

**Guest Editor's Note:**  
**Universities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: meeting the changing needs of  
a new generation of students**

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In this age of globalization the quality of a university's degree programmes is looming to be of greater importance than in times past-especially from the point of view of students-and, indeed, society.

Rangsit University, as a private university in Thailand, is a case in point. The President, Dr. Arthit Ourairat, is always very clear about the importance of quality. At his annual address to faculty and staff he invites all members to continue their work toward enhancing the quality of course offerings, of teaching, and of students' welfare. His dream is that Rangsit will one day soon be ranked in Asia's top tier universities.

However, such a dream may be difficult to realize in many Asian countries. Typically Asian universities have little or no autonomy to be different in their quest for greatness. There seems to be a reluctance by governments in allowing individuality and entrepreneurship among their institutions of higher learning.

**Student Satisfaction.** Because we believe the quality of post-secondary education is crucial to the on-going development of societies, this present Issue will continue a focus on universities – not on quality or rankings, *per se*, but on the matter of 'student satisfaction' – which, of course, is an integral component of quality, and the right of students to question the quality of the curriculum itself, even the instructional methods of university teachers (Williams, 2014).

**The on-campus learning experience.** In this Note we will limit our focus on the role of universities with respect to teenagers – fresh out of high school. A topic for future issues might be working adults.

Campus-based education typically provides for young learners, a rich, immersive environment for interacting with hundreds, if not thousands, of other teenagers. Also, it is an opportunity to learn from more highly educated teachers; perhaps some of whom may be from other parts of the world. For many students, universities are also the place where networking can begin.

Major campuses are able to provide the necessary 'hands on' facilities: learning pods, interactive technology work spaces, laboratories, specialized equipment, studios, and libraries that are connected to the world. The more advanced campuses can also connect students to working industry professionals, non-governmental organizations, writers, musicians, and artists, to mention some unique community resources.

Of course, many universities can be a place where students can compete for mentorships and research assistantships. Also, a campus education typically provides opportunities for students to engage in sports and special interest activities such as drama, choral, and literary clubs.

**But, how about the quality of their university experience, particularly teaching?** Australia is one of a growing number of countries that has seriously focused on the quality of teaching in its universities.

A recent study revealed that some 79.1% of students were satisfied with the quality of their overall educational experience; 82.4% expressed satisfaction with the quality of teaching. However, only 64.8% were satisfied with what was termed ‘learning engagement’ (Australia Department of Education and Training, 2012). Note: this latter component of student satisfaction, learning engagement, measures how and to what extent students engage with activities that lead to productive learning.

Australia’s institutions of higher learning, and the national government’s Department of Education and Training, have recently agreed that an **external, independent research body** will carry out three surveys each year beginning this year, 2015: Student Experiences Survey, to measure satisfaction of current students, a ‘Graduate Outcomes Survey’ that examines labour market outcomes of higher education graduates, and a new ‘Employer Satisfaction Survey’, to assess the generic skills, technical skills and work readiness of graduates.

This agreement represents a major attempt by an advanced nation to ensure that its students receive the best possible overall university experience.

The foregoing description of Australia’s bold initiative is but one of the many examples of the increasing attention being given by national governments to improving the quality of higher education. Particularly prominent are new developments in the United Kingdom, United States of America, and Canada, for example (See, for example, websites for institutions such as American University, Washington, D.C., University of Leicester, The University of British Columbia, and Stanford University).

**Alumni.** Student-centered universities do not ignore their alumni, particularly the role they can have in enriching the experience of current students. In a February, 2013 article in *The Guardian*, the writer, Alastair Creamer, states, “... we should rethink alumni associations as, firstly, a coaching network and secondly, as a fundraising resource. . . . I believe that alumni should be actively encouraged by [student] advisors to return more than once . . . to offer personal real-world insights from a graduate perspective and . . . as an invaluable professional partner (Creamer, 2013).

The writer goes on to state that universities should be proud of the ‘careers and employability service’ they are providing the new generation and that their alumni should be viewed as ‘ambassadors’. He suggests that recent alumni (rather than older generation graduates) should be invited to help with the mentoring of new students: “Newer alumni have more recent, relevant experience of getting started in a career, which is what [soon-to-be] graduates want to hear about in the current economic climate. This should be prioritized over advice and tips on career progression (Creamer, 2013).

**Concluding Note.** This particular Editor’s Note has focused on student satisfaction. However, connected with student satisfaction is a matter related to the relevance of some university degree programmes to the needs of employers.

In the case of Thailand, a recent report underlines this point: “. . . almost 60 per cent of employers need vocational graduates and just 29% require workers with a university degree, yet university education continues to be more popular. . . . job mismatching is likely to increase over the next five years . . . the problem stems from society’s negative attitude toward vocational schools . . . most people highly value

university degrees while most employers [are in need of] labourers in communication technology, consumer goods, construction and engineering” (Sripong, 2015).

The *Rangsit Journal of Arts and Sciences* welcomes papers related to the Arts and Science. In addition, papers that focus on matters discussed in this and previous Editor’s Notes would be welcome, too.

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