# NOVEL EDUCATIONAL ECOSYSTEMS: THE ROLE OF CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES SHAPING THE TEACHING-FOCUSED ACADEMIC LANDSCAPE.

Francesca van den Berg, Timothy Lee, Hong-dao Nguyen, Osu Lilje, Matthew Pye

Presenting Author: Francesca van den Berg (francesca.vandenberg@sydney.edu.au)
School of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, 2006, Australia

**KEYWORDS:** education-focused academics, connectivity, idea exchange, educational ecosystems

A new and emerging landscape within higher education is one populated by an increased number of education-focused academic positions. Ultimately, these appointments have created novel ecosystems within departments/schools and faculties, where the type of research and workload allocation differs from traditional academic roles. These novel ecosystems are highly functional and productive, providing important ecosystem services for students and the institution. However, the education-focused academic population is often isolated within the school, effectively creating 'islands' of ideas subject. This leads to isolation from other academics within the school and decreased access to resources including mentorship, collaboration and education-focused academic seminars/talks/workshops. All of these can be barriers to academic productivity. Using island biogeography as a conceptual framework, we propose two alternative solutions. Firstly, we can create corridors between several small (SS) 'island' populations of education-focused academics in different schools, faculties and institutions to improve connectivity; forming a metapopulation. These corridors will allow greater connectivity and stimulate flow of ideas while continuing to maintain integral disciple-specific pedagogies. Alternatively, creating a single large (SL) education-focused academic community comprised of multiple discipline-specific populations, compared to several small (SS) isolated populations, may lead to greater productivity, opportunities for mutualistic symbioses and increased resilience to perturbations.