Editorial 18.1: Satisfying Many Masters: Teaching into Professional Degrees in the 21st Century

Pauline Collins
University of Southern Queensland, Australia, pauline.collins@usq.edu.au

Lynda Crowley-Cyr
University of Southern Queensland, Australia, Lynda.Crowley-Cyr@usq.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp

Editorial 18.1: Satisfying Many Masters: Teaching into Professional Degrees in the 21st Century

Editorial 18.1. Satisfying Many Masters: Teaching into Professional Degrees in the 21st Century

Pauline Collins
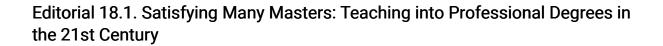*University of Southern Queensland, Australia*, Pauline.Collins@usq.edu.au

Lynda Crowley-Cyr
University of Southern Queensland, Australia, Lynda.Crowley-Cyr@usq.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp

Editorial 18.1. Satisfying Many Masters: Teaching into Professional Degrees in the 21st Century

Editorial 18.1. Satisfying Many Masters: Teaching into Professional Degrees in the 21st Century

Welcome to this special issue of the Journal of University Learning and Teaching Practice.

Tertiary teaching in 21st Century Australia is, for educators, imbued with challenges as they attempt to balance the changing needs and expectations of multiple *masters* in a corporatised and vocational higher education environment. Those teaching into a professional degree, such as law, must consider an additional master – relevant professional associations. This Special Issue focuses on the perspectives of educators who must grapple with sector-wide changes in policy, the organisation of work, and their work practices, as well meeting the requirements of professional bodies. It aims to increase knowledge on how educators are navigating such competing demands, while seeking to achieve a rewarding and enduring career in educating students to become successful and professional graduates.

Some of the competing demands faced by educators emanate from the changing expectations of tertiary institutions and their increasingly diverse students, the professions and professional bodies, and those of the wider community. Educators are in an era of change and universities are competing for their survival (Watts & Robertson, 2011). Teaching practices are having to adapt to deal with learning analytics, flexible mode delivery, online platforms, 24-hour participation cycles and dwindling classroom attendance (Abouserie, 2006; Riddle, Harmes & Danaher, 2017). The *corporatised* university and pushback from educators (Thornton 2012, 2016, 2020) creates tensions over curriculum design and best pedagogical practice (Menkel-Meadow, 2015).

This Special Issue speaks to these contemporary concerns (Lieberwitz, 2015, Curran & Prottas, 2017). It adds to the knowledge base by providing current insights into how educators are responding to competing demands in an increasingly complex environment replete with looming funding cuts. With predictions of a profound economic downturn associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, tertiary institutions are likely to experience further funding deficits. In any case, the preparation and delivery of courses require constant readjustments in response to new information and technological advancements, organisational policies and processes, differing support networks, growing demands in governmental and professional standards, and so on. Educators must be increasingly *flexible* in how and what they teach.

The articles in this Special Issue illustrate contemporary educators' strategies and practices. Some are research articles addressing a practice problem; some reflect on positive outcomes (for both educators and students) of current teaching approaches, and others are position articles reporting on experience or critical engagement in a facet of higher education. The articles are presented in the context of master/educator relationships. The first relationship considers the student as master. Here the 'student' is perceived as a 'client' of the tertiary organisation. Satisfying the student has become a primary focus in competitive higher education environments. To do so, educators must address the needs of changing student demographics, students from Generation Z to Baby Boomers, low socio-economic backgrounds, first in the family, working full or part-time, 'First nations' students and those from non-English speaking backgrounds. It requires flexible service delivery increasingly via online platforms, particularly since the 2020 pandemic. The second relationship considers the 'university' as master. It sees higher demands placed on educators to publish and engage at higher impact levels and retain and progress student numbers, while remaining resilient and in good mental health and wellbeing. The third relationship considers professional associations as masters. Tertiary education oversight by professional associations brings an additional layer of demands to the

curriculum and design of courses. Designing good assessment for professional degree student often requires a work-ready vocational focus to develop the skills required by the professional body. Educators must instil values such as professional ethical standards and an understanding of the impact of professional misconduct.

The Special Edition provides a unique 'snap-shot' of contemporary concerns in this Higher Education environment that can influence those working in the domain and their students. The articles cover experiences of professional educators from different backgrounds and levels of involvement in teaching students, using different modes including online, on campus or multi-modal. The articles highlight examples of different teaching and learning practice that will be of interest to all educators. They demonstrate how educators are accommodating competing demands, while maintaining a generally positive outlook in achieving improved learning and teaching.

The articles in this Special Issue were drawn from presentations given at a University of Southern Queensland one-day symposium on September 30, 2019. The symposium, entitled 'Satisfying Many Masters: Teaching into Professional Degrees in Law and Engineering in the 21st Century', presented two keynote speakers, Emerita Prof Margaret Thornton and Prof David Dowling along with 13 other presenters. A national call out was made and presenters abstract were peer reviewed for selection and inclusion. Notwithstanding the discipline specific focus, the articles are relevant to educators in other discipline areas and institutions beyond tertiary level.

Students as Master

Crowley-Cyr and Hevers use a case example from a first-year law course to provide evidenced based research on the use of a university peer-assisted learning program customised to meet the support and discipline specific skills development needs of online students. Peer assisted learning has long been identified as an important dimension for a healthier, inclusive and more effective learning experience for students. More recently, there has been a growth in the use of PAL in online education. This article reports the findings of a pilot project. It reflects an initiative to improve problem solving skills development, social inclusion and engagement of online students in a first-year substantive law course through the introduction of Meet Up sessions with a student leader. The results suggest a significant increase in student engagement with the course, and potential improvement in assessment outcomes. This experience demonstrates the equitable delivery of support to satisfy the needs of online students, while considering the skills required of graduates by legal professions and the changing nature of university education, requires flexibility and consideration of the needs of diverse students.

van der Laan, Fergusson & Ormsby describe a design thinking approach in workplace integrated learning for Higher Degree Research Students in their article, that empathises with the student experience. Utilising an approach that empathises with the student experience as the 'master' of the design provides possibilities that inform future formal higher education in the professions. It reports a case study of Professional Studies programs developed at the University of Southern Queensland. Exploratory evidence of the student experience concludes that that this form of professional development (work-based learning and research) should be recognised in terms of the contributions these studies make in addition to the skills and abilities illustrated by its graduates.

Professional Associations as Master

Dickie and Robinson describe dealing with the regulatory masters standing at the entry gate of professional life. They argue that the Office of the Migration Agent Registration Authority

(OMARA) is perhaps the most demanding of such masters. The authors argue that since 2006, the OMARA has specified the course content requirements for the prescribed qualification of migration agents, determined and regulated the exams to be taken by students within each university, and imposed a competency-based education framework, which conflict with other educational preparation that agents require for practice. Their position article describes the operation of the professional body in prescribing a Graduate Diploma as the qualification for migration agents, which agents must undertake at designated universities, and a stand-alone pre-registration exam, which graduates must undertake within a year of the completion of their Graduate Certificate.

Ashman, Rochford and Slade's article considers the intersection between two major themes in university policy: the improvement of participation by rural and regional communities and dimension of graduate employability. It describes how work integrated learning has the potential to address both themes, but that the development of an apprenticeship model for prestige degrees such as law may deliver additional benefits to rural and regional student engagement. The position article argues a radical approach to employability is possible by re-introducing an apprenticeship approach in disciplines of law and accounting. The authors' hypothesis is that the visible integration of work-integrated learning has the capacity to address a deficit in the expansion of university education, particularly for rural and regional students. They propose that an innovative program of modern apprenticeships in prestige degrees could address both participation and employability outcomes. The article contributes by making explicit the link between the visibility of prestige occupational pathways for rural and regional students, the affective concerns of potential students making the choice to undertake higher education, and scaffolding of skills and knowledge. It describes a pilot for integration of an apprenticeship model within a university program.

University as Master

The impact of budget cuts and a shift to self-funded students on academic freedom and teaching practices, such as assessment design and the extent to which 'student choice' should affect these processes, is the focus of **Hemming and Power's** position article. They address whether university funding and more student self-funding of higher education courses together with retention demands by universities in Australia, mean that students' 'choice' of course assessment is informing teaching practices and the preferences of tertiary education policy makers. The use of rating scales such as 'MyOpinion', which surveys student evaluations of courses, and the use of these in comparison 'league tables' between universities in marketing campaigns is addressed. The authors draw on a broad review of international research from higher education to examine whether a meaningful body of research concerning student 'choice' in higher education assessment exists, and how the extent of student 'choice' may change in the future. Producing a better understanding of how higher education assessment practices are moderated by decisions and factors that can influence the educator are addressed.

Stamboulakis, Moritz, Pearce, & Christensen provide a positive assessment of their project to help educators by developing support through Peer Review and Enhancement of Practice (PREP). This support for educators focuses on delivering a best-practice structure for enhancing teaching practice informed by evidence-based pedagogy, and involves shared experience, self-reflection and peer review. Dealing with the challenges presented by diverse students at a regional university, often with higher rates of first in family learners, while maintaining high quality teaching to fulfil both student satisfaction and meeting university and professional requirements, the article provides evidence-based success in the adoption of the PREP process. The authors report PREP achieves an enhancement in teaching practices, through an innovative ground-up approach driven by educators

that creates a collaborative space, which is relevant and suitable for staff to address learning and teaching challenges and opportunities.

Addressing the institutional shift by universities to vocational work-ready training, alongside the professional associations demands for graduates to have relevant skills, **Collins** reports in her practice article, on a teaching and assessment approach that prepares students for a new style of lawyering. The author describes the positive student engagement and response to using action reflective learning techniques. The renewal in a manner of educating that encourages life-long learner skills and prepares students for professional practice environments is described. This article reports on the outcomes of adopting the action reflection learning approach when teaching a mediation law course. The approach and outcomes described pay specific attention to how this style of teaching enriches the student experience.

Acknowledgment

Reference List

Abouserie, R. (2006). Coping Strategies and Job Satisfaction in University Academic Staff' *Educational Psychology. 16*(1), 49-56. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144341960160104

Curran, T. M. and Prottas, D. J. (2017). Role stressors, engagement and work behaviours: a study of higher education professional staff. *Journal of Higher Education and Policy Management, 36*(6), 642-657. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2017.1377964

Lieberwitz, R. L. (2002). The Corporatization of the University: Distance Learning at the Cost of Academic Freedom. *Boston University Public Interest Law Journal*, *12*, 73-135.

Menkel-Meadow, C. (2013). Crisis in legal education or the other things law students should be learning and doing. *McGeorge Law Review, 45*(1), 133-160.

Riddle, S. Harmes, M. and Danaher, P. (2017). *Producing Pleasure in the Contemporary University*. Sense Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6351-179-7

Thornton, M. (2012) *Privatising the Public University: The Case of Law*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203804537

Thornton, M. (2016). Law student wellbeing: A neoliberal conundrum. *Australian Universities' Review,58* (2), 42-50. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2887812

Thornton, M. (2020). The challenge for law schools of satisfying many masters. *Australian Universities' Review 62(*2), 5-13.

Watts, J. and Robertson, N. (2011). Burnout in university teaching staff: a systematic literature review. *Educational Research, 53*(1), 33-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2011.552235