

## Message from the Editor-in-Chief

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As this year draws to a close and we enter the Christmas and holiday season, I would like to extend my warmest wishes to you on behalf of the International Journal of Higher Education. The end of the year is always a natural moment to pause, to look back, and to look ahead. In higher education, we know that reflection is not a luxury but a necessity. This year, our community has once again navigated rapid change: the continuing impacts of digital transformation, evolving student needs and expectations, new policy directions in many countries, and ongoing questions about equity, inclusion, and the public value of higher education. Through your scholarship, you have helped to illuminate these issues with rigour, nuance, and care. For the final issue of Volume 14, we have 10 articles and strong representation from researchers from the UK, the USA, China, and Canada.

The first article from Valentine Matthews explored the Delphi technique which is a systematic method for evaluating anonymised expert opinions to achieve convergence on complex issues. As a modified Classical Delphi, Policy Delphi explores diverse relationships between policy options rather than forcing consensus. This study explores the idea of "Categorical Delphi", a novel adaptation of Policy Delphi. Matthews found that the Categorical Delphi Technique offers a robust approach for evaluating categorical relationships between a regulatory policy and a policy addendum, providing actionable insights for institutions. The second article is from Craddock and associates who evaluated the implementation of the Exercise Science Practice Model (ESPM) within a regional University curriculum. The ESPM is a foundational framework that unifies professional education, reasoning, and practice within the field of Exercise Science. Unlike allied health disciplines such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and athletic training, Exercise Science has lacked an established practice model to guide curriculum design, professional identity, and accreditation. Craddock et.al., found that the ESPM advances Exercise Science education by providing a replicable, evidence-informed framework that promotes curricular coherence, professional legitimacy, and the cultivation of reflective, competent practitioners prepared for the evolving demands of preventive health and performance science.

The third article is from DiFurio and colleagues who used survey data to examine student satisfaction with their broadband access, comparing traditional and nontraditional students. Key variables included demographic background, student status e.g., first-generation, full-time enrolment, employment, and subjective learning experiences. Their Qualitative findings reported that student satisfaction with broadband varied by their characteristics e.g. the impact of being a full-time student without a job differed between traditional and nontraditional students. The quantitative data found that students who reported a positive online learning experience were significantly more likely to be satisfied with their broadband. However, no statistically significant difference in overall broadband satisfaction was found between traditional and nontraditional students. These findings suggest shifting expectations and nuanced influences on technology satisfaction, and that institutions must ensure that students in at-risk counties and those with nontraditional profiles are not left behind in a rapidly evolving learning environment. The fourth article from Zhu and colleagues explored how Chinese international students negotiate their lived experiences in U.S. universities through the lenses of transnationalism, transculturalism, and translanguaging. Their findings show that a greater understanding of Chinese international students' lived experiences can (a) guide institutional policy, (b) challenge myths and deficit narratives, and (c) promote inclusive, globally aware learning environments. These can also help reframe identity as multidimensional, improving educational offerings for all students and educators in higher education institutions.

The sixth article is from Soboleva and Delute who explore Russian international students' narratives, particularly those participating in the Fulbright Program in the United States, to understand how they perceive and navigate their war-related experiences. Their findings reflect how narrative genres function as mediational tools through which students can balance safety and civic ambiguity. The findings contribute to research on youth civic development in authoritarian contexts by showing how storytelling becomes a form of cautious civic engagement amid geopolitical rupture. The seventh article is from Toro-Troconis and colleagues who studied of the impact of the CoDesignS ESD AI Coach on academic and practitioner perspectives regarding the integration of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within teaching and curriculum design. Employing activity theory as the analytical framework, they investigated both the opportunities and limitations associated with the use of generative AI (GenAI) in educational contexts to support ESD. They found that the CoDesignS ESD AI Coach holds particular value as a prompt for idea generation, however, it should not be used in isolation. Those specialising in sustainability and curriculum design should guide its effective implementation.

The eighth article is from Gross and colleagues who examined the link between institutional characteristics and the provision of basic needs services at nonprofit, two- and four-year colleges in a high-poverty U.S. state. Their results show

that public, four-year colleges are more likely to offer comprehensive basic needs services than community colleges and private institutions, whilst spending on academic and student services per full-time student strongly relates to the availability of emergency housing, health services, and transportation support. Colleges with a higher percentage of students of colour are more likely to provide mental health services. The findings contribute to global discussions about institutional capacity, legitimacy, and equity in higher education. The ninth article is from Segniga and colleagues who conducted accumulated empirical research on Massification that has not been systematically reviewed. Massification has transformed higher education worldwide, and their findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex nature of higher education massification and offer practical implications for achieving equitable massification through critical pedagogy. The tenth article is from Boinin and colleagues whose study evaluated the effectiveness of a 50-minute workshop designed to explicitly teach scientific inquiry as a transferable skill to first-year undergraduate students in a biodiversity course. The workshop, delivered in either a biology-specific or general context, emphasized active, experiential learning. Their findings offer practical guidance for designing inclusive and intentional skill development in undergraduate education. The research presented here explores the topic at a single point in time – an undergraduate student’s first year of higher education. Further research is needed to examine how students’ perceptions of skill development in different instructional contexts evolve across stages of their academic careers.

The final article in the 2025 edition of *IJHE* is from Allen and colleagues who used survey data and a series of regression analyses to test predictors of institutional commitment among n=116 Black undergraduate and graduate students at a research-intensive Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in higher education, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Their findings are numerous and recommend that efforts be made at the individual, program, and university levels to support the retention of underrepresented students in STEM programs, with attention paid to the unique experiences of Black students in varying disciplines and degree programs.

I would like to pause here and deliver my sincere Christmas 2025 message to the *IJHE* family. To our authors: thank you for choosing the *IJHE* as a home for your work. Every manuscript represents months, and often years, of thinking, data collection, revision, and perseverance. Your willingness to share your insights, to invite critique, and to contribute to a collective body of knowledge is at the heart of what we do. We are especially grateful for the increasing diversity of perspectives, methodologies, and contexts represented in our pages, which strengthens both the journal and the broader field.

To our reviewers: the quality of academic publishing rests on your often invisible labour. You give generously of your time and expertise to read, question, encourage, and refine the work of others. In a period when professional demands are high and time is scarce, your commitment to constructive, ethical, and timely peer review is deeply appreciated. The advancement of higher education research simply would not be possible without you.

To our editorial board and associate editors: thank you for your leadership, wisdom, and steady guidance. You help us maintain high scholarly standards while also cultivating a supportive and developmental review culture. Your efforts to mentor emerging scholars, champion underrepresented voices, and engage with global debates in higher education are essential to the mission of the journal.

To our readers: your engagement gives meaning to all of this work. Whether you are a researcher, practitioner, policymaker, or student, we are honoured that you use the journal to inform your teaching, your decisions, your research, and your reflections on higher education’s purpose and future.

Christmas for many, is a season of gratitude, generosity, and hope. For others, it coincides with different cultural and religious celebrations, or simply a well-earned break at the end of a demanding year. Whatever this period means for you, I hope it brings time for rest, connection with family and friends, and the opportunity to step back from daily pressures and rediscover what inspires you—both personally and professionally.

As we look toward the new year, *IJHE* remains committed to fostering robust, ethical, and inclusive scholarship that speaks to the complex realities of universities and colleges around the world. We will continue to welcome contributions that challenge assumptions, bridge theory and practice, and centre the experiences of diverse learners, educators, and communities.

Thank you once again for your continued support of the journal and for the vital work you do in and for higher education. On behalf of the editorial team, I wish you a peaceful Christmas, a restorative holiday season, and a new year filled with good health, renewed energy, and fresh opportunities for impactful scholarship.

With warm regards,

Associate Professor Ingrid Harrington  
Editor-in-Chief  
International Journal of Higher Education