

## **Towards a Global First Year: Understanding the international exchange and adaptation of ideas and practices.**

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This roundtable acknowledges the status of the First Year Experience as an internationally recognised construct in Higher Education, and aims to encourage debate on the next phases of development around the world.

The USA has been active for over 25 years in terms of the National Resource Centre which is holding its 20th international conference in 2007; the Pacific Rim Conference has reached its 10th anniversary; and the 2nd European Conference on the First Year in Higher Education is being held in Sweden in May 2007. These events display a rich picture of ideas, interest, practice, research and development around the globe. However there is as yet no sense of movement towards a 'world congress' on the first year, or some equivalent unifying initiative, which might consolidate the work, and attract additional contributions from areas and nations which remain to be engaged.

This level of expanding international development raises issues and questions about the nature of the differences, similarities and engagements between national systems of higher education, and the interactions between pedagogical research and organisational development of the first year, within and across national borders. In particular the questions of access to and diffusion of practice across national boundaries, and the conditions for adoption and adaptation of ideas within institutions. For example:

- Is the world system simply following the USA lead on the first year experience, or are we engaged in a complex development involving diverse cultures and different national traditions, priorities, and standards of higher education provision?
- Are the main determinants of action pedagogical, managerial or cultural?
- To what extent are local/national approaches to student feedback transferable, or even susceptible to unification?

In terms of the conference themes, a number of specifics can be identified for discussion:

- Regenerate understanding of first year by comparing different national approaches and debating whether a new 'global' perspective can be discovered.
- Engage thinking through multi-national perspectives and comparison of the nature and purpose of first year work in different national systems.
- Experiment in our thinking by postulating the transfer of practice from one culture to another as a 'market' activity, similar in kind to any other international trade in goods and services.

Participants can take these cues as starting points, or present additional and alternative views for open discussion.

Outcomes may include descriptions and opinions about the various models, programs, practices and activities which constellate around the First Year construct, framed as examples of national trends, in order to enhance the explanatory power of the specific example as an entry point to macro level discussions.

A specific outcome will be to form views of the potential for a 'fusion' project, to checklist the various concepts, programs and practices in current use, and to develop categories for a framework of international comparisons, which could be used to guide research and strategic development of practice. This discussion could involve soundings to identify possible international collaborations on the first year between institutional contacts who can engage with relevant organisations within their national higher education systems.