



Early College Folio

Unconventional Paths to College Education

Volume 2, Issue 2 | Spring 2023

Editor's Note

Kyaw Moe Tun, PhD
Parami University

The title of this issue, “Unconventional Paths to College Education,” could not be more apt during this period of increased global higher education disruptions, insecurities, and crises. The military coup that has unfolded in Burma since February 2021 has forced me, as the founder and president of Parami University, to pivot away from the initial plans for Parami to be a residential, liberal arts university based in Burma. Instead, Parami now operates as an online, synchronous university based in the United States. I find, through this issue’s theme, my own agency to make the challenges faced by displaced and refugee communities seeking access to higher education more well-known among conventional higher education educators and leaders.

Unsurprisingly, this issue includes three submissions from authors working on expanding access to higher education for displaced students in Burma amidst the Burmese military’s inhumane atrocities and attacks against its own population. May Honey Maung’s poem titled “Move” appeals to leaders in education to creatively develop pathways so more students have access to higher education. Yee Wai Than’s case study of Phaung Daw Oo International University introduces readers of *Early College Folio* to the largest monastic school in Burma and how it is developing multi-pronged approaches to establish channels through which impoverished students can grasp higher education opportunities. “Solving Higher Education in Burma, the Global South, and Beyond,” submitted by my colleague Myat Su San, Director of Institutional Advancement at Parami University, explains how the institution transitioned from a planned brick-and-mortar university to an online university using advanced technologies to cater to students with high academic and social aspirations. Readers may notice these three authors use both “Burma” and “Myanmar” to reference their shared home country. In an effort to be pluralistic and respectful of each author’s preference, the Journal’s editors have opted to retain the use dictated by each author.

In an exploration of the challenges faced by similar initiatives to expand access, Rebecca Granato’s piece titled “Rolling a Boulder Up a Mountain: The Path to Higher Education in Displacement Contexts” provides a powerful summary of the need for an entire “pipeline” of educational opportunities for displaced students, starting with bridging programs, then moving toward creative, online synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid programs, leading all the way to providing job opportunities upon graduation.

Creating innovative, unconventional paths to college education is not unique to developing countries. Bard Early College has paved a way through uncharted territory to develop college education programs for high-school-aged students. In an example of this pedagogy at work, Cynthia Brown's and Maryann Tebben's piece presents the challenges and opportunities they experienced while teaching an OSUN Collaborative Course to students in two different early college settings—one from a residential campus and one from a program employing the Bard Early College curriculum. Bard College has done a great deal of work in providing higher education to inmates in New York prisons through the Bard Prison Initiative. The interview featuring Megan Callaghan and Elías Beltrán titled “Commitment to Access: A Conversation about the Unconventional and College-in-Prison” speaks beautifully of the power of higher education in transforming the lives of those individuals society would otherwise deem unworthy or ill-equipped for college-level work.

Finally, Raheela Abro's self exploration in the form of a visual essay, “Artist Into An Educator—Educator Inside An Artist,” offers a unique perspective on the need for educators who also practice in their field to consider the need to transcend and transition smoothly between their perspectives of both professional and educator. Raheela's experience is not an isolated case, and is a call for thinking about creating unconventional paths to college education, particularly suited to resource-poor contexts against the backdrop of pandemic-fueled changes in our classrooms' form, focus, technology, and students.

DR. KYAW MOE TUN completed his undergraduate education at Bard College at Simon's Rock and Oxford University, and received his PhD in Chemistry at Yale University. The transformative liberal arts and sciences education that he received abroad challenged him to find deeper meaning behind his actions, a notion which has informed much of his ensuing work. After completing his doctorate, Dr. Kyaw Moe Tun returned to Myanmar to dedicate his life to the development of his native country. He believes that empowering youth is the most rewarding investment that a country can make to safeguard its sustainable future. With this mission in mind, he led the establishment of Parami Institute in early 2017, the precursor to what would become Parami University in 2021. In addition to leading Parami University, Dr. Kyaw Moe Tun also serves as faculty in science.