



Centre for Learning and Teaching

# focus

on university teaching and learning

Graduate Student Issue

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## From the Director

A genuine curiosity about the world around us - and the people in it - drives many facets of academic work. Quite often, the genesis of that curiosity is an unexpected encounter with diversity. The contributors to this second annual Graduate Teaching Assistant issue of *Focus* challenge us to think deeply about how engaging diversity in our academic community enriches the experiences of both learners and teachers.



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*Inspiring Minds*

## Perspectives on Equality in Higher Education



Abu Kamara, *Graduate Teaching Associate-CLT IDPhD Program*

Higher education's ability to recruit and support students' development has come under increasing scrutiny, in part as a consequence of its role as a key developer of human resources for the knowledge economy. With most universities raising their tuitions, equal access to higher education and the provision of more support services is receiving increased attention. In particular shifts in the discourses surrounding university support resources have injected new life into discussions about the importance of institutional commitment to these much-needed resources. The growth of key student groups within the university, most notably international students, visible minority students, students with accessibility needs, and students from low-income families, has highlighted some gaps in university support structures. Although some level of student support resources currently exists on most university campuses, such as advising, international student offices, accessibility services, writing centres, financial aid, and transition year programs, the available resources are not always finely tuned to address the unique challenges of international students and historically underrepresented students. Cultural differences and historical problems with discrimination increase the likelihood that these students will encounter circumstances, whether on or off-campus, that may pose serious challenges to their success.

This second annual Graduate Student Edition of *Focus* presents four different views on equality in higher education. Though the topics addressed in the articles vary across the authors, each author provides a convincing perspective on the value of revisiting the issues of access and support resources on university campuses. All of the authors share, as part of the core message of their recommendations, the central premise of student empowerment in addressing resource needs. Natasha Hanson's article identifies increasing tuition costs in higher education as a strong barrier to student access and simultaneously makes the case for countering low enrollment of underrepresented students by increasing financial and non-financial resources. She also calls for student awareness raising activities around issues of access to higher education. *(continued on page 2) >*

*(continued from page 1)* > Taking on the timely issue of international students, Cheluchi Onyemelukwe's article illuminates the benefits of international student enrollments by providing examples of their academic, economic and cultural contributions and argues for the importance of the supports students can provide to one another. On the issue of equality in the classroom, Moeza Merchant's article presents a thought-provoking example of how a faculty member can implement an inclusive teaching methodology where students can negotiate what is taught and how they learn. Finally, Gaia Aish gives her unique and insightful perspective on the challenges facing students with accessibility issues by arguing that such students need to be proactive in seeking and accessing resources. While all the authors demonstrate an underlying commitment to student empowerment, they also all recognize and highlight the importance of institutional accountability to support all students who are admitted to the university.



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