

FROM THE EDITOR

The Embeddedness of Assessment

An understanding of embeddedness, the location of behavior and institutions within the social settings which condition and constrain them, can boost our understanding of the range of influences which affect organization, and so should have a critical impact upon the analysis of organizations.

(David Collins, Organizational change: Sociological perspectives, p. 133)

As the profession of higher education assessment advances, it continues to take on different forms at the field, organization, division, and department levels. One of these developments includes the introduction of a model which adopts a philosophy of embeddedness. This approach situates persons with a specialized knowledge of assessment in given organizational divisions such as student affairs, medical colleges, and academic units (e.g., arts and sciences). This issue of RPA focuses on a particular embedded sector of assessment within the university - student affairs assessment.

Assessment has been foundational to student affairs as a profession. Both the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and American College Personnel Association (ACPA) professional associations have vibrant communities of practitioners and scholars focusing on this area. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) has been an influential component since 1979. More recently, a group of embedded student affairs assessment professionals has been able to successfully establish a professional association: the Student Affairs Assessment Leaders (SAAL). To this end, student affairs assessment offers advanced and established approaches to embedded assessment that warrant further discussion by the profession writ large.

The Winter 2013 issue of RPA opens with two provocative feature articles. In the first, Bowman presses student affairs professionals to critically examine the widespread practice of measuring outcomes by asking students how much they have learned. He addresses psychological processes that often result in flawed responses as well as factors that may lead to improvements in validity. In the second, Gerstner and Finney urge practitioners to ask, "Are students receiving the planned program?" Here, they offer a means of measuring the alignment between the planned program and implemented program.

Four peer-reviewed articles are the mainstays for this issue. Ng, Skorupski, Frey, and Wolf-Wendel develop an instrument useful for exploring how commitments to diversity are reflected in teaching, research and service. Highly valuing a liberal studies emphasis, Puncchar and Klett offer a direct measure of student understandings of science inquiry processes. Athas, Oaks and Kennedy-Phillips suggest that we consider the value of university student employment with regard to the development of competencies and applied knowledge. Finally, DeMars, Bashkov and Socha examine gender differences in test-taking effort regarding three measures of motivation.

The reviews in this issue afford student affairs professionals with two substantive works to consider adding to their library. *Successful Assessment for Student Affairs: A How-to Guide* is reviewed by Lindsay, Stroud and Tubbs while *Learning Is Not a Sprint: Assessing and Documenting Student Leader Learning in Cocurricular Involvement* is reviewed by Endersby.

I would encourage readers to give pause and reflect on the first painting showcased in *Ruminare*. The issue concludes with original artwork by Keith Frew, coupled with excerpts from George Herbert Mead and Georg Simmel. Here, we are reminded the process of schooling has two primary foci, information and socialization, which the student affairs emphases on learning and growth suitably complement.

Regards,



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