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Editorial

I am sure that all readers of JANZSSA are familiar with many individual stories of student resilience. Hearing these stories and being in a position to encourage students to achieve their goals and dreams despite the barriers in their way, is often the most rewarding aspects of our particular roles. Judy Wright sets the tone for this edition of JANZSSA with her refereed article on the importance of student stories of determination and resilience and the ways in which these stories can be used to validate the experiences of other students and encourage their own resilience, thereby strengthening their determination to succeed.

The importance of student narratives is also the theme of Eva Marie Seeto and her colleague's case example. Student stories can illustrate the difficulties faced by those with mental disorders and, as a result, specific programs to meet their needs can be initiated. The recently released book by Cathy Stone and Sarah O'Shea, reviewed in this edition by Marcia Devlin and Josephine May, features the personal stories of mature-age female students, providing more examples of the determination and resilience that we meet amongst the students with whom we are privileged to have contact.

The particular barriers faced by many students are highlighted in other articles, such as Judy Wright's second article in this edition on students and domestic violence, Patrick O'Keeffe's article on the barriers facing students with mental illness and Heather McLeod and Julie Harrison's case example on students with Asperger's Syndrome. Meanwhile Marina Zochil discusses the piloting of a scale in development which may have the potential to assist in the early identification of student lifestyles which could be contributing to mental health issues.

Christie White has contributed an interesting and engaging report on her experiences and observations of the Global Summit of Student Affairs and Services held in Washington, USA in 2012, which Christie attended on behalf of ANZSSA. Christie provides important feedback to the ANZSSA membership and all readers of JANZSSA about the current status and role of University Student Affairs and Student Services across more than 20 different countries.

Finally, one of our international ANZSSA members, Stuart Brown, has contributed what we are calling a "Conversation Piece" from his home town in Connecticut, USA. We invite others to continue the conversation in our next edition, on any topic that interests you!

Heartfelt thanks go to each of the authors who has contributed to this edition. Once again, we encourage others to consider submitting articles, either to be peer reviewed or not, best practice case examples, book reviews, reports and conversation pieces, for the next edition due out in October this year. Guidelines for submission can be found at the back of the journal. Meanwhile, we hope you enjoy this edition of JANZSSA.

Cathy Stone
Annie Andrews
Co-editors, JANZSSA

Reports

**Reflections from the Global Summit on
Student Affairs and Services:
An Australian Perspective**

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Abstract

In 2012, the inaugural Global Summit on Student Affairs and Services was held in Washington, D.C., USA. The Summit was jointly hosted by the IASAS and NASPA, two well-respected associations with interests in the student affairs and student services profession. It aimed to share ideas regarding student services' role in bettering opportunities for students, consider the changing nature of higher education, discuss common issues and best practice, as well as consider current and future research. The Summit brought together 47 delegates from more than 20 different countries. It resulted in a validation of common challenges, a commitment to common solutions, and a shared understanding of the student services' context globally. This is a narrative of my experience and my learnings as a representative of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association Inc.

The context

What an honour to be part of higher education history when Student Services and Student Affairs professionals from varying corners of the globe came together in one place to discuss commonalities, differences, and opportunities. With thanks to NASPA, the USA association for Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and the newly formed IASAS, the International Association for Student Affairs and Services, we came together as one to venture into uncharted territory. And they came. With 47 delegates from over 20 different countries, representatives from student services and student affairs associations were invited to attend the inaugural Global Summit on Student Affairs and Services in Washington, D.C., USA in September 2012. I had the fortunate pleasure of being selected by the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association Inc. (ANZSSA) as the Australian and New Zealand representative, jointly funded by my own institution, the University of Southern Queensland.

The Summit took the format of a keynote presentation and multiple facilitated group discussions and group work. Together we shared, debated, and rationalised trends, global issues and common threads. Allow me to share my learnings.

Who we are

The Summit brought about a collegial debate about who we are in higher education and what we are known as. Most commonly in Australia, the activities we refer to would be known as 'student services' but in the USA the term 'student affairs' is well renowned. 'Student affairs' was certainly a new concept in some countries for the work that we do and at times in Australia it reflects student administration type services. While no common definition for student affairs or student services exists globally, we are primarily referring to non-academic services that support the transition and progression of students studying in higher education. For the purposes herein, I will be referring to the term 'student services' unless specified otherwise due to my Australian context. ANZSSA, which partly funded my participation, is the professional association in Australia and New Zealand that is established for people with an interest in the role of support services in post-secondary education. Such support services focus on the quality of the student experience, supporting and empowering students to achieve their educational and life goals, enhancing student wellbeing and development, improving student success and persistence, providing outreach to students at-risk and raising institutional student retention rates.

Interestingly, but in hindsight not surprisingly, was the discovery that student services' departments are structured differently, resourced differently, and funded differently across the globe. Student services can exist in a centralised model with a central unit governing the delivery of services or it can exist in a decentralised model that permits student services professionals to be embedded within faculty. Staff to student ratios differed as did organisational structures. Some student services were outsourced providers servicing a range of higher education institutions, while many were consistent with the Australian and New Zealand approach of being owned and operated by the institution itself. Some countries had associations to support the profession nationally, such as ANZSSA and some lacked a professional association at all. Some countries had specific training and career development programs in the field of 'student affairs' while others merely drew together multidisciplinary teams to drive forth the agenda of student support. It would appear from my observations that Australia and New Zealand's most similar comparators are those student services that exist in Canada and Ireland. While such similarities and differences existed, there appeared to be common threads to challenges and core issues across the globe. The richness of this discussion was invaluable.

Key take-home messages

Over the two days of the Summit, there were multiple messages and discoveries that allowed me to feel validated and normalised in the work that we do. In addition, I was exposed to material and discussion that has allowed me to challenge the status quo in Australia or, at the very least, encouraged me to look 'outside the box'. I have selected a few key points to share here.

Our keynote speaker, Dr Phillip Altbach from the Center for International Education at Boston College started our proceedings with sharing global issues and trends in higher education. It was a great introduction to the climate and context within which we were all working. He drew our attention to the issue of massification whereby increasing access to higher education was occurring worldwide and the impacts it is having on the institutions. He highlighted that the battle of state funding is a common matter experienced across the globe and he emphasised that our students have changed. Our students can no longer be regarded as 'elite' and are no longer fully committed to their studies due to competing priorities. Our students are now a more diverse group of people than ever before. Dr Altbach announced that the challenge has moved beyond simply access and widening participation but rather our emphasis needed to be about enabling our students to exit the system successfully; that is, our focus now is about progression and success. We were challenged to consider that our historical structures and methods were no longer catering to this diverse group of students and we needed to change to succeed in our endeavours. In comparing programs and processes, a plug for Australian higher education was made when Dr Altbach referred to the Australian student loan system as one of the better systems globally. He suggested that the choice to study by distance is increasing and the increasing use of technology is a growing challenge, as well as an opportunity for both the learner and the institution themselves. Amongst many other pertinent points, Dr Altbach argued that the mere nature of massification and the change in the student cohort are resulting in the role of student services becoming increasingly significant and we can expect that we will be seen more valuable by academia in time to come.

Our group discussions were also insightful. What was striking to me was the consistency in challenges we are facing across different countries - staff retention, engaging non-traditional students, HIV/AIDS issues, mental health issues, alcohol issues, financial concerns and affordability, engagement with Indigenous students, employability and graduate outcomes, campus security and safety, access to technology or more so lack thereof, attrition rates, student preparedness for university, language barriers, and our constant battle with integrating into the curriculum, just to name a few. Sound familiar?

There were plenty who could relate to the dilemma and ongoing tension for student services in whether to work in the best interests of the student or the institution. The best outcome for the student in terms of their choices for deferring from study or taking a reduced study load is not

necessarily a good outcome for the institution when we are considering student load or headcount summaries. Sound familiar?

There appeared to be a common theme whereby student services in higher education are always placed last on the agenda and we are constantly striving to prove our worth. This resulted in a great discussion about how we evaluate our effectiveness and subsequently raise our profile and worth across the institution. What is our data? How do we assess what value we add to the institution or the student experience? Are we adequately addressing student needs? Sound familiar?

What we delivered

What we delivered was a commitment to the ongoing conversation that came out of the Summit but the challenge of returning to our busy workplaces was always going to be an issue. Time will tell if this is the case but the energy appeared electric to carry the momentum forward. We discussed topics of mutual interest, established meaningful global relationships, and established action plans for future opportunities.

There were seven key actions that we committed to achieving after we returned to our home countries. We agreed to work collaboratively to maintain the summit network, develop academic partnerships, construct shared learning outcomes and assessment instruments, explore the role and use of technologies across our different institutions, create a shared repository of pertinent information and data, form an overarching philosophy of student affairs and write a summary of the Global Summit. I foresee opportunity in future collaborations in joint publications, a global network, sharing global resources, joint research projects, and joint evaluation strategies and I challenge all of us to take advantage of this invitation. After all it was my job to come back and share this detail.

Throughout the Summit, I was able to share my journey in part via Twitter and LinkedIn. ANZSSA is a wonderful platform for us to venture further on this journey together and create solid foundations, share best practice, and create common solutions, even at the local level. There is so much we could achieve if we worked more closely together here at home.

To be acknowledged are two shortcomings of the Summit. A glaring omission from the debate and discussion was representation from under-privileged countries. Are my observations and opinions around 'global' and 'common' not so 'global' and 'common' if we had the voice of our colleagues who were not fortunate to join us? In addition to this shortcoming, is my admission that I question how well I represented the interests of New Zealand given that I am yet to visit our reportedly beautiful neighbour. Whilst my attendance at the upcoming ANZSSA conference in late 2013 to be held in Wellington, New Zealand should provide insights for me, I do hope my limited yet growing understanding of higher education in New Zealand represented your interests in the Summit to a satisfactory degree.

Closing statement

All in all, it was a fantastic Summit and who would report on a conference and not report on the great food and fabulous dinner. The informal interactions were just as valuable because of the shared conversations with like-minded individuals - although they thought *I* had the funny accent! In the words of my colleagues - "the world is a little smaller now" and I feel privileged, like many of my newfound colleagues, to have been part of higher education history. Thank you ANZSSA and USQ for providing my opportunity but thanks to the NASPA Board and IASAS executives for creating the opportunity in the first place. Let the conversations continue...

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