

Editorial

16th International First Year in Higher Education Conference, 7-10 July, 2013 Museum of Wellington Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand

Both the Conference and the Journal have a history of utilising the Conference Keynote Speakers in a variety of ways: at the Conference to run Master Classes and Workshops and in the Journal for example to initiate debates—see *In Conversation with Professor Steve Larkin and Professor Mantz Yorke* (Nelson, Kift & Clarke, 2011). This year is no exception with both Vincent Tinto and Nick Zepke running Master Classes and Workshops. The Conference has not been in New Zealand since 2002. Nick is a New Zealander, aptly described by the Chair of the Conference Committee, Karen Nelson as “a Living National Treasure” and it seemed most appropriate to install Nick Zepke’s Keynote Address as the Feature for Volume 4 Issue 2.

Articles

There are seven articles in this issue with a variety of related foci. Two focus on preparing students either for their profession or for entry into higher education. First, Rachael Field and James Duffy from the Queensland University of Technology and Anna Huggins from the University of New South Wales, Australia examine literature from the law and psychology arenas to discuss how encouraging first year law students to develop an emergent professional identity is vital for not only their transition to law school, but also their psychological wellbeing as a student and into their professional careers. And second, a long-running undergraduate preparatory program in an Australian regional university—Central Queensland University—is detailed by Phyllida Coombes, Patrick Danaher and Geoff Danaher, who discuss the implications from their data analysis

for students from diverse backgrounds to realise their potential in higher education

Diverse cohorts are becoming the norm and this is reflected in two articles catering for expectations and distance education students. From the University of Southern Queensland, Jill Lawrence discusses the impact of changing educational pedagogies in areas such as assessment, technology, research-informed learning and student expectations on an undergraduate nursing program. While Jill’s curriculum development included online activities, the second article here focussed explicitly on distance education (DE) students. Mark Brown and his colleagues from Massey University in New Zealand and Charles Sturt University in Australia detail a comprehensive Design-Based Research study which suggests disconnections between first-time DE students and the services their institutions provide. The article follows on from a Practice Report published by the same authors detailing the experiences of distance education students who recorded their perspectives through video diaries (Volume 3, Issue 2)

As always, student support is a popular topic, reflected in two articles. Helen Kemp, Ann Lefroy and Natalie Callan highlight a comprehensive suite of initiatives developed as part of their First Year Advisor Network (FYAN) at Australia’s Murdoch University whereby connection to support systems is facilitated and co-ordinated at both an institution and school level. The authors note that while outreach contact is a successful way to promote access to support, many students still self-identify as at-risk and will access advisors for direct advice. The Belonging Project is the focus of

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Lucy Morieson and her colleagues from RMIT University in Australia. This learning and teaching project was aimed at improving student engagement in a particular school and has developed a narrative model which positions undergraduate students as co-creators of their university experience rather than submissive consumers.

Finally, there is a timely reminder for practitioners and researchers to think carefully about the concepts being explored in FYHE policy and practice. Janet Taylor examines how student-centredness and student-centred learning are variously defined and understood and presents the readers with an overview of interpretations of student-centredness and student-centred learning from the perspective of the first year in higher education. Taylor suggests that the focus should be more on learning-centredness – the learning rather than the learner.

Practice Reports

Six practice reports are selected for this issue. Three focus explicitly on student support—two on peer support and mentoring and one on belonging. Andrea Chester, Sophia Xenos, Karen Elgar and Bianca Denny from RMIT University and Lorelle Burton from the University of Southern Queensland discuss the delivery of a peer mentoring model in two psychology programs – one face-to-face and one online. The model ‘TiTo’ (Transition in, Transition out) is designed as an inclusive teaching approach to support both first year students as they transition into the program and third year students as they transition out.

The Victoria University of Wellington’s recent development of a holistic training module for its peer support and mentoring leaders detail that the move from an isolated, institutional student-leader programs to a collaborative model may foster a sense of belonging (whanaungatanga) within the university community as a whole. Deborah Lars, Dayna Eggeling and Peta-Maria Harris allude to wide ramifications of this training that extends the humanistic values beyond the Māori student context. Fostering a sense of belonging amongst ethnically diverse students is also the focus of Linda Leach’s practice report that examines data collected from a multi-institutional case study. Linda guides us through selected findings in the data and illuminates the differences between four specific groups: Pakeha (New Zealand European),

Māori (New Zealand’s indigenous people), Pasifika (those who trace their heritage to Pacific Island nations) and Asian students. She also discusses data on feedback, highlighting the importance of prompt and constructive feedback.

Reflecting an increase of its implementation across the sector, there are two reports of Transition Pedagogy activities. Betty Gill, Lien Lombardo and Sharon Short from the University of Western Sydney reflect on the inclusive body of research and theory around the requirement for a proactive, co-ordinated institution-wide approach to FYE and transition – referred to as third generation. From their own institutional perspective the authors detail their institution’s embarking journey to third generation offering effective and inclusive strategies for the progression of their goals. Collaboration between librarians, learning skills advisers and academics in two first year degrees is the focus of Anne Taib and Julie Holden’s report of the adoption of the Research Skills Development (RSD) Framework at Monash University. Monash Library has been tasked to align the Framework, currently in use in five Australian universities, across all courses and the authors detail the advancement of library and faculty partnerships

Finally, in catering for the diversity in discipline knowledge, multiple authors from the University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology, University of Wollongong, the University of Sydney and Monash University present their current findings and challenges as they detail the first stage of an Australian teaching and learning project to implement a diagnostic and intervention activity framework which may ultimately provide support to entering first-year students who have poorly formed conceptions in chemistry.

Karen J. Nelson
Editor-in-chief

John A. Clarke
Sally M. Kift
Rachael Field
Co-editors

Tracy Creagh
Journal Manager

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Reference

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