Introduction to *Online Learning* Volume 24, Issue 2

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This issue of *Online Learning* is the first to be published during the ongoing pandemic, which has had substantial implications for the education sector. The significance of online learning has changed dramatically since the onset of COVID-19. Virtually every institution from primary schools through graduate schools in the U.S. and around the world has moved instruction from classroom settings to remote and distance settings. It is important to note that institutions undertook this shift under extreme pressure with unrealistic timelines, frequently a matter of days or weeks. In many cases, the resultant coursework does not adhere to standards reflective of high quality online instructional design. Many institutions in the U.S. have adopted terms such as "emergency remote instruction" to describe their current distance learning offerings. While our timeline for reviewing rigorous studies generally precludes publication of current research on the great migration to emergency remote instruction, we do include two papers relevant to the current crisis.

The first section of this issue contains two papers relevant to the ongoing challenges related to the pandemic and higher education's response. Our first paper is "U.S. Faculty and Administrator Experiences, Concerns, and Approaches With Online Learning in the Early Weeks of the COVID-19 Pandemic" by Nicole Johnson of the Canadian Digital Learning Research Association, George Veletsianos of Royal Roads University, and Jeff Seaman of Bay View Analytics. This paper presents results of a national survey of 826 administrators and faculty across 641 institutions. At the time the survey was conducted 90% of institutions reported moving some or all instruction to distance format and 97% reported working with faculty new to remote instruction. Other high-level findings indicate that a majority of faculty surveyed changed the kind of assignments their students complete and nearly half of respondents lowered expectations for the amount of work students do. The results add empirical weight to the anecdotal evidence that remote instruction relies much more heavily on synchronous video than is typical of online learning with 80% of respondents reporting using synchronous video. This early study of the institutional transition to remote learning provides valuable insight as a snapshot of the quick response and actions taken across the U.S.

The next paper "Crisis Planning for Online Students: Lessons Learned from a Major Disruption" by Peggy Holzweiss, Daniel Walker, Ruth Chisum, and Thomas Sosebee of Sam Houston State University is also relevant in the current crisis. The authors of this study argue that, although more than a decade of prior research has emphasized the need for planning, crisis response on college campuses has been primarily reactive rather than proactive. This is clear from the current crisis and the absence of plans to move instruction online. The paper discusses the need for more planning after Hurricane Harvey, which disrupted access to online learning for the majority of students who lived close to the city of Houston but not those residing on or near that

campus, an hour north of the city. The study examines the experiences of the frontline staff who employed a plan to address the needs of the online learners. Results indicate that institutions need a proactive crisis plan for online students that includes knowledge of where this population lives, how different campus units can provide support in a crisis, who should lead the crisis response, and what kind of care can be offered to the frontline responders during the crisis period.

The next section presents several studies that look at student perspectives. The first paper in this section is "Examining Student Perception of Readiness for Online Learning: Importance and Confidence" by Florence Martin, Brandy Stamper, and Claudia Flowers of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. This paper presents a model of online learner readiness, building on an extensive presentation of prior models. The authors identify four common constructs including online student attributes, time management, technical aspects, and communication competencies. The paper presents a survey on the importance of these measures of learner readiness with a sample of 177 students. The respondents rated student attributes, time management, and technical competencies high for importance compared to communication competencies. Students were significantly more confident in the importance of online student attributes and technical competencies compared to time management and communication.

The next paper in this section is "Attitudes Towards Technology Among Distance Education Students: Validation of an Explanatory Model" by Sonia J. Romero Martínez of Madrid Open University, Xavier G. Ordóñez Camacho of Complutense of Madrid, Francisco D. Guillén-Gamez of the University of the University of Almeria, and Javier Bravo Agapito of Madrid Open University. The goal of this paper is to investigate cognitive, affective, and behavioral beliefs of learners about the inclusion of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching. The specific objectives of this study are to test the reliability and factorial structure of an instrument that measures attitudes and to propose and validate a model that hypothesizes a positive correlation between digital competence and frequency of use of technologies and positive attitudes. The authors test this model on a sample of 1,251 students of the Madrid Open University. Results indicated satisfactory psychometric properties for the instrument and a positive relationship between frequency of use of digital devices and positive attitudes to ICT. The influence of student's self-perceived digital competence on attitude was rejected however.

Rounding out the student perspectives section is "Flipping e-Learning for Teaching Medical Terminology: A Study of Learners' Online Experiences and Perceptions" by Perihan Şenel Tekin, Hale Ilgaz , Gülgün Afacan Adanır, Denizer Yıldırım, and Yasemin Gülbahar of Ankara University, Turkey. The authors of this paper argue that flipped classrooms can enhance and facilitate deep learning through greater use of active learning activities in the classroom. The researcher collected learners' usage of the system, submissions to the study process questionnaire, and academic achievement as quantitative data. Learners' attitude about the flipped classroom model were obtained as qualitative data. The authors conclude that learners' academic achievement was significantly related to their perceptions of deep learning and their time spent on learning activities.

The next three papers in this issue discuss faculty, professional development, and online learning from different perspectives. The initial paper in this section is "Presenting a Validated Mid-Semester Evaluation of College Teaching to Improve Online Teaching" by Virginia Byrne and Alice Donlan of the University of Maryland, College Park. This paper focuses on how to improve online teaching through formative feedback from students. The authors of this paper note that formative feedback is often used to improve teaching and identify concerns before the end-of-

semester evaluations are collected. Mid-semester evaluations give instructors an opportunity to gather actionable feedback from students in time to implement changes that can improve instruction, learner satisfaction and end-of-semester evaluations. The authors document how existing student evaluations of teaching have been found to be biased and set out to develop and validate an instrument for mid-semester formative feedback specifically for online instructors that is an improvement over current practices. This study found evidence that the instrument is valid and reliable for gathering formative feedback from undergraduate students about online teaching practices.

Continuing this theme, the next paper in this section is "Development and Validation of the Purdue Global Online Teaching Effectiveness Scale" by Elizabeth Reyes-Fournier, Edward Cumella, and Gabrielle Blackman of Purdue Global University, Michelle March of the College of Lake County, and Jennifer Pedersen of the University of Alaska Anchorage-Kenai Peninsula College. While the previous paper focuses on formative feedback, this study examine summative evaluation. Like the previous study, the authors of this paper also note that currently available measures of online teaching effectiveness are flawed and they also validate a measure based on more clearly-defined constructs. They identify four clear online teaching effectiveness factors: presence, expertise, engagement, and facilitation. The resulting instrument showed good internal consistency, good test-retest reliability, and predictive validity in relation to student achievement.

A third paper addressing the theme of quality online instructions closes out this section. This study is "Community College Faculty's Perceptions of the Quality Matters Rubric" by Rhonda Gregory of Volunteer State Community College, Amanda Rockinson-Szapkiw of the University of Memphis, and Vickie Cook of University of Illinois Springfield. The Quality Matters (QM) Higher Education Rubric provides a model to help assure quality course design. The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of a QM workshop on community college faculty perceptions of the rubric and their course design skills. Research was conducted in two phases at two institutions. Specifically the paper asks how successful completion of the QM professional development training effects participants' perceptions about the QM rubric, and what challenges and successes that faculty experience as a result of the training. The paper identifies six themes that respond to these questions including that the experience can be transformational though time consuming.

The next section presents two empirical studies, the first of which is "Detection of Online Contract Cheating Through Stylometry: A Pilot Study" by David Ison of Northcentral University, San Diego. This paper investigates issue of academic integrity and specifically the topic of contract cheating; that is, when a student employs another individual to complete assignments. This violation of academic integrity is difficult to track (we don't know the extent to which it is done in online higher education settings) and difficult to detect. Current plagiarism detection technologies do not identify original work produced by someone other than the student enrolled in the course a violations. One technique that has potential in uncovering contract cheating is stylometry, the analysis of authorial style and writing attributes. This study evaluated the efficacy of three stylometry software systems to detect simulated cases of contract cheating. Accuracy ranged from 33% to 88.9%. The authors conclude that while more research is needed, readily available stylometry software shows promise for the potential detection of contract cheating.

The second paper in this section is "From Design to Impact: A Phenomenological Study of HumanMOOC Participants' Learning and Implementation into Practice" by Patrice Torcivia Prusko at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Heather Robinson and Whitney Kilgore of

the University of North Texas, and Maha Al-Freih of Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University. This paper seeks to advance research of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) by moving away from the common focus on course completion rates and instead seeks to foreground the learning experience and application of learning to practice among course completers. The study examines a MOOC designed to help educators better understand and implement the Community of Inquiry framework in their course design and teaching. A qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to explore how completers of the course perceived the phenomenon of implementing what they had learned, and its impact on their subsequent educational practices. The authors identify themes in the interview data they collected, highlighting the various goal and outcomes for MOOC completers.

The next section contains two papers that focus on online learning in the K-12 sector. The first of these is "Irrelevant, Overlooked, or Lost? Trends in 20 years of Uncited and Low-Cited K-12 Online Learning Articles" by Karen Arnesen of Brigham Young University, Shea Walters and Jered Borup of George Mason University, and Michael K. Barbour of Touro University, California. The authors of this paper point out that while systemic reviews of a field are useful, they usually center on highly-cited work and journals and ignore less-frequently cited work. The assumption is that less-frequently cited work is inherently less important or interesting. To analyze this assumption the authors identified 62 articles that had 5 or fewer citations and analyzed them for trends in authorship, publication outlets, dates of publication, and topics that could explain their low citation rates. The study found that the majority of these articles were published in less well-known journals and may have attracted fewer readers because they addressed topics with a narrow focus, often outside of the U.S. They did not find articles that were uninteresting, poorly researched, or irrelevant. This inversion of the conventional systemic review of a field of study thus raises interesting questions and presents intriguing possibilities relating to the future design of such studies. Perhaps looking at both ends of the spectrum of cited work in a field is a more fruitful approach.

The second paper in this section is "Student Perceptions of Their Interactions with Peers at a Cyber Charter High School" by Jered Borup, Shea Walters, and Megan Call-Cummings of George Mason University. These authors argue that, while lacking in many K-12 online settings, learner-learner interactions are perceived to be critical components to meaningful educational experiences because they help students to co-construct understanding of the course material. However little research exists that studies learner-learner interaction in cyber high schools, especially from the students' perspective. This paper begins to fills that gap. Utilizing the Adolescent Community of Engagement framework, this qualitative descriptive case study explored learner-learner interactions at a cyber-charter high school and identifies significant themes in these interactions. The authors conclude that interactions with peers allowed K-12 online students to develop friendships, improve their motivation, receive peer instruction, and collaborate effectively with others.

The next paper in this issue is a review of literature entitled "A Ten-Year Review of Online Learning Research Through Co-Citation Analysis" by Hyejin Park and Peter Shea (me) of the University at Albany. In this paper my colleague and I examined highly cited articles on online learning for the past decade. We review frequently cited and co-cited research items and unfold clusters of co-cited documents to reveal evolving research trends in online learning. Our results showed that literature review and studies on learners' discourse in asynchronous discussion were most frequently cited in the first half of the ten-year period. In the second five years, the focus

moved to online learners' satisfaction and self-regulation, informal learning, and learning through MOOCs. These results identify the contours of the field, but lack a view of research that was not highly cited per recommendations by Arnesen and her colleagues in this issue.

The final section of this issue contains two very different articles on best practices in online education. The first of these is "Making Instant Adjustments in Online Journalism Education: Responding to Continuous Needs Assessments in Asynchronous Courses" by Amanda Bright of the University of Georgia. This paper is founded in Knowles's theory of andragogy and analyzes the implementation of continuous needs assessment in three graduate-level online journalism courses. The study reveals that through this process of ongoing need assessment the instructor was able to provide a personal and practical level of instruction in the asynchronous courses that produced high levels of learning and satisfaction among the students in these courses.

The final paper in this issue is "Ensuring Online Learning Quality: Perspectives from the State University of New York" by Kristyn Muller, Kim Scalzo, Alexandra Pickett, and Lawrence Dugan of the State University of New York System Administration, Lisa Dubuc of Niagara County Community College, Ryan McCabe of Finger Lakes Community College, William Pelz of Herkimer Community College, and Donna Simiele of Niagara County Community College. This study examines best practices regarding the evaluation and assessment of online learning from an institutional perspective. It draws upon practices from the State University of New York (SUNY) System, which has developed a process using the Online Learning Consortium's (OLC) Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs to help SUNY campuses examine and improve the quality of online learning. The first section of the paper describes the development and implementation of that process and the second section probes deeper into the standards related to evaluation and assessment using examples from four SUNY community colleges. The authors conclude that using the OLC Quality Scorecard has helped to support positive campus culture change in online learning at numerous SUNY campuses.

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