

Editorial

Special Section on *Innovation in Undergraduate Curriculum*

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Welcome to our special section dedicated to showcasing an initiative, developed at the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA), to provide final semester students with the opportunity to investigate a significant social issue and conceptualise, plan, host, and deliver an academic scholarly research conference. The papers in this special section are the result of this group exercise and illustrate not only innovation in curriculum development and assessment but that undergraduate students are ready and able to undertake any academic challenge presented to them and are eager to experience applied learning in their degree. We would like to thank the Editor, Dr Lauren Breen for her encouragement and support when we presented this idea to her. It is unusual for an editor of a peer-reviewed scholarly journal to take such a risk in devoting a special section solely to undergraduate authors. We hope you agree that her faith was well founded given the high quality of these papers.

The Bachelor of Behavioural Science degree is founded on the principles of Critical Community Psychology and although benchmarked to, and operating within the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council (APAC) Standards, is not a psychology degree per se and therefore does not come under the jurisdiction of APAC. As such there is the flexibility to provide applied learning opportunities for undergraduate students that are not possible in traditional psychology degrees. The Internship unit, which students are required to take in their final semester of study, has been developed as a capstone unit in which students have the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge through 150 hours of workplace based learning. This is supported by a series of seminars throughout the semester where they are able to debrief and explicitly link the experiences to the frameworks and models taught in the

degree. In addition, each cohort of students must plan and develop some form of group based workshop to which lower year students, academic staff, and external agency supervisors are invited to be the participants. This activity models the type of skill development that the second year students must aspire to and provides an additional experiential learning opportunity for the third year students as well as showcasing the students' skills and abilities to potential employers.

In 2009, the third year cohort comprised 24 students and the activity they were charged with developing was an academic research conference exploring the issue of poverty in the wake of the global economic crisis (GFC). Students were assigned to one of five groups, each tasked with a specific component of the conference; the organising committee, a round table discussion, poster presentation, workshop, and final plenary. Students were mentored throughout the process by the Internship co-ordinator and concept developer, Sharon McCarthy, but the ideas, research and final result was the work of the students. Internship agency supervisors were invited to attend the conference, as were lower year students and all academic staff of the school. One attendee said that it was one of the most professional conferences he had ever attended (Associate Professor Dylan Korczynskyj, Dean Arts & Sciences) and another was impressed by the depth of analysis undertaken (Professor Ros Walker, Telethon Institute of Child Health Research).

The idea for this special issue came from Sharon McCarthy as a way of further promoting the work of the students and encouraging them to see their success as being more than just a class exercise. After discussions with the students and Lauren, we developed a series of workshops to be offered during the inter-semester break in July

2010 to help students develop their papers. All of the students were offered the opportunity to be part of the process, but many had already commenced their post-graduation careers and time and other constraints prevented full involvement. Five students embraced the opportunity and four papers emerged. This issue represents the culmination of those workshops and a rigorous process of blind review coordinated by Lauren.

The papers are presented in a sequence that seeks to bring alive the conference as well as the processes surrounding it. The first two papers present content delivered within the first two sessions of the conference, while the final two provide personal reflections on the experience. Ashleigh Owen reflects on the interactive round table and discusses the various discourses of poverty and how these place the responsibility for poverty with the person(s) experiencing it. Whitney Darlaston-Jones' paper is drawn from the workshop that explored responses to poverty. In her paper she offers an alternate, community-based, and empowering response to poverty through community currencies. Stef Sifandos provides a reflection on his experience of the conference, including delivering the keynote address that established the framework for the day, while conducting his placement at a local faith-based agency and dealing with the real and diverse faces of poverty and homelessness. Finally, Jade Beavington offers her insights into the overall process of the internship, conference and the behavioural science degree and the tensions she experienced in trying to work within an empowering process while having to some degree internalised the dominate power structures of formal education. Together these papers provide a glimpse into the concept, structure, and purpose of the Behavioural Science degree at UNDA and we hope that you enjoy reading them as much as we enjoyed the process of their evolution.

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