

Introduction to Section II of *Online Learning* vol. 24, issue 3

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In addition to the special section on papers presented at conferences sponsored by the Online Learning Consortium, this issue of OLJ also contains articles from our regular submission process. These papers appear in three sections broadly related to faculty and student issues as well three papers on blended learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed much in the world, and in higher education dramatically so. Colleges everywhere continue to consider which courses, if any, to offer in classrooms and which to move online or to new distance formats that many refer to as “emergency remote instruction.” As we will see, many of the papers contained in Section II, submitted before the pandemic, are based on assumptions about distance and online learning that, at least for now, no longer hold true. This includes assumptions about common temporal modes of delivery (e.g. mostly asynchronous delivery), faculty decisions about whether they will teach online (most faculty are now required to teach online), percentages of students in the US studying at a distance (much higher now than previously), and the current feasibility of blended learning (many courses will not have classroom instruction, even if it is reduced due to blending).

The first article in this section is “Video-based Feedback on Student Work: An Investigation into the Instructor Experience, Workload, and Student Evaluations” by Cheri Ketchum, Daria S. LaFave, Chelsey Yeats, Elaine Phompheng, and James H. Hardy of Ashford University. This paper examines issues related to primarily asynchronous delivery of online learning and the potential for student and faculty isolation and lack of social presence in the absence of real-time interaction and feedback. The paper builds on previous research looking at the benefits of video-based feedback for the development of social presence, increased student-faculty connectedness, faculty workload, and end-of-course instructor ratings. The paper improves on prior research with a larger sample size, more careful control of the measurement of workload, and an examination of the instructors’ experiences with video feedback. While the results indicated that video feedback required more time, engendered varied instructor experiences related to social presence, and had limited impact on instructor performance evaluations, the study raises interesting questions for future research.

The next paper in this section is “Faculty Perceptions of Online Teaching at a Mid-Sized Liberal Arts University” by Dana Shreaves, of Pacific Lutheran University, and Yu-Hui Ching, Lida Uribe-Florez, and Jesús Trespalacios of Boise State University. This study looks at faculty acceptance of distance/online learning, specifically focusing on liberal arts faculty when this form of instruction was not as widespread as it is currently. The authors note that traditionally, liberal arts faculty have been particularly concerned with the quality of relationships with their students and thus may be more resistant to adopting online education where the perception is that the

instructor-student relationship may degrade. The authors use mixed methods to analyze perceptions of online teaching and learning and faculty decisions to teach online. Content analysis of faculty perceptions of online teaching identified six shared themes including attractiveness to students, teaching value compatibility, regulation of online learning, technology and infrastructure, faculty resources, and personal influences. An examination of 21 quantitative factors found 17 of these were reported by more than half of respondents to influence their decision to teach online. One wonders how the study itself, and the results might have changed with the wide scale shift to distance education in light of the pandemic. How have faculty responded to the abrupt implementation of distance methods? This paper thus might serve as a foundation for new investigations of faculty experiences, acceptance, and adoption of distance education in our newly transformed context.

The third paper in this section is “Examining Students’ Confidence to Learn Online, Self-Regulation Skills and Perceptions of Satisfaction and Usefulness of Online Classes” by Brittany Landrum of the University of Dallas. This article examines how students’ confidence regarding their ability to use a learning management system, employ self-regulation strategies, and ratings of their confidence in their ability to learn online predict both their satisfaction with and perceived usefulness of online courses. Multiple regression analyses indicate that students’ confidence to learn online was the strongest predictor of satisfaction and usefulness of online classes. The findings suggest students’ motivation for taking online classes mediate their evaluations of online learning experiences. This paper also may serve as a launching point for future investigations of student motivations for online study in a time when online education has become much more widespread and mandatory in many cases.

The next paper is “The Impact of Multimedia in Course Design on Students’ Performance and Online Learning Experience: A Pilot Study of an Introductory Educational Computing Course” by Torria Davis and Thomas Frederick of California Baptist University. The authors argue that given limited time instructional designers can dedicate to creating multimedia in course design, it is critical to identify the effects of the time investment on student performance and perceptions of overall online learning experiences. This study therefore investigates whether multimedia use in online courses impacts student performance or their perception of online learning after controlling for faculty expertise with course design. The paper presents the results of two studies. In the first study, T-tests were used to analyze if students performed better in courses adhering to Quality Matters (QM) standards or in courses built according to instructor preferences without using QM. The second study involved the course design of four sections of courses, two sections of which were enriched with a variety of multimedia content. Study one analyses indicate that students in the courses that adhere to QM guidelines earned higher end-of-point total scores than those in the non-QM courses. Results of study two indicate that, though participants in the text-based course design scored slightly lower than those in the multimedia course, both of which adhered to Quality Matters standards, the outcome was not statistically significant.

The fifth paper in this section is “Using Crowdsourced Wikis to Teach an Online Undergraduate Course” by John Fisher and Steve Allred of Utah Valley University. This article seeks to address a number of process and outcome questions about using Wikis in online courses. These questions were presented as part of an end of course evaluation to students in an online course in crisis communication. The specific questions included how a class wiki can contribute to learning; whether the class wiki was helpful in learning course content; whether students read the contributions of other students and thereby learn from their work; whether and how students

edit the work of other students, and what incentives motivate students to change, edit, comment and provide feedback to other students using the wiki. The student responses were analyzed using descriptive techniques, allowing the authors to explore the perception and themes about the benefits and challenges of using wikis. The authors conclude that their research confirms much existing research on using wikis in online education. Wikis engage students in the learning process; encourage student collaboration, require students to learn a new skill; but significant preparation and orientation are required for students to benefit from wikis.

The next paper is “Examining Student Reported Interaction and Satisfaction in Higher Education Administration Graduate Seminar-Style Blended Courses” by Derek Thurber of Arizona State University and Lois Trautvetter of Northwestern University. This study investigates how a graduate, seminar-style courses offered in a blended format can promote student satisfaction, motivation, and interaction among students and instructors. Data were collected from 11 courses within a graduate degree program at a private research university from spring 2016 to 2018. The researchers conducted semester-based surveys of students using an instrument developed and validated for evaluating the Community of Inquiry framework. They also conducted interviews with faculty and teaching assistants and used this data to inform future iterations of course design. The results from the student surveys and instructor interviews are reported in detail in the paper. The authors conclude that class size was the biggest factor relating to student interaction. As class size increased quality of interaction with both peers and instructors decreased. This study also found synchronous online discussions had a greater impact than other learning activities. Asynchronous discussion boards were rated as the least helpful tools and were also the only tool rated as unhelpful on average. This finding is in contrast to existing online learning research on the CoI framework. Finally, the authors found that satisfaction and interaction had a slight increase over time as participants became more familiar with the blended format.

Also on the topic of blended learning is “Blended Learning in STEM and Non-STEM Courses: How Do Student Performance and Perceptions Compare?” by Ron Owston, Dennis York, Taru Malhotra, and Jirarat Sitthiworachart of York University. As the title suggests this article addresses two research questions: 1) how does student performance in STEM and non-STEM classes compare when both are taught in the blended mode? and 2) how do student perceptions of blended learning in STEM and non-STEM courses compare when both are taught in the blended mode? Data for the study came from 6 STEM courses and 8 non-STEM courses. Students were given a questionnaire to assess their perceptions of their learning experience in a blended class and 300 questionnaires were collected. Student performance was defined as final course grade. A total of 318 grades were obtained. Analyses indicate that STEM students outperformed the non-STEM students after adjusting for prior academic attainment using GPA as a covariate. However, STEM students did not perceive their blended courses as positively as non-STEM students. These results are consistent with research comparing student performance in blended and traditional course formats suggesting that students perform better under blended conditions.

The final paper, again on the topic of blended learning, is “Optimizing the Technological Design of a Blended Synchronous Learning Environment” by Lauren Angelone of Xavier University and Zachary Warner and Janet Mannheimer Zydney of the University of Cincinnati. This paper discusses a form of blended learning that, while not new, may be new for the many faculty in the US who are teaching “hyflex” courses for the first time as a result of efforts to accommodate social distancing and student preferences for alternate modalities to in-person classes. These are courses in which students may attend either in the classroom or at a distance in a synchronous mode,

frequently with options to move between these modes from week to week. This exploratory study used qualitative methods to iteratively plan, evaluate, and improve the technological deployment of a blended synchronous course to enhance the experience. Qualitative data collection and analysis were used to understand the impact of design decisions on the experiences of the students and the instructor. The results are design recommendations that can be used as guidance for future research and implementation of blended synchronous modes of learning.

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