Introduction to Section II

Peter Shea
University at Albany, SUNY
Editor-in-Chief, *Online Learning*

This issue of *Online Learning* contains seven papers from our regular submission process. The studies in this section examine student, faculty, and administrative issues in online learning. The initial set of papers look at preparing and engaging learners in online study. The second group of papers analyze questions related to faculty development. The final paper in this section presents a national study of online learning leaders.

The first paper in section two is "The Effect of a Multifactor Orientation on Student Performance: Organizational Skills, Goal setting, Orientation to Classroom, and Academic Support" by Barbara McKenna, Dora Finamore, Valerie Hewitt, Linda Watson, Loretta Millam, and Michelle Reinhardt of Purdue University Global. In this paper, the authors sought to understand whether a well-structured student orientation focusing on organizational skills, goal setting, orientation to the online classroom, and academic support could improve student grades. In each of the study's three treatment sections, students had the option of participating in an orientation during the second week of the term. The study implemented the intervention in the second week to control for differences between students as measured by second week grades. The authors found support for the hypothesis that the constructs used to develop the treatment were effective. Students who attended the orientation earned significantly higher end-of-term grades compared to control students.

The next paper is "Examining Construct Validity of the Student Online Learning Readiness (SOLR) Instrument Using Confirmatory Factor Analysis" by Taeho Yu of the University of Virginia. This study also examines student preparation for online learning, focusing on a somewhat different set of factors. Building on the work of Tinto, the survey instrument that is the focus of the study attempts to measure students' technical competencies as well as their ability to communicate socially with instructors and other students. Using confirmatory factor analysis, the author found that the items and factors are a good fit for the survey data collected to assess it. This instrument may be a valuable tool for future research seeking to build a model of online learner retention.

The third paper in this section is "Student Engagement with Course Content and Peers in Synchronous Online Discussions" by Allison Truhlar, Kimberly Williams, and M. Todd Walter of Cornell University. Shifting from preparation of students to engagement of students in course learning activities, this paper analyzes the effects of assigning chat roles, facilitating self- and group reflection on forms of interaction in four synchronous sessions conducted in an online course. The authors found that assigning roles increased critical student-student interactions. Perhaps surprisingly, individual self-reflections had no effect on interaction. However, group reflections correlated with a greater proportion of critical student-content and student-student interactions compared to groups that did not complete the group reflections. Assigning roles and

promoting group reflections appear to be effective approaches to enhancing productive interaction in synchronous online settings.

The next paper, which examine similar issues is, "Supporting Learning Engagement with Online Students" by Janet Buelow, Thomas Barry, and Leigh Rich of Armstrong State University. The central question in this study is which activities contribute to learning engagement for online students. Building on prior research the authors developed a survey reflecting the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement. The authors conclude that engaging course activities include those that changed student understanding of a topic or concept, connected learning to societal problems, linked learning to prior experiences, and were fun in themselves. Faculty and other course designers seeking to engage students in learning activities may benefit from these results.

The fifth paper in this section is "Faculty Development to Promote Effective Instructional Technology Integration: A Qualitative Examination of Reflections in an Online Community" by Roberta (Robin) Sullivan, Victoria Neu, and Fengrong Yang of the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. This study focuses on an online peer-learning, professional development approach that encourages faculty and instructional support staff to reflect on innovative and creative uses of emerging technologies through experiential learning activities. The authors analyze participants' reflective summary posts from the shared online community to gain insight into their learning attributable to experiences with the project. Findings indicate that participants reported gaining knowledge from peers in the community; integrating technology into their courses while participating in the project; and expressed a desire to continue to learn about emerging technologies after the project ended.

The next paper is "Studying Cultural Relevance in Online Courses: A Thematic Inquiry" by Megan Adams, Sanjuana Rodriguez, and Kate Zimmer of Kennesaw State University. This study analyzes instructional materials to identify instances of curricular drift, a state that can occur when multiple faculty make different choices in teaching a course that was meant to reflect the same standards, objectives, and assessments. Curricular drift happens when the curriculum returns to a pre-innovative state, and faculty go back to teaching what they know. The focus of the study is to determine if culturally relevant pedagogy is integrated into online courses with fidelity. The authors present an array of evidence indicating that it is not. These results have implications for faculty development, online course and curricular design, student learning, and the broader literature on culturally relevant pedagogical innovation.

The final paper in this section is "A National Study of Online Learning Leaders in U.S. Community Colleges" by Eric Fredericksen of Rochester University. This paper focuses on basic questions of backgrounds, roles, and responsibilities of the leaders of units designed to advance online learning at two-year colleges in the United States. Based on an earlier study of such leaders at four-year campuses, this study provides insight on how different institutions define online learning, strategic goals for these initiatives, reporting structures, use of online program management partners, and other items relevant to the role. This study is the first of its kind to explore online learning leaders in community colleges and provides a foundation for understanding similarities and differences in institutional approaches to the organization of online education.

We invite you to read and share this issue with colleagues and to consider submitting your original work to *Online Learning*.