

# Editorial

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## *STARS Conference 2021*

After a COVID-induced postponement of the annual STARS Conference in 2020, the event bounced back, albeit virtually, in 2021. Over five days (5-9 July) the STARS community heard from four keynote speakers, participated in 65 concurrent presentations (Emerging Initiatives and Good Practice Reports) and enjoyed live poster sessions - all allowing online interaction between authors and delegates. The conclusion of the Conference saw a plenary panel of five students (see *Feature*) answer questions from the STARS community.

The opening keynote for the Conference was Professor Simon Marginson, Professor of Higher Education, Department of Education and Linacre College, University of Oxford. Simon challenged 'educators currently trapped by limited ideas of higher education as solely the source of consumption benefits, and first job graduate employability' to 'do more to draw attention to the larger impact of higher education on societies'. On day 2, Dr Jennifer Keup, Executive Director of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition in South Carolina (USA) thoughtfully discussed the current COVID interruption and civil unrest in her presentation *The Cycle of Crisis, Uncertainty, and Change: Reflections from a U.S. Higher Education Context*. Professor Mark Brown, the Director of the National Institute for Digital Learning at Dublin City University, opened Day 3 by exploring the topical issue of whether small is beautiful and questioned: Is the micro-credential the next big thing? Will the micro-credential unlock the promise of a learner-centred curriculum for student success and deliver the demand for more work-ready graduates? Is the micro-credential poised to fundamentally transform higher education by opening up new career and life-long learning pathways?' On Day 4 delegates were privileged to hear from Dr Jane den Hollander AO, Professor Emerita and former Vice Chancellor of Deakin University, who carefully considered how higher education leaders could adjust to the changed funding environment, and how the education of the next generation and collective research efforts can be sustained.

## **Feature**

Co-ordinated by Piper Bell, Student Voice Australia, the student plenary provided a valuable opportunity to hear directly about the student experience. In this Feature we present an edited transcript of the panel discussion identifying the key discussion points and themes of each student's tertiary experience (to-date) and responses to the key questions and comments from delegates and the Panel hosts.



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A selection of research articles submitted for consideration for STARS 2021 underwent double-blind peer review and we are pleased to present the six papers accepted for publication:

## Articles

From the University of Queensland, **Katelyn Barney** and **Hayley Williams** discuss the institution's outreach initiative for Indigenous high school students which attempts to elevate aspirations of Indigenous students to go to university. "*A Stepping Stone That Just Pushed Me Further into Wanting to Go to University*": *Student Perspectives on 'What Works' for Effective Outreach Strategies for Indigenous Students* draws on findings from interviews with Indigenous university students as part of a National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) Equity Fellowship providing a robust evidence base for outreach activities.

A second NCSEHE Equity Fellowship is the focus of **Nicole Crawford** and **Sherridan Emery's** article, "*Shining a Light*" on *Mature-Aged Students in, and From, Regional and Remote Australia*. Four vignettes from mature-aged students, reveal students' diverse and complex circumstances. While the four students shared some common experiences, the extent to which their challenges were understood and supported differed. The authors suggest that entrenched approaches of privileging some students over others needs to be challenged and replaced.

**Jill Lawrence** and colleagues **Alice Brown**, **Petrea Redmond**, **Suzanne Maloney**, **Marita Basson**, **Linda Galligan** and **Joanna Turner** extend their work from an earlier project at the University of Southern Queensland (see [Lawrence et al., 2019](#)) around course learning analytics data (CLAD), combined with nudging initiatives, which are emerging as strategies for engaging online students. *Does Course Specific Nudging Enhance Student Engagement, Experience and Success?: A Data-Driven Longitudinal Tale* details the positive outcomes and benefits for academic staff and their students.

The collaborative research of staff and students involved in a students as partners (SaP) co-curricular program is detailed in *Learning, Unlearning, and Relearning Together: Unmasking Power in a Students as Partners Program using Collaborative Autoethnography*. **Sakinah Alhadad**, **Daniela Vasco**, **Jude Williams**, **Pauline Dizon**, **Rachel Kapnias**, **Saira Khan**, **Hayley Payne**, **Bronte Simpson** and **Chantelle Warren** talk about power within SaP, highlighting the power asymmetry between staff and students, and the need to address that power imbalance through considered strategies.

Several of the articles address the disruptive nature of the COVID climate on the transition experience of students. The emergency pivot to online teaching and assessment is explored from the perspective of a regional Australian university in *Balancing the COVID-19 Disruption to Undergraduate Learning and Assessment with an Academic Student Support Package: Implications for Student Achievement and Engagement*. **Natalie Lloyd**, **Rebecca Sealey** and **Murray Logan** discuss James Cook University's implementation of an Academic Safety Net to provide an institution-wide support for students.

From Griffith University, **Rhys Cooper's** study uses established qualitative methods to analyse student surveys about the institution's first online orientation sessions instigated in 2020. In *PECS: An Evidence-Based Orientation Event Framework for Enhancing Students' Sense of Belonging* the article focuses on developing the students sense of belonging at this critical stage of transition.

Our next issue is due for release in November this year and continues this theme with the title [Student Success in a Global Pandemic](#). We are very grateful to the work of the Editors Professor Marcia Devlin and Dr Jade McKay, and we look forward to sharing their Special Issue with you. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this STARS Conference issue of the *Student Success Journal*.

## References

- Lawrence, J., Brown, A., Redmond, P., & Basson, M. (2019). Engaging the disengaged: Exploring the use of course-specific learning analytics and nudging to enhance online student engagement. *Student Success*, 10(2), 47-58. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.v10i2.1295>

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