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Guest Editor's Corner: The Great Convergence and Critical Issues

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In the winter semester of 2015, students in the “Critical Issues in Higher Education” course at Grand Valley State University were challenged to dig deep and ponder the major questions facing the field of student affairs and higher education today. In the course of the sixteen weeks, their perspectives expanded; their ability to ask big questions grew; and they were stretched to their limits in the ways in which they presented what they had learned. The goal of these challenges was to develop critical thinkers about some of our most pressing issues in higher education today and have them see themselves not only as practitioners, but as scholars too. Through one of the assignments, students were asked to write a book chapter for a hypothetical book titled “Higher Education: Issues in the 21st Century.” The special section of this issue of *College Student Affairs Leadership* is a compilation of some of these “chapters” and the students’ hard work.

As you read this special section, the pieces center on what is the convergence in higher education of changing demographics and the global economy as discussed by Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007). Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner state, “What one wants to learn, what is offered, and the ways in which one learns are determined to a large extent by the nature of society at any particular time” (p. 5). Essentially, they discuss the new social context for adult education where there exists an aging population with greater diversity that has moved to be more adult-oriented in nature. Additionally, they refer to Brysk’s (2003) statements regarding globalization that society is ever more connected through information technology and has become more cosmopolitan in nature with an expansion of world markets and an extension of market-like behavior across all sectors, including education. As a whole, as Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner claim, society is at an age where these forces having us explore new policies; contemplate new philosophical/educational rationales; examine work practices; recognize greater diversity; interact with the market; as well as interact with one another and the creation of knowledge technologically.

Fatma Ayyad worked to address these forces and issues from her own vantage point in the field of higher education. Her piece is titled “Higher Education and Privilege,” and discusses social inequities, privilege and accessibility. Moving from a more practical examination of higher education, the remaining scholars explored more theoretical perspectives looking at the purpose of higher education, trying to find out what the role is in this new world. Paul Bylsma tackles the big question of the “Teleological Effect of Neoliberalism on American Higher Education,” discussing the

role and purpose of higher education from a broad perspective. Finally, in his piece, "Whose Fault Is It, Anyway?," Chad Patton explores the relationship between K-12 education and higher education, posing questions as to which sector is responsible for the failures in the educational pipeline and the ways they influence one another.

Their topics are indeed difficult to discuss, as institutions of higher education, as well as society, are often slow to change. This is why they are *critical issues* for individuals working in these fields to discuss. In those sixteen weeks during the winter semester of 2015, I hope that it became evident to the students, and now to those of you reading their articles, that this assignment was a challenge in deep thinking about education in today's society and that you are provided with a new perspective on these topics.

References

- Brysk, A. (2003). Globalization and human rights: It's a small world after all. *Phi Kappa Phi Forum*, 83(4), 21-24.
- Merriam, S., Baumgartner, L., & Caffarella, R. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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