

Editorial

In Volume 2, Issue 2 we are pleased to be able to continue with the convention established in the inaugural issue of this journal in 2010, by publishing selected manuscripts from the 14th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference held in Fremantle, Western Australia from 28 June to 1 July 2011. Submissions to the 2011 Conference dealt with programs and practices related to the conference theme of *Design for Student Success*, a theme that builds on that of the previous issue, *From Aspiration to Action*. The authors of the top ranked refereed papers and shorter nuts and bolts submissions were invited to prepare their manuscripts for publication in this issue. The nuts and bolts selections have been reconfigured as “practice reports” and include any developments since the submission was made along with feedback received at the conference. Four *Articles* and five *Practice Reports* are presented in this issue.

The *Feature* in this issue of the journal is *In conversation with Mantz Yorke and Steve Larkin*, the two keynote speakers at the conference. Following the conclusion of the formal conference program, the Editors joined Mantz and Steve to explore some of the issues raised in their keynotes and an edited version of that conversation is presented.

In addressing the Conference theme of *Design for Student Success*, the *Articles (A)* and *Practice Reports (PR)* exhibited a number of common characteristics: Almost all articles and practice reports had an institution-wide, multi-institution or sector-wide focus with many stressing some aspect of coherence or collaboration—sometimes among programs, other times among personnel

(administrative, academic and professional staff)—and there was an academic rigour, particularly in the articles, that was reflected in the presence of theoretical underpinnings of evidence-based practice and often an evaluation component.

The focus on first year students ranged from all students to specific sub-groups. With a view to designing for success for *all* commencing students, Andrea Adam, Jane Skalicky and Natalie Brown (*Article [A]*) out of the University of Tasmania discuss the development and application of a *Peer Learning Framework*, an institutional-level planning tool for designing and coordinating peer learning programs and theoretically underpinned by a community of practice model. They reflect on the framework by using it to evaluate an existing peer learning program, demonstrating its usefulness and dynamic nature.

A number of studies focused on the needs of *specific* cohorts of students—alternative entry mature-age students, first in family and Pacific students—and on the development of *specific* knowledge (geology) and skills (essay writing). The University of Western Australia (UWA) has an alternative entry pathway, the Mature age Access Pathway (MAP). In her interview in the last issue of this journal, Jane den Hollander noted that widening participation brings with it increasing diversity and increased variation in the level of academic preparedness (Clarke, 2011). Picking up on this issue, Liana Christensen and Sarah Evamy (*A*) from UWA, focussed on the underpreparedness of mature-age students, and, in designing for student success, developed a program—*MAPs to Success*—that aims to use a coherent blend of administrative, social and academic support for

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the MAP cohorts. This paper outlines the theoretical perspectives underpinning this project's social and academic components, and evaluates the impact of the project after its first year of operation.

Ann Luzecky, Sharron King, Sheila Scutter and Russell Brinkworth (*Practice Report [PR]*) from various universities in South Australia, drawing on a multi-institutional project, aspects of which have already been reported in this journal (Scutter, Palmer, Luzeckyl, Burke da Silve & Brinkworth, 2011), explore the differences between expectations of first in family students and those students who have been preceded at university by immediate family members (parents, care givers, siblings). They suggest that determining these differences provides opportunities for university staff to consider how they may better support students who have the ability, drive and determination to succeed at university but may be challenged by unexpected obstacles.

Faafetai Sopoaga and Jacques van der Meer (*PR*) from the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand report on The Pacific Orientation Programme at Otago (POPO), an initiative seeking to provide a holistic approach to improving academic outcomes for Pacific students across New Zealand. The programme involves setting up systems for support, monitoring performance and addressing concerns early in the first year at University. Sopoaga and van der Meer present a pilot case study from the University of Otago outlining the development of the programme, lessons learnt, and early indications of its usefulness in improving academic outcomes for Pacific students.

Leslie Almborg (*PR*), based at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia, discusses a novel and successful approach to engaging first-year geology students by deconstructing and correcting scientific misconceptions in popular culture. Working within an action research context, a semester-long assessment was designed with the intent of highlighting and subsequently challenging students' misconceptions using examples of "bad geoscience" from pop culture.

Starting with the assumptions that effective written communication is an essential graduate attribute and that there is misalignment of student perceptions of expected writing styles and levels between secondary and tertiary education—both

compounded by the increasing diversity of students entering higher education—Julie Beckman and Gerry Rayner (*PR*) from Monash University in Melbourne, Victoria, report on the development, implementation and outcomes of a collaboration among academic (learning skills) and professional (library) staff on an essay writing intervention for commencing students in a large first year science subject.

While still keeping the spotlight on student success, several writers, rather than concentrating on the needs of particular cohorts or the knowledge or skill sets that commencing students require for success, adopted a different focus for the "design" element—the curriculum. Molly Townes O'Brien, Stephen Tang, and Kath Hall (*A*) from The Australian National University in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, examine the curriculum and its underlying assumptions as a potential source of obstacles for students. In their case, it is the legal curriculum which embodies a particular conception of a lawyer as adversarial, emotionally detached, and competitive. Exploring the negative impact this has on student mental health, they propose that legal educators should re-examine their curricula, particularly their conception of what it means to be a lawyer, and think creatively about ways that law schools may encourage healthier approaches to the study of law.

Working in the same discipline and again focussing on the curriculum, Anna Huggins (*A*) from the University of New South Wales in Sydney, New South Wales, focuses on one of the six Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) developed for the Bachelor of Laws degree as part of an Australian sector-wide project on Learning and Teaching Academic Standards. One of these TLOs promotes the learning, teaching and assessment of self-management skills in Australian law schools. This paper explores the concept of self-management and how it can be applied relevantly in the first year of legal education. Huggins proposes the design of a pedagogical framework for the first year law curriculum that promotes students' connection with their intrinsic interests, values, motivations and purposes, arguing that it will facilitate student success in terms of their personal well-being, ethical dispositions and academic engagement.

Peter Jones and Kate Galloway (*PR*) from James Cook University (JCU) in Townsville, Queensland,

report on the appointment of “Curriculum Scholars” in each of the faculties at JCU—an institution-level innovation designed to enhance academic capacities for curriculum development with a particular focus on the first year experience (FYE). While lauding this as an example of a 3rd generation approach to the FYE, Jones and Galloway, using the concept of academic identity, raise the issue of the tension between a discipline-specific identity and identification with the scholarship of learning and teaching and the impact of that tension on the success of the innovation.

In response to comments praising his brilliance, Isaac Newton is reported to have commented that he was simply standing on the shoulders of giants. Just as the theme for this issue—*Design for Student Success*—builds on that of the previous issue—*From Aspiration to Action*—the authors of the *Articles* and *Practice Reports* presented here have drawn on what is now a large body of work captured in the FYHE conference papers and in earlier issues of the journal to report on increasingly sophisticated ways of designing for student success. We believe that this is indicative of the more mature approaches being taken by the community of scholars and practitioners in this field of first year in higher education research.

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