Introduction to the Issue

Welcome to the Spring 2012 issue of the All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE–J), the open-access journal of research into teaching and learning published by the All Ireland Society for Higher Education (AISHE), a professional society whose goal is to bring together and support those people who are concerned to advance higher education in the island of Ireland.

We commence this issue with an invited article from Professor Glynis Cousin, who delivered one of the AISHE 2011 Conference keynote addresses last August. In her article, Cousin challenges models of global citizenship based on the notion of competent cross-cultural exchange. These models, she tells us, can engender "a market view of culture in which cross-cultural exchange becomes a swop shop of apparently readable differences." In her paper, she invites us to consider a more comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural issues, grounded in a more nuanced understanding of the complex nature of difference.

This issue presents five research articles, coming from a wide range of disciplines and including numerous creative strategies to enhance teaching and learning. Each research article submitted to the All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education is blind peer-reviewed by at least two reviewers. We would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Editorial Committee, to thank these reviewers who have given freely of their valuable time and expertise.

The first of our five research articles is set in the context of the need for graduates, in this case in Chemistry, to demonstrate a wide variety of skills such as problem solving, teamwork and the ability to work on their own initiative. In the paper, Fenelon and Breslin discuss an interesting approach to the chemistry practical that incorporates all of these skills into an engaging undergraduate laboratory entitled "Mystery Death on a River". Referring in its title to a popular TV crime series, the paper discusses the advantages of a 'Mystery Death' laboratory where the students work in groups to solve the mystery. Presented with a scenario of an unexplained death, they are asked to work together to design and carryout the experiments necessary for solving the mystery within a day. The paper provides interesting insights into group work skills, problem-solving and student engagement.

We have two articles on the current issue of engaging technology in the process of enhancing student learning. Morrissey's paper reflects on how podcasting can systematically and creatively prompt and steer independent learning outside of the lecture environment. The discussion is situated against the background of a commitment to teaching that "is driven by a passion for engaging students on key global issues". The paper offers practical detail on podcasting but its central focus is on the use and value of podcasting in achieving educational goals, such as prompting independent learning, supporting constructive alignment of learning

outcomes and giving effective feedback to students. The paper is written in the context of a geography programme but is likely to have wide appeal because of its strong focus on the pedagogic issues.

Our second paper in a technological context examines the use and perception of a national open repository of teaching and learning resources, namely the National Digital Learning Resources service. The study, by Dundon, Exton and Diggins, sought the views of a computer science academic community of practice spread over twenty-one higher education institutions, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, to uncover reservations and concerns towards contributing resources to an open repository. It also sought to identify what incentives, if any, would encourage participation and contribution. The findings are particularly useful at this time of competition and budgetary stringency.

O'Dwyer provides an interesting reflection on the use of multiple-choice questions in formative and summative assessment with advanced undergraduate and postgraduate engineering students, over four academic years. The paper reports that student feedback on the assessment methods is broadly positive and that the change in assessment strategy has improved student learning, as measured by assessment data. The paper situates the study within the vigorous debate in the literature about the role of multiple-choice questions. The paper offers an informative summary of the debate and concludes that multiple-choice questions should be used as one strand in a balanced and creative summative assessment regime, matched to the learning outcomes that are being assessed.

Dunne and Sheridan evaluate first year students' engagement with information literacy as they make the transition to third level education. Their results remind us that many students find transition problematic and spend their first semester in a state of uncertainty. The authors take a constructivist perspective on student learning. Students maintained reflective journals which provided the data for a qualitative, grounded theory study undertaken by the academic and librarian who delivered the module. The study is situated in the context of the student need to develop ways to learn independently and to carry on learning, throughout their employment and throughout life. The paper highlights the benefits of higher education lecturers and librarians working closely to develop a curriculum that fosters the development of students' information literacy throughout their university careers.

This is the first issue of the All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education to be produced since the appointment of the new Editor (Saranne Magennis, NUI Maynooth) and Associate Editor (Linda Carey, Queens University, Belfast) in October 2011. We are pleased that it has been possible to reflect the all island focus of the Society in this way.

The AISHE Journal arises from the commitment to scholarly publication in teaching and learning, on an open access basis, which has been a core activity of the Society since 2004 with the online publication of the annual conference proceedings, and from 2005 the AISHE-Readings Series, an occasional series of monographs collecting together key Irish research in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The journal, now in its fourth year, offers an open space for scholarly discussion and debate that reflects the complex nature of teaching and learning in higher education and the diversity of practice of those engaged in higher education

who support enhancement in the quality of student learning.

The journal has a particular interest in fostering publication by new or early career researchers in teaching and learning, and the work of those who wish to share practical teaching and learning interventions and approaches that they have found useful with their own students and might prove useful to colleagues in other disciplines.

Finally, as the journal is produced by the All Ireland Society for Higher Education, we encourage colleagues who are presenting at the annual conference to consider whether they would wish to submit their papers for consideration by the journal. It is our continuing policy to invite our keynote speakers to contribute a paper to the journal.

It has been proved an interesting and enjoyable challenge to bring the issue to publication. Sincere thanks are to three individuals without whose efforts the journal might not exist: to Barry McMullin, for the development and management of AISHE publications and in particular for his technical support of our online journal system, to Sylvia Huntley Moore, the inaugural editor who has brought the journal safely through its first three years, and to Linda King the AISHE Administrator for her patience and skill in bringing this issue to fruition.

Saranne Magennis and Linda Carey, May, 2012.