Guest Editorial Preface

Special Issue on the Assessment of Diversity in Higher Education

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We take great pleasure in introducing this Special Issue: Assessment of Diversity in Higher Education in light of the reemergence of diverse learning environments due to globalization of borderless education for 21st century learning. This special issue specifically aims to highlight the recurring concerns of recognizing and assessing the various aspects of diversity found in the landscape of higher education. Engagement with diversity is essential for 21st century learning as it provides opportunity for students and staff to interact across the limitations of culture, ethnicity, demography and many other aspects that typically defines concerns of diversity. In recognition of this importance, many institutions of higher education have been making decision-informed attempts to continually assess and realign efforts to make the best of diversity in the promotion of 21st century learning. Despite so, relatively little is still known from instructional. efforts right up to institutional efforts in assessing the various levels of compositional diversity of campus climate.

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The ensuing suite of papers presented provides a breadth of discussion on the mapping of assessment and realignment of instructional efforts to institutional efforts - all in addressing the benefits and challenges of diversity in higher education.

The first article by Lim and Vighnarajah shares qualitative findings regarding assessment of diversity through academic, social and emotional isolation. They argued that as higher education institutions grow as a commodity with diversified groups of local and international students, it is imperative for students, educators and policy makers to identify and address concerns that might arise from such amalgamation of cultures and experiences. Set in the context of a Malaysian private university, findings indicated how engagement in a diverse classroom learning environment can pose challenges to successful university learning experience and holistic development of graduates.

The second article by Choi and Ng highlights findings of regression analysis on the effect of lecturers' competencies on students' performance. In the diverse and dynamic environment of education, many higher institutions are demanding for effective teaching and learning for their students. While numerous studies have widely investigated the different types of teaching methods, this paper looks specifically into the instructor's competencies to increase students' performance in a diverse classroom learning climate.

The third article by McCarthy explores blended learning strategies for engaging diverse student cohorts in higher education. Three case studies were critically examined to highlight the efficacy of

various blended learning techniques to improve students' learning experience. Culturally, educationally and socially diverse first year student cohorts participated in this study to provide insight into the advantages and disadvantages of each blended learning technique. Findings of these case studies draw significance in light of the growing diversity found within student cohorts in higher education; as well as an increase in technology-driven teaching innovation and student-centered learning techniques.

The fourth article by Helfaya and O'Neill takes on a focus on using computer-based assessment and feedback in meeting the diverse needs of digital natives in the digital age. Using e-assessment with prompt e-feedback reduces the gap between present and desired performance and is considered to be a reflexive and dynamic system in dealing with the new generation of digital natives. Based on findings of semi-structured interviews and focused-groups, it was found that many participants valued working online compared to traditional assessment and appreciated the instant feedback they received. In the context of diversity, it is apparent that technology do provide personalized approach to accommodate diverse needs of students both in conventional and online learning environments.

The last article by Waite and Colvin explores the institutional efforts of Utah Valley University in creating and assessing faculty training on global, intercultural and inclusive practices. They argued that as university and college campuses continue to become more and more diverse, it is paramount that institutions of higher education examine how faculty are incorporating components of inclusion, diversity, and intercultural and global awareness. Although many institutions have begun to require diversity course work, little has been written on how faculty members are trained to incorporate these components into their pedagogical practices. In addition, the paper shares feedback from faculty members on the institutional efforts in realigning instructional efforts in increasing cultural awareness in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

It has become increasingly important to recognize the presence of diversity in higher education, and the benefits and challenges that come with it. In fact, diversity plays an especially significant role in the face of globalized 21st century borderless education - bringing into play entwined factors of higher education commodity, diverse approaches to conventional and online classroom climate, and holistic development of graduates through successful university learning experiences.

It is equally important to recognize how diversity has initiated discourse across the boundaries of student intake, staffing, administration and policy - all of which captured in noteworthy dialogue at international conferences leading to profundity of research and publications. It is with this hope that this special issue shares instructional and institutional efforts in addressing concerns of assessment of diversity in higher education.

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