

In This Issue...

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The situation in Asia has changed dramatically in the last 30–40 years. Standards of living have greatly improved, and higher education has become more of an expected commodity rather than a privilege reserved for the elite few. Along with these changes is a growing sense of social consciousness and responsibility, especially in young people, and a realization that education should not be simply about vocational and professional training, but also about holistic education of the whole person, and that intangible aspects such as global outlook, social responsibility, and ethical leadership are as important as discipline-related skills and knowledge.

Service-learning has been shown to be an effective pedagogy, and many higher education institutions in Asia have incorporated it as an institutional strategy. However, many cultures in Asia do not have a strong tradition of service-learning or, indeed, of community service. Many of these areas are still considered developing regions, and many others fit into that category until recently and were themselves the beneficiaries of service projects. Building up a culture of service-learning in these contexts, therefore, necessitates educating the local stakeholders and supporting adaptation of commonly held beliefs and practices.

In this issue, we present five double-blind, peer-reviewed articles that investigate service-learning in Asia from different perspectives.

In Asia, universities and higher education have traditionally been seen as a stepping stone to a better (and more well-paid) career. This differs from the West, where higher education is viewed more as part of personal development and expansion of knowledge. Therefore, many Asian universities have departments that are highly specialized and professional. As these universities learn to incorporate service-learning into their curriculum, these same departments have initiated novel methods of incorporating two aspects of service-learning: applying the skills and knowledge from their professional discipline in a general education context and making these projects available and appropriate for all students. Two articles in this issue present projects such as these. In one Project with Promise, “Blending Community Service and Teaching

to Open Vision Care and Eye Health Awareness to University Students,” Do et al. document a service-learning subject that combines major and nonmajor students in a vision-screening project. The authors discuss how students are prepared and assessed, as well as the gains accruing to the teachers in planning and teaching this subject. In the research study “Service-Learning in Building Engineering by Use of Interdisciplinary Field Education,” Leung documents a three-tier model and a pragmatic pedagogical design developed through her service-learning class in building engineering education, which incorporates interdisciplinary academic education and field services.

Service-learning differs from volunteerism and community service in its equal emphasis on community impact and student learning. In “Empowering Students Through Service-Learning in a Community Psychology Course: A Case in Hong Kong,” K. Chan et al. present a qualitative evaluation of student learning outcomes from a service-learning community psychology class. The authors analyze students’ reflective essays to identify concepts that the students learned and examine the relationship between these concepts and class activities. In “The Long-Term Impact of Service-Learning on Graduates’ Civic Engagement and Career Exploration in Hong Kong,” A. Chan et al. tackle the challenging topic of the longitudinal effect of learning interventions to link service-learning with civic responsibility and career choice.

Although student learning is the ultimate objective of service-learning, teacher education and empowerment are necessary for students to be given these opportunities. In “Engaging and Empowering Academic Staff to Promote Service-Learning Curriculum in Research-Intensive Universities,” Fang takes on the issues of staff motivation, tension between research and teaching, and promoting understanding between different stakeholders in a research university in Taiwan.

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