Full Paper Proposal

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Paper Title

Higher education evaluation through assurance of learning in Australia

Authors

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Abstract (297 words)

Evaluation is an important process in higher education (Burrell, Anderson, Bessette & Dawson, 2011; Praslova, 2010). The domestic government uses evaluation to justify investment in education and achieve assurance that graduates will be able to compete and lead in a global marketplace (Huang, 2009; Jiang, 2009). Traditional evaluation processes include student feedback on teaching (Beaty, 2001), public satisfaction surveys (Oshio, Sano, Ueno & Mino, 2010), and student demographics and statistics (Brook, 2011). These are secondary indicators of the key evaluative questions – what the students are learning and how well they are learning it. Assurance of learning addresses whether students are achieving appropriate and substantive change in knowledge, skills and attributes and whether they are adequately prepared for functioning as graduates. This paper reports qualitative empirical research into evaluation processes. Australia was chosen as the case study, due to recent changes in auditing bodies making evaluative themes salient. Associate Deans in Business faculties were selected as interview subjects due to a focus on accreditation. The response rate was 61% in that 25 of the 41 universities agreed to participate. Data was collected through semi-structured telephone interviews. Transcripts were analysed using NVivo9. Open coding identified general themes followed by axial coding to identify relationships within general themes (sub-themes). The two main emergent themes concerned graduate attributes (GA) and assurance of learning (AoL). Most

interviewees shared that their universities had articulated GAs, or in other words, transferable capacities such as communication and leadership skills and used them as the basis for education evaluation. Most universities were deeply concerned with AoL. Interviewees shared various means of measuring AoL such as mapping assessment outcomes and evaluating capstone projects. Analysis confirmed evaluation as a predominant issue in higher education and provided evidence that universities are practicing creative and multifaceted processes of assuring learning.

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Presenter Bio

Shelley Kinash is an Associate Professor Higher Education and the Director of Quality, Teaching, and Learning at Bond University, Australia. In this role, Shelley has responsibility for: strategic planning and assurance of learning for University Quality Assurance including national audit preparations; policy development and review, and directing academic development through Teaching and Learning, and; overseeing academic, literacy and mathematics assistance through Student Learning Support. Prior to Bond University, Shelley was a Faculty of Education academic for twelve years at the University of Calgary in Canada. Shelley's PhD is in Educational Technology. She is an active researcher with numerous publications including books, chapters, journal papers and full-paper conference proceedings.