Editorial 2011 - JSEEM 1(1)

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Abstract
Welcome to the first issue of the Journal of Student Engagement: Education matters (JSEEM), a medium for showcasing the work of undergraduate students from the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong. All of the articles have been written specifically for the JSEEM, on a topic of interest to the student and chosen by them. These are not submitted assignments, although they may draw on material covered during coursework – just as any author draws on their previous work.
Editorial

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The need for the JSEEM became apparent through discussion with undergraduate students over a number of years. Feedback indicated that a significant proportion, often the most able, feel disconnected from the academic side of university life. These are the students who have the potential to become academics themselves, but this disconnect impairs their experience. As an example, when I approached one second-year student for assistance with a research project the response, after I had explained the project and what was involved, was “I didn’t even know this side of university existed”. That comment laid the genesis of the JSEEM, for it showed that there was a need for connecting undergraduates with academic life, not just academic writing for assignments.

The engagement process is fundamental to tertiary education, while crucial to this is engagement of undergraduates in non-coursework activities. In the 2009 AUSSE survey of 30,000 students, only 4% “Worked on a research project outside requirements” (ACER, 2010, p.viii), that is, 96% of students did not engage with non-coursework study. There is a growing understanding that engagement of undergraduates with academic life and standards is necessary for a “superior education” (ACER, 2010, p.3). The basis for this lies in an individual’s learning through “educationally purposeful activities” (ACER, 2010, p.4), with consequent positive impact on learning outcomes.

Undergraduate students normally go through their entire degree writing for the sole audience of the marker, without any consideration of wider audience or the processes inherent in publishing their work. The higher-achieving students who go on to higher degrees are then thrust into the expectation of regular and consistent publishing, an arena that their studies have not prepared them for. In this regard, the JSEEM is a training tool, designed specifically to replicate the process of submission to a professional journal.

Other undergraduate journals do exist with the purpose of publishing students’ work, however, with notable exceptions, these are under the charge of other undergraduates. Comparable designs include:

- The ANU Undergraduate Research Journal – dedicated to essays written as part of coursework, although there is an academic review process (ANU, 2011).
- BYU–Idaho Undergraduate Journal of Education – articles selected by peer jury, although must be sponsored by an academic (BYU–Idaho, 2011)
• CURJ publishes papers relating to student research, but does not appear to be subject to academic review (CURJ, 2011).

The papers in the JSEEM stand alone, in that they are written for the journal, with the author’s interest, rather than subject requirements, guiding the article progression. This expression, and encouragement, of independent thought lies at the heart of the journal’s raison d’être and is representative of the values that the Faculty of Education at the University of Wollongong espouses. While editorial responsibility and review fall squarely under the purview of academic staff – with boundless thanks going to those academics who freely gave of their time to review papers – the support provided through the process has been described as ‘comforting’ by students, as it encourages a ‘safe’ environment for engagement with the non-coursework activities that ACER (2010) identified as necessary for “superior education” (p.3).

The intention is to publish two issues of JSEEM annually, in Autumn and Spring sessions, with occasional special issues. Normal last submission deadlines for each issue will be the first week of the relevant session. It is to be hoped that our undergraduates will be inspired by the efforts of their peers and want to be included in future issues.

If this edition whets your appetite and you want to utilise an academic medium to express your ideas or address issues, with an education slant, then get in touch – I am always happy to hear from students and welcome your input. If you just want to think about it, check out the journal webpages – accessible from the faculty homepage or direct at http://www.uow.edu.au/educ/students/jse/index.html. Feedback regarding this first issue should be sent to the journal administrator, Darcie Bellanto – darcie@uow.edu.au

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References