

# Introduction to Section II

Peter Shea

*University at Albany, State University of New York  
Editor-in-Chief, Online Learning*

In addition to the special issue section reflecting papers presented in the OTL SIG at the 2016 conference of the American Educational Research Association this issue also features papers from our standard submission process. These papers investigate issues related to the academic performance of minority students in online settings, experiential online learning, learning styles, and virtual conference participation.

The first paper, “Relationships Between Minority Students Online Learning Experiences and Academic Performance” by Alex Kumi Yeboah of the University at Albany and Patriann Smith of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, used a mix methods approach to address six questions about the performance of 149 minority students enrolled in online college courses. The research questions looked at the relationship between online academic performance of these students and their satisfaction with the online course, interaction in the course, use of social media, use of other technology, number of courses taken, and the students program of study. The author found a significant relationship between academic performance the use of technology, the number of online courses taken, and program of study. Results also suggest that lack of support, cultural differences, and limited self-regulated learning skills affected the academic achievement of minority students. They conclude that, as in face-to-face environments, students in online courses bring different cultures, learning styles, and educational backgrounds. The authors recommend that faculty strive to consider diversity in their online instruction more consciously.

The next paper “Using Importance-Performance Analysis to Guide Instructional Design of Experiential Learning Activities” is by Sheri Anderson of the University of North Carolina Wilmington, Yu-Chang Hsu of Boise State University, and Judy Kinney of the University of North Carolina Greensboro. The authors document the benefits of service learning and argue that there is a dearth of research on its application in online education. To begin to address this gap they conducted survey research using the Importance-Performance analysis. The authors found that students generally reported that “applying knowledge to the real world” was rated highly for both importance and performance as a result of the service learning activity in which they had engaged. Other potential outcomes of the service learning experience were ranked lower. The authors suggest that IPA can be used as a model to assist with instructional design decisions in courses where service learning will be used.

The third paper in this section is “Evaluation of Online Graduate Epidemiology Instruction and Student Outcomes” by Jacqueline Knapke, Erin Haynes, and Julie Breen of the University of Cincinnati and Pierce Kuhnell, Laura Smith, and Jareen Meizen-Derr of Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. In this paper the authors conducted a comparison of an introductory to epidemiology online course to the same, classroom-based course that was offered in the same term. They found no differences in students’ learning styles, satisfaction, and overall achievement. They did find that a significantly higher percentage of students in the physical class were matriculated into a degree program, were more likely to be full-time, and more likely to work part-time or not at all. The authors conclude that student preferences for the online modality are related to lifestyle factors and not age, previous experiences, or learning styles.

The final paper in this section is “Ethos and Practice of a Connected Learning Movement: Interpreting Virtually Connecting Through Alignment with Theory and Survey Results” by Maha Bali of the American University of Cairo, Autumn Caines of Capital University, Helen DeWaard of Lakehead University and Rebecca J. Hogue of the University of Ottawa and the University of Massachusetts-Boston. In this paper the authors investigate *Virtually Connecting* (VC) an organization created to engage people in virtual participation at academic conferences. They argue that physical conference participation is inherently biased toward more resource rich participants with virtual attendees frequently left to participate only marginally and missing the social and informal connections created outside formal session attendance. They conclude that by adding the social and informal dimensions to virtual conference attendance VC creates a richer online experience for virtual participants and helps conference organizers actualize the value in online participation.

## References

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