

## FROM THE EDITOR

### All About Perspective

A change of scenery, a change of pace or even a change of clothing can help alter one's perspective and bring a new point of view to an existing issue or problem. Faculty and staff assessing student learning and development sometimes find it difficult to get a new outlook on their work. Annual assessment cycles and the need to gather comparable, longitudinal data suitable for regulatory reporting can result in routinized assessment activities maximized for consistency and efficiency. Some individuals may lack the necessary resources to engage fully in assessment activities and may only utilize techniques that are familiar or easily replicable. Consequently, the desire or need to maintain consistency, comparability and efficiency can inhibit persons from examining alternative approaches. But what if we asked different questions? What if we examined existing data in a different way? Or better yet, what if we examined our assumptions of what we believe data should be? And what if we could do this and still meet stakeholders' expectations?

The contributions presented in this issue demonstrate that bold approaches to assessment are being taken, different questions are being asked, data are being examined differently, and expectations are being met, if not exceeded. Qualitative inquiry allows researchers to examine different questions than the ones customarily asked and by its very nature the process of conducting qualitative research has the potential to transform the researcher. This volume of RPA emphasizes qualitative research methods and seeks to challenge readers to consider alternative paradigms, particularly the focus on traditional assessment questions that are often answered using quantitative methods.

The Summer 2014 issue of RPA opens with a thought provoking special feature that posits readers should examine important professional assumptions by asking the question of "assessment for whom?" Here, the authors, Wall, Hursh, and Rodgers call for assessment to be an ethical and values-based social practice and argue that assessment methods, including qualitative approaches, should be used to complement this practice.

Five peer-reviewed articles that employ qualitative methods comprise most of this issue. Jonson, Guetterman, and Thompson call for a broader understanding of the ways in which assessment results are used for improvement. Danley-Scott and Scott provide a perspective on assessment from non-tenure track faculty through their analysis of survey comments from these faculty members. Ariovich and Walker conducted focus groups with faculty and students to examine how a redesigned developmental math course impacted not only student learning, but also student and faculty attitudes toward redesigned courses. Applying a qualitative framework to enhance the context of institutional data, Gustafson, Daniels and Smulski utilized multiple methods to examine how an institutional mission is being met. MacDonald, Williams, Lazowski, Horst, and Barron used a semi-structured interview approach to better understand the attitudes general education faculty have toward assessment.

In the reviews, Monaghan comments on the Gap Year: How Delaying College Changes People in Ways the World Needs a qualitative study of students who engage in an extended study abroad/ service learning experience service before entering college and how those experiences impact global perspectives. Kennedy-Phillips reviews Building a Culture of Evidence in Student Affairs, an edited volume designed to help student affairs leaders develop strong assessment efforts on campus. Martin reviews Paying for the Party: How Colleges Maintain Inequality, an interview study that examines the impact of social class on the experience of college women.

The Notes in Brief provided by Blaney, Filer, and Lyon offers an example of qualitative assessment of experiential learning using NVivo software. We also encourage you to consider your viewpoint, as well as the points of view of others, as you reflect upon the photographs showcased in Ruminare. The photographs by Qozop remind us that changing our outlook can begin simply by changing what we see. I hope your engagement with the contributions of this issue provides you with a welcome change.

Regards,

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