural issues and leadership styles in different cultural contexts and settings, including protracted crises; conflicts and conflict sensitivity; negotiation skills; advocacy and influencing; ethics; and humanitarian foresight. Both graduate and faculty participants highlighted the importance of the GCHL remaining relevant, continuously evolving, being forward looking and addressing emerging trends.

There were some concerns raised about the leadership styles promoted through the GCHL, and particularly the approach to the simulations, which a small number of graduates characterised as 'traditional' or too focused on non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Demonstrating a responsiveness to feedback, the GCHL has already incorporated scenarios into the simulations that require students to assess situations from a variety of perspectives, including local government and non-government actors and UN agencies as well as international NGOs.

Faculty interviewees felt the GCHL brings together a combination of actors, including humanitarian practitioners, academics and human resource specialists, and leverages their expertise through a highly collaborative design process to deliver a unique curriculum. They talked about the rich partnerships that have been cultivated, which enable the GCHL to access content and participation from a broad range of sources and perspectives and make that available to students.

The fact the GCHL is accredited by Deakin University is of note for students and faculty alike, and the perception is it gives the course extra status. It also ensures consistency of focus and direction.

Graduates spoke about how much they valued the continuous feedback they received throughout the GCHL, from their peers and their coaches, and the benefits they continue to draw from this in their day to day work. They reflected on how coaching and feedback had made them more self-aware, and receptive to insights about their strengths as well as areas for improvement. They also spoke about their own improved ability to give feedback to others in a constructive manner.

Several respondents commented that the mentoring component would benefit from being more formally embedded in GCHL. One respondent recommended establishing a pool of mentors whom students can access, who know and understand the program and are really interested in it, and who can also help students extend their networks.

All the graduates surveyed felt participating in GCHL had increased their knowledge and skills and three-quarters of respondents said they had been easily able to apply their new expertise in their daily work. In addition to having new tools and techniques, graduates spoke about GCHL having instilled in them confidence in their own leadership capability and a willingness to try new things as a result – even if this meant taking themselves out of their comfort zone. Two-thirds of graduates felt the GCHL had notably enhanced their career options, with university accreditation perceived to hold influence with employers.

Time was a key challenge graduates encountered in applying GCHL learnings. Specifically, making the time to reflect, to consciously and consistently draw on the GCHL tools and experiences, and to not

fall back into old patterns of behaviour. One respondent said they would really appreciate a reference manual they could revisit whenever they needed.

The majority of graduates said they had stayed in touch with their fellow GCHL students since graduating. The reasons they gave for staying in contact are a mix of professional and social. Whilst acknowledging their own responsibility for sustaining their networks, many graduates said they would welcome CHL playing a facilitating role to assist alumni to continue connecting and networking. The upcoming alumni reunion symposium (to be held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2018) was noted as a platform for furthering dialogue and fostering ongoing collaboration.

A large number of graduate interviewees said they have recommended the GCHL to their colleagues and their organisations. Many respondents who are in management roles had already sent or recommended their own staff for the GCHL course. Several graduates have already re-engaged with the GCHL through joining the faculty. Those who have not yet been able to participate said they are interested to do so.

There were many comments from graduates about the composition of student cohorts. Networking with people from different backgrounds and organisations was one of the elements of the GCHL graduates found most useful. However, a few respondents did question the level of experience of some students in their cohort and emphasised the importance of the GCHL maintaining a rigorous recruitment approach. From the faculty perspective, interviewees who had been engaged with the GCHL from the outset felt the student recruitment process had improved over time, although they also acknowledged it is a constant challenge to bring the right mix of people together at the same time to maximise learning for students.

Faculty interviewees also noted the constant challenge in achieving desired levels of diversity across each faculty team, especially gender diversity. As the GCHL partner base expands, it is hoped the course will be able to address this by drawing from an ever-increasing pool of organisations and staff with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Bringing GCHL graduates onto faculty is another widely supported approach to increasing faculty diversity and sustainability.

Based on the findings of this study, the GCHL is clearly relevant and is satisfying graduates' expectations in terms of course content and delivery. However, as was consistently mentioned throughout the study by both graduates and faculty members, the humanitarian sector is rapidly changing. As new challenges emerge and new and diverse actors enter an increasingly complex humanitarian eco-system, the CHL needs to continuously challenge itself to ensure the GCHL is meeting the evolving needs of emerging humanitarian leaders.

As part of this longitudinal study, CHL will continue to engage with GCHL graduates, track their evolving leadership journeys, and draw on their insights and experiences to continuously strengthen the course and ensure it remains fit for purpose and cutting edge.

The following recommendations are drawn from analysis of the study findings:

- Ensure a continuous focus on horizon scanning, incorporating new thinking and ideas, and addressing emerging issues to ensure GCHL's ongoing relevance and value to the sector.

- GCHL is at its core a 'humanitarian' leadership program. It should never lose sight of this and the current strong humanitarian perspective needs to be maintained throughout all aspects of the course.
- Ensure GCHL doesn't propagate a singular, (traditional) ideological interpretation of humanitarian response, but rather remains agile, adaptive to change and relevant.
- Retain GCHL's high valued academic-practitioner balance.
- Continue the development of institutional partnerships to ensure the desired mix of students and faculty.
- Review the mentoring component of GCHL and explore opportunities for graduates to be recruited and trained to become mentors.
- Identify opportunities to increase the number of students from local organisations through continuing and expanding on current scholarships, in line with the localisation agenda.
- Continue advocating to institutional partners to support greater participation of local partners in the GCHL.
- Maintain rigorous student recruitment practices and a focus on quality, and identify options and opportunities to ensure students selected for GCHL are in a position to successfully complete the course.
- Consider developing a GCHL student reference manual, comprising key tools and relevant case studies, to support graduates' continued application of GCHL learning.
- Build a community of practice with GCHL alumni to maximise opportunities for humanitarian system transition.

Introduction

The Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership (GCHL) is an accredited tertiary postgraduate course delivered by Deakin University through the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (CHL) in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The eight-month course consists of four units: two cloud-based distance learning units and two residential units. Comprising lectures, facilitated sessions, distance learning, research, coaching, self-reflection and scenario-based learning, the GCHL is designed for senior managers and leaders working in the humanitarian and development sectors. Applicants must have a minimum of five years' experience working within humanitarian, development or related sectors, and at least three years' experience in a senior management or other related position to be eligible for the course.

The GCHL was conceptualised and designed in 2011, with the first unit taught in January 2012. The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade approved seed funding to Save the Children Australia through the Humanitarian Partnerships Agreement, which provided the impetus for Save the Children and Deakin University to create a course focused on improving leadership capability in the humanitarian system. Deakin University also supported the introduction of the course through a fee waiver for the first three student intakes. The GCHL was accredited in 2013 and IKEA Foundation funding was secured as part of a more expansive humanitarian capacity building grant in May 2015. At this time, the GCHL moved from being delivered once to twice a year, with student intakes commencing in July and November. The CHL was launched as a more formal collaboration between Save the Children Australia and Deakin University in November 2015. A second tranche of IKEA Foundation funding commenced in May 2018.

A French language iteration of the course was launched in September 2017 in partnership with Action contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger), with the first intake of students completing the final unit in April 2018. United States (US) Government funding for this course has been received through the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance.

From inception to June 2018, approximately 550 students from 85 countries and 80 organisations have engaged with the GCHL.

Regular evaluation processes, using tools such as Deakin University's eVALUate¹ and CHL's SurveyMonkey application, are built into each GCHL course cycle to seek students' feedback and recommendations on course content and delivery modes. Feedback from faculty members is also captured regularly. CHL commissioned this study to complement these established evaluative processes, deepen understanding of how the course has impacted graduates, and inform the continuous improvement and evolution of the GCHL. This report presents the key study findings.

¹ <https://apps.deakin.edu.au/evaluate/results/index.php>

The GCHL was formerly known as the Humanitarian Leadership Programme (HLP) and many graduates and faculty members still refer to the course as the HLP. The term HLP is used in this report when directly quoting study participants.

Study objective

This study was designed to assess the extent to which GCHL graduates have been able to apply the knowledge and skills from the course in their workplaces and if/how the GCHL has impacted their career pathways.

Specifically, the study explored:

- How relevant do students feel the GCHL course content was for them?
- What have been the enablers and barriers to students applying GCHL learning in their workplace?
- Have the relationships established through the course, including with the GCHL faculty, had any impact on students' professional pathways/choices?

Methodology

Study design & tools

The study used a mixed methods approach. An online survey questionnaire, comprising both quantitative and qualitative questions, was administered to GCHL graduates. Graduate participant identification purposefully ensured diversity across a number of measures, including gender, nationality, type of organisation, course intake, and employment status at the time participants undertook the course (i.e. national or international staff member). This was complemented by semi-structured in-depth interviews with a sub-set of survey respondents to gather more detailed information. The same considerations of diversity were applied when selecting the interview participants, as well as their availability. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with GCHL faculty members, including the Course Director.

Participants

Fifty graduates from eight GCHL intakes were recruited to participate in the online survey. Identified participants came from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies, Red Cross Red Crescent, government agencies, and one independent contractor. A sub-set of 18 respondents was purposively selected for more in-depth interviews. The interview group aimed to include graduates from the same spectrum of organisations and intakes as those who responded to the survey. This was mostly achieved, with graduates from seven of the eight intakes involved and all of the organisation types represented except for independent consultants. Seven GCHL faculty members participated, including founding members of the course through to recently recruited members of the faculty team.

Limitations

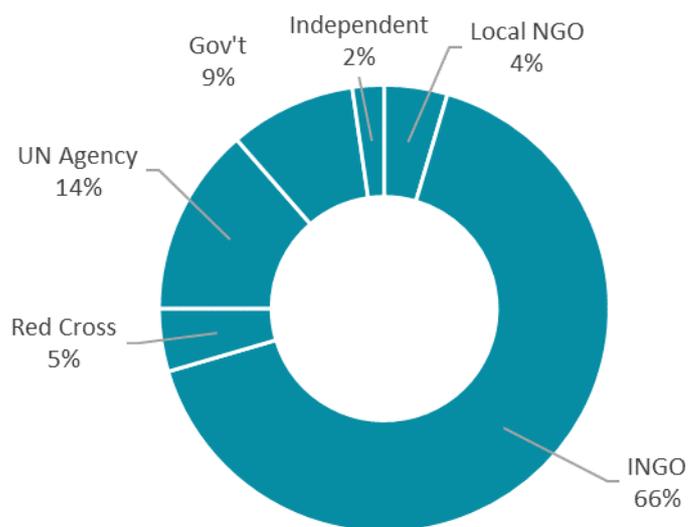
Graduate recruitment for the research was challenging. The research initially set out to survey 80 graduates, 10 from each of eight GCHL intakes. However, despite multiple attempts, it was not possible to reach this target. After a lengthy recruitment process, 50 graduates spanning the eight intakes were recruited and the required participant diversity was achieved. On a positive note, the survey response rate was 88% (44 responses). The initial recruitment challenge did not negatively impact the in-depth interviews – the original target of 20 was 90% achieved (18 interviews conducted). The only limitation with the graduate interviews was achieving sufficient gender diversity, due to participants' availability: 67% of interview respondents were female and only 33% male. For the graduate survey and faculty interviews, the ratios were well balanced (52% F/48%M; and 57%F/43%M respectively).

Study participants and tools

Respondents	Survey (graduates)		Interviews (graduates)		Interviews (faculty)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
INGO	16	13	8	2		
Local NGO	1	1	1	1		
Red Cross	1	1	1	1		
UN Agency	5	1	2	1		
Govt		4		1		
Independent		1				
Total	23	21	12	6	4	3
	52%	48%	67%	33%	57%	43%

Interview participants by student intake

Student intake	Number of interviewees
1	2
2	3
3	2
4	2
5	3
6	2
7	4



Survey participants, by organisation type

Study findings

Fifty graduates were recruited for the study. A total of 44 participants (88%) responded to the online survey. Forty-one participants (82%) provided complete responses and three (6%) provided partial responses. There were six non-responses (12%). In-depth interviews were conducted with 18 of the online survey respondents and with seven members of the GCHL faculty.

Graduate satisfaction with the GCHL

Graduate satisfaction with the GCHL overall was high, with all survey respondents saying they were satisfied (32%) or very satisfied (68%).

The survey findings were backed up in the graduate interviews. Respondents spoke about the impact of the GCHL on them, at both professional and personal levels, and every graduate interviewee expressed a level of satisfaction with the course.

“Honestly, I loved the course.”²

“HLP changed my outlook on many things – including in my personal life. The level of self-awareness it brought me was so beneficial.”³

“It was very practical. I think everyone could take what they needed/wanted and adapt to their own circumstances . I have only positive things to say.”⁴

“Most useful for me was to step back and observe my own practice and my own representations of the sector; my expectations towards colleagues and myself; observe how I interact with people – in an emergency, but even in the group work, it was a concrete tangible experiment where you get to experience how you work, lead, be led. Doing it with a constant stepping back and getting input and feedback and being self-critical – but in a positive way... And the fact it happens over almost a year which is a significant period to really reflect and improve. By the end of the year I knew myself better – knew my strengths and felt equipped to work on my weaknesses.”⁵

“To me it was the most interesting course I’ve done in my humanitarian experience by far.”⁶

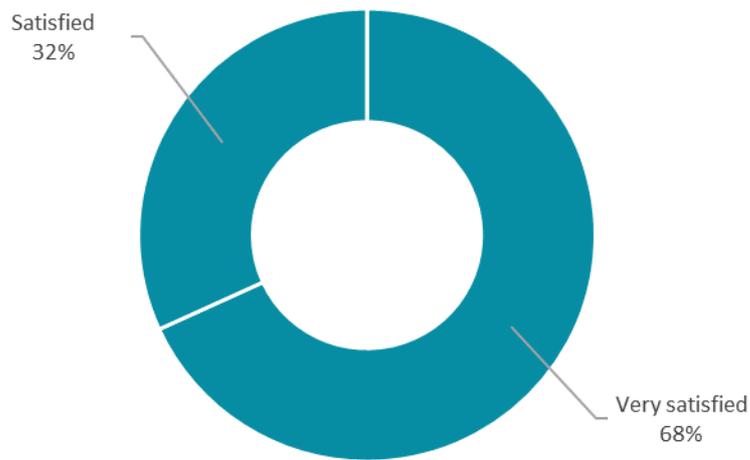
² Interview 1

³ Interview 18

⁴ Interview 8

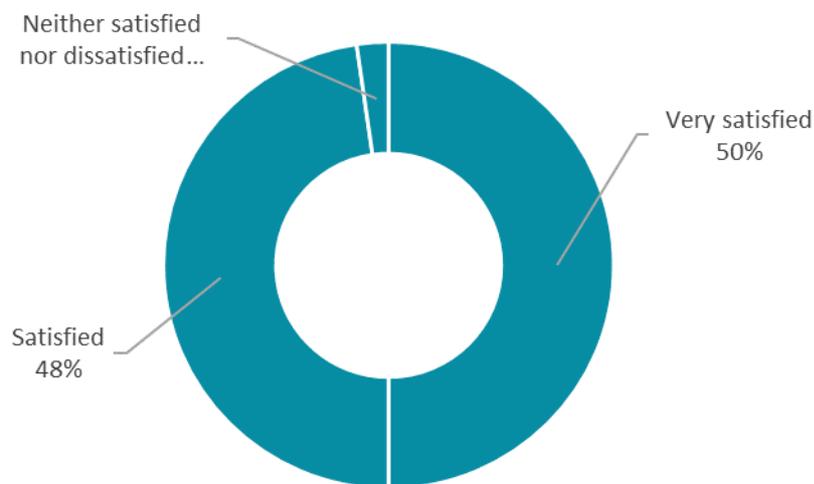
⁵ Interview 7

⁶ Interview 16



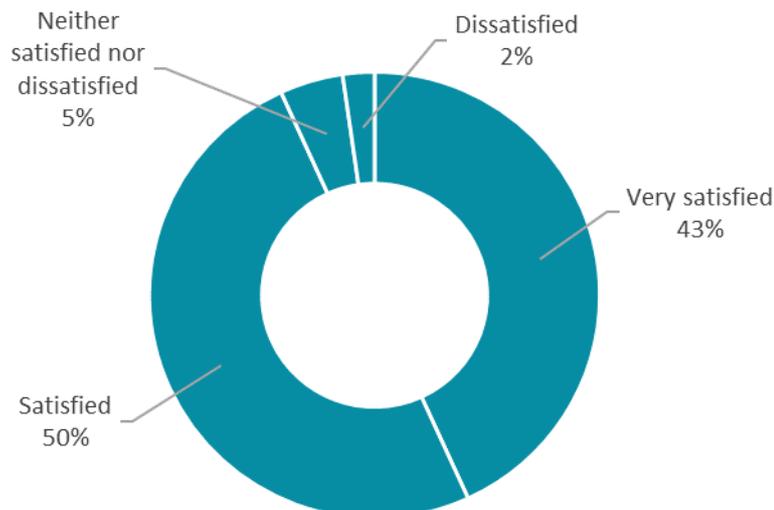
Graduate satisfaction with GCHL

Graduate satisfaction with GCHL course topics was high, with 50% of survey respondents saying they were very satisfied; 48% satisfied; and 2% expressing neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction.



Graduate satisfaction with GCHL course topics

Graduate satisfaction with GCHL course materials and readings overall was high, with 43% of survey respondents saying they were very satisfied; 50% satisfied; and 5% expressing neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction. Two percent said they were dissatisfied.



Graduate satisfaction with GCHL course materials and readings

In terms of the individual GCHL learning modules, at least 61% of survey respondents said they found each module either extremely useful or very useful. The module *Mentoring and 360 Feedback* received the highest rating, followed by *The Role of Leadership in Humanitarian Contexts*, and then *Building High Performing Teams*. All three of these modules are introduced in Unit 2. The module that received the lowest rating was *Support Services – Strategic Considerations* (covered in Unit 3).

Survey respondents and graduate interviewees were asked if they perceived anything missing in the GCHL. Whilst almost all respondents felt the course was sufficiently comprehensive, some felt there were specific topics that need even more attention, given the rapidly evolving contexts in which humanitarians are increasingly operating and the complex leadership challenges they face. These included: gender and inclusion; cultural issues and leadership styles in different cultural contexts and settings, including protracted crises; conflicts and conflict sensitivity; negotiation skills; advocacy and influencing; ethics; and humanitarian foresight.

“I realise that sometimes when responding to disasters, we take less time to appreciate the culture of the people and this brings in conflict. HLP should focus more on cultural issues. You really have to understand local practices before you can introduce new ideas.”⁷

“HLP should have more focus on conflicts. It was touched on but would benefit from more in-depth focus – especially in refugee situations because these are becoming more common everywhere globally now.”⁸

“More focus on negotiation skills would be good – it was a bit limited. You need to understand how do you get your intelligence, position yourself, how to engage with

⁷ Interview 2

⁸ Survey 38

the political class without compromising humanitarian principles. There is so much complexity these days – the more you can negotiate your way through, the better.”⁹

“It would be good to cover more on advocacy in HLP. For example, humanitarian negotiations and diplomacy – negotiating humanitarian access in complex settings.”¹⁰

“Giving a bit more space to discussing more thoroughly ethical issues in humanitarian contexts and safety and security would be very helpful for the participants. Lots of the time a leader in such a context has to deal with these kind of dilemmas and issues and it is there that we need to develop skills and more understanding.”¹¹

Graduate respondents acknowledged the inherent tension between the GCHL delivering a comprehensive program that covers key topics to sufficient degree, and individuals wanting to explore particular topics in much greater detail. Whilst graduates are clearly satisfied with the GCHL course content overall, as evidenced by the survey results reported above, their suggestions related to incorporation of additional topics, or more in-depth focus on some topics already included, are valuable for the GCHL leadership team to consider.

Another issue raised by both graduate and faculty participants is the importance of the GCHL remaining relevant, continuously evolving, being forward looking and addressing emerging trends.

“More research on emerging issues is really important – things are changing really fast and HLP needs to keep apace.”¹²

“HLP needs some space for new things in the humanitarian sector. Our sector is changing all the time – so having a bit more space for young leaders or current leaders to be thinking about the new things they should be trying; what they need to be aware of; what’s coming into the sector now and in the next five years... there wasn’t enough of what’s on the horizon.”¹³

“More on the humanitarian mega-trends would have been good – it was there but more could have been done.”¹⁴

“It would be interesting to explore the role of technology in more detail.”¹⁵

⁹ Interview 2

¹⁰ Interview 6

¹¹ Survey 30

¹² Interview 2

¹³ Interview 14

¹⁴ Interview 4

¹⁵ Survey 18

“Humanitarian foresight - projecting ahead; considering the consequences of choices; anticipating the future and planning better. HLP would be a wonderful platform to do more of that.”¹⁶

The perception amongst faculty respondents is the overall methodology of the course is sound but there is a need to keep looking forward and continuously weave in emerging trends. Two examples given of where this was already happening were an increased focus on the role of local partners and an enhanced focus on ethics. But there was also acknowledgement among faculty participants – and commitment from them – that more can and should be done.

“I don’t think the simulations are quite future focused enough; they’re a good device to drive behaviours but we need to think more about different ways of working in the sector going forward. We could push the envelope more.”¹⁷

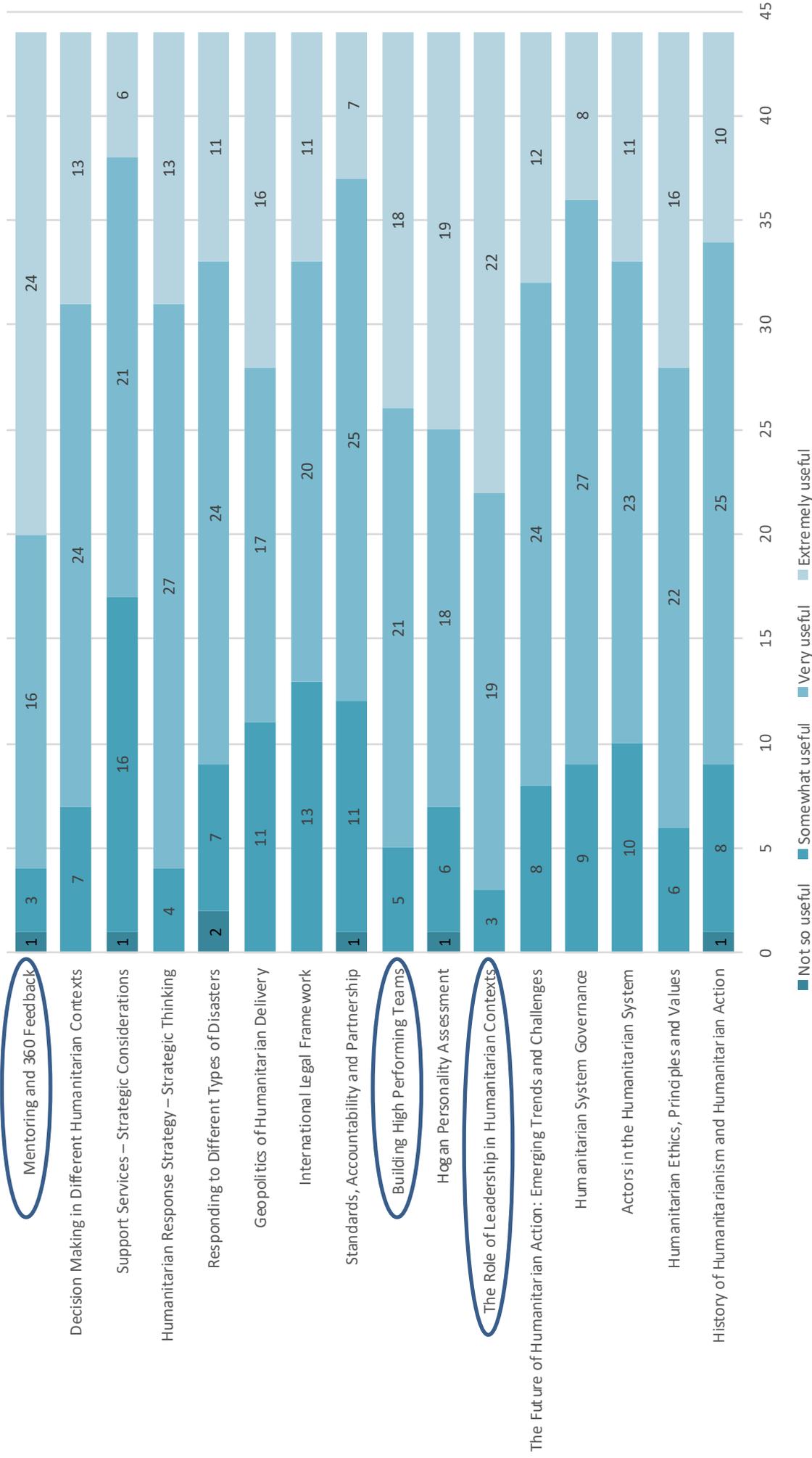
“I think there will always be ongoing improvements we can make. It’s important to keep looking to future state humanitarian reform; the humanitarian transformation agenda; how donors behave etc. But we also need to critically analyse and constantly ask ‘Will it make humanitarian response more effective or not?’”¹⁸

¹⁶ Interview 7

¹⁷ Faculty interview 1

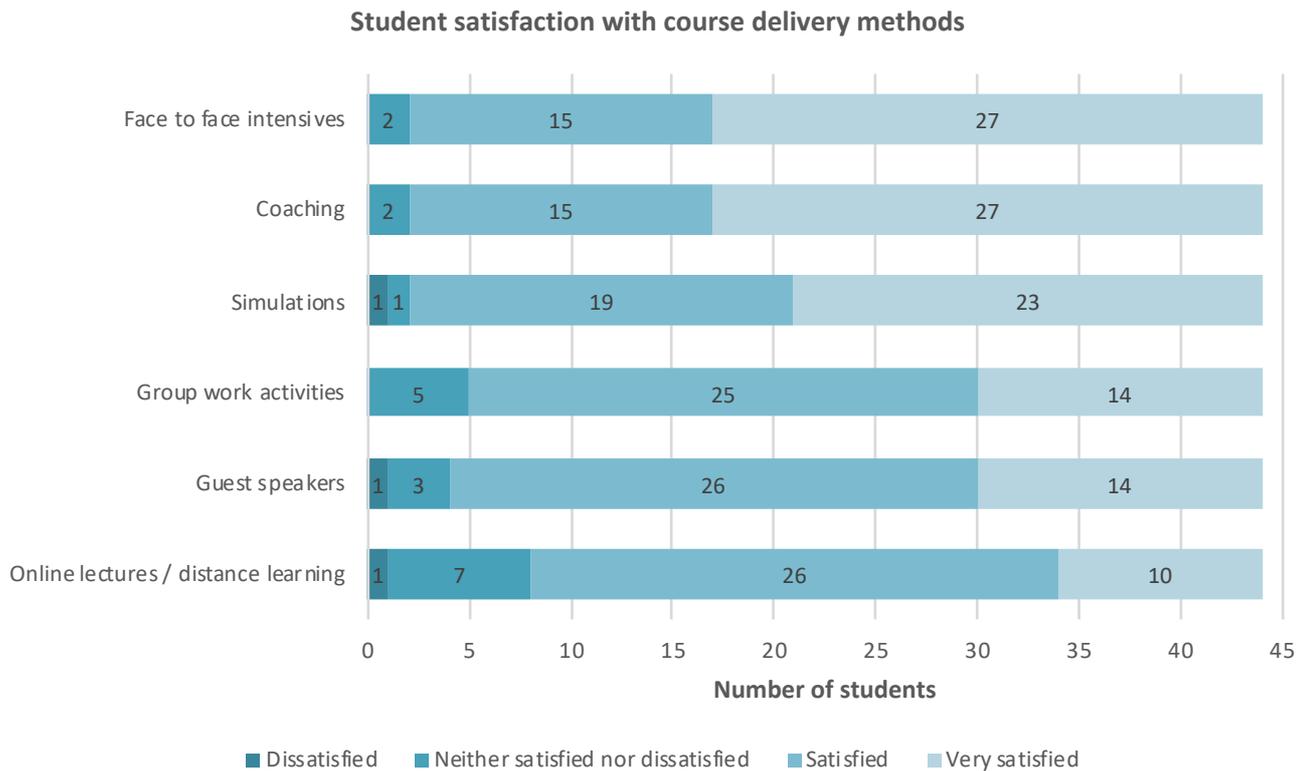
¹⁸ Faculty interview 5

Student perceptions of usefulness of learning topics



Delivery of the GCHL

Graduate satisfaction with the GCHL course delivery methods was very high, with at least 81% of survey respondents either satisfied or very satisfied with each approach. The equal highest-rated approaches were *face to face intensives* and *coaching* followed by *simulations*. *Online lectures/distance learning* was ranked lowest, albeit still receiving a high score in relative terms.



In the graduate interviews, the simulations were the stand out component of GCHL for the majority of respondents. Networking with other students was also highly valued as was coaching and feedback.

“The simulation in Semarang was one of the best things I’ve ever been involved in.”¹⁹

“It was a pressure cooker – intense – so you couldn’t fake it. It’s you and how do you react under pressure – real parts of you are exposed for better or worse – and they’re viewed by your colleagues and fed back on. You can put on a face at work but when under constant pressure with a team for that long – the cracks emerge. It felt authentic.”²⁰

¹⁹ Interview 3

²⁰ Interview 1

“One of the things I really appreciated was the networking – it was amazing to have that different exposure.”²¹

“I found the personal observations really useful and challenging – in a good way. The level of criticism from my coach was higher than I’ve had on any other training course – but it was constructive and helpful. I still think about key things that were said to me then. To remember what somebody has said to you verbatim is unusual – the feedback was very targeted and personalised and that was so helpful.”²²

However, there were some concerns raised about the leadership styles promoted through the GCHL, and particularly the approach to the simulations. Specifically, there was a perspective among some graduates who do not come from international NGOs that the course is highly NGO focused, and that situations were primarily presented through an international NGO lens.

“It was too focused on NGOs. Maybe look at different leadership styles across different types of humanitarian organisations.”²³

“I believe that because the HLP was initially shaped very much by NGOs... sometimes the approaches, mainly in the residential units and the simulations, were very much shaped by NGOs perspectives. Every simulation puts you in a role like you are the NGO in the environment. It didn’t push you to think about different perspectives. But I felt that once we made this point, there was an effort by the HLP team to reshape and reformulate things.”²⁴

There was also a perception among a few graduates that the GCHL pushed a particular approach and style of leadership, which they characterised as ‘traditional’.

“We need to challenge the representation that humanitarian work today is still a firefighter approach. It’s much more nuanced and we need to be diligent in how we respond.”²⁵

“I think in the first course it was very much about ‘you have to lead in this way’. I think some of the faculty could have been more open to different perspectives. For example, dealing with emotional issues. I felt it was very much ‘make a decision and move on’, but you have to deal with people and in our sector, we have specific people issues, for example high stress. HLP should broaden out the leadership styles and present different models.”²⁶

²¹ Interview 6

²² Interview 10

²³ Interview 10

²⁴ Interview 5

²⁵ Interview 7

²⁶ Interview 14

“It felt a bit like the army where there’s a bit of a cowboy culture – either suck it up and get on with it and cope or you’re out. I question are these the sorts of leaders we want to produce? Push people to their limits and expect them to cope? Or are we trying to produce leaders who challenge that kind of leadership? I think we want leaders who have the skills to identify and provide appropriate support when it’s needed and it’s not seen as a weakness.”²⁷

One faculty interviewee reflected on the importance of ensuring the GCHL doesn’t propagate a singular, ideological interpretation of humanitarian response, but rather remains agile, adaptive to change and, most importantly, relevant.

“There is a danger that mantras become dogma; we need to be aware of that in terms of course content and design.”²⁸

With regards to the online/distance course modules, there is some correlation between graduates’ level of experience and their satisfaction with the content and pace of delivery of the online units. For more experienced graduates, some felt the topics were covering old ground and that unit one in particular went too slowly. For those who had limited or no experience in the humanitarian sector, it was a great opportunity to learn about the fundamentals of humanitarianism.

“Getting to know the history of humanitarianism and the ethics and debates – it was fascinating. My background is not humanitarian so I found this so useful.”²⁹

“The online for me was quite repetitive of other stuff I’d done – and I found it a little bit too entry level. If you were thinking about what do leaders in the humanitarian sector know, I thought it would move along quicker.”³⁰

“Some of the reading materials were old – I understand the need for the history part but I expected to see more on trends. Didn’t think the materials reflected fully the trends in the humanitarian sector.”³¹

“For people entering the humanitarian world, getting a stronger background on what is humanitarian, reviewing the history and the literature, I see it as very important. People entering the humanitarian system now are very technical but don’t have so much background on the history. HLP provides the core roots on what is the humanitarian environment – and what will be the future challenges.”³²

Participating in the online units was challenging for some students given their different time zones, with some struggling to fully engage and having to rely on the recorded sessions. This was frustrating

²⁷ Interview 9

²⁸ Faculty interview 5

²⁹ Interview 13

³⁰ Interview 10

³¹ Interview 12

³² Interview 5

for them, and for their fellow students, but also the reality of delivering and participating in a global program.

Graduates appreciated the mix of remote learning and face to face intensives. The format enabled participants to learn and then put theory into practice, and importantly, also allowed them to combine work and study.

“It was a good mix of blended learning; coursework online, groupwork online and face to face. A good mix of styles – we got a bit of everything.”³³

Faculty interviewees felt the GCHL brings together a combination of actors, including humanitarian practitioners, academics and human resource specialists, and leverages their expertise through a highly collaborative design process to deliver a unique proposition. They talked about the rich partnerships that have been cultivated, which enable the GCHL to access content and participation from a broad range of sources and perspectives and make that available to students. Faculty also spoke about the rich hybrid approach of bringing together academic and practitioner perspectives and connecting them in a meaningful way.

“HLP has good theoretical underpinnings and we also bring in coaching, behaviours, power, decision making – all of these things really help people in their leadership journey.”³⁴

“I think it gets the balance right between providing students with deep contextual, historical sector foundations – good heady stuff that matters – and sense-making of the system as it is now: the players, structures, pressures, challenges; including the particular pressures leaders are under at team, organisation, wider context levels.”³⁵

“It’s like a magic combination of like-minded people with the academic rigour.”³⁶

“The residentials are where you see the manifestation of the academic and practitioner components coming together; it’s where we get to really embed some of the behavioural changes we’re looking for in the students. It’s very intense.”³⁷

The fact the GCHL is accredited by Deakin University is of note for students and faculty alike, and the perception is it gives the course extra status. It also ensures consistency of focus and direction.

“Without the academic rigour, it would be easy for the course to go into all sorts of different directions; keeping it to what has been approved academically by Deakin gives it rigour.”³⁸

³³ Interview 13

³⁴ Faculty interview 1

³⁵ Faculty interview 4

³⁶ Faculty interview 3

³⁷ Faculty interview 5

³⁸ Faculty interview 3

Feedback, coaching and mentoring

Graduates spoke about how much they valued the continuous feedback they received throughout the GCHL, from their peers and their coaches, and the benefits they continue to draw from this in their day to day work. They reflected on how coaching and feedback had made them more self-aware, and receptive to insights about their strengths as well as areas for improvement. They also spoke about their own improved ability to give feedback to others in a constructive manner.

“Coaching helped me be more flexible; to recognise my areas of weakness and strength, and I made a deliberate plan to focus on where I am weak. I need to be more accommodating – and I have been really reading and practicing and trying to accommodate others’ ideas and have an open mind. I got some positive feedback recently on my resilience and the way I conduct myself with people at all levels and I would link this right back to what I learned in HLP.”³⁹

“By the second simulation I was ready. I knew I needed to focus on the positive as well as the negative – being kind to people in the process, but also being kind to share areas where others can improve and also receiving that feedback. It has been a really good growing experience; proving yourself and trying to improve your team.”⁴⁰

“The reflection and feedback sessions were really valuable; you could talk about how you felt; give your own impressions and then hear from others what they were witnessing.”⁴¹

“I thoroughly enjoyed the discussions where my coaches challenged specific behaviour and asked me to identify why I was doing/not doing certain things. I would strongly encourage this to continue.”⁴²

Some graduate respondents suggested it would be useful to have the coaches involved outside of the residentials so students could draw upon them during the online components – particularly unit three.

One of the faculty interviewees also said they’d like to see more coaching, including a session after students have graduated. However, they also recognised that it was a big ask for faculty, who already give a lot of time, and unrealistic in practice.

There were a few graduate respondents who found some of their coaching experience disappointing.

³⁹ Interview 2

⁴⁰ Interview 13

⁴¹ Interview 16

⁴² Survey 18

“Not sure I got a great deal out of the 1:1 coaching. With the 360 feedback analysis, my coach didn’t tell me much more than what I could get from it myself.”⁴³

“The coach has just said to me what I’d already said. I’m there listening and wanting a different perspective but I didn’t get it.”⁴⁴

In contrast to graduates’ overall support for and appreciation of the GCHL’s coaching component, there was mixed feedback on the mentoring component of the course. For some, it had been very successful:

“The mentoring worked really well; I had never had anyone I’d ever wanted to ask to be a mentor – which is a pretty scary thing – but through HLP I was linked to a senior humanitarian and we still reach out to each other for advice. My mentor has also helped me to grow my network.”⁴⁵

For others, not:

“The mentoring didn’t really work – I don’t know if that’s because my mentor was not part of the HLP faculty. It felt a bit disconnected to the rest of the program. I think if I had picked one of the presenters it would have been easier. But I had to tell them what HLP is; what I wanted to get out of the mentoring. They didn’t know the program – they’re busy – somehow it just didn’t work for me.”⁴⁶

Several respondents commented that the mentoring component would benefit from being more formally embedded in GCHL. One respondent recommended establishing a pool of mentors whom students can access, who know and understand the program and are really interested in it, and who can also help students to extend their networks.

GCHL evolution

Faculty interviewees who have been involved with the GCHL since the start spoke about how it had evolved, most notably the introduction of a fourth unit. Initially, there were a total of just three units, with units one and two combined.

“In HLP 1 we had a three-unit approach. We quickly realised the amount of content we were trying to fit into the first residential was too ambitious. We also realised there was a significant variation in the baseline understanding of the humanitarian world across the student cohorts and we needed an online unit to precede the first residential.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Interview 15

⁴⁴ Interview 6

⁴⁵ Interview 1

⁴⁶ Interview 13

⁴⁷ Faculty interview 5

“It’s evolved to be much more experiential. The simulations have always been there but the sessions in between have really evolved; the curriculum has really developed.”⁴⁸

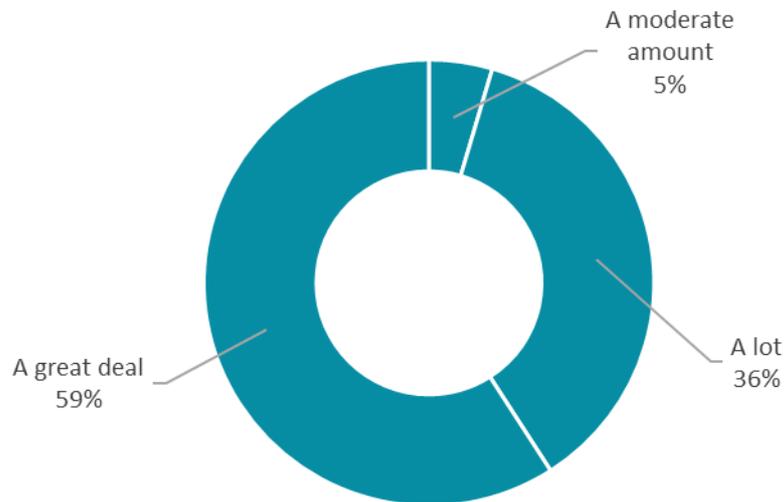
“The initial prototype was good – what’s changed is the degree of professionalism that’s been brought to it.”⁴⁹

“Things link up much more now; there has been a lot of work put into that. There is a strong thread linking the sessions and the behaviours; there is greater linkage between the online units and residentials, especially between units three & four; and in the simulation, all the interventions are very purposefully linked to the leadership behaviours.”⁵⁰

Additional elements have also been introduced in response to student feedback. For example, there is now a ‘market place’ on the last day of the final residential unit where students can seek information about further academic opportunities and faculty share career stories.

Increasing humanitarian leadership knowledge and skills

All of the graduates felt they had increased their knowledge and skills as a result of participating in the GCHL. Fifty-nine percent of respondents said their knowledge and skills had increased a great deal; 36% said a lot; and 5% said a moderate amount.



Graduate perceptions of increased knowledge and skills

⁴⁸ Faculty interview 7

⁴⁹ Faculty interview 4

⁵⁰ Faculty interview 2

The survey findings were strongly reinforced through the graduate interviews. Respondents commented on how the GCHL has influenced their thinking and behaviours and given them a greater sense of self-awareness and confidence in their leadership capability. Respondents also talked about the GCHL equipping them with tools and techniques to translate their learning into practice.

“I would say that as a result of HLP I am a much stronger leader; I can take more perspective on my leadership style now and I think it’s given me the ability to mentor and support other people in my team.”⁵¹

“I have a greater awareness of self in both my strengths and areas I need to work on. I take these factors and try to bring them to the front of mind in both my personal and professional life. I worked hard on understanding strategy and the course gave me so much on this. I would love to keep developing in the areas of strategy and building high performing teams.”⁵²

“HLP provided a substantial capacity building environment and opportunities to develop my leadership skills, managerial courage and thrive in different settings. I learned a lot about myself as a leader, helped me become conscious about my weaknesses and strengths and provided ways to elaborate them.”⁵³

“Some great leadership tools and techniques in there, relatable to any context not just humanitarian responses.”⁵⁴

“I learnt a huge amount about myself, my strengths and weaknesses and how I react in different situations. It has given me a big confidence boost that I am able to continue developing character traits that will allow me to perform well in leadership roles, and it has given me the skills to understand where there are areas of development that I need to focus on.”⁵⁵

Faculty interviewees highlighted that GCHL is delivered over a period of eight months – a timeframe that gives students the opportunity to fully embrace their own leadership journey and draw upon all the different elements of the course.

“You can’t learn behaviours in a week, that’s the beauty of HLP; it’s tailored to the individual and it’s really the attention each student gets from the Course Director, the coaches, all the faculty. That’s what makes the difference.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ Interview 1

⁵² Survey 12

⁵³ Survey 30

⁵⁴ Survey 20

⁵⁵ Survey 18

⁵⁶ Faculty interview 3

“HLP is very much designed to be an individual journey; it’s tough, but such an opportunity too. You know there is a team of people who are really invested in your development and want to see you succeed – that’s pretty awesome and quite unique in a university course.”⁵⁷

Applying GCHL learning in practice

When graduates were asked how easy they have found it to apply GCHL course learnings in their workplace, 74% of respondents said it had been easy or very easy; 19% did not express an opinion either way; and 7% said they had found it difficult.

Interview respondents gave practical examples of using specific tools such as contracting within teams to set agreed ways of working; using de Bono’s Thinking Hats⁵⁸ to work through scenarios; and consciously building 360 feedback mechanisms into their team practice. Respondents spoke positively about their experience of applying these skills and techniques, although they also recognised the need to invest time in consistently applying their GCHL learning in their daily practice.

Some graduates had had the chance to put their knowledge and skills into practice in response situations.

“I was a field manager in the Nepal earthquake response and my HLP experience really helped me manage myself in a high pressure situation. In the simulation, we had to coordinate with NGOs, government, the UN etc and I had to do this in Nepal. I was attending cluster meetings there, meeting with the head of the District, and I really drew on my HLP experience for this.”⁵⁹

“From HLP, I learnt to relate and appreciate people as they are. I learnt to develop response plans which I have since been doing for different country offices in Africa. I have learnt a lot about networking and my self-worth. I have learnt to coach and mentor others in my role as a coordinator for emergency in Africa.”⁶⁰

A consistent theme that came through was how the GCHL had given graduates confidence in their own leadership capability. Respondents spoke about their willingness to try new things as a result – even if this meant taking themselves out of their comfort zone.

“I am taking a more proactive/direct approach to managing-up. I have a better understanding of the type of management I need from my line-manager to be successful. I feel more confident in my style of leadership and focusing more on 'being a better version of myself' rather than a focus on needing to develop 'charismatic-type' 'typical' leadership behaviors which are not my natural fit.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ Faculty interview 6

⁵⁸ <https://www.debono.com/de-bono-toolkit/six-thinking-hats/>; (Introduced in unit four of GCHL)

⁵⁹ Interview 3

⁶⁰ Survey 35

⁶¹ Survey 2

“After HLP I have more confidence in decision making – and more confidence in myself and the decisions made.”⁶²

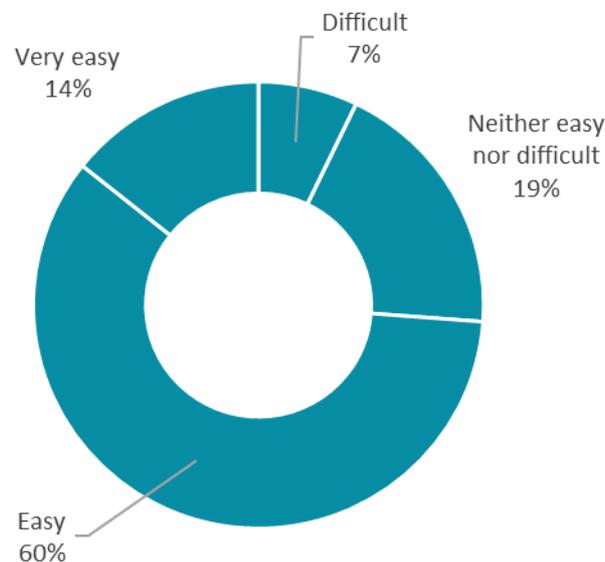
At the end of HLP I knew better what made me feel uncomfortable, what I don’t like to do. I learned I was very risk averse. After HLP I had the chance to take a position that put me in situations where I would have to be responsible for negotiation, representation, having little support, being autonomous. I took the position to try these things. I realise you don’t change who you are but you get to adapt to your environment and duties. Every day I thought about the HLP when I was in those uncomfortable situations and I knew I can do these things.”⁶³

Time was a key challenge graduates encountered in applying GCHL learnings. Specifically, making the time to reflect, to consciously and consistently draw on the GCHL tools and experiences, and to not fall back into old patterns of behaviour. One respondent said they would really appreciate a reference manual they could revisit whenever they needed.

“It’s very easy to keep going and not take time to think; not step onto the balcony and take a look around.”⁶⁴

“Workload can be a hindrance. Sometimes it’s difficult to step back and think – you just run and do your thing.”⁶⁵

“I’d really love a text book with tools and case studies that I could go back to; sometimes it’s difficult to remember everything we learned.”⁶⁶



Applying GCHL learning in the workplace

⁶² Interview 12

⁶³ Interview 8

⁶⁴ Interview 11

⁶⁵ Interview 8

⁶⁶ Interview 18

Career pathways

Many graduates have changed roles since completing the GCHL. Of the 42 graduate respondents who answered this question, two thirds (67%) said they had made a change. Seventy-six percent of respondents thought it was likely they would change roles within the next three years.

Opinion was varied among those who had changed roles regarding how much graduating the GCHL had influenced their decision to move. For some students, it was a complete game-changer and their decision to move was directly attributable to graduating the GCHL.

“One of the recommendations from my coach in the final unit was to expand my career and go for an international position. This encouraged me and motivated me to plan big. It was perfect timing.”⁶⁷

“I was looking for a more challenging role and context. The HLP course provided me a platform to make it happen.”⁶⁸

For others, whilst they valued the GCHL, it was one of several factors influencing their career decisions.

“The course is excellent but I don’t think one course has such a dramatic effect on a person’s career.”⁶⁹

Graduate perceptions about whether the GCHL increased their career options ranged from not at all (7%) to a great deal (17%). Sixty-five percent of respondents thought the GCHL had increased their career options a lot or a great deal.

For some GCHL partners, the course has become a recognised qualification for their humanitarian staff to complete in order to advance within the organisation. Interviewees from one INGO all spoke about the recognition the qualification has within their organisation, and the opportunities graduating the GCHL opens up internally.

“HLP has given me scope to continue to develop my career because graduates are considered pioneers in our organisation.”⁷⁰

Something raised by many respondents was the added value of the Deakin accreditation. Having a qualification that is university-accredited is highly valued among GCHL graduates and there is a perception that it holds influence with employers.

“I think the fact you’ve got a qualification with the word leadership in it, it matters – it shouldn’t but it does. And it’s a certified qualification from a university.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Survey 11

⁶⁸ Survey 10

⁶⁹ Interview 14

⁷⁰ Interview 3

⁷¹ Interview 10

“A lot of us happened into this field so it’s nice to have something formal, recognised, academic, but also experiential that gives you a foundation and some of the basics that apply everywhere. We need some sort of standard to help unify this vast universe of humanitarian work and HLP contributes to that.”⁷²

Once again in the interviews, the issue of the GCHL building confidence came through strongly. Whether graduates directly attribute GCHL graduation to their career progression or not, there is a consistent acknowledgement the course has instilled confidence in them to back themselves and to venture in new directions.

“Rather than opening doors itself, I think it has allowed me to open doors that I wouldn’t have had the confidence to before. It has allowed me to ascribe a higher value to my skills.”⁷³

“HLP has given me the confidence to take a risk that I perhaps wouldn’t have taken – stepping outside of my comfort zone, outside of my technical role / knowledge base to use skills in other areas. Since HLP, I’ve expanded my focus beyond pure technical. I’m not always supremely comfortable in these roles but HLP gave me confidence that I am a well-enough rounded individual to do something outside of my technical specialisation.”⁷⁴

“I always put HLP very prominently in my applications and always mention it in interviews. I don’t have evidence it has made a difference, but it has given me confidence – both for interviews and to apply for more senior positions.”⁷⁵

“In the humanitarian sector, if you have HLP on your CV, it will be noticed. Also, it’s who you meet by doing this course – the people I’ve met and who have seen me perform, I think they would give me a good reference.”⁷⁶

“HLP has showed me that leadership tools can be applied across industries. It has also showed me that my skills are valuable to other organisations – and I’m now considering other organisations; something I would have never entertained previously.”⁷⁷

⁷² Interview 13

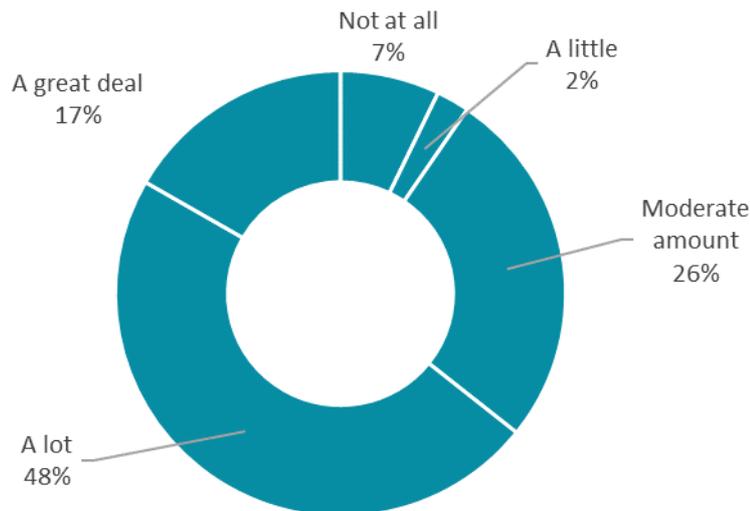
⁷³ Survey 18

⁷⁴ Interview 16

⁷⁵ Interview 4

⁷⁶ Interview 15

⁷⁷ Survey 12



Graduate perceptions on whether GCHL has increased their career options

Networking and relationships

Asked if they had stayed in contact with other GCHL students since completing the course, 79% of survey respondents said yes; 21% said no.

The reasons graduates gave for staying in contact are a mix of professional and social. Many spoke about sharing job openings within their organisations with their GCHL networks; contacting their fellow GCHL students for advice when considering a new job; and reaching out to their GCHL contacts when seeking to recruit for their teams. Some respondents talked about reaching out for technical advice and sharing of tools among their GCHL colleagues.

“Building friendships for a lifetime. I’ve hired some people; some of us have been in similar countries in similar disasters and we’ve shared information regarding different contexts; we’ve shared tools and practical thinking... I’ve kept updated on our sector and been more effective practically because of my HLP network.”⁷⁸

“The HLP was an incredible bonding experience and I met with some amazing people that I’d really love to work with in the future.”⁷⁹

Graduates from the same organisation, from different countries across their global network, often connect with colleagues who have graduated the GCHL at meetings or during field assignments and find their common experiences very useful.

⁷⁸ Interview 14

⁷⁹ Survey 7

“I feel that there’s a sort of mutual understanding/shared values/common language among HLP faculty and students I’ve been in touch with, whether they were on my cohort or another cohort.”⁸⁰

One of the faculty interviewees spoke about wanting to bring graduates together again after a period of time, to keep them engaged in reflecting on their leadership. Another faculty interviewee spoke about the potential influence of GCHL alumni if they truly come together as a movement.

“I’d like to do another whole unit for graduates a year later; something that keeps them engaged in reflecting on leadership. It could be a residential or something online – to share experiences; to access additional coaching and mentoring; to design their plans for the next one-two years etc.”⁸¹

“For me, the big opportunity space is with the alumni; when big issues surface, such as recent events in the sector regarding ethics, there is a potential for this really rich pool of people to come together and address these challenges collectively.”⁸²

Whilst acknowledging their own responsibility for sustaining their networks, graduates said they would welcome CHL playing a facilitating role to assist alumni to continue connecting and networking. The upcoming alumni reunion symposium (to be held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2018) was noted as a platform for furthering dialogue and fostering ongoing collaboration.

“A lot of HLP is about putting things into practice; it might be useful if maybe a year later you could step back again and reflect further.”⁸³

“Maybe some sort of virtual catch up/online platform would be good.”⁸⁴

“I think the reunion will be a great opportunity to reconnect.”⁸⁵

Seventy-four percent of graduate survey respondents said they have stayed in contact with GCHL faculty, primarily the CGHL Course Director and the CHL Directors. Graduates said they have reached out to these faculty members for career advice; advice on research projects; to discuss further education opportunities; and through connecting at conferences and meetings.

A large number of graduate interviewees said they have recommended the GCHL to their colleagues and their organisations. Many respondents who are in management roles had already sent or recommended their own staff for the GCHL course.

⁸⁰ Survey 2

⁸¹ Faculty interview 3

⁸² Faculty interview 1

⁸³ Interview 8

⁸⁴ Interview 3

⁸⁵ Interview 11

Several respondents had already re-engaged with the GCHL through joining the faculty. Those who have not yet been able to participate said they are interested to do so.

“For me, it was very useful to go to Dakar⁸⁶ as a coach; it made me think about things I should try to work on more. I felt very privileged.”⁸⁷

“I’d like to do some coaching. I’ve been asked, but I haven’t had the time; but I’d love to at some point.”⁸⁸

There was a note of caution from one of the faculty interviewees that whilst bringing graduates into the faculty is a really good move, and a diverse faculty is extremely important, not everyone is suitable. To mitigate this, all potential faculty members must go through a rigorous selection process, including being interviewed by the coaching lead, in order to ensure new faculty fully appreciate what they are undertaking and are equipped to do so.

“There is a potential danger that anyone who has passed the HLP is considered able to do either coaching or simulations; not everyone who is a leader is also able to coach, mentor and support.”⁸⁹

GCHL student recruitment

There were many comments from graduates about the composition of student cohorts. As already mentioned, networking with people from different backgrounds and organisations was one of the elements of the GCHL graduates found most useful. However, some respondents did question the level of experience of some students in their cohort and emphasised the importance of the GCHL maintaining a rigorous recruitment approach.

“One of the best things I got out of it was the networking with other students. The more people of similar skills level you put together the better it can be for them.”⁹⁰

“This was my biggest challenge of the whole course. I was really concerned I didn’t have the experience to get on the course and I spent a lot of time on the application, thinking it would be my opportunity to be with people more experienced than me, who were already in leadership positions. But when I got on the course, there were people there who’d never been to a humanitarian response. I was curious how some people had got on the course. There was only one other person on my course who was in a leadership position. I respect wanting diversity but that was the biggest disappointment I had.”⁹¹

⁸⁶ With the GCHL French language course

⁸⁷ Interview 8

⁸⁸ Interview 14

⁸⁹ Faculty interview 2

⁹⁰ Interview 14

⁹¹ Interview 10

“People need to be really clear about the level of commitment required to get something out of it. I really liked having a variety of people to bounce ideas off – we had a massive range of people in our course. But some had never done an international response and their background knowledge was quite limited. In my group, some people struggled and others flew through it.”⁹²

“I bonded more with the students who had a similar background to me – in the field in difficult places – it was easier to connect with them to share experiences.”⁹³

Respondents talked about the importance of maintaining a high entry level in order to keep the GCHL niche and for it to not become just another training offering. This is particularly important as the GCHL expands into new markets.

“I wouldn’t want to see the course ‘juniorised’ in any way; one of the strengths is peer senior humanitarians working alongside each other. The student cohort I was on was excellent but there is a risk that could get watered down the more times you deliver it.”⁹⁴

“HLP needs to make sure the cadre that comes out really impress the broader humanitarian sector; if they do then others will want to be on it.”⁹⁵

From the faculty perspective, interviewees who had been engaged with the GCHL from the outset felt the student recruitment process had improved over time, although they also acknowledged it is a constant challenge to bring the right group of people together at the same time.

“I think we’ve improved the recruitment process to ensure we don’t have so many fails in unit two and then in unit four and we’ve elevated the criteria for enrolment to senior manager (used to be manager) and/or in a leadership role (technical etc).”⁹⁶

“Nobody has ever stood out to me as people who shouldn’t be there, but it does surprise me how little some people know about the humanitarian world.”⁹⁷

There is need for purposeful partnership development to ensure the desired mix of students is continuously coming through.

In terms of diversity, faculty interviewees felt the GCHL is succeeding in attracting a broad range of student participants, although they acknowledged it does vary from intake to intake and there needs to be an unwavering emphasis on quality.

⁹² Interview 15

⁹³ Interview 13

⁹⁴ Interview 1

⁹⁵ Interview 16

⁹⁶ Faculty interview 3

⁹⁷ Faculty interview 6

“Entering a lecture theatre and there being about 60 people in the room from about 30 different countries; that degree of diversity was quite special.”⁹⁸

“I think in terms of diversity we’re ok, especially compared to the start when it was very heavy Australian and UK participants. Of course, we can always do better, but we also need to be conscious of not sacrificing quality. That’s why the questions we ask at the beginning about motivation are really important, and we also ask for a recommendation from the supervisor.”⁹⁹

Faculty interviewees also reflected that the focus of the GCHL is on leadership behaviours and there are some cultures that make it difficult for students to perform at the level required to successfully complete. This is an ongoing issue of debate among faculty. The introduction of the francophone GCHL and the anticipated replication of the course into additional languages and contexts will go some way to addressing this but it is a real challenge.

GCHL faculty

Asked about the calibre and diversity of the faculty, faculty interviewees noted the constant challenge in achieving desired levels of diversity across each faculty team, especially gender diversity. As the GCHL partner base expands, it is hoped the course will be able to address this by drawing from an ever-increasing pool of organisations and staff with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Bringing GCHL graduates onto faculty is another widely supported approach to increasing faculty diversity and sustainability. There is a deliberate focus on ensuring all new faculty are paired with a more experienced faculty member in a ‘buddy’ type approach.

One faculty respondent described the need for ‘pracademics’ for the online units – people who have field experience but also academic understanding and rigour. Another respondent spoke about the special skills required to facilitate and train large groups.

“For the residentials, you need to make sure you have somebody who understands large group process; that is a special skillset and different to normal training. You need large group leadership development skills; an understanding of how to use the data in the room to demonstrate the validity of what you’re offering.”¹⁰⁰

There was an observation that the range of guest speakers, particularly for residential units, has become a bit narrow and there is a need to ensure GCHL is accessing sufficient cultural diversity and diversity of perspectives.

⁹⁸ Faculty interview 4

⁹⁹ Faculty interview 3

¹⁰⁰ Faculty interview 4

“There could be more learning staff drawn from the South; some more cultural diversity among those who come in and speak, both online and at the residentials. HLP needs to be intentional about bringing a diverse group of people into the learning sessions.”¹⁰¹

“We used to have somebody from government background, someone from the sector and someone from private sector, to give at least three different perspectives on leadership. We need to move back to that – we’ve shifted much more to sector people.”¹⁰²

Faculty interviewees spoke about how the GCHL has impacted them and influenced their own behaviours. Tools such as the leadership behaviours framework, the Hogan assessment, and group discussion techniques were all mentioned by faculty respondents, who reflected on their success – or otherwise – of putting these into practice.

One interviewee noted there are almost two programs going on alongside each other: students and the faculty team, with the faculty going through the same learning curve.

“Every time we do a residential unit, you learn something new; it makes you constantly reflect and think.”¹⁰³

“HLP has been an incredibly rich training ground for myself, enormously rich learning.”¹⁰⁴

“Personally, I try as much as possible to model the leadership behaviours – and succeed at times and fail at others!”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Faculty interview 6

¹⁰² Faculty interview 5

¹⁰³ Faculty interview 1

¹⁰⁴ Faculty interview 4

¹⁰⁵ Faculty interview 6

Discussion

Based on the findings of this study, the GCHL is clearly relevant and is satisfying graduates' expectations in terms of course content and delivery. However, as was consistently mentioned throughout the study by both graduates and faculty members, the humanitarian sector is rapidly changing. As new challenges emerge and new and diverse actors enter into an increasingly complex humanitarian eco-system, the CHL needs to continuously challenge itself to ensure the GCHL is meeting the evolving needs of emerging humanitarian leaders.

Specific topics graduate respondents raised as requiring deeper attention include: gender and inclusion; cultural issues and leadership styles in different cultural contexts and settings, including protracted crises; conflicts and conflict sensitivity; negotiation skills; advocacy and influencing; ethics; and humanitarian foresight. The role of technology is another emerging area that will require increasing focus.

There is evidence of GCHL already addressing some of these issues, for example through an increasing focus on locally led humanitarian response and the role of local partners. There has also been a recent enhanced focus on ethics. In response to feedback that the course was too NGO-focused, steps have been taken to incorporate scenarios into the simulations that require students to assess situations from a variety of perspectives, including local government and non-government actors and UN agencies as well as INGOs.

But there is also acknowledgement that more can and should be done – and a strong commitment on the part of the CHL leadership and GCHL Course Director and core team to do so.

On the subject of relevance, GCHL needs to ensure it does not fall into a trap of perpetuating old-school humanitarian leadership styles and approaches. The simulations are most vulnerable to this and are where the greatest attention is required to prevent it happening.

In terms of cultural relevance, there has been a lot of debate among faculty members about the GCHL's focus on leadership behaviours and the challenge students from some cultures face performing at the required level to succeed alongside more dominant peers. The introduction of the francophone GCHL and the ambition to further replicate the course in additional languages and contexts will facilitate more students from more countries to access the course and go some way to addressing this issue. However, in any context, the dilemma between attracting diverse student cohorts and benchmarking assessment at an equitable level for all will be an ongoing challenge.

All the graduates surveyed felt participating in GCHL had increased their knowledge and skills and three-quarters of respondents said they had been easily able to apply their new expertise in their daily work. In addition to having new tools and techniques, graduates spoke about GCHL having instilled in them confidence in their own leadership capability and a willingness to try new things as a result – even if this meant taking themselves out of their comfort zone. Almost two-thirds of graduates felt the GCHL had enhanced their career options. The fact the GCHL is university-accredited is highly valued among graduates and there is a perception that it counts with employers. From the faculty perspective, the university oversight guarantees a level of necessary rigour.

With regards to networking and movement building, there is a perception among some of the faculty that the full potential of the GCHL alumni network is as yet untapped. For graduates, whilst acknowledging their own responsibilities in this area, many said they would welcome CHL playing a facilitating role to assist alumni to continue connecting and networking. The upcoming alumni reunion symposium (to be held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2018) was noted as a platform for furthering dialogue and fostering ongoing collaboration.

As part of this longitudinal study, CHL will continue to engage with GCHL graduates, track their evolving leadership journeys, and draw on their insights and experiences to continuously strengthen the course and ensure it remains fit for purpose and cutting edge.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from analysis of the study findings:

- Ensure a continuous focus on horizon scanning, incorporating new thinking and ideas, and addressing emerging issues to ensure GCHL's ongoing relevance and value to the sector.
- GCHL is at its core a 'humanitarian' leadership program. It should never lose sight of this and the current strong humanitarian perspective needs to be maintained throughout all aspects of the course.
- Ensure GCHL doesn't propagate a singular, (traditional) ideological interpretation of humanitarian response, but rather remains agile, adaptive to change and relevant.
- Retain GCHL's high valued academic-practitioner balance.
- Continue the development of institutional partnerships to ensure the desired mix of students and faculty.
- Review the mentoring component of GCHL and explore opportunities for graduates to be recruited and trained to become mentors.
- Identify opportunities to increase the number of students from local organisations through continuing and expanding on current scholarships, in line with the localisation agenda.
- Continue advocating to institutional partners to support greater participation of local partners in the GCHL.
- Maintain rigorous student recruitment practices and a focus on quality, and identify options and opportunities to ensure students selected for GCHL are in a position to successfully complete the course.
- Consider developing a GCHL student reference manual, comprising key tools and relevant case studies, to support graduates' continued application of GCHL learning.
- Build a community of practice with GCHL alumni to maximise opportunities for humanitarian system transition.

*“If you take a position as a leader,
you can use the HLP for the rest of your life.”¹⁰⁶*

¹⁰⁶ Interview 8