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An Introduction to the Higher Education in Transformation Proceedings

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Designing Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: An Introduction to the Proceedings of
the 2016 Higher Education in Transformation (HEIT) Symposium

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Abstract

This paper is an introduction to the proceedings of the 2016 Higher Education in Transformation Symposium (HEIT) that was held November 2 to 4, in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. The overall theme for HEIT 2016 was Designing Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century. This theme addressed the many ways that colleges and universities are actively reinventing and reinvigorating higher education. The papers in this collection cover a broad spectrum of research and experiences in both Canada and Ireland. In this paper we review the main themes that arose in HEIT and we briefly discuss the establishment of the Centre for Higher Education Research, Policy and Practice (CHERPP). CHERPP will be developing higher education research networks and projects that will influence future HEIT Symposia.

Keywords: higher education, proceedings, HEIT, centre, CHERPP, transformation, postsecondary, international education

An Introduction to the Higher Education in Transformation Proceedings

The Higher Education in Transformation (HEIT) Symposia focus on change processes and outcomes in evolving and developing higher education institutions. The papers presented at the conference analyze the pace and scope of change in higher education. System structures, funding models, institutional mandates, accountability requirements, quality assurance, student demographics, technologies, pedagogies, programs, employment conditions and research profiles are but some of the areas in flux.

HEIT 2016 was a collaboration between: The University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT), Durham College (DC), and Trent University in Ontario, Canada, and The Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB), The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), and the Institute of Technology, Tallaght (ITT) in Dublin, Ireland. This was the second HEIT with the inaugural symposium having been held in Dublin in the spring of 2015. The University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) and Durham College (DC) hosted the HEIT 2016 Symposium in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada. The sessions were held over three days from November 2 to 4, 2016, in the Faculty of Education at UOIT.

The overall theme for HEIT 2016 was Designing Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century. This theme addressed the many ways that colleges and universities are actively reinventing and reinvigorating higher education. The general theme of design was broken out into three general sub-themes:

- Designing Higher Education Systems and Institutions
- Designing the Curriculum and Pedagogy
- Designing Student Experience Supports

Paper presentations, panels and workshops engaged these themes in the broad context of institutions or systems as well as within specific disciplinary or professional environments. The call for participants was distributed widely and although the majority of the presentations and papers were by faculty and staff from the sponsoring five institutions there was a healthy response from outside of this collaboration. There were over 130 conference attendees. All submissions went through a blind abstract review process. Full papers also were blind reviewed and authors were given the opportunity to further revise after the symposium so that the papers included in this collection are products of selection, reflection and revision.

There were three program chairs, Larry McNutt (ITB), Bill Hunter (UOIT) and Brian Campbell (UOIT), and a program committee of thirty-three people including the chairs. The paper reviews were done by the program committee members with a few additions to cover specialized areas. Final copy editing was coordinated by Jesse Parsons (UOIT).

Keynotes

We had three keynote sessions with two speakers in each. Each of these sessions was connected to one of the three main symposium sub-themes. Our first keynote session on “Change in Canadian Higher Education” featured Donald Fisher, Professor Emeritus, from the University of British Columbia, and Dan Lang, Professor Emeritus, from the University of Toronto. Don Fisher’s presentation was on “Policy and Change in the Canadian Higher Education Systems.” Professor Fisher’s keynote was based on his recent book on this topic (Fisher et al., 2014). Dan Lang addressed the changing quality assurance landscape in Canada under the title “New Approaches to Bureaucracy, Homogeneity and Isomorphism in Quality Assurance.” Our second keynote session was on “Innovation in Curriculum and Pedagogy” with Janette Hughes, the Canada Research Chair in Technology and Pedagogy at UOIT and Tom Carey, Executive-in-

Residence for Teaching and Innovation at the British Columbia Association of Institutes and Universities. Jannette Hughes addressed the symposium on “Making Space for Makerspaces in Higher Education” while Tom Carey spoke on “Exploring Innovation Capability as a Graduate Attribute.” Our final keynote session on “Student needs, goals and trajectories” had addresses from Geraldine Gray, Lecturer, ITB and Rod Skinkle, the President of Academica Group, in Ontario, Canada. Geraldine Gray presented on “The potential and limitations of learning analytics in tertiary education” while Rod Skinkle discussed “Trends in Higher Education demand: Implications for the Academy.” More information on the keynotes and their presentations can be found at <https://cherpp.ca/index.php/heit-2016-keynotes/>.

Paper Themes

Although the call for papers suggested three general themes, the eventual conference sessions were finer grained in their thematic organization. In assembling this collection of proceedings, we have built on the symposium experience and have placed the papers into seven thematic categories. There is always an element of arbitrariness to this type of exercise as some of the papers could move easily from one category to another because of their range and scope. However, this thematic organization is meant to help the reader and it signals areas of interest going forward.

1. System and Institutional Design and Transformation

The sponsoring institutions are part of the actively evolving and changing higher education sector in both Ontario and Ireland. Change and transformation are at the heart of our experience. UOIT, ITB, and ITT are relatively new institutions with rapid growth rates. The three Irish sponsoring institutions are part of an alliance to merge into a Technological University for Dublin (TU4D). UOIT was an initiative proposed and initially managed by the

governors of Durham College and thus involved both of these institutions. These experiences serve to animate many of the authors from these institutions. Resulting papers based on these change experiences have included the examination of: institutional culture and identity in the face of change (Conway, 2017), the influence of the stakeholder model in the Irish merger (Brennan, 2017), designing services in a merger (Quinn & Edge, 2017), researcher recruitment and retention in an entrepreneurial university model (Dunne, 2017), how system and institutional change are affecting program development (Fingleton & McSweeney, 2017) and the role of Ontario conservative politics in creating UOIT (King & Van Nuland, 2017). HEIT 2016 also attracted other authors with interests outside of the sponsoring institutions' direct experience. Linda Muzzin and Diane Meaghan (2017) presented an analysis of inequities in college teaching focussing on data from British Columbia. Michael Rostek (2017) extended strategic foresight to forecasting in higher education. Dan Lang (2017) compared quality assurance frameworks from Ontario and the UK.

2. Pathways, Transfer Credits and Recognition

The pathways that guide students moving between colleges and universities is an active and evolving area for policy and practice within Ontario, and this has been an important operational and policy consideration for both UOIT and DC in their developing relationship. HEIT 2016 papers examined the pathways, transfer credits and recognition processes that are critical issues not only within Ontario, but also for international exchanges, and the international aspect of articulation and transfer. The academic performance of college to university pathway students versus traditional students in health science at UOIT, was analyzed by DiGiuseppe et al. (2017). Percival et al. (2017) examined the development of a remediation program for pathway students who have transition difficulties in moving from college to university. Scott Clerk (2017)

considered the international transfer credit issues around vertical articulations for two year plus two-year degree completions.

3. Teaching and Learning in a Digital Context

Although we cast our net broadly in calling for papers on curriculum and pedagogy many of the papers that we received explicitly addressed technologies in teaching and learning. Beyond directly engaging technology, it was clear that for HEIT participants, modern communication technologies have become a pervasive backdrop to teaching and learning. Technology has become woven into the fabric of the environment for changing institutions. Our largest collection of papers falls within this general theme.

Six of the papers in this theme were concerned with examinations of online learning environments. Two specified “fully online” reflecting UOIT’s commitment to this form of delivery. As Atkins and Ryan-Harshman indicate in their HEIT paper, “Fully online courses do present design challenges because, in the absence of face-to-face time with an instructor, the teaching and learning activities must be able to suitably guide the self-directed learning of students” (p. 15). Their paper reports on a conscientious attempt to apply principles of learning and design to the creation of a course on social marketing in the health sciences. In the UOIT context, a model of fully online learning community (FOLC) programs has been developed. Details regarding this model of learning and the research around it were included in the HEIT paper by Blayone, Van Oostveen, DiGiuseppe, Barber, and Childs. Barber and Robertson provided consideration of the role of student voice in building critical and reflective online learning communities and further elaborations were contributed by Christie (faculty development for online learning) and Hughes, Morrison, and Fridman (using “maker” models online so promote production pedagogies). Barber, DiGiuseppe, Van Oostveen, Blayone, and Koroluk also

studied faculty and student use of learning technologies at the technology-intense UOIT.

Looking at a broad sample of faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students, they outlined the different patterns of use and confidence-in-use for various learning and productivity activities as they were carried out on different devices (laptop, tablet, and phone). The study provides data that might well be of particular interest in light of the growing movement to “bring your own device” learning environments.

Looking at technologies more broadly, HEIT had contributions that looked at:

- breaking the language barrier between journalism and science (Browne & De Angelis)
- using technology-supported teaching in professional ethics courses (Bruder)
- enhancing a flipped classroom approach to teaching management (King)
- promoting technological citizenship (Mirrlees & Alvi)
- teaching robotic safety to engineers at UOIT (Rosen & Zhang)
- using DIT’s RoboSumo Robot Building Initiative to promote professional development for engineers at ITB (Stacey & Looby) and
- applying universal design to develop curricula that foster the development of socio-cultural capital.

4. Learning Outcomes and Skills

Many HEIT papers focused on curriculum development, learning outcomes and skills. Increasingly learning and skill outcomes for students are being incorporated into accountability, planning and curriculum design. But also, there is an increasing focus on developing faculty skills and pedagogies. The topics covered at HEIT 2016 encompass this broad range. The HEIT 2016 papers examine: soft skills (O'Connor, et al., 2017), critical skills and critical pedagogy (Doughty, 2017), co-learning in graduate education (Barber & Robertson, 2017), the emotional

well-being of Irish third level educators (Lawless, 2017), curriculum transformation in the technological university model (Irwin, 2017), and building preservice teachers' capacity in makerspace pedagogies (Hughes, et al., 2017).

5. Student Success

The call for participation focused on student support services, but it quickly became clear that student success is a more appropriate lens. Student success incorporates support service units within higher education institutions but also points to student backgrounds, trajectories and the various ways that institutions can adapt to an increasingly diverse student body. HEIT 2016 papers cover a broad set of topics on student access and success including: pathways and skills for non-traditional students (Collis & Reed, 2017), the correlation between physics and calculus workshops and university grades (Ferguson, 2017), learner analytics to inform teaching and learning (Gray, et al., 2017), student narratives on success (King, 2017), integrating assessment From Day One in a Student Development Event Troughton (UOIT), and the effects of peer mentoring (Webb, et al., 2017).

6. Internationalization, Globalization and Exchange

Analyzing initiatives to provide students with international experiences was another area of focus for a series of papers. Given the international collaboration at the heart of HEIT it is expected that the interest in this area will grow over time and be reflected in further research. HEIT 2016 papers in this area include: an analysis of the use of video conferencing for international student learning experiences (Dervan & Appleby, 2017), internationalizing the curriculum through language integration (Feeney & Murphy, 2017), and using technology for international leadership learning (Robertson, et al., 2017).

7. Partnerships and Community Engagement

Finally, we had a strong set of papers from both Canada and Ireland on partnerships and community engagement. The sponsoring institutions all have a strong applied and community mandate and this experience has resulted in analysis and critical reflection. There also was a Caribbean contribution under this theme. The partnership and community engagement theme included papers on: training construction workers in Ireland (Fenns et al., 2017), experiential learning in a community based health collaboration (Gamble, 2017), the transformation of a commercial automotive entity into a centre for research, education, community outreach and commercial partnerships (Liscano et al., 2017), technology infusion in professional development programs (McAvinia, et al., 2017), integrating work experience into a digital media curriculum (McCabe, 2017), and developing an e-learning environment for the professional development of public sector workers in Trinidad and Tobago (Rauch, 2017).

Conclusion: Building Networks and Future Collaborations

This collection of papers from HEIT 2016 presents a broad spectrum of topics, issues, and perspectives on change and development in higher education. Going forward we will build on these topics for future HEIT conferences and collaborations. At HEIT 2016, UOIT, DC and the TU4D Alliance institutions signed an MOU to establish an international Centre for Higher Education Research, Policy and Practice (CHERPP). CHERPP will have a footprint in both Ireland and Canada and will foster collaborations at these host institutions and beyond to any researchers and practitioners who are interested in the same range of higher education issues. As part of CHERPP we are developing networks of researchers and practitioners based on the themes that have emerged in the HEIT conferences. Future HEIT conferences increasingly will rely on CHERPP associated networks of researchers and practitioners for their direction.

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