

Reflecting on 'Directions': Growing with the times and future developments

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Abstract

This Editorial reflects on the 'Directions' section of the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* over the last 25 years and highlights the new Co-Editors' plans for the future of the section. We discuss how the section first emerged in the context of a heightened focus on skills development in higher education and follow this with a brief analysis of the 42 'Directions' papers published to date. We reflect on how the nature of the published articles initially focused on enhancing undergraduate student assessment performance before expanding the discussion to consider broader aspects of the student experience and disciplinary learning. We recognise that while most of the articles have focused on undergraduates, many of them are also relevant to postgraduate geography students. Following a lull in submissions between 2008 and 2017, a revival of the section emerged through articles either co-authored by students and staff, or authored solely by geography students. We intend to develop this 'students as partners' approach with respect to future 'Directions' publications, by encouraging submissions co-authored by students and staff and ensuring that all articles are reviewed by both a current academic staff member and a student.

Editorial

The 'Directions' section of the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education (JGHE)* was first introduced in 1994 (volume 18, issue 1) with an article by Peter Vujakovic, Ian Livingstone and Caroline Mills. This addition to the journal reflected the growth in interest in geography higher education in skills development (Jenkins & Ward 1995; Gravestock & Healey 2000), enterprise (Clark 1991; Healey 1992) and employability (Jenkins & Pepper 1988; Jenkins & Healey 1995). The section was established to offer "study guides for students studying geography in higher education" (Vujakovic *et al.* 1994a: 123). It aimed to provide resources for tutors and lecturers to help them bring skills training into their teaching in order to enhance the student learning experience. These study guides were written specifically so that they might be reproduced by tutors for use with their students in their own institutions. To date, 42 'Directions' articles have been published, with the section having been informally managed by four different editors since 1994 (Caroline Mills, Peter Vujakovic, Sue Burkill, and Pauline Kneale,). In August 2018, we took on responsibility for this section of the journal. This editorial reflects on 25 years of 'Directions' articles and outlines our planned developments for the section in future.

When 'Directions' was first introduced, higher education was in a state of transition moving from teaching a predominantly subject content focus, in which students explored the range and depths of the geographical discipline, to a greater focus on identifying and developing skills (generic, disciplinary and transferable) (Hall 1999). This transition has not only led to a broader range of approaches towards teaching the discipline, but also to changes in the way in which students are assessed in order to demonstrate their abilities in relation to these skills. From its beginnings, the 'Directions' section offered resources on approaches to teaching and

learning to support students, and tutors, as they developed the skills and competencies expected by employers. Early articles tended to focus on activities to enhance assessment performance, including working in groups (Vujakovic *et al.* 1994b), writing essays (Fitzgerald 1994), preparing for and undertaking exams (Hay 1995a; Hay 1996b) and getting started with the geography dissertation (Burkill & Burley 1996). Then, in 1997, the focus of 'Directions' shifted slightly to address the broader student experience with a focus on developing disciplinary and generic study skills such as time management (Kneale 1997), using the internet (Livingstone & Shepherd 1997), note taking (Kneale 1998) and map work (Parry 1999). The popularity of resources related to skills development has been demonstrated through Pauline Kneale's highly successful *Study Skills for Geography Students* (1999) which will be released in its 4th Edition as *Study Skills for Geography, Earth and Environmental Science Students* in 2019.

'Directions' has also offered resources to support the risk awareness and ethical development of geography students, coinciding with the growth in recognition of the value of undergraduate research (Jenkins, Healey & Zetter 2007). Key papers to date include Higgitt & Bullard (1999) on 'assessing fieldwork risk' and Vujakovic & Bullard (2001) on 'the ethics minefield'. The development of ethical thinking has also gone beyond that related to conducting primary research. The nature of the subject leads geographers to deal with many controversial subjects, and thereby the discipline offers a range of contemporary topics in which to situate ethical discussion (Healey & Ribchester 2016). As such, many higher education geographers are now engaging consciously with ethical issues in curricula (Healey & Ribchester *in press*). This has included consideration of academic integrity, for example in the 'Directions' paper on 'avoiding plagiarism' by Burkill & Abbey (2004).

An analysis of the content of all 42 ‘Directions’ articles to date (based on the title, key words and introduction of each article) reveals that most of the articles (41 articles; 98%) have been aimed at undergraduate students. However, much of the advice is still applicable to postgraduates, with half of the articles including information of relevance to postgraduate students (21 articles; 50%). Most articles focus on generic skills which are applicable to all higher education students (33 articles; 77%), although many of these also touch upon subject-specific skills. In total, 18 articles (43%) discuss subject-specific skills only, such as fieldwork, or offer a disciplinary view on generic skills. Over half of the articles focus on assessment skills (25 articles; 60%), while around a third explore employability or transferable skills (15 articles; 36%). The download statistics from the journal indicate that the most popular ‘Directions’ papers have focused on generic skills applicable to many students and assessments (Table 1).

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

The frequency of publication of ‘Directions’ articles was reasonably consistent in the early years, with at least one paper coming out each year until 2008. After that, the number of submissions dropped off, before a revival in 2017. The most recent submissions display two notable characteristics. Firstly, the learning spaces examined have been extended from the physical arenas of the classroom and field to more informal and sometimes virtual co-curricular spaces. We can trace a merging of signature pedagogies: “types of teaching that organise fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions” (Shulman 2005: 52), with broader signature learning experiences, which often happen beyond the curriculum (Spronken-Smith 2013). Uniting both of these teaching and learning approaches helps to develop self-authorship and academic success in our students

(Baxter Magolda 1999). Secondly, and of key significance for ‘Directions’ moving forward, more recent articles have been written solely or have been co-authored by individuals who identified as students at the time of submission (West *et al.* 2017; Hill *et al.* 2018a; Hill *et al.* 2018b; Rewhorn 2018). While co-authoring with students has been encouraged throughout the history of ‘Directions’, the practice has been rare until recently.

This development in the authorship of ‘Directions’ articles reflects a broader evolution in the ethos and practice of higher education, which has broadly been labelled as ‘student-staff partnership’. Defined as “a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis” (Cook-Sather *et al.* 2014: 6-7), this approach recognises the value of students and staff working together to enhance higher education. Following this argument, as ‘Directions’ moves forward, we intend to work towards embedding the ethos of student-staff partnership into this section of *JGHE*. Authors will be encouraged to write in partnership, in student-staff teams. Furthermore, each submission to ‘Directions’ will be reviewed by both a current student studying geography in Higher Education and a staff member. Whilst this is not an entirely new approach to publishing, it is still relatively unusual. The *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal*, for example, encourages student reviewers, as did the former Higher Education Academy Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences disciplinary journal *Planet* (Hill 2013). Indeed, the *International Journal for Students as Partners (IJSaP)* ensures that every submission to the journal is not only reviewed by a student and an academic staff member, but is also managed by student-staff partnership editorial teams (Cliffe *et al.* 2017; Healey *et al.* 2018). Unlike *IJSaP*, which was established from its conception to operate in this student-staff partnership model, embedding partnership into the

existing reviewing and editing structures of *JGHE* requires a different approach. Hence we begin this challenge by conceiving of ‘Directions’ as a section established for, and written and reviewed by, current geography higher education students. This change in the operation of the journal moves towards developing the radical egalitarian potential of the ‘students as partners’ movement within publishing (Healey *et al.* 2018). Through this evolution we commit to inclusivity in sharing good practice in the scholarship of teaching and learning. We offer a ‘borderland’ space for promoting learning (Hill *et al.* 2016; 2019), where traditional power hierarchies surrounding the production of knowledge in higher education can be destabilized.

All ‘Directions’ reviewers will be provided with a ‘reviewer tool kit’, which includes: a past ‘Directions’ article going through the review stages from submission to publication; a list of the criteria outlining the characteristics of a good ‘Directions’ article; and a frequently asked questions document outlining the answers to common queries about the review process.

Student reviewers will initially be identified through the Editorial Board. Anyone interested in reviewing is invited to contact the co-editors (details below). Additionally, we welcome new ‘Directions’ submissions, particularly those co-authored between students and staff.

Possible topics might include, but are not limited to:

- Achieving inclusive fieldwork
- Application/supporting fieldwork learning through augmented reality (AR); virtual reality (VR); or un-manned aerial vehicles (UAV)
- Developing assessment and feedback literacy
- Developing resilience in learning and enhancing student wellbeing
- Ethical research in the context of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- How to do well in reflective assignments

- Note-taking in the digital age
- Teaching geography through the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Setting up / running a student geography society
- Surviving a geography PGCE
- Using social media in research projects

If you are interested in submitting an article, please contact Ruth Healey

(r.healey@chester.ac.uk) and Jenny Hill (Jennifer.Hill@uwe.ac.uk) to discuss your ideas.

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Table 1: Top 10 Directions papers by average downloads per year available

Rank	Total downloads	Number of years available	Average downloads per year	Article Title	Author	Issue
1	1427	1	1427	Writing your successful literature review	Sonja Rewhorn	Vol. 42, No. 1, January 2018
2	3936	11	358	Using Photographs as Illustrations in Human Geography	Gillian Rose	Vol. 32, No. 1, January 2008
3	1009	8	126	How to Produce a Digital Story	Derek France, Kelly Wakefield	Vol. 35, No. 4, November 2011
4	1721	16	108	Writing Research Briefing Papers	John H. McKendrick	Vol. 27, No. 2, July 2003
5	944	15	63	Avoiding Plagiarism	Sue Burkill, Caroline Abbey	Vol. 28, No. 3, November 2004
6	593	15	40	Describing numerical data in words	John Bradbeer	Vol. 28, No. 1, March 2004
7	696	18	39	Making an Argument: Writing up human geography projects	Sarah L. Holloway, Gill Valentine	Vol. 25, No. 1, March 2001
8	692	24	29	Field notebooks: A student's guide	Simon Lewis, Caroline Mills	Vol. 19, No. 1, January 1995
9	661	23	29	Getting started on a geography dissertation	Sue Burkill, Jane Burley	Vol. 20, No. 3, November 1996
10	458	21	22	Giving Oral Presentations	Chris Young	Vol. 22, No. 2, July 1998