

# Introduction to OLJ Volume 27, Issue 1

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In addition to the special issue papers, this first issue of 2023 also includes ten articles from our regular submission process. Topics include access, inclusion, synchronous online learning, student satisfaction, student evaluation of online faculty, student perspectives on engagement, faculty adoption of online teaching, and more.

In “Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Infusion in Online Higher Education” author Noha Fahad Altowairiki of University of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, investigates whether UDL, a framework for creating inclusive learning experiences that decreases barriers in education, offers appropriate accommodations and preserves high achievement expectations for all students. Providing education that is more inclusive requires that we understand barriers to adoption of frameworks such as UDL. The author specifically used a case study design to investigate the role of academic leaders and faculty in adoption of UDL in an online graduate program. The analysis reveals four themes providing insight about effect adoption: the need for leadership, professional development, a community approach, and specific challenges. The author concludes that UDL adoption is more than an individual initiative and that it requires sufficient support and collaboration across multiple levels within the academic institution.

The pandemic increased the number of online students and especially those who participated in synchronous online learning either through Zoom or through other video conferencing platforms. With the sheer increase in new populations studying online, there is a need to better understand how students, many of whom would otherwise not have opted into online education, responded to this new mode of instruction. The authors of “Students’ Satisfaction with Quality of Synchronous Online Learning Under COVID-19 Pandemic: Perceptions from Liberal Arts and Science Undergraduates Students,” Izabela Majewska of the University of North Florida and Varaidzo Zvobgo of Texas A&M International University use the Community of Inquiry model to frame their investigation of student satisfaction with synchronous online courses. Somewhat surprisingly, results indicate that neither interaction with the course platform, nor interaction with peers was associated with perceptions of the quality of the overall synchronous online instruction. The authors provide interpretations of these result and recommendations for future research.

The topic of student satisfaction is also central to the next study in this issue, “Student Satisfaction and the Future of Online Learning in Higher Education: Lessons from a Natural Experiment” by Graham Wright, Shahar Hecht, and Leonard Saxe of Brandeis University and Sasha Volodarsky of Northeastern University. As with the previous article, these authors note that the pandemic forced new students into the online modality and may have therefore eliminated the selection bias that adheres to online learning in normal times. By the second year of the pandemic, some of the initial challenges experienced by faculty, staff, and students had abated, thus setting the conditions for a natural experiment in which we might see the impacts of online learning across the board, rather than with students who traditionally opt in to online education as with pre-pandemic online programs. Accepting this premise might require some suspension of disbelief. For example, a key benefit of online learning is its flexibility and voluntary nature. Moreover, the spring 2021 term was still not “normal” online learning, so it might not be a fair representation of mature, planned online education environments tailored to support the needs of voluntary online learners. However, these conditions did allow us to see how a significantly broader segment of the student population responds to online learning, especially in emergency conditions (which may come around again). The authors present results indicating that students who experienced at least weekly face-to-face coursework were more satisfied with their overall college experiences and with the interaction with faculty than were students who did not experience in-person instruction. Regarding the value of the interactions with faculty, the relationship between in-person instruction and the perceived higher quality of the interactions with faculty were significant only for white students compared to

Hispanic, African American, and Asian students, who did not perceive these benefits—a very interesting finding itself that warrants further research. The other key implication of the study may be to reinforce our current understanding that online learners benefit from the flexibility afforded by online education when they choose it, not when online learning is forced on them (a condition—“voluntariness”—discussed in another article in this section of the journal; see below). Going forward it may be helpful to remember that what some see as selection biases that hinder online learning research can also be seen as an inherent condition of online learning. In other words, the freedom to opt into online education is not a “bug”—it is a “feature.” Given that, institutions do indeed need to plan more carefully for online instruction (especially in times of crisis), including more professional development for faculty and support for students who are not the typical audience for distance learning when crises that require a pivot to online learning occur.

Student evaluation of online teaching effectiveness is also the focus of the fourth article in this section, “Establishing a Student Evaluation of Online Teaching and Learning Framework Through Analysis of Existing Instruments” by Ting Sun of the University of Utah, Florence Martin of North Carolina State University, and Stella Kim and Carl Westine of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. As online education continues to grow, student evaluation of faculty online teaching is taking on greater importance. Whether used as a consideration for tenure and promotion decisions; for renewal of contracts for contingent faculty; or as formative assessment to improve online instructional quality, student evaluation of online instruction is an important element in the lives of online instructors. Previous work in this area indicates that many institutions do not customize the forms used for student evaluations of faculty to reflect the online educational context. The authors of this article have a goal to develop a more representative framework for the evaluation of online teaching through an analysis of 278 evaluation elements found in 27 different instruments. Through this work, the authors developed the SEOTL framework, a multidimensional approach that includes consideration of learner, instructor, course, technology, and organization, thus providing a holistic and comprehensive model for evaluation.

The next paper in this section also seeks to understand student perceptions of important variables in online learning, in this case online engagement. In “Student Perceptions of Online Engagement” authors Petrea Redmond, Megan Alexsen, Suzanne Maloney, Joanna Turner, Alice Brown, and Marita Basson of the University of Southern Queensland, Australia, argue that the large and expanding area of research on learner engagement rarely includes student views of what engagement is. In this paper, they aim to highlight student voices regarding the nature of learner engagement in online contexts. Building on previous literature, they sought to understand student perspectives on various aspects of engagement, including its social, cognitive, behavioral, collaborative and emotional dimensions. Using a mixed methods approach, the investigators gathered quantitative and qualitative data on the relative importance of the various dimensions of engagement among a broad representation of online students. Results suggest that cognitive and behavioral dimensions of engagement are highly ranked and that hands-on learning activities are associated with engagement.

There are several theories that aim to describe, explain, or predict adoption of innovation including the increased usage of online teaching. The unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) incorporates several of these and is the framework for explaining adoption, continued use, and increased use of online instruction in the next paper, “Rising to the Occasion: The Importance of the Pandemic for Faculty Adoption Patterns” by Jing Zhang, Becky Sumbera, Pamela Medina, Melika Kordrostami, and Anna Ya Ni of California State University San Bernardino and Georgette Dumont of the University of North Florida. The UTAUT model predicts the adoption of innovations through its depiction of various constructs that enable or constrain such adoption. These constructs include the degree to which potential adopters are influenced by peers (social influence); the degree to which adoption of the innovation is required or voluntary (voluntariness); whether potential adopters believe the adoption will improve their ability to complete tasks associated with the innovation (performance expectancy); how difficult or time-consuming it will be to learn to employ the innovation (effort expectancy); and whether there will be support for adoption (facilitating conditions). The authors of this paper surveyed 180 faculty with an instrument reflecting the UTAUT model and found that the model does predict adoption of online

teaching as well as continued and increasing use. This paper clarifies the conditions under which faculty will engage in large-scale efforts to respond to crises as well as their likelihood to participate in ongoing attempts to meet the flexibility needs of online learners in the 21st century.

The next paper in this section considers how classroom space influences approaches to active learning and how that understanding informs the transition of active learning designs for classrooms to active learning designs for online settings. In “Faculty Transition Strategies from In-Person to Online Teaching: Qualitative Investigation for Active Learning” authors Tracey Birdwell and Merve Basdogan of Indiana University, Bloomington employed a phenomenological research method to elicit personal descriptions of lived experience regarding online active learning design. The researchers conducted interviews with faculty who had undergone training in the consideration of physical spaces for online learning as a foundation for designing active online spaces. They elicited narratives that documented the journey from replicating classroom instruction, to augmenting it, and, finally, to transforming instruction for active online collaborative learning. Through this research, the authors propose different metaphors for virtual learning spaces including core, supplemental, and augmented spaces that describe the designs that instructors enacted.

One of the less researched areas in online education is virtual field placements and supervised experiences. How do learners develop skills and professional identity when the field placement or supervision is conducted remotely? That is the topic of the next paper, “Online Group Supervision in Graduate Psychology Training During the COVID-19 Pandemic” by Shulamit Geller, Keren Hanetz-Gamliel, and Sigal Levy of The Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo, Israel. The authors review literature indicating that successful group supervision experiences are characterized by factors associated with group climate, group cohesion, supervisor-supervisee working alliances, and professional identity development. Using four existing instruments to measure student perceptions of these important dimensions of successful supervisory experiences, the authors aimed to compare rankings of students who completed their placement with in-person supervisors as compared to those who worked in virtual supervisory settings. They also sought to test the association between COVID-19 related worries and social support and aspects of online group processes. Results indicate that there were no differences between online and in-person group supervision in group cohesion, group climate, and working alliance with their supervisor. However, the researchers concluded that students’ worries about COVID-19 related social interactions and their perceived social support were linked to productive involvement with the group and the supervisor. More specifically, students’ reports of more pandemic-related worries and less social support were associated with reports of less productive group processes. The paper includes more details and recommendations for online group supervision in psychotherapeutic educational settings.

The Community of Inquiry model should be familiar to many readers of the *Online Learning Journal*. We have been publishing papers on this influential theory since 2001 when Terry Anderson, Liam Rourke, Randy Garrison, and Walter Archer wrote a seminal paper on the teaching presence construct when our journal was named the *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*. The theory has been a framework for hundreds if not thousands of studies in many different journals since those early days. As the model has become the focus of international research, it has become necessary to translate the instruments used to assess forms of presence that are hypothesized to make up an effective collaborative online learning experience. The next paper is “Development and Validation of the German Version of the Community of Inquiry Survey” by Lisa-Maria Norz, Werner O. Hackl, and Elske Ammenwerth of Private University for Health Sciences and Health Technology, Austria, and Petra Knaup-Gregori and Nils Benning of Heidelberg University, Germany. The authors conducted item analysis, reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the reliability and validity of the German CoI Survey. This work will enable other researchers to employ the CoI survey with German speakers and extend research beyond its current boundaries.

The pandemic led to a huge surge in research on the topic of emergency remote instruction. Unlike planned online education with its focus on faculty training, instructional design, and student support, emergency remote instruction was conducted in haste, with great urgency, and with varying degrees of success. Early results indicated that faculty and students struggled with this somewhat chaotic

form of distance education, despite the often-heroic efforts of faculty, staff, and students. As time goes on opportunities for mapping the literature that has emerged become available with the potential to get a sense of where the research was published, which topics were covered, which journals published the work and other variables related to bibliometric analysis. The final paper in this issue is “Research Trends in the Field of Emergency Remote Teaching: A Bibliometric Analysis” by Betül Tonbuloğlu of Yildiz Technical University and Burcu Avcı Akbel of Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University. Studies such as this do not provide a review of the content of the literature (for example, disclosing results of the research) but instead focus on the shape of the literature in terms of publication frequency, countries producing the literature, citation analyses, and other parameters that describe the emerging field of research. In this paper the authors also limited their research to open access journals, which may color the results given many studies on this topic appear in closed journals. Nonetheless, studies such as this one begins to sketch the outlines of emerging fields and can provide valuable information to other researchers.

In closing, I would like to thank the special issue editors, Florence Martin, Curt Bonk, and Vanessa Dennen for their many labors on this edition of the *Online Learning Journal*. Their service to the field is significant and very much appreciated.