

## Abstract Template

**TITLE: How arts students come to understand employability through an economic lens: challenging the construction of skills-based identities**

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Abstract (*no more than 300 words with no figures or tables*):

This paper forms part of a larger PhD project concerning the employability of liberal arts and business students from an elite Australian university. To date, the vast majority of Australian employability research has focussed on economic issues, such as graduate employment rates (e.g. GCA, 2012), employer skill requirements (e.g. Jackling & de Lang, 2009; Commonwealth of Australia, 2000) and skills-based teaching interventions (e.g. Spencer, Riddle & Knewstubb, 2012). Given their theoretical underpinnings and quantitative methods, these types of studies have paid little attention to questions such as how students come to understand employability and how they develop a sense of graduate identity. This research differs, in that it takes a sociological approach to employability and uses a theoretical framework based on Bourdieu's notions of cultural and social capital; Hodkinson, Biesta and James' (2007) work on 'learning cultures' and Holmes' (2012, 2001, 1999) graduate identity theory. This presentation will draw on an institutional case study of one Group of Eight university; which involved policy analysis at various levels and interviews with senior administrators, career advisors and arts and business academics and students. In particular, it will explore how arts students developed an understanding of employability consistent with an economic, skills-based approach, whilst business students developed a more holistic understanding, each within differing policy contexts and learning cultures. Questions will be raised as to how students in this study developed these ways of thinking, within learning cultures based on fundamentally different paradigms. More broadly, the way students understand employability is important, because it affects the way they prepare for the future, and the development of graduate identity. This research aims to stimulate discussion amongst the academic community about the way employability is understood within higher education, and seeks to offer an alternative, sociological approach.