

Editor's introduction

Welcome to the fifth edition of the University of Greenwich's learning and teaching journal, *Compass*. This conference edition brings together articles from across the three conferences that the university hosted in July 2011. The conferences were an opportunity for colleagues and their students within and outside the University of Greenwich to meet, discuss, debate and to be inspired. While the conferences addressed distinct themes, they all shared a commitment to the enhancement of student achievement.

The first conference on 4 July focused specifically on black and minority ethnic (BME) students. Entitled *Promoting inclusive change: addressing equality and success for BME students in higher education*, it was co-sponsored by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU). The conference sought to promote dialogue around the differential attainment of students of different ethnicities. While it is recognised that the situation is improving for BME students within UK higher education, there is more that can still be done to promote equity and success for all. Three papers in this edition come from this conference.

- Sue Jones, David Timmins, David Wood, Po Li Tan and Sian Howells, Kings College London, ask the question: 'multiculturalism in higher education: fact or fiction?' Fuelled by the belief that their pharmacy students lacked an understanding of the broader concepts of culture, the team devised a pedagogical strategy to support discussions around culture. They argue that it is only through the sharing of cultural similarities and differences that the goal of multiculturalism can be pursued.
- Chantal Davies and Matthew Garrett, University of Chester, report on a small-scale study exploring BME student experiences within a northern England university. Following their analysis of focus group and interview data, the authors drew together findings around the themes of: belonging and segregation; academic and social experiences; differential treatment and equal opportunities; and early education and employability. Their work provides clear indications for institutional development in the areas of student engagement and enhancement.
- Ronke Shoderu and Suzanne Kane, London Metropolitan University, Deborah Husbands, University of Westminster and Debbie Holley, Anglia Ruskin University, focus on students' sense of belonging within UK higher education. The article presents interim findings for a study involving three different universities. Drawing on the biographical, narrative, interpretive method (BNIM), the authors paint rich pictures of three students and contrasted these students' experiences of transition, cultural integration, and of their expectations and aspirations.

The fourth annual Learning and Teaching conference took place on 5 July. With a focus on the student experience, curriculum regeneration and changing relationships within higher education, the conference, *Redefining the Student Experience: directions for learning, teaching and assessment*, offered a platform to celebrate the successes and achievements of higher education practitioners and their students. The conference hosted twenty-nine presentations, three of which have been selected for this edition.

- Noel-Ann Bradshaw and Steve Lakin, University of Greenwich, describe the Greenwich Maths Arcade initiative, piloted in the School of Computing & Mathematical Sciences. Drop-in sessions were offered to enable maths students to receive support from staff on tutorial questions and also to play a range of strategy games and attempt mathematical puzzles. The drop-in sessions proved a popular way for struggling students to access help and for students to socialise, and to interact with each other and with the teaching staff. The initiative also positively impacted on student retention, progression and attainment.

- Edward Phillips, Department of Law & Criminology, University of Greenwich, makes the case for the use of role play and simulation in the teaching of legal application and practice. He argues that the use of simulation-based teaching is particularly beneficial due to its inherent student focus. The approach also offers an effective means of developing 'soft skills' through its emphasis on collaboration, communication and experimentation. As such, it provides a bridge from university into the world of professional education and ultimately the workplace.
- Rita Headington, Hetty Baron, Michael Smith and Duncan Callnon, School of Education, University of Greenwich, provide a case study exploring students' perceptions of feedback and assessment. The project team used a World Café approach to support large discussion and analysed the resulting data. The findings provided concrete recommendations that led to the redevelopment of feedback sheets and student workshops dedicated to understanding and working with feedback.

The final conference on 6 July was the ninth annual e-learning conference. The conference, entitled *Enhanced and Transformed: Tales from the Digital Age*, invited participants to tell their personal and institutional stories of how technology has enhanced and transformed learning and teaching practices. This edition of *Compass* carries four papers from this conference.

- Will Stewart, University of Bradford, describes the pedagogical model that was successfully deployed in the transformation of a face-to-face postgraduate certificate into modules for online delivery. The model, which focuses on both collaborative and individual participation, encourages peer-to-peer support, while recognising individual expertise and experience. It also draws together teaching, social and cognitive elements into a supportive, authentic and active learning environment.
- Shivaun Gammie, Medway School of Pharmacy, University of Greenwich, University of Kent, also describes the importance of collaborative online learning in her evaluation of web-based learning sets, designed to support workplace learning for community pharmacists. While the project was beset with some technical issues, the students seemed to appreciate the learning sets, which could be fitted into the busy schedules of practising pharmacists.
- Christine Davies, University of Glamorgan, reports on a student experience survey that had questions specifically relating to students' use of technology for learning. The findings from the survey indicate how students use technology, but also raise questions about the generalisability of previous technology-usage research and the design of survey instruments.
- Nigel Ecclesfield, Learning and Skills Improvement Service, Geoff Rebbeck, Institute for Learning and Fred Garnett, London Knowledge Lab present the findings from a study exploring the changing attitudes of further education staff to e-learning and technology in action. Their research suggest that college staff have a new professional confidence in using technology that stems from their own curiosity as to how technology could be used to enhance student learning.

As these overviews show, there is a wealth of interesting work here that captures of feel of the 2011 University of Greenwich conferences. We hope that you will enjoy reading it in more detail and that we will see you at our forthcoming conferences: 3 July 2012, *Inspiring Teachers: learning and leading in academic practice* and 4 July 2012, *Employer Engagement in a Digital Age*.

Karen Smith

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