

Editorial

Welcome to the sixth volume of *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*. Our thanks go to the authors of the essay, articles and commentaries, the anonymous referees who read the essay and the articles, our publisher Berghahn and the Editorial Board.

In the first article, Mariya Ivancheva examines the history of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (BUV), founded in 2003 by the Chavez government. The new university's purpose is to provide universal access to higher education and educate graduates equipped to contribute to the solving of social problems and the development of a more equal society. All students undertake fieldwork with disadvantaged urban and rural communities. Criteria for the appointment of academic staff include their ability to support students in this activity. However, this alternative model of higher education is evaluated alongside existing elite universities that perpetuate Western capitalist notions of academic excellence. The government has required national evaluation systems to give due weight to the applied research and scholarship associated with the Bolivarian University of Venezuela but has also obliged the new institution to conform to more traditional academic values. Despite this tension, the BUV continues to work against the grain of global trends in higher education.

In the second article, Melody Viczko analyses the efforts of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) since 2008 to encourage its member organisations to embrace one of these global trends, that of internationalisation. Increased harmonisation of higher education in Europe through the Bologna Process provided the stimulus for the AUCC to urge Canadian universities to adapt their policies and practices to promote student and staff mobility in ways that would boost the international standing of Canadian higher education and the international competitiveness of the Canadian economy. Viczko explores how these developments entailed subtle shifts in the meaning of university 'autonomy'. While acknowledging the autonomy of individual institutions, the urgent tone and content of the AUCC's public statements left little space for universities, or for their students and



staff, to consider the implications of this drive for their existing local and national responsibilities.

In the third article, Gudrun Willett presents an ethnographic case study of how one liberal arts college in the U.S.A. engaged academics, support staff and students in long-term educational development. The collective and democratic nature of this endeavour meant that relatively few participants felt threatened by open discussion of what aspects of learning and teaching needed to be improved. Participants in the meetings and workshops gained a greater understanding of how people with different roles in the college contributed to students' learning and a greater sense of community was one of the outcomes of the project.

In the essay that follows, Ageeth Sluis and Elise Edwards argue the case for combined departments and the practice of interdisciplinary teaching and research within them. The Department of History and Anthropology in which they work offers a combined major with cross-listed options and a required interdisciplinary first-year course. This course is organised around the theme of encounters such as colonialism and immigration and incorporates theoretical and methodological questions. Not all academic staff in the department undertake interdisciplinary research, but the majority contribute to interdisciplinary teaching and the departmental workshops that support it. We have invited a number of academics from different countries to respond to this essay and to contribute their experience of integrating disciplines in combined departments.

The issue concludes with responses to 'The Academic Rat Race', which was published in *LATISS* 5.2. This essay by Xavier Landes, Martin Marchman and Morten Nielsen was written from the perspective of junior academics on the negative aspects of academic competition. The commentaries on this essay are from people with a range of experience and from a range of disciplines: Mary Taylor Huber, Joseph Heath, Rebecca Boden, John Craig and Christopher Newfield.

Penny Welch and Susan Wright